

Today, there can be no doubts in the minds of anyone, that we are indeed living in trying times. Incurable diseases, war and death, poverty, crime and criminal related activities, drugs and kidnapping are now becoming permanent fixtures in any news programme.

Many questions are being raised as a result of these occurrences, and the answers seem to be elusive. The population is blaming the government, the government is blaming its employees and the trend of passing the buck continues until everyone or every institution is blamed. All the while, incidents of criminal activities are continuing at an alarming rate.

The family plays a very important role in the understanding and solving of the present problems and while there are many other factors to explore and investigate, if we are to truly solve these problems today, we must focus primarily on the family, its role, functions and responsibilities.

## **Priorities of the Family**

Every couple that gets married must make a list of priorities, whether they do it formally or informally. They set goals and work towards these goals. Couples usually have a vision of what they want to become – of what they want to achieve. In many cases, some of these couples may not necessarily sit down and formally plan a vision, but it is done, nonetheless as their actions and statements constitute a vision.

Haven't you and your family ever make plans about the future? – to build your own home in a few years, to do some renovations, to buy a new car, to plan a vacation etc. Haven't you thought about how you are going to achieve these dreams? – what sacrifices that you need to make etc. These plans are part of your vision and all families have such plans.

Some families have short term visions (that is, plans that would materialize in a short space of time). They also have long term plans – those that take longer to occur. Every family must have a vision. Do you have a vision for your family? Do you see the need to have a vision?

Yes! Every family must have a vision. You must plan ahead as you need to have an idea of where you would like to be in five years from now; in ten years from now and so on. Plans are important and goals must be set so that the status of the family can be elevated. No family must ever want to be stagnant. Move forward and upward. The Holy Bible states very clearly that where there is no vision, people perish. Do you want your family to be lost?

However, it is important to understand that in setting your priorities and goals, certain considerations must apply. Look carefully at the following points:-

1. Set goals that are achievable and attainable. Do not ever set goals that you yourself can never achieve. Be realistic and thoughtful in setting these goals.
2. Set goals by your own standard. Determine your own potential and access these goals by your own ability. Very often we want to do what others are doing – do not use your neighbours or relatives as the yardstick by which we set our goals.
3. Prioritize your goals according to your needs. If educating your child is important to you, then educate your child instead of building that extra room.  
Your own ideals in life will help you to prioritize your goals.
4. Both husband and wife must have equal inputs in goal setting. This is not the responsibility of one parent. Listen to each other and be considerate to the other person's ideas and concerns. There must be a lot of compromise.
5. Prioritize your goals according to need and not as a result of emotions. Be sensible and realistic.
6. Prepare for disappointment. Regardless of how well you plan, there will always be something that you didn't cater for. Do not allow unexpected problems to derail your goals. Surely they will cause a setback but never must they totally derail your targets. Prepare to make adjustments as you go along.
7. Always re-visit your goals. Things change as we go along and new and more important needs may arise. Plans must never be rigid. Instead, they must be flexible enough to cater for changes.

If you fail to set goals and prioritize these goals, it will ultimately affect the success of the family.

## **The Need for Professional Recognition**

It must always be our ultimate goal to be recognized in our chosen field.

We must aspire for promotion in the work place. We need to be recognized and acknowledged by our peers as being good at what we do. Each employee must aspire to be the manager, each teacher must aspire to be a principal, and each player must aspire to be the captain.

However, in trying to be better at what we do, some criteria apply. For instance, we may be required to work longer hours at the office, bring extra work at home to complete, enroll in extra courses so that we could upgrade our skills. All of the above require us to spend more time on job related activities and less time with the family. Such actions can have severe consequences in the family life.

If one or both parents are regularly absent from the home, children are forced to stay with substitute parents. It doesn't matter how much a grandparent loves a grandchild or it doesn't matter how efficient and responsible the babysitter is, they can never be the

parents. A child has only one mother and one father and no one could ever replace these people.

I know that many parents would often say that they have no choice- if they are to get ahead in the workplace, they must do many of the things outlined above and these activities would ultimately lead them to being absent from the home. Many parents also claim that the main purpose for doing all these extra activities is for the benefit of the family. The higher I am promoted, the more I will earn and the more I earn, the better I am able to provide for everyone.

