

Parenting and Friends

Friends Support Family Life in Joy and Sorrow

Parenting is rewarding but also challenging work. One's own spouse is an important support and listener. We also need other friends alongside us. Spending time in discussion with friends may open new perspectives. At its best, friendship is the altruistic, reciprocal offering of help.

It is night. The wife is awake. She is tense. Does this now mean what I think? she wonders. The husband snores beside her. He has to be awakened now. The husband immediately wakes up, noticing the situation and telephones a friend, who without hesitation promises to come to babysit. Very soon the friend drives into the yard and allows the parents to go to the hospital for the mother to give birth.

Parenting is a duty that God gives to mothers and fathers. We were given this duty a little over 13 years ago when our eldest child was born. After that we have yet become mother and father to five more children. These years have been a time of learning to parent. Along the way, we have received much knowledge and experience about what parenting requires and what it gives.

Parenting is demonstrating love and tenderness as well as setting secure limits. It seems to be quite simple, but it often isn't. Each child's uniqueness and the variability of each day bring surprises along with them, so that the work is sometimes difficult. Mistakes are also a part of learning. The teachers have been our own wonderful, patient children as well as our friends.

Friendship Opens Perspectives

Usually one's spouse is the closest person with whom it is the most natural to discuss matters pertaining to parenting. Although the family, in fact, forms one's own small and inseparable community, it isn't intended that we should manage alone. In His wisdom, God has given us human relationships outside of our family, of whom the dearest ones have become friends. In addition to our own family, friends are immeasurably important.

With them, we have been able to discuss parenting issues and their associated problems. These discussions have often opened new perspectives for us. Sharing these matters with our friends helps us to notice that our own family's problems are also typical to other families with children. In talking with our friends it is good to also bring forth all things that are good in our family. There are many matters to be thankful for.

When we have been in fellowship with other families, our children have at the same time had the opportunity to get to know and become friends with other children. Mutual hobbies bring us closer together and then foster the mutual friendship of both parents and children. With other families we can draft mutual rules of conduct. These help the parents in setting limits.

Friendship in Joy and Sorrow

We have experienced the importance of sharing the joys and sorrows of our life with our friends. This refreshes and comforts us. They are interested in how things are going with us. If joy gushes forth inside us, we don't have to conceal this from our friends. We know that they rejoice along with us. We also know that in the midst of difficulties we will receive support from them. We can trust that our friends will not gossip about our matters with others.

Our friends accept our family exactly as we are. They know our many lackings and mistakes but they still don't reject

us. I believe that if we are choosing pathways that will lead us astray in our faith life, our friends will come to talk about this with us. They want the best for us, so they want to instruct us in truth.

Some of our friends are friends in faith; others are not. We don't share the same kinds of thoughts with all of them. Some of our friends live far away, so that communication is not as frequent with all of them. All the same, each one of them is important to us. We have chosen godparents for our children from our own friends. We hope that they would also become our children's friends. Godparents who live far away from us surely remember our children and our whole family in prayer. Also grandparents and other relatives support our parenting.

Altruistic Help

Our family has experienced much altruistic friendship. Sometimes it has been help in caring for children, sometimes jogging accompaniment, often just someone who listens. Friendship is reciprocal. Still it is not a calculated wait for the return of a favor. The desire to help does not come from the point of view of receiving a benefit, but it springs from mutual love and respect. It has been a joy for us also to be able to help the families with whom we are friends.

The best and most altruistic examples of parenting and friendship are found in the Bible. God is our Father who tenderly cares for us and never rejects us. Jesus is our best friend. He wants the best for us and therefore atoned for our sins by dying on the cross. We will one day see Him in our home in heaven. We mothers and fathers may securely trust in this.

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Discussion Questions:

1. Read and discuss James 13:1–5. What do we learn from this portion of God's Word?
2. Share examples of help and support you have received from "older" parents in God's kingdom, those who have already raised their children. Has their shared experience been valuable in your life?