

# What Every Family Should Know



**Working Together  
Sticking Together  
Play/Praying Together  
Loving Together**



Redcliffe United Church  
*At the heart of the Peninsula*



# Introduction

Family; arguably the most important part of our life in bringing us happiness and contentment.

When 'family' goes right, it's great, when it goes wrong, it's devastating!



We'd love family life to be simple, but households come in all shapes and sizes;

- Man and cousin wife – and mistress – with kids.
- Man and wife, ex-wife, and mistresses. Brothers, daughters, step brothers, half brothers.
- Wife and 5 different husbands.
- Mum & daughter in law
- Husband, wife and warring twins!

And these are just some of the households we find in the pages of the bible [the above are described below]...

- Abraham, Sarah & Hagar, Ishmael & Isaac [Genesis 16]
- Jacob, Rachel, Leah & children [Genesis 29]
- The Woman at the Well [John 4]
- Ruth & Naomi [Book of Ruth]
- Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, Jacob [Genesis 25]

The good news is, God engaged with *all* these families. He used them to bless, change and even save their world, even though they weren't perfect.



Family is the basis for our society. It's where we learn to speak, listen, love and argue. It's where we develop our identity and values. It's where we go when the world collapses.

In this booklet we'll be asking, '*What is it every family should know?*' to help them become just a little better!

Oh, and if you think you don't fit, you haven't got a family. Of course you do – the biggest and greatest family of all; the family of God.

***Please Note:***

*The information in this booklet is general and does not take into account your unique family situation! If you need help to work through this, please seek further assistance!*

We're serious! Every family is different. We're going to cover some stuff that may bring up issues for you. I have to assume a certain type of family in this. If your family is already broken, I have compassion for you not judgment. How can it get better for you from here?

This information is also transferrable to work, social groups, sporting clubs and most importantly the Church – the family of God.

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# Working Together



Consider any team, work group, political party; things go better when everyone is pulling in the same direction – working together.

This is also true in families; husband and wife working together towards the same end, helping the kids to be part of that togetherness.

Jesus himself said, '*a family fractured by feuding will fall apart.*' Mark 3:25

How do we get our family working together?

## Parents must be Parents

Whoever the parent/s are in a family, they must decide which direction you are going as a family. Parents make the decisions.

It seems pretty simple but it's amazing how often parents don't behave like parents. I find that I don't behave like the parent when;

### **I want the kids to like me!**

If I rely on getting my love needs from my kids – I need them to *like* me – I stop behaving like a parent, making good decisions, and cave in to their wants! Being a parent means often saying 'no' to treats, tantrums, TV and 'yes' to vegetables, chores, homework and sleep. Your kids might scream and carry on, but you are the parent.

Parents who spoil their kids, *spoil* their kids. Your kids might *like* you in the short run, but they won't *love* you in the long run.

### **I'm scared!**

I often don't behave like the parent because I don't *feel* like the parent. I'm scared! *I don't want to carry the responsibility!* But if mum or dad is scared, how does that make the kids feel? *If Dad is scared, I'm terrified!*

‘Parent up’. If you have kids, you are a parent. You are in charge. Suck-it-up and make decisions, follow through, stand firm.

### **I want to get it right!**

Sometimes I can’t make a ‘parent decision’ because I need more information; I’m worried I won’t get it right. But *a late decision is wrong even if it’s right*. No use telling the kids to catch the 8:45am bus at 9am!

Parents have to make the best decisions they can without all the information. Good parenting is not *perfect* parenting, but positive and proactive!



### **I leave it to the other, or leave the other out.**

Worse of all is when one parent continually leaves the other parent out of the loop, or doesn’t raise to the challenge of decisions making.

Nothing frustrates a wife more than when her man won’t *man-up* and make a decision, or de-values the wife by leaving her out of the decisions, and vice versa.

If you want to say ‘*I don’t love you*’ to your spouse; leave them out of the decisions, or behave like a kid and don’t make any.