But have you considered that sometimes in the quest for professional recognition, the family is lost and by the time you acquire your desired position with increased salaries, the family life is broken beyond the point of repair. The children would have been all grown up by then and the important lessons that you could have instilled in them would have passed you by.

So then, what do we do? Do you remain stagnant in your job? Should you refuse to work extra hours? Should you refuse to upgrade your skills? Do you give up your dreams? No! No! No!

Do both. In order to do both, you need to strike a balance. Your professional life as well as your family life is both important and as a concerned and caring parent, you need to pursue both. It requires good and careful planning for you and your spouse. It is very important that if one parent decides to pursue professional growth and development, the other has to be very present and visible in the family life. This is the kind of compromise that marriages require.

If for example, the wife is on the verge of a promotion at work and it has become necessary for her to work extra hours and attend classes after work, then the husband has to encourage her by supporting her in her endeavours. He must be now very present at home. The understanding and supportive husband would come early, assist with the kids and complete some of the chores at home. In this way, although the mother is temporarily absent, the father is filling in – the children would not be deprived of any attention as a smart and tactful father could easily look after the family needs. The same is true if the positions were reversed.

If this is done properly, then the goals of each are achieved as the wife may eventually get the promotion and the needs of the family are met through the efforts of the father. But in today's society, it is so different. Each parent is in pursuit of separate goals at the same time, often at the expense of the family.

As a principal, I have often heard about children staying with grand parents and babysitters till late in the evening because both parents are late from work regularly. I have often heard that by the time these parents return and collect their children, they

are so tired that they just send their kids off to bed. I need not elaborate on this as many of you know exactly to what I am referring. Aren't we sacrificing everything here? Our children would grow up, right in front of our eyes and we would miss it all.

If this is happening to you, then revisit your goals and re-prioritize your needs. Remember the quality of the family life must always be very high on your agenda and you need to do everything to ensure that it remains of paramount importance.

Please note the following points:

1. Do not let your children be supervised by grandparents and babysitters all the time.
2. One parent must be present to meet and greet the children when they return from school. If the children must be with the sitter for a time after school, parents should ensure that this time is minimized.
3. Parents must take turns if they have to work late. Discuss with your boss and explain the situation. In most cases he will understand and certain arrangements can be put in place.
4. Have regular discussions with your spouse so that each knows of the other's situation. In this way, both parents can understand fully the other's requirements at his/her workplace so that some mutual agreement could be reached.

The ultimate aim is to provide for the family and provision for the family far exceeds only financial provisions. It is very important that we assess our efforts and if these efforts are bringing about undesirable outcomes, we need to organize and plan new and different strategies.

Do not give up on individual dreams but attain these dreams in the context of the family. Other members in the family are just as important as you and in the pursuit of your dreams; you must never affect the life and quality of lives of those around you.

## **Are You Building a House or a Home?**

Do you believe that there is a difference between a home and a house?

Think about it for a minute.

Most certainly, there is a big difference between the two.

Many of us start off by attempting to build a home but eventually end up building a house.

Parents' plans often detail building a home – renovating the existing structure, changing the roof, re-painting the house etc. Plans include acquiring state of the art appliances – radios, mobile phones, stereos, televisions etc. We want new furniture, the best china. We want to host parties and invite friends and family to show off these assets. We measure ourselves by these acquisitions.

All of the above constitute a house. The infrastructure we put in place describes the materialistic environment that we desire. By extension, we do the same for our kids and believe in our hearts that we are fulfilling our roles as parents. We dress them in designer outfits and load them up with the latest gadgets.

Parents support each other and their children with material things and even sometimes believe that once these gifts are showered, everything else will automatically fall into place.

Do you know how many times I have heard parents complain that they provide everything for their children yet still their performance in school is below an acceptable level? They get desks, chairs, books etc as these parents would boast. Entrenched in the minds of some parents is that once they provide these items for their children, then the children would do well. But do you believe that money can buy success? No, it doesn't and if for one minute you believe this, then you are sadly mistaken.

As parents we need to stop building a house and start building a home. Provide emotional support for your spouse and children. Create and sustain an environment at home that is friendly and non-threatening, where everyone is comfortable, free, relaxed and clam.

