

# Children in Relationships

## Scripture References

Children are a gift from the LORD; they are a reward from him.

*Psalm 127:3 NLT*

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.

*Ephesians 6:4 NLT*

## Notes and Highlights

### TRUST God's Design for children

- Children are a joy and a blessing to have; a gift and reward from the Lord.
- God's design includes children being raised in godly families where parents pass on the legacy of trusting God and teaching their children to know and revere God and trust Him in their lives.
- God's design is for children to be raised with unconditional, sacrificial love, yet with appropriate discipline, just as God our Father loves us unconditionally, and disciplines us in line with His love for us.

### Importance of the parents having a united front in dealing with children

- Although children are a blessing, they can also present a challenge to the couple's relationship when the child's parents have not talked about and decided ahead of time how exactly how to raise their children.
- Each spouse/partner may have very different ideas on parenting, discipline, nurturing children, etc. Ideally, all these should have been ironed out beforehand – particularly as to who exactly will be doing what, when, how and why.
- It is also important for both parents to agree and decide on how they will back each other up and present a united front before their children. Avoid situations that can lead to children playing one parent against the other, or a biological parent against a stepparent.
- Reminder: just because you may have started out so in love with each other before the child/children came along, that does not guarantee that everything will just work out automagically. To be able to maintain unity and harmony in your relationship, both parents must intentionally DECIDE, DON'T SLIDE<sup>1</sup> the day-to-day practicalities of raising their children ahead of time.
- Ideally, children should always see love between their parents which helps give them emotional stability. When adults argue or fight in front of children, particularly very young children, that can be very unsettling for the children.

### Raising Children in Blended Family Situations

- In blended family situations, it is even more vital for both the biological parents of each child, as well as the new stepparent(s) to work out beforehand the practical details of their approach to parenting, in accordance with God's Word.
- When two people who have children from prior relationships enter a new relationship with each other, they should really take the time beforehand to come to agreement on how to parent their

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<sup>1</sup> From the book *Fighting for Your Marriage* by Markman, Stanley & Blumberg, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, Chapter 1 Five Keys for a great Relationship, pp 21-22

blended family in accordance with God's Word, as well as establishing the proper biblical authority structure.

- As an example, we may have a situation where a mother and her child or children from a previous relationship are about to enter a new relationship. The mother and her child or children are already a family unit. Now a new man is about to blend into that pre-existing family unit. How does he do so, what rights does he have, as a stepfather, to guide and correct his partner's children, who are not his own? All this should be worked out as early as possible to avoid conflict later on.
- How smooth the "blending" of the pre-existing family units into one cohesive larger family will be all depends on the willingness of the stepparents to accept and love and treat their stepchildren as their own.
- Placing emphasis on "his" versus "her" children will not foster healthy relationships. Only when all the children are considered "our" children can proper authority structure be in place. Goes back to the importance of the couple presenting a united front to their children and stepchildren.

### Trusting God's Design for the Order of Family Priorities

- God's design is for the couple unit to be the core of the family structure.
- The strength of the family is largely dependent on the strength of the joint leadership of the couple unit, on the strength of the couple's relationship with each other.
- For each couple, the biblical order of priorities is God first, then your spouse, followed by the children, and then others.
- The couple in a committed relationship need to keep their relationship as a couple as the primary focus and a higher priority even than their relationship with their children. That requires work, that requires adjustments, and intentionality. They may need to remind each other about that need often.
- The best thing any parent can do for their children is to love their spouse or partner so as to model healthy relationships. Parents would then be modeling for the children how the parents are investing the time and effort to work on their relationship as a couple.
- **EMPTY NEST** – another reason to properly prioritize your mate ahead of your children is that someday those children grow up and leave.
- Keep the focus as a couple on staying together and presenting a united front to the children in the relationship.
- The best way for children to learn how to have a healthy relationship is by example, by having it modeled to them by their parents/stepparents.

### The Benefit of Spiritual Instruction and Counsel

- New relationships will go a lot smoother when the couple seek spiritual instruction and counsel to gain insight into how to have healthy relationships, including how to parent any children they may already have or will bring into the relationship in the future.
- Even people who have had relationships before can benefit from going through a series of sessions specifically designed to help the couple prepare for their covenant relationship. A well-designed program would also help identify any areas or habits or thinking patterns that need to be addressed so they don't derail the relationship.
- Another benefit of getting spiritual instruction or counsel is to check how well aligned the relationship is with God's Word and His design for healthy relationships.

## The Benefit of Intentionality

- The day-to-day life in a relationship will go a lot smoother when the couple intentionally work out details such as how children are to be raised, how you will discipline them as needed, who will do the bulk of the disciplining, how do you support each other, etc.
- Being intentional also helps each partner realize that there are many factors that impact why they or their partner behave in certain ways in various situations. Once they can identify these factors or influences, such as background, birth order, personalities, etc., they can then take steps to address them as a united couple.
- Being deliberate about seeking the Lord's guidance on a daily basis about the person you are in a committed relationship with, as well as the children you have jointly been blessed with, whether your own, or your mate's, makes a massive difference in how happy and fulfilled the relationship will be.

## Influences of Background, Birth Order, Personalities

- Parents coming from different family backgrounds will generally approach parenting differently.
- How we were raised ourselves as well as our experiences growing up will have a significant bearing on how we raise our own children, or the children that become part of the relationship.
- We should also consider how our past influences the way we correct or direct our children, and ask God's guidance on making sure you align with biblical principles in parenting.
- Birth order can also influence the dynamics between the couple as well as their individual parenting styles.
- When people come from different financial backgrounds, different values are placed on having things and these are passed on to the children. Parents who felt deprived when they were young may tend to make sure that their own children have more material blessings.

## The Benefit of Intimate Knowledge of Each Other

- Understanding your mate's background, personality, exposure, value system, etc. will help you come to agreement on how to parent as a united couple.
- Usually, it is beneficial for the couple to have more time to adjust to each other in a committed relationship before adding children to the mix.

## When the Union has not yet been blessed with children

- This may result in external pressures from other people, or internal pressures where the couple starts questioning what they might be doing wrong. It could shake the couple's faith and cause doubt. It may also result in finger pointing.
- Be honest and real and take all our moaning and groaning and griping and whining to God.
- Don't let the lack of children as a fruit of the relationship make you take your eyes off of your relationship with God, and off of nurturing your relationship with your mate.

## Resources

### Primary resource

the Holy Bible – as the ultimate source of 100% God's Truth.

### Other resources

***Fighting for Your Marriage*** by Howard Markman, Scott Stanley and Susan Blumberg.