

# 7 Gifts

## for church & home

**Summary Gift Six**

Strong  
Marriages

INFORMATION & DISCUSSION GUIDE

# **Why a strong marriage is important for our children**

**Strong marriages are a game changer when it comes to raising children of faith. Children from strong marriages are more likely to attend church, commit to faith and to get involved in leadership positions at the local church.**

**Children derive their deepest impressions of the gospel and what God is like from the picture of their parents and their marriage.**

A lot of research supports the idea that children's early images of God are strongly influenced from their lived experience with their parents. When marital crises and fracture occurs this can also have an impact on the child and their relationship to the church and spirituality. (See for example, The Commission on Children at Risk, Hardwired to Connect, New York: Institute for American Values, 2003).

Studies show that when children from broken homes reach adulthood, compared to those who grew up in intact families, they feel less religious as a whole and are less likely to be involved in the regular practice of faith. (Elizabeth Marquardt, Between Two Worlds, 2005)

Recent research also found a strong link between parental divorce and religious attendance appears to be due to the lower levels of the father's involvement in childhood and adolescent religious attendance and involvement with the offspring of divorce. (Zhai, Ellison, Glenn and Marquardt, 2007)

When parents divorce the result is not just a separation from their natural parents but also results in the rupture of the child's connection to a congregation and even to a life of faith.

Andrew Root (Children of Divorce, 2010) suggests that divorce causes children to question some of the deepest questions surrounding their reason for being now that the two people who are responsible for the child's being are no longer together. This is where he says the church/youth group needs to step in be that community of being but also to wrestle with these children as they suffer through their crises of being.

It is crucial that churches step in particularly when marriages break down, to mentor, support and encourage the family and children on with their spiritual journey.

Churches need to support parents and families and encourage openness and honesty especially with children who are the bystanders to a marriage breakdown. Kara Powell and Chap Clark (Sticky Faith, 2011) suggest that faith becomes sticky when children can see their parent/s struggle and wrestle with how to live their faith in the midst of pain and hardship. Powell and Clark say that this genuine honesty is one of the best gifts that parents can give their children.

## **What can CHURCHES do?**

**Invest in marriages. Healthy Marriages Create Safe and Secure Children.**

- 1. CELEBRATE THE MARRIAGES IN YOUR CHURCH REGULARLY — OLDEST MARRIAGE, GOOD MARRIAGES, MARRIAGE RETREATS ARE ALL GOOD WAYS TO CELEBRATE MARRIAGE.**
- 2. RUN REGULAR MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS — SET UP INTENTIONAL WEEKEND RETREATS OR AFTERNOONS WHERE MARRIAGE IS PRIORITISED.**
- 3. RUN PRE-MARRIAGE COURSES — MAKE SURE THAT EVERY COUPLE AND THOSE CONSIDERING MARRIAGE ATTEND PRE-MARRIAGE COUNSELING TO GET THEIR MARRIAGE OFF TO THE BEST START.**

4. RUN “GREAT DATE WITH YOUR MATE” EVENINGS — SET UP A GAMES NIGHT FOR THE KIDS AND SEND YOUR MARRIAGE COUPLES OUT ON THE TOWN, OR A NIGHT IN WHERE THEY CAN HAVE SOME QUALITY TIME TOGETHER.
5. PROVIDE MARRIAGE MENTORS FOR YOUNG COUPLES IN YOUR CHURCH — MATCH OLDER MARRIED COUPLES THAT HAVE A GOOD MARRIAGE WITH YOUNGER COUPLES. SET UP EVENTS WHERE THESE COUPLES CAN GET TOGETHER AND SHARE STORIES.

Minister to those affected by marriage separation and divorce.