## **Parents must be working together**

As a couple, you must agree on just about everything to do with the kids, in front of the kids. Nothing undermines a partner worse than one parent ‘pulling the rug out’ from under the other.

Once upon a time my wife would say, “Ok kids, enough TV.” The kids would complain and come to dad. To my shame, I would back the kids against my wife. I thought she was being too tough [and I wanted the kids to like me!]

She courageously told me how much it hurt her when I did that. I was able to listen, and change my ways. Now I back my wife before my kids.

“You heard what mum said!” If I disagree I still back her and we discuss it later, when the kids are in bed.

If you want to say, ‘I don’t love you’ to your spouse; undermine him/her in front of others.

Remember kids aren’t all sweetness and innocence; they are unfettered selfishness! They will play parents against each other to get their way.

## **Working Together is more than just Common Sense**

King Solomon said, ‘if you want to learn about working together, go to the ant!’

*Go to the ant, you slacker!  
Consider its ways and be wise!  
It has no commander,  
no overseer or ruler,  
yet it stores its provisions in summer  
and gathers its food at harvest. Proverbs 6:6-8*

For a long time people pointed to this verse saying, ‘the Bible is wrong, ants have Queens to command them!’ Ants do have Queens, but scientists now tell us, ‘Queens command no-one, they simply lay eggs!’ The Bible was correct.



Ants are amazing! Millions of individual creatures, following instinct, scent, genes – to build complex cities bigger in scale to anything we humans have built! Individually they are simply wingless wasps, but together they form *Super-Organisms*, greater than the sum of their parts.

Scientists are amazed at how a collection of seemingly mindless wasps become almost conscious! In my way of thinking, something divine is going on.

In the same way, our brain is simply a collection of brain cells. Individually not much – but when they all fire together, in sync, something profound takes place – ‘we’ exist. We become conscious and aware! We still don’t know how this works – where ‘we’ is!

Jesus said something similar. 'Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.' [Matt 18:20]. When we come together as family, as the church – in Jesus name – something divine happens – Jesus is present to do the things he used to do on earth – comfort, heal, challenge, teach, love. We truly do become *the body of Christ*!

This tells me *Working Together* isn't simply practical, common sense – it is divine! Profoundly good things happen when we work together as our own family, and the family of God! We miss out on this when we don't work together!

## **For Reflection...**

- Are you actively working for or against your family and the groups you are part of?
- Which of the reasons given for not being a 'parent' most ring true in your life? How can you work to fix this?
- Are you and your partner on the same page? Find a way to talk about this with him/her.
- How does the idea that working together is more than just 'common sense' but 'Divine' add to the importance of working together in your family, work situation or church?
- For further reading; 1 Corinthians 1:10-17; Philippians 2:1-18; Act 4:32-37



# Staying Together

It's 1915. You're off at the war. You have walked into a living hell beyond anything you ever imagined. You signed up for king and country, but that's not what keeps you here now. That's not what keeps you going.

It's those around you; that band of brothers who are in this together. You go into battle shoulder to shoulder. But more profoundly, it is those at home – your family, your parents, your sweetheart – who keep you going. *I might enlist for king. I might fight for country. But it is only for my sweetheart that I'm willing to die – so that this living hell does not make it to her shores.*

I have only read how valuable the letters and parcels from home were for our diggers. How having those at home remain faithful, helped those abroad go on. The tenacity our ANZACs had to stay true, makes my knees knock as I think about our society today, and how we're terrible at sticking with anything.



Nowhere is this more devastating than in family. Work, clubs, churches need people who are going to stick it out for the long term, but our families, our children need it more.

## Staying Together Makes a difference.

Our second topic is Staying Together. We need families who stay together. I write not to make you feel guilty – we all have a trail of broken relationships behind us – but to encourage you to get back on the horse, and do your best.

