

Family Culture

by Valsan Thampu

The sermon emphasizes the importance of creating and sustaining a distinctive and spiritually wholesome family culture, and provides practical guidance on how to address negativity and foster a positive domestic culture.

Scripture: Joshua 24:15, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 11:28, Mark 10:45, Luke 4:18, John 15:4, 2 Corinthians 6:14, Ephesians 5:21, Revelation 3:20

Topics: "Family Values", "Kingdom Living"

Description

Valsan Thampu preaches about the importance of maintaining a distinctive and spiritually wholesome family culture in a world that prioritizes conformity to materialistic and individualistic trends. He emphasizes the need to create a home that nurtures children with a balance of values from both cultures, focusing on seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Thampu highlights the unique life of Jesus, who embraced love and compassion while staying true to his godly foundation, encouraging families to follow his example. The sermon delves into the challenges of modern society, such as the erosion of parental authority, decline in caring culture, and the negative impact of materialism and individualism on family relationships, urging a shift towards a spiritually regenerated family culture that values fellowship, creativity, and togetherness.

Transcript

The age in which we live prefers the typical to the unique. Today conforming to the tastes and ways of the world has become a craze. Media enables the modern materialistic culture to be pervasively invasive. The world is too much with us. And the hedge between our home and the world remains breached at several places. In such a situation, it is all the more important to create and sustain a distinctive and spiritually wholesome family culture.

Peoples in the non-western societies are now in a state of transition. They are sandwiched between the old world and the new. Sentimentally, they subscribe to moral and spiritual values; but in practical terms they are pulled in the opposite direction lured by the perks and pleasures of an amoral, technological culture. An analogous case is that of Indian Christian parents in western societies, striving to combine the best of both worlds: the values of their parent culture and the material advantages of the adopted culture. Many struggle for a period, but get resigned to the inevitable. Their children adopt, as is only to be expected, the mores of the host culture. The split back home in India is between private values and public practices. Parents want their children to thrive in the world and not be handicapped in the rat race either

by idealism or by non-conformity. Yet they want their children to be orthodox, caring and principled. They want them to board two buses at the same time: one going to prosperity, and the other going to personal stability. They don't seem to care if these buses are headed in opposite directions.

What spirituality in respect of family involves is a resolution of this contradiction. The biblical faith is not a world-denying faith. It does not insist that we renounce the fruits of development and discount what is positive in the sphere of culture. What spirituality in practice involves is the acceptance of a godly foundation and the re-ordering of priorities that this entails. We are to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. (Mtt. 6:33). Given this stable and sanctified foundation, we shall know how to factor the facilities and opportunities of the world into our family culture, so that what we accept is conducive to fullness of life.

This was the secret of the uniqueness and fruitfulness in the life of Jesus. Unlike John the Baptist, Jesus did not live a life of stern asceticism. He was remarkably free in the Spirit and celebrated life as a festival of love and compassion. He came to reach out to the world, not to keep the world at a distance. He was as at home with the publicans and sinners as he was with anyone else, with the exception of the self-righteous Pharisees and Sadducees. That was because he was sure of his godly foundation. Jesus was so saturated in the love for God, so obedient to His will and so committed to his mission, that he was authentically himself wherever he was. He did not have to be in the Temple of Jerusalem to be with God or to be right with Him. His sanctity was not a matter of where he was or the people he was with. It was a matter of his total commitment to God's Kingdom and righteousness. This unambiguous commitment was proof against hypocrisy. Even more importantly, it was also safe against negativity, compromise and capitulation. Jesus did not flee from the world or even the worldly, nor did he function in terms of the premises or preferences of the world. He lived in the world and ministered to it according to the culture of the Kingdom of God, and not according to the culture of the world.

The best that parents can do for their children is to maintain a distinctive family culture wherein children are nurtured and equipped for life. Sadly, this is a responsibility routinely neglected by parents around the world. The decisive blessing that a person can have is growing up in a Christian home that lives the culture of the Kingdom. This truth is also reflected in Jesus' affirmation, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God." A home that maintains the balance between bread and Word is a happy home indeed. It is a pity that parents are over-solicitous about the physical and mental nourishment of their children; whereas they neglect their spiritual formation.

