
Foundations for Families – Family context

5 Parenting skills - teamwork

Reading – Ephesians 2:17-22 *Keywords* – foundations stone; building; peace

Teamwork

You will recall from the second essay that it is important to place considerable emphasis on mother and father sharing responsibilities, and the workload. Parenting is a matter of team work. In our current society there is a greater emphasis on mother and father sharing many tasks, especially if both need to work to maintain financial support for the family.

One of the Biblical pictures you might imagine in your working together is that of the oxen joined together with the yoke. (Matthew 11:29-30) While we don't see too many oxen around these days, we certainly know what it means. The two oxen are inextricably joined together so that they can pull together in the one direction. They wouldn't get anywhere if they tried to go in separate directions. Of course, the yoke in our case is the bond of love in Christ. There can be no greater bond, nor a more effective one.

Something to think about

- What are some of the main ways parents can share the workload in the raising of a family? When thinking about this, try to think more broadly at the beginning than just dividing up 'chores'. As a hint, you might start with how you determine goals and priorities. High on this list might be your spiritual foundations.
- What are some keywords (ideas) that must form the basis of your teamwork? Once you have looked at broad issues, try to tease out some of the more 'nitty gritty' activities that demonstrate teamwork.

Getting the most out of each other

It is vital that in the parent partnership that there are three elements: you, me and we. This implies that there must be awareness between parents of the unique contribution each can make to the team. This is standard in any team isn't it? We all know that a team requires commitment on behalf of all members. You can probably think of examples where teamwork falls down when one (or more) members of a team are not respected by the others. Sometimes the lack of respect might have a basis. Others it may not. However, each team has its own unique makeup. Can you imagine a cricket team made up of magnificent batsmen but no bowlers, or excellent bowlers but no batsmen? Can you imagine the cricket team with a wicket keeper who doesn't very well? It's the same in a family team. Each member is unique and can make a specific contribution for the benefit of the family.

And let's not forget who the real Captain is! (Hint: it's not the father, mother or any of the children!)

Something to think about

- Try to think of your own family. What unique contribution can you make? What unique contribution can your wife/husband make? What unique contribution can each of the other family members make?
 - Putting all the resources together, what contribution can you all make as a whole to a rich family life in which every member is respected?
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Planning

One of the great things about parenting is the opportunity to share in planning. Sometimes either parent can plan something without consultation with, or consideration for, the other. Sometimes, both parents can plan something without input from the children. While children's ages may not mean that they always have a broad perspective on what is being planned, they can respond to the fact that they at least have been involved in the planning process. This planning can be carried out at a family 'meeting'. The meeting doesn't always need to be formal or scheduled. Often good 'meetings' simply arise spontaneously out of a discussion around the dinner table. Come what may, any planning should involve consultation with God through prayer. Don't leave Him out of the discussions.

Something to think about

- Work out a program or activity that needs planning. Prepare a few ideas on how you might go about the planning process. Think of the people involved and try to think of what their reaction to the plan might be – and their possible contribution to the discussions. Remember, that in this class discussion, the emphasis is on the process of planning rather than the outcome.

Lone parents

While these discussion notes are largely based on the notion of a family of mother and father and say, one, two children (or more), the same principles can be applied to single parent families. The situation generally can be more difficult. In most cases, the processes could be similar. However, a disadvantage might be that the single parent has to take on more responsibility, in fact, the responsibility of just about everything that happens in the family.

In many cases the single parent has the disadvantage of not having someone close to them to talk over the issue. No matter what our own situation is, it is important that we are aware of the families around us and the circumstances in which they find themselves. We might try to understand their situation and try to be sensitive to their different needs. Where it is possible and welcome, we might try to embrace them in our own family circumstances, especially if we have children at around the same age. While this might not be always possible, the support that could be shown to the single parent in general, may help them through some very difficult times.

Something to think about

- Try to put yourself in the place of a single parent. How would you go about the teamwork that we have discussed here. What differences in planning can you imagine?
- In what practical ways could you go about helping someone who is a single parent?
- In what practical ways could a single parent help you in planning?

Handling parental conflict

It happens! Parents disagree – the issues may be lesser or greater. They may have only momentary consequences or they may be more far-reaching. Why do they happen? Because parents are humans and humans disagree with one another at times. But we know that sometimes it's not just a matter of disagreeing about something. Sometimes we have a point to make, or we feel something very strongly, and our view isn't necessarily the same as that

of our wife or husband. Our disagreements can range from simple household distribution of duties to more fundamental ways of helping raise our children.

How do we try to resolve these conflicts? The Scriptural principle is to show love to one another and to talk through the issues. We should never lose track of the words of the Apostle John -

‘Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.’ (1 John 4:7)

And we can take the words of Jesus Matthew 18:15 very liberally– when we have a parental disagreement we should talk to our brother (or sister/husband/wife) about it. The lines of communication are important.

Something to think about

- Jot down a few words that itemise the kind of conflicts (relating to families) that occur in household. Don’t think too deeply about them for the moment. Let the list just ‘roll out’.
- Now that you have your list, group them into those that are more important and those less important.
- Choose one of each of the less and more important groups and suggest a ways you might address the conflict.

Parental styles

We might be able to hold many disagreements at bay by respecting our partner and his/her views and also recognising that there are different parenting styles. The styles can be related to our personalities. Essentially, we are all different and it is so important for us to recognise the differences and work to their strengths. One parent might be exceptionally active and a little volatile and the other the quieter, steadier type. While this can sometimes lead to conflicts, through patient discussion and a mutual recognition of the value in each other’s personality, the family can benefit immensely.

Dealing with specific conflicts

The extent to which time is spent in trying to resolve an issue may depend on the seriousness of the issue itself. Some less major conflicts might be readily resolved. Others will take greater time. There are many ways to resolve conflicts – the following is just one. (You might like to discuss others that you are aware of in later discussion.)

Prayer – seeking God’s guidance to help you achieve your agreement. A short Bible reading of a few verses (say, from the Psalms) will help to create a peaceful atmosphere.

Defining goals – work out what each of you is trying to achieve in the issue you are facing.

Finding areas of agreement – try to find areas where you agree (it’s all too easy to find the disagreeable areas!)

Take a break – have a temporary break from your discussion so that there is time for the different views to be assimilated.

Persist – don’t give up in ‘exasperation’ because you cannot reach agreement. Go through the process again and try to find a way that will lead to the conflict resolution. It may mean that one or both may need to compromise their position a little.

Remember, though, that taking Paul's advice can be very helpful:

'In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.'
Ephesians 4:26

A final comment

We should always recognise that conflict will occur. How we handle it will determine the way in which we can create a positive atmosphere in our family. And this is the main point – we should turn conflict into a very positive experience. We can be richer by going through the process of discussion. We should always make sure that we discuss – and a prime part of discussion is **listening!**

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