I also write acknowledging, that just like Gallipoli, there are times when it is better to get out. When things aren't safe, and retreat is the best option.

If your relationships are challenging your **safety**, your **sanity** or your **salvation** – get out!

We know generally;

- **Children** have better outcomes in stable families.
- **Adults** have better outcomes in stable families.
- **Society** has better outcomes with stable families

Should we condemn those who don't stick together? No, we should help them, because a fourth thing is true;

- **Broken families** have better outcomes when they are supported by loving, stable communities, like churches.

## It takes Grit.

Staying together isn't easy. It's hard. A marriage and a family is like a garden, you've got to work on it often to keep it alive!

Remember math class? If you came to a difficult question and gave up – that's where you would stay! But if you worked harder, asked for help, persisted, you would take your math to a deeper level! So it is with family!

Handwritten notes on lined paper showing a chi-square test table and calculations. The notes include the formula for chi-square, a table of values, and a conclusion.

Chi-square test for independence

Formula:  $\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$

Table:

	df=2	df=3
0.10	0.07	0.06
0.30	0.21	0.17
0.50	0.35	0.29

Conclusion:  $\chi^2 < 0.05$  (unlikely chance) – not no independent effect size with chi-square test for independence.

## What helps us Stay Together?

- **Considering the other.** We must take the other person/people into account in our daily decisions. This is the end of selfishness and ego. This is hard work!
- **Listening.** Seek to understand the other through listening. Put *love* into your communication. This is hard work!
- **Ask, 'How can I love you?'** and act on it. Do things you like together. Get rid of saying 'You never...' More hard work!
- **It takes two!** You must both do this! I can see why relationships break up. One or both parties want to dominate; can't empty themselves of ego, are not interested in doing the above.

St Paul writes in the Bible<sup>1</sup>, '*Husbands, love your wives...*' That seems easy, I like her!

'*...as Christ loved the Church...*' OK? How did Christ love the Church? [His followers, not the building]

'*...and gave himself up for her on a cross.*'

Boom! Whoa! Jesus was willing to *sacrifice* for his wife!? Yes, that's how husbands should love their wives – be willing to sacrifice their own rights for their spouse's happiness [and vice versa].

And if you ever needed something clear about domestic violence keep reading; *So men ought to love their wives as their own body*. Who ever hurt their own body? Who ever beat themselves? There is to be no violence in our relationships.



## Divine Character

Staying together like this isn't just practical, common sense – it's divine character.

St. Paul writes the above and we think he's talking about husbands and wives, but he says, no, I'm really talking about Jesus and us [the church].

God has been faithful to humanity for centuries despite humanity's unfaithfulness to God from day one! [The Old Testament is testament to this!] The New Testament continues this theme but takes it to a new level calling Jesus the faithful bridegroom of the church.

Jesus continues to love us despite ourselves. It is *Divine Nature* to be faithful. That's good news for us, and a challenge for us. To be faithful in our relationships, and to show grace to those whose relationships fail.

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 5:25

<sup>2</sup> Isn't it amazing that one of the things Jesus left for us was Communion. Sharing a meal around a table, a family tradition where we tell our story that defines our identity!

## **For Reflection...**

- How would you rate yourself on your 'stickability' to things? Is this something that needs some serious work?
- Life does become mundane, and the grass can seem greener over the fence. Yet divorce rates are higher for second marriages – people who 'hop out' for something greener are often worse off. How can you 'stay true' through mundane times?
- How can Jesus' faithfulness inspire your own?
- For further reading; Matthew 5:27-28; The Book of Ruth; Matthew 19:4-6.

# Playing & Praying Together

## Playing Together

The family that plays together, stays together. It might seem trivial, but most of our strongest family memories come from times we *laughed, struggled* or *cried* together.

Hard times come, but the more we play and pray together as families, the better prepared we will be for the struggle and tears.

How do we Play Together?