While the acquisition of material things is important, it is also important that parents must spend time at home ensuring that the environment is one that is supportive. The home must be a lively place –where something interesting is happening all the time. It must be a fun place to be, pleasant conversations regularly take place and problems are solved. Everyone, including children has an opportunity to speak, to give an opinion, to voice his/her approval or disapproval (politely). Home is where values and morals are taught, practiced and reinforced. Home is where children grow and develop physically, socially, intellectually, mentally and emotionally. Home is home and there is no other place in the world like home. We now come back to the question asked before. What are you doing to build a home?

Here are some suggestions -:

1. Unplugged:

Once each week, unplug all the appliances in your home – no television, no radio, no stereo etc. and have each member of the family involved in a game.

Play Scrabble, Monopoly, Sorry or some other family game. Many lovely games are available. Buy one.

Relationships between parents, between children and between parents and children will definitely improve.

The game will be the source of many discussions and everyone will look forward to these events.

2. The family must have at least one meal together each day. During the day, children are at school and on mornings, everyone is hustling to leave home so this makes lunch and breakfast almost impossible for the family to have together. If this is so, then every attempt must be made to have dinner together. At this time, informal discussions can take place and these informal discussions will be very informative. Each person can have a turn to describe how the day was spent or each person can say what was the most pleasant thing that happened to them during the day. Children can talk about school, parents can talk about their work and by so doing, each knows a little about the other. You will hardly ever realize how important these discussions are.  
Do you know that there are many children who have no idea of what their parents do for a living!
3. Make it a rule that at least once for the month (or as your financial situation would allow) that the family goes somewhere together. Go for a pizza, chicken & chips etc. – but do it together as a family. Sometimes, plan trips to the beach, river, the Pitch Lake, the zoo or simply go for a drive.  
The family must do things together. Use your initiative as a parent and plan activities that will include all members of the family.
4. Always be a good listener. As a parent, listen to your children as they speak. Give them an opportunity to voice their opinions and views on different matters, even if you disagree with them. Do not simply dismiss them as children. Afford them these opportunities. The more they speak, the more you will know about them and the more you know about them, the better it is for you.
5. Pray together. Go to the temple, church or mosque together. I am sure that you have heard that a family that prays together stays together. Children must see parental involvement in matters of religion. If you make excuses for not attending religious functions, then children will grow up making these same excuses.
6. Do not openly show discord between spouses. In any marriage, there must be times when parents will disagree with each other. Always discuss differences in a cordial and civil manner. Do not quarrel in front of your children. Children usually take arguments between parents personally and it can affect their emotional development. Instead, children should witness meaningful discussions between parents and they should see that when problems occur, there is a definite way to deal with them and sort them out. Teach your children by the way you behave – children learn by imitating and if they see that disagreements can be solved through polite discussions, then they too might try to solve some of their problems in a similar manner. As parents, you must also realize that some discussions are not suitable for children and parents should discuss such issues if and when they arise, in private.

7. Never put a child against a parent. Some parents have the habit of ill-speaking one parent with a child. This practice should never occur. A child has feelings for both parents and should never be influenced by one to dislike or disrespect the other.
8. Always be supportive. The key role of a parent is to be supportive. Support your spouse – he/she may depend on you for advice, a kind word etc. Your children too, need support. Support here refers to a lot more than just financial support.
9. Be Contented. Contentment is a virtue that is endorsed by all religions. Be contented with who you are and what you have. Never aspire to be someone else. Teach your children this virtue so that they too will grow up with confidence and assurance of being contented with whom they are.

Parents, the answers to the problems and challenges we face today are so elusive that we may spend a lifetime and never find these solutions. But, as we pursue our dreams, we must always know that the family to which we belong requires our fullest attention. Ensure that you fulfill your role in the family. This is the key to success and maybe if family life improves, the problems and challenges that face us may be solved. Let's make a start by being more effective in our family.

*Do all the good you can,  
By all the means you can,  
In all the ways you can,  
In all the places you can,  
At all the times you can,  
To all the people you can,  
As long as you ever can.*

*John Wesley*

- ❖ *To be of value, expressions of appreciation must be continually renewed.*
- ❖ *We must do good to others because it is the right thing to do – not to make ourselves look good.*
- ❖ *It is good to think well; it is divine to act well*
- ❖ *He who wishes to secure the good of others has already secured his own.*