1. STORY MATTERS. ALLOW CHILDREN AND ADULTS TO WRESTLE WITH THEIR FAITH STORY AND TO WRITE THE CONTINUING STORY OF GOD’S LOVE AND GRACE INTO THEIR LIVES IN THE CHAPTER OF THEIR LIVES CALLED PAIN AND LOSS.
2. ADULT MENTORS MATTER. MAKE SURE THAT SEPARATED/DIVORCED ADULTS AND THEIR CHILDREN FEEL WELCOME/INCLUDED AND ARE BEFRIENDED MENTORED BY CHURCH MEMBERS.
3. BEING GENUINE MATTERS. CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR PEOPLE TO DOUBT, QUESTION, SEARCH, PRAY, STRUGGLE, AND FIND HOPE, GRACE, AND TRUTH ON THEIR OWN TERMS.
4. CHURCH SPACES MATTER. THE CHURCH BUILDINGS, OFFICES AND ITS VARIOUS ROOMS CAN BE A SACRED SPACE FOR CHILDREN OF DIVORCE WHERE THEY CAN FIND REFUGE, SECURITY AND A SENSE OF PEACE WHEN NEEDED. THIS SACRED REFUGE IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT WHEN SIGNIFICANT FAMILY EVENTS OCCUR WHERE PARENTS/STEP PARENTS AND OTHER FAMILY FIGURES COME TOGETHER. PROVIDING ACCESS TO THESE SPACES IS CRUCIAL FOR BOTH THE CHILD AND PARENT. (HOW DOES THE SHAPE OF FAMILIES SHAPE FAITH, INSTITUTE OF AMERICAN VALUES, 2013).

## **What can FAMILIES do?**

Strong Marriages help our children feel safe, loved and connected.

1. MAKE YOUR MARRIAGE A PRIORITY – WHILST MANY MARRIAGES BREAK DOWN BECAUSE OF AN AFFAIR, SOMETIMES A PARTNER CAN HAVE AN AFFAIR WITH THEIR WORK OR SOME OTHER PRIORITY RATHER THAN THEIR MARRIAGE.
2. HUG AND KISS YOUR SPOUSE - TRY KISSING FOR SIX SECONDS EVERY DAY. YOUR YOUNG CHILDREN WILL GROW UP FEELING SECURE IN THE LOVE BETWEEN THEIR PARENTS. YOUR ADOLESCENTS WILL BLUSH AND GROAN YOUR TEENS WILL HOPE THAT SOMEDAY THEY CAN BUILD A MARRIAGE LIKE THEIR PARENTS.
3. MAKE TIME TO REGULARLY DATE YOUR SPOUSE – PENCIL... NO INK THIS ONE INTO YOUR DIARY BEFORE ALL THE OTHER COMMITMENTS TAKE OVER. A LITTLE BIT OF ROMANCE PAYS HEALTHY DIVIDENDS WHEN IT COMES TO GROWING A STRONG MARRIAGE.... GO THE WHOLE WAY AND ORGANIZE A WEEKEND ESCAPE HERE AND THERE TOO.
4. SAY “I LOVE YOU” DAILY. EVEN THOUGH IT SEEMS CRASS JUST SAYING THOSE WORDS EVERY DAY AND MEANING IT IS AWESOME.
5. FIGHT FOR YOUR MARRIAGE - DON’T GIVE UP TOO EASILY ON YOUR MARRIAGE. REMEMBER THOSE VOWS AND DETERMINEDLY FIGHT SCHEDULES, EMPLOYMENT, CHORES AND THE MILLION AND ONE OTHER THINGS THAT CAN GET BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR SPOUSE.

## **5 Questions for Boards and Churches to Discuss/ Brainstorm**

**1. HOW CAN WE STRENGTHEN/ENRICH MARRIAGES IN OUR CHURCH?**

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**2. WHAT WOULD MARRIAGE MENTORING LOOK LIKE IN OUR CHURCH?**

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**3. WHAT EVENTS DO WE NEED TO REMOVE/ADD TO OUR CALENDAR IN ORDER FOR COUPLES TO HAVE THE TIME TO STRENGTHEN THEIR MARRIAGE?**

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**4. HOW CAN WE EFFECTIVELY MENTOR SINGLE PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN?**

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**5. HOW CAN WE MAKE OUR CHURCH A REFUGE/SACRED SPACE FOR CHILDREN OF DIVORCE AND SEPARATION?**

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