- **Family holidays** – often the simple ones, roughing it, time together.
- **Games/sports** – board games, sports, bike riding together.
- **Family traditions** around events like Christmas & birthdays.
- **Sharing family stories** – telling your kids what life was like when you were younger. This is a powerful way to build identity.
- **Turning chores into games**
- **Wrestling/hugs** – boys especially like to wrestle!
- **Family meals around a table** – consistently listed as a significant part in building healthy families and healthy adults!<sup>2</sup>
- **Be playful about faith** – a deadly, dire faith will attract no-one!
- **Can you think of more?**



If you do some of the above you will unknowingly build fundamental building blocks in your children;

- **Identity** – Who your kids are and where they come from.
- **Security** – I have people I belong to, who are there for me.
- **Communication** – No greater way to learn to debate, to compliment, to disagree, to love – than around a safe kitchen table.
- **Character.**
- **Future Family** – A knowledge of what family is, and how to do it!

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<sup>2</sup> Isn't it amazing that one of the things Jesus left for us was Communion. Sharing a meal around a table, a family tradition where we tell our story that defines our identity!

Do you find yourself saying, 'I'd like to do family stuff, but she's always on the computer.' Here's a challenge as a parent or grandparent. ***Be interested in what they are interested in.*** Find out their hobbies and be interested in them. Play their computer games with them. You are the adult, bend to them!

## Praying Together

The family that prays together, also stays together. We know that developing the spiritual side of life is vitally important for self-esteem, to reduce self-harm, and to bring purpose to life.

The first thing to know about this is, *you can't pass on what you haven't got.* If you want your kids to have faith, you must have it first!

The Bible says, *The commandments I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates.* Deuteronomy 6:6-9



It encourages us to make our natural life spiritual and our spiritual life natural. Not to be fake about faith, but to let it leak out from us as natural as breathing! What a challenge, to develop a faith like that.

How can we develop that in our families<sup>3</sup>?

- **Read the Bible at bedtime.** Read to your kids an age appropriate version of the Bible stories at bed time. Talk about it!
- **Pray before bed,** at dinnertime and other times. Teach your kids to pray. Giving your kids your individual attention once a day is crucial for giving them the space to have the courage to tell you the things they are struggling with.
- **Family devotions.** Doing the above as a family, perhaps in a fun way.

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<sup>3</sup> It's been noted that all these things are what educationalist tell us to do with our kids; read with them, talk to them, develop critical thinking. If kids worship, they learn to focus and think. No wonder people who join a church tend to improve their life outcomes!

- **Worship together.** If worship is not a priority for you, it will be even less for them. Kids will go through a time of fighting you about going to church – they want to know how *important* and how *reasonable* you'll be about it.
- **Let the kids overhear you** praying, reading the bible, talking about faith.
- **Share with them how you came to faith.**
- **Serve as a family.** Find ways to live out your faith as a family. Feed the poor. Cook for a neighbour. Protest together. This teaches kids you mean it!

### **A Couple of Don'ts.**

- Don't **guilt** kids with God, or moralise Christianity. If faith boils down to do your homework, be good obey your teachers, kids will run a mile from it!
- Don't use God as your **discipline strategy**. '*God doesn't like lying!*' No, you don't approve of lying, don't make God the bad guy!
- Don't get **super-spiritual** and scare kids! [Blaming being sick on evil spirits, or the like.]

Remember, how the Father treated the Prodigal Son when he returned after running away? Graciously, with longing love, no condemnation, welcoming.

**And this will grow in your kids**, something amazing!

- ***Spiritual Identity*** – they have Heavenly value.
- ***Eternal security*** – life that lasts forever.
- ***Divine Communication*** – ability to talk to God.
- ***Godly Character*** – isn't that needed today?
- ***God's family*** – the best of all

Play & Pray as a family!

