

MARITAL COUNSELLING

PARENTHOOD IN MARRIAGE

I. Definition of Family/Parenthood

Biblical marriage is a faithful bond between a man and woman with the four basic features: **1. Covenant 2. Grace 3. Empowering (or lines of mutual submissiveness) and 4. Intimacy.** Yet a marriage may not constitute a family. Jesus placed limits on what He considered to be the difference between a *marriage* or a *relationship*. When He spoke with the woman at the well of Samaria, He distinguished between her previous five *marriages* and the *relationship* she was now living in (John 4:16–18).

Marriage in its most basic form does not necessarily mean that it is a family. When we begin using the terms “father and mother,” we’re speaking of a family. Some may object to this definition because they believe that once you define who is “in” you must also be stating who is “out” of the composition of a family.

Everyone finds their roots in a **family of orientation**. Once a child leaves their family of orientation and enters the bond of marriage, they remain as members of their **family of origin**. Once that couple gives birth to a child, the parents and their child together become a “**family of procreation.**”

Although there are a variety of domestic configurations, there can only be one foundation of society and therefore only one definition of a family. The family is the basic unit of our society and each and everyone of us has a family of origin. By definition, the family of procreation it includes children and refers to its uniqueness and not to the characteristics of domestic structure or relationship. That uniqueness has no substitute according to the Word of God.

God intends for the family to include both father and mother and their children. Involved, committed and knowledgeable mothering and fathering are essential in natural and healthy human development. There will be close ties with grandparents, siblings and other relatives. The excessive absent of either parent, whether by intention or default, requires compensatory parenting and support. What is unique and special about the body of Christ is that all believers are part of the “**family of God.**” Each local church and its individual members (singles, singles again), marriages and families, whatever their form, are a special part of this spiritual family to nurture and support one another.

In the introduction of the publication titled, “*Profiling Canada’s Families*,” the Vanier Institute of the family states:

“Family is one of the deepest, most abiding of human needs. Few things matter more to most of us more than the well-being of our families. Collectively, families remain the foundation of our society whatever the age, whatever the changes with which they must contend.”

Fathers and mothers become models of faith, teachers of values, disciplinarians, informed caregivers, encouragers, and examples of God’s love (Genesis 2:16 – 19; 6:1 – 2,5; 29:32 – 35). Clearly both fathering *and* mothering are essential in the care in nurturing of young children.

II. Family Types

A. Natural Family - the traditional family: father, mother, and their biological children

B. Blended Family - a family consisting about two adults and children operating as a family. Due to divorce, separation, or death, the children may be the product of other biological parents or of just one of the adults in the family.

C. Single parent family - one parent with children, either biological or adopted.

D. Extended family - family members related to the parents or children: grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives.

The community as well as its churches is made up of marriages, families, the unmarried, the widowed, the divorced, single-parent families, remarriages, and re-married families. The community of believers needs to become the primary support system for those who have faced firsthand the breakdown of the family unit.

It often seems of the Christian community is much harder on those who fall short of God’s intentions with respect to divorce, re-marriage or sexual sin than on those who fail in other ways (e.g. - gossiping, lying etc.). We must find a proper balance of encouraging a godly standard with out becoming critical of those who need our compassionate support. Asking ourselves “**What Would Jesus Do**” could keep us from becoming judgmental.

III. The Time of Parenthood

Every couple needs to ask themselves how many years of their married life that they want to be raising children. As you can see, those who choose to have children must be prepared for a lifetime of commitment.

- ___ Number of children you desire
- X Years apart you want your children
- = Total
- + Add 18 years
- = The total number of years you'll be raising a family
- + Age when you have your first child
- = Age your children will begin directing their own lives

IV. The Purpose of Parenthood

Once we act according to Ephesians 6:4, we find that God's order for parenthood contains three basic commands: to discipline, to teach, to love.

A. To Discipline

God holds parents directly responsible for disciplining their children. Eli, the priest (I Samuel 3:13,14) incurred God's wrath for not restraining his sons. The following are important guidelines for discipline:

- a. Begin at infancy
- b. Don't be afraid to be the boss
- c. A child who has everything is deprived
- d. You do not give favour by being lenient
- e. Continual threats without action are harmful
- f. Administer discipline justly and promptly
- g. Be consistent

IV. The Purpose of Parenthood (Contd.)

A. To Discipline (Contd.)

There are several Biblical demands for discipline:

- a. Lack of discipline indicates a hatred for your child (Proverbs 13:24)
- b. The rod is the first response, not the last resort, if the action is deserving of it (Proverbs 29:15)

B. To Teach

- a. Teaching must be adapted to the specific needs and character of each child
- b. Teaching must be specific (table manners, moral values, etc.)
- c. Teaching needs to emphasize the things you want your child to learn. Promote the positive. They will easily learn the negative. A hypocrite often says “*do as I say*”; a mentor says “do as I do”; a teacher says “do as I did”
- d. Teaching must be modelled (I Corinthians 11:1)
- e. Remove anything from your home that is contrary to what you want your child to learn.

