

Once upon a time, the building block of society known as the family was influenced by parents, the church and the extended family. There was safety in this and apart from some exceptions, children grew up to be more or less like their parents. Hardworking, diligent people of integrity produced the same character in their children and the Christian principles found in Scripture strengthened the community as a whole.

Today things are vastly more complex and the myriad of influences that hurtle towards the family can determine the rise or fall of this institution.

Here are a few 'family shapers': How much is your family shaped by them?

### Parents

God designed us to be imprinted by our parents and to learn from them how to effectively manage our own families some day. The way the finances, discipline, problems, holidays, or education were handled in your family will influence how you handle your own. A religious family is not necessarily a Godly one. Being steeped in religious traditions does not mean you have a vibrant and alive relationship with our Lord and Saviour. It is vital that we model for our children what it means to have Scripture governing everything we do. Any decision we make, from education to discipline must be based on God's Word.

### Church

Being regular members of a Congregation is certainly a good tradition and an essential part of growth as a family. Finding the right Church is vital to fortify the family and to provide a platform upon which you can teach your children to serve in the Community. Parents must use discernment from Scripture in order to choose a Church that does not fear preaching the Word of God even if it offends. How do you know that your church is the correct one, if another church

down the road preaches a different message? Some churches ignore missions and evangelism altogether. Others, as Robert Andrews put it: “concentrate solely on saving the lost outside the church, and have not learned to preserve the fruit from biological reproduction that God has placed inside the church. If we save the world and lose our own children, we start over again every generation without the strength of a Christian heritage”. He continues: “The Bible becomes, for all practical purposes, a book of salvation only; one that tells me how to get to heaven, but not how to live in every area of life on a daily basis”.

### Media, the Movies and TV

Nothing impacts us like the visual media. We spend countless hours imbibing the world's message instead of feasting on God's Word. Our children and indeed most adults tend to accept the media's portrayal of the traditional family as the norm. This depiction is rarely wholesome and seldom positive. Non-traditional families are viewed by the undiscerning public as normal and we forget what God's original intent was. That of being the building block of Society. For this to happen, we need courageous and God-fearing fathers that are leaders in their home, loving wives and mothers that fear God and raise their children to love God and respect and honour their elders, and an education that illustrates how Scripture speaks to all areas of life. We must ask ourselves: Is anything we believe about our family, love and marriage being shaped by the Silver Screen? The influence of music is not be underestimated either. Carefully crafted lyrics, repeated over and over via the headset of a teenager, begin to take on a reality that shapes the views and emotions of the listener.

### Psychology

There is certainly no lack of books available today on the topic of parenting, education, marriage and any other domestic topic imaginable. If you enjoy reading, it is sometimes tempting to pick up a well-designed book, written by a well-meaning author in an attempt to become a better parent or spouse. The problem is that what may be acceptable in the medical or psychological community today may be out of favour tomorrow. Rather than taking in trendy advice, we should search the Scriptures for lasting and truly authoritative instructions.

### Peers

We tend to think of peer influence as something that only affects our children at school. But the same is true for parents. If you are unsure about what to do, the natural tendency is to do what everyone around you is doing. Especially in your church. Measurable results are so far in the future that no one knows whether or not a particular view of family behaviour will produce good fruit. It is also true for education. If you are the product of government education, it is natural to assume your children will turn out just as you did with the same educational approach. The onus is on parents to assume the opposite and seriously look at how the education system has changed and what some of the results are today. Considering the many hours spent at school, the character of our children is being shaped now more than the mind being challenged academically. Placing children into Christian schools is not an absolute safeguard either. Deuteronomy tells us (parents) to write God's precepts on our (parents) foreheads to hang them on our (parents) doorposts. It would be dangerous to delegate this responsibility to the local Christian school and assume our job is done.

### **Our Vision**

Too often our families are run on a trial and error basis. They become reactors to whatever life hurls at them, rather than initiators who attack life with an overall battle plan. How much better to make use of the blueprint in God's Word than to make what appear to be random choices. Scripture gives clear goals which we should aim for; in fact this should be the vision we have for our family. We cannot expect our children to 'turn out ok' unless we take serious the Biblical principles of childrearing. It is not good enough to say 'we did the best we could'.

It needs to be our earnest prayer that we would govern our family according to the clear teachings in His Word. What shapes our family will determine the outcome. Clear Biblical ground rules, goals, and a vision for the future will give our children the security they need to develop into mature, productive and useful citizens. Let us aim to raise children who are willing to make a difference in their communities and who are brave enough to live boldly for Christ. With God's grace, our aim should be to raise children who will fear Him more, love Him more and obey Him more than we do. May God give us this boldness.

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