This failure is especially dangerous at the present time. The present generation is a great deal more talented and able than its predecessors. The greater the capacity or genius of a person, the higher is his need to be guided by values and ideals. The talented taking to crime or anti-social activities is a greater social menace than the mediocre resorting to it. Criminal inclinations arise out of the inability to love others like oneself. The social function of spirituality is to help us to value and care for all people as 'neighbours'. A thief is an un-neighbourly person: one who sees others as means to profit the self. Neighbours are not means to an end, but the ends in themselves. They are to be loved for who they are, and not for what we can get out of them. This is a strength of character that every child needs to acquire through family nurture. Parents who default on this count discover sooner or later that their children treat them, not less than others, selfishly and uncaringly. 'Neighbour' evokes a caring response from us; provided we are not thieves. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Priest and the Levite also are de facto 'thieves'. On the analogy of 'active' and 'passive' smoking, we may say that there are active and passive thieves. Those who fail to respond caringly to human needs are passive thieves, from a spiritual perspective. The life of

the wounded man in the parable is at risk not only because the thieves attack him but also because the Priest and the Levite will not respond to his dire need. But for the Samaritan, he would have died indeed.

'Culture' is a total environment and it cannot be reduced to a few ingredients. It is possible, however, to identify broad trends in a culture that we could either avoid or accept. Spirituality too is a culture: the culture of the Kingdom of God. Every culture to reveal its full scope must preserve its integrity and function in the fullness of thereof. Our personal integrity too depends on this. Hence the words of Jesus, "No man can serve two masters" (Mtt. 6: 24). The universal temptation in the religious sphere is to compromise the integrity of one's own being in a bid to serve God and Mammon alike so as to derive the benefit of the two contrary cultures they symbolize. Many of the pathological traits of family today derive from this 'double-orientation' that seems to have become second nature to us. It is useful, hence, to examine some of the typical symptoms of the cultural neurosis that today afflicts families as well as explore the corrective measures from a biblical perspective.

Conflict and the spirit of negativity. We are living in an age par excellence of conflict. This spirit infects family as an institution. The damage on account of this is not confined to what is manifest through open conflicts or the eruption of domestic violence of a physical nature. The real danger is the spirit of negativity implied in the conflicts. The conflictual outlook and the adversarial spirit it engenders focus perforce on what is mean and negative. Opposing and frustrating each other then becomes the mission and obsession in the interpersonal space. Husbands and wives who are infected by negativity often do not understand that they are in conflict, simply for being driven by the spirit of their times. Negativity breeds negativity. Negativity is a pull in the opposite direction. To see this relational disease for what it is, it is helpful to recall an image that Jesus used to denote his relationship with us: the yoke (Mtt. 11:28-30). Think of a pair of yoked oxen pulling in opposite directions. It is a very frustrating spectacle of laboured futility. Yet this is what happens in husband-wife relationships when they are not cemented by the love of Christ. It is in this light that we need to see the implication of St. Paul's insistence that we should not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. (2 Cor. 6:14) A believer is, by definition, immune to the spirit of negativity. There was not even a shadow of negativity in Jesus. A believer is not just one who says, "Lord, Lord". He is one who imbibes the spirit of Christ: the spirit of dynamic positivity. Or else, abiding in him would not result in fruitfulness. (Jn. 15: 4-6). It is by its fruits that a tree is known. A simple test to ascertain if someone is in Christ or not is to ascertain if that person is positive or negative in orientation. Not everyone is self-consciously and explicitly negative! Often negativity masks itself in a variety of specious alibis. Negativity, for instance, revels in improvising plausible excuses for not doing what needs to be done. Impressive inventiveness would be used in making them sound convincing. Negativity is necessarily admixed with a large measure of self-deception. So one should not be surprised if some seemingly altruistic sentiments are included in the arsenal of negativity. Such a person will convince you, for example, how it is entirely for your sake that he/she chooses to stand in your way.

Negativity generates a world of grievances, anxieties, and resistance. There are mothers who would instinctively conclude that their sons are too fragile to play with other children who are, by definition, rough and are sure to cause physical harm to all playmates. Such parents take protectiveness beyond healthy limits and rob their children of the freedom to be. The fact that this is done out of 'good intentions' does not make it any less harmful. Tragically, countless wives and mothers mistake this spirit of negativity for sacrifice. They deny themselves everything for no justifiable reason and, thereafter, feel aggrieved on account of doing so. They resist, in an air of apparent self-renunciation, the suggestions or arrangements to improve their well-being. The spirit of grievance that they entertain, however, gives them away. A

personality orientation of true sacrifice, in contrast, generates and radiates joy. When negativity infects a home, conflicts become endemic to it irrespective of the issues involved. At times there could be provocations. But provocations are incidental to conflicts, which are improvised for their own sake. Often, the intensity of the conflict between spouses is disproportionate to the gravity of the issues involved. They get locked in conflicts and feed on mutual hurts and grievances. This amounts to a regrettable waste of energies and ensures that they live a life of aggravating frustration.