C. To Love

Children often misbehave simply to be noticed. Children have been naughty just to be given the time with parents that is lacking.

- a. Just as punishment demands physical expression, so does loving your children.
- b. Love must be equally distributed to every child (i.e. - Jacob with Joseph and Benjamin).
- c. “*Love times*” often need to be set aside and guarded.
- d. Love and courtesy goes hand in hand.

V. THERE IS A BALANCE THAT MUST BE MAINTAINED

There seem to be two extremes that parents fall into. Some parents are too lenient and under discipline their children. Boundaries must be set firmly in place. A child actually gains security when limits are clearly known. Other parents are too authoritarian and become unfair in their punishment. A child clearly understands when they have been treated unfairly. It can cause many other discipline problems.

VI. WHY IS CORRECTION NECESSARY?

A. We are all Born Into Sin

Even though young children appear charming, lovable and innocent, they are still born with a sinful nature. (Psalm 51:5; 58:3). If we do not curb this sinful nature, it will eventually mature into acts that will create a multitude of sorrows.

B. Sin Must be Punished and Righteousness Rewarded

We are given a God-given responsibility to discipline our children much like God disciplines us for sinful actions (Hebrews 12:6-8). Parents need to be responsible to training their children in ways that will bring about a child of quality (Ephesians 6:4). If sin is not dealt with it will affect a whole society. We are to keep our standards high even though it may bring us into difficult decisions (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

C. God Holds Parents Responsible for their Children

God holds parents accountable for enforcing righteous patterns, punishing evil actions in order to bring about a character that is submissive to God. Eli felt the judgement of God against himself and his two sons because he feebly protested against their adultery and greed and therefore did little to restrain them (I Samuel 2:22-25).

D. A Child will Seldom Learn to Live Upright on Their Own

A child that is restrained and held responsible for his action will become one who won't bring shame to his parents (Proverbs 29:15). If we want to delight in our children, we must correct their wrong actions (Proverbs 29:17). We must give the necessary correction while there is still hope (Proverbs 19:18).

E. It Will Set a Godly Pattern for Their Life

Some parents still have an influence over their children after they leave the home (Proverbs 22:6). In fact, some parents have more respect from even their children who have grown into adulthood and are living on their own than other parents who have their children still at home and under their direct care and responsibility.

VII. THE IMPORTANCE OF HONOUR/RESPECT

A. It is One of the Highlights of the Commands of God

The Bible is very specific in the area of honouring our parents (Exodus 20:12; 21:15, 17; Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20). It is important to realize that God places this commandment on the top of the list of laws regarding our relationships one to another. The New Testament reemphasises the truth (Matthew 15:3-9; Mark 7:6-13).

B. There is a Wonderful Promise for Those Who Heed its Warning

There is a reward of a long and productive life (Ephesians 6:1-3). Our children will never learn to honour God if they don't first learn to honour their parents. We can never live a truly meaningful life outside of the will of God. Those who are taught honour and respect will use its valuable teaching in all areas of life (i.e., - law, government, marriage, workplace).

Our churches must work to better equip parents to reach their full potential as God has granted them the ability to do so. The late Dr. C.C. Ellis of Juniata College studied to see why certain Christian leaders objected to bringing Sunday School into churches. He found a thought-provoking objection.

“If the church takes up the teaching of the children,
the homes will let it go and will leave the
responsibility to the church!”

We must work together to raise godly children that we can be proud of.

The Police Department in Houston, Texas, drew up a list titled

"Twelve Rules for Raising Delinquent Children"

1. Begin at infancy to give the child everything he wants. In this way, he will grow up to believe the world owes him a living.
2. When he picks up bad words, laugh at him. This will make him think he is cute. It also encourages him to pick up "cuter" phrases that will blow off the top of your head later.
3. Never give him spiritual training. Wait till he is 21 and then let him "decide for himself."
4. Avoid the use of the word "wrong." It may develop a guilt complex. This will condition him to believe later, when he is arrested for stealing a car, that society is against him and he is being persecuted.
5. Pick up everything he leaves lying around - books, shoes, clothing. Do everything for him so he will be experienced in throwing all responsibility onto others.
6. Let him read any printed matter he can get his hands on. Be careful that silver ware and drinking glasses are sterilized, but let his mind feast on garbage.
7. Quarrel frequently in the presence of your children. In this way they will not be too shocked when the home is broken up later.
8. Give the child all the spending money he wants. Never let him earn his own. Why should he have things tough as YOU had them?
9. Satisfy his every craving for food, drink and comfort. See that every sensual desire is gratified. Denial may lead to harmful frustration.
10. Take his part against neighbours, teachers, and policemen. They are all prejudiced against your child.
11. When he gets into trouble, apologize for yourself by saying, "I could never do anything with him."
12. Prepare yourself for a life of grief. You'll be apt to have it.