## **For Reflection...**

- When was the last time you laughed with your children/ grand-children?
- What positive family traditions do you already have?
- What is some extra 'play' or 'pray' you could add?
- How could you employ some of this in your workplace, sporting group or church family?
- For further reading; Matthew 6:5-15; Mark 10:13-16



# Loving Together



People often describe the moment they see their first born. They say they were overwhelmed with this deep sense of love for the child, and it caught them off guard.

When we were preparing for our second child, part of me thought I didn't have enough love to go around. So deep was my love for my daughter, how could a son fit? But I didn't need to worry. When he was born my love grew! It was astounding!

Given what I have described, we shouldn't have to say, 'as a family, love one another', but we do! Families can give us the greatest of joy, but also be the deepest source of pain!

Sometimes we treat our families like we would never treat a stranger. We talk to our spouse, children or siblings like we would never talk to another! When you hurt your family, you hurt yourself! Love one another!

The scariest fact going around is that the person most likely to murder you, is your spouse! THIS SHOULD NOT BE! Love your family!

How do we love our family?

- **Understand them as gift!** Your husband, wife, children are NEVER property – they are gift. Given to you by God, and He will take them away if you don't love them. Someone has said, 'if you want to be treated like a prince, treat your wife like a princess.' and 'the greatest thing a husband can do for his children, is love his wife.'
- **Make them a priority.** This can be hard in a world that screams that our value is in what we do – our job or career.
- **Treat one another with kindness.**
- **Think and expect the best about the other.**
- **Be patient, forgive, say sorry...**

## Love is a Decision

It's a remarkable thing to realise that to love our family it is not about feelings! ***It's a decision to act in certain ways.*** The challenge for loving in families is to choose to act in positive ways when you don't feel like it, when you are tired, when you are annoyed at the other person, when you are angry! That is the secret of loving as families!

St. John wrote this;

*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. 1 John 3:16-18*

Families *lay down their lives for one another*. I don't mean literally die, I mean *put their own wants aside for the benefit of others*. As we said at the start, this seems to come naturally for most mothers. They give up their time, hobbies, careers even, for their children<sup>4</sup>. This is a wonderful, pre-



cious gift! Our society by and large does not value this like it should.

While it might come naturally for some, or for a time, as we said at the start, it's not always true! Families don't always love as we should!

### **We need something more!**

The Biblical answer to this is in the above passage. The Bible argues that *we cannot love as we should in our own strength!*

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<sup>4</sup> I'm not saying parents *have to* do this, just listing some things parents do sacrifice for their children. It is actually best to maintain a healthy level of 'self' in life such that you keep up some of your interest, work. Some people choose to give more in certain areas.

*We will fail!*

We need the love of God in us to love when our love runs dry!

How do we get God's love? We must dwell on, imbibe, make it our own – God's love for us.

Jesus laid down his life *for us. Us!* That includes **you!**

It's like you've been held hostage by a terrorist cell, always in darkness, always in doom – who knows what your outcome will be.

They want millions! Trillions! It doesn't matter, no-one will pay. Then Jesus steps up and says, 'I will take your place.' Wow.

The terrorists are happy, 'heck, we've got the Son of God!' They execute him for you – you go free!

How would you feel towards this Jesus? Pretty grateful! Probably want to live a life of gratefulness in return!

## **Eternal Rewards**

In the Bible's version of the story, Jesus' death wasn't the end. Instead of a posthumous medal as a reward for his great act, God raised him from the dead as a reward for this great act. Once you've been raised from the dead, you can never die again – that's eternal life.

The story doesn't stop there – Jesus says, 'anyone who wants to call themselves mine – you can share my reward – life forever!'

## **Get your Soul around God's love**

If we can get our heads, our hearts, our soul around what Jesus has done for us – how deep and wide his love is for us – then it will empower our love for others. Because the truth of the matter is – Jesus did this for us while we didn't even care about him. While we ignored, or were apathetic, or even antagonistic towards him.

