
Foundations for Families – Family context

4 Parenting skills - family patterns and relationships

Reading – Matthew 6:25-34 *Keywords* – life; righteousness, kingdom; tomorrow

Where to start

So far we have looked at the Scriptural foundations for the family – the loving relationship between mother and father, and the role and purpose of children that form part of the family. We should always recognise that not all families are made up of mother, father, boy and girl. There are many variations. For a variety of reasons it may well be that there may be more children, or that there is only one parent (or grandparents, or other relatives) who have the prime responsibility in the raising of children. When we are considering the following family issues, we should keep in mind the ways in which the circumstances of the family, however it is made up, will affect how decisions are made.

Patterns

Have you noticed that families have their own life-style patterns? For example, some families get up at a special time and have a specific order of doing things early in the morning. They have set tasks for various members of the family. They congregate (or separate) in various parts of the house and at 'usual' times. They may go to bed at different times. Many of these patterns will be determined by the age of the children and what activities and schools they are involved in, by the work carried out by the adults, and many other responsibilities that each family member may have.

Something to think about

- Think about your own family pattern. What are its main characteristics? You may find it useful to think of a particular day. Let's say, Tuesday. How did the day start? What did each member of the family do during the day? How typical was it? What were its high points? What were its low points? Try to think of everyone's perspective – for example, how do you think your husband/wife felt about the day? And your children?

Family aims and directions

The reason for thinking about the direction that your family is taking is that there could be a danger that it just drifts from day to day with no particular goal or plan. A problem with drifting is that the family might end up like the boat that, without rudder or oars, gets carried around with the wind or the current and ends up going nowhere.

Something to think about

- What are the key aspects of your family's direction at the moment?
- Now, within the framework of the first two essays, work out the aims or direction you believe would be useful to follow.

Changing patterns

As a result of personally considering the previous questions, you may well find that there are some directions that need change and some that you would like to change. How would you go about this? You might consider the following:

- Change needs to be gradual.
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- Change needs to be agreed to and put into practice by everyone involved, including the proposer! In other words, it's 'we' who may need to change, not 'you'.
- Remember that change is more easy with the little 'things'. But, this is the place to start. It's trite, but very true, to repeat the saying, 'big journeys start with little steps'.
- Time is needed for long lasting change to take place. It would be useful to monitor the changes regularly, to see if they are taking place.
- Some changes may need to be immediate, especially if what needs to be changed is harmful to other members of the family.
- Don't forget to include the children in family discussions about changes.

Balancing work, religious, school and family life

Family life is often a balancing act. There are so many conflicting and competing influences that many families become stressed in trying to balance everything. What are some of the pressures?

Money – there is little doubt that the cost of living is rising. Housing is more expensive as is food. And there are many social pressures to have what 'just everyone' has – and we are constantly bombarded in advertising on what these 'necessities' of life are.

Leaving aside the things that are advertised, it often happens in many societies that in order to cope, both husband and wife take a job each. This can lead to easing financial difficulties but can lead to other problems.

Family integration – where both mother and father work there can be less time for them to spend with their children and with each other. The children can become less supervised and a feeling of less care and this can lead to family tensions and a lack of communication. Childcare – this is becoming more prevalent where, in order for the family to be more financially secure, children are put into childcare to enable both parents to work. A variation of this is where the grandparents help with the care.

The activity 'circus' – where parents and children go around in circles from one activity to another. The aim of this is for children to have meaningful activities that help in their general growth. These activities can be ecclesial, school, extra-curricular and so on.

Job pressures – every job seems to have its own set of pressures. Some may have long hours; some are stressful in both short and long term; some require the absence of the father for varying periods.

A key element of trying to achieve a balance is to spend some time with the whole family sitting down and identifying the pressures, the problems and the activities and then prioritising them. The first step in such a planning session is to put God first in reading and prayer. We need His guidance in all our lives and asking His help in faith will go a long way in achieving the balance.

Something to remember – sometimes as parents we can be very committed to trying to do the best for our children and have them involved in so much that they don't have time to be children. Let's make sure they have time just to be themselves.

Something to think about

- Try to identify the key pressures in your family. Ask your family to help in the identification.
- Think of three key things you would like to do each day to ensure some family 'togetherness' time. (What have you, or other families found successful?)
- Make a list of a few activities your family can do together at various times.

Family processes

We've mentioned that families are made up of very dynamic relationships. The aim of the family is to live, play and work together for the benefit of all members. Often, part of the social activity is the interaction between brothers and sisters (and between brothers and brothers, and sisters and sisters). This can be very enriching for each of them. There are however, times when the interaction is not so enriching and can be simply tense.

The most important thing to recognise in a family is that each member is different. Each member needs to be regarded as being different and that difference needs to be respected by all.

Family management

You've probably realised by now that parents need to develop good skills in family management. Being able to recognise each member in the family (mother, father and children) as having their own integrity, caring for them and, above all, loving them and then trying to manage all of the good and bad times together is so important, as is recognising the way God can assist us is most important.

Something to think about

- Think of five skills (virtues might be another word) that you believe you need to help in the management of the family. Try to think of specific instances in your own family life as you can to help you identify the skills.

Some verses to think about

Here are some verses about family relationships. You might like to read them and have a quick discussion about the importance of each.

- Leviticus 19:32 – honouring older people
- Romans 12:9 and Romans 13:8 – respect for one another
- Ephesians 6:1 – children obeying parents
- Exodus 20:12 – honouring parents