*'While we were still his enemy, Jesus died for us.'* Romans 5:8



## We can love, even when we don't like!

This can empower us<sup>5</sup> to love people [*to act in loving ways towards them*] while we don't like them. While we don't feel it. Now that is Divine family love, because it comes from the Divine Father!

### For Reflection...

- Did you experience that 'love burst' for your children?
- How is your love for your family?
- Does defining love as a *decision* rather than *feeling* help?
- Are you able to *love* even when you don't *like*?
- Do you need the *love of God* in your life to empower your love for others? What are you going to do about it?
- For further reading; 1 Corinthians 13 [the great chapter on love.]  
1 John 3: 16-20; 1 John 4: 7-12

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<sup>5</sup> Christian teaching is that when we "get on Jesus' team", he actually fills us with the Holy Spirit, the 'power' of God, to live beyond our natural self! It's not just following an example, but letting his example live out through us!

# Love Languages.

Dr Gary Chapman wrote the New York Times Bestselling book “The Five Love Languages.” If you haven’t come across it before it is a very powerful model for understanding how we better give and receive love. We would encourage anyone to buy the book!

Basically the book says that there are five main ways people express and receive love. Often in families husband or wife are expressing love *in their language* but the others is not noticing!

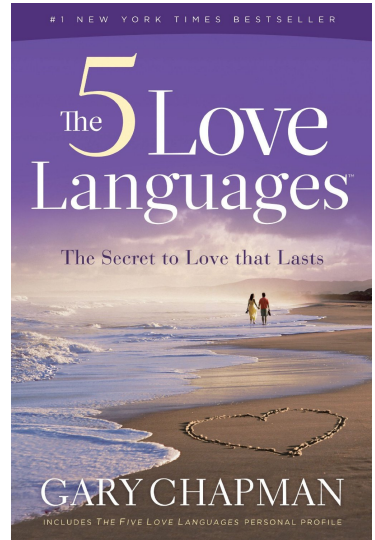
Like the husband mowing the lawn, fixing the house, doing the dishes. He is *serving* his wife to say ‘I love you’ – but she wants to hear him say, ‘I love you’ and snuggle on the lounge – but he rarely does! He get’s frustrated because she never does anything for him!

They love each other, but are ‘talking’ past one another.

If you can work out your love language, your spouse’s and your children’s – you can begin to speak love into each other’s lives in ways you will understand and appreciate!

The Five Love Languages are;

- **Quality Time.** You just want to spend time with your loved one. Not even particularly doing anything. Just being together. Talking. Sharing.
- **Words of Affirmation.** You long to hear your partner say, ‘I love you’, ‘you are so good at this’, ‘the way you handled that situation was amazing!’ Words are how you truly experience love! If he/she writes you a poem or letter! Wow!
- **Gifts.** You love it when he brings you flowers, or she makes little cards for you. It doesn’t have to be expensive, just a little something that says, ‘I thought about you.’ Even more so when the gift shows you that he/she knows you well! Nothing says ‘I love you’ like a well chosen gift!



- **Physical Touch.** While we all like a snuggle now and then, these people are all touchie feelie! Always wanting to hold hands or link arms. Stroke her/his hair or enjoy a massage. Hugs? Yes! The child who wants to sit in your lap. Touch is how you experience love!
- **Acts of Service.** For these people nothing says 'I love you' more than considerate action. Cleaning a room! Mowing a lawn. Doing the dishes for someone else, fixing a light, earning a wage! They might be low on talk but quick on action, after all, actions speak louder than words!

## For Reflection

Think about which of these five gel with you? We all enjoy all five of these but there is usually a couple that stand out. If you're having trouble working it out, ask your spouse, they probably know! [There are also online quizzes you can do.]

What is your partner's love language? Chances are you are different! [Something about opposites attract!] Talk about this together.

How can you better express love to your partner in a way that will speak to them loudly?

How about your children? As they develop, their love language will become clear. If you can't work it out express love to your children in all five ways! They will really appreciate it.