This disease needs to be addressed in the light of the mandate to heal that Jesus has given us (Mtt. 10:7,8). within the 'ministry of healing' as envisaged by Jesus Christ. In a spiritual sense, the largest and most universal prison in the world is the personality orientation of negativity to which people succumb when they are alienated from God. Adam and Eve hiding in the bush, as a mark of their alienation from God, illustrates this human predicament. Negativity is a form of escapism, a self-created hiding place. But it is also part of the logic of negativity that those who are captives in its prison-house see themselves as the victims of others. Nothing short of a total mental transformation will suffice to 'set the captives free' from this inward dungeon. Spirituality needs to be seen as a radical mental shift from the negative to the positive, and not as some pious postures and practices. This positivity is not a matter of saying 'yes' to everything. It is, instead, a discipline of saying 'yes' or 'no' keeping the biblical goal of 'fullness of life' as the point of reference. Such a positive outlook cannot be sustained consistently unless there is a stable spiritual foundation for it.

It is in this light that the importance that the Bible ascribes to spouse-selection needs to be seen. But even after maximum caution is exercised in this respect, one may still find oneself 'unequally yoked' in a conjugal relationship. This is as widespread a reality in the so-called 'love marriages' as it is in the case of 'arranged marriages'. What is one to do in such an instance? Negativity, in a practical sense, is the opposite of reciprocity or mutuality. The impact of sin on human relationships is that it degrades mutuality into negativity. Negativity is the incapacity for reciprocity. Reciprocity is the corner stone of fellowship, companionship and partnership. It is what enables a partner to be a proper help as Eve was envisaged to be in respect of Adam. The Cross is a symbol of the agony created by the degeneration of reciprocity into negativity, "He came to his own; his own received him not." Negativity is the womb of rejection. It breeds an inability to receive and to accept. It is relational rebelliousness.

The life and mission of Jesus is understood best as engaging and mastering the spirit of negativity that defiles the sanctuary of God-human relationships. Ironically, when one of the parties in a relationship falls short of mutuality, other has to carry the burden of it 'unilaterally'. Unilateralism, in the context of relationship, is a sort of crucifixion. But crucifixion involves not merely having to put up with the suffering that the negativity of the partner evokes but also the spiritual endeavour to transform it into mutuality. This is the logic that underlies the un-ending compassion and supervening Grace of God. God's love never fails, because He is absolutely committed to the mutuality of His relationship with us. It is this absolute commitment that generates the power to transform us by setting us free from the prison of negativity in our responses to God.

As the agony of Jesus Christ indicates, encountering and mastering the spirit of human negativity is the most agonizing spiritual battle that a person can wage. It is this spirit of negativity that the Bible identifies as satanic. Satan is the 'adversary'. He is the embodiment of absolute negativity. His mission is to resist the loving will of God and to pervert His glorious plans. His condemnation is that he cannot help being so. Tragically, that is almost the case with those who are possessed by the spirit of negativity. This is the commonest form of demon-possession in the contemporary world. It is necessary to be realistic about this,

if we are to minister to people in distress on account of this spiritual illness. Entertaining naïve and romantic notions about it will only induce premature desperation. One has to 'minister to' one's spouse, as Christ ministers to the Church. Jesus has been struggling with the Church over the last two millennia, sweating blood in the mission to deliver her from the grip of spiritual negativity. The image of Jesus standing and knocking at the gate of the Laodicean Church is a telltale image of the nature not only of Jesus but also of the Church. The 'shut gate' (Rev. 3:20) is a striking image of individual and collective negativity.

Seen in this light, the spiritual and practical profundity of spouses submitting to each other (Eph. 5: 21) becomes all the more striking. Domination, and the spirit of rebelliousness that it unfailingly provokes, are counter to the norm of mutuality in marital relationships. They point to the spirit of negativity at work in this foundational relationship. Mutual submission, in such a context, is the most powerful experience of mutual acceptance that effects a break-through from the misery of being locked in a relationship of conflictual negativity. What Paul urges the spouses to do may be described as 'pro-active, or redemptive, submission,' which is the response that the Bible advocates to such situations. Unfortunately, 'submission' has only negative connotations in the worldly context. It is, ironically, a pointer to the negativity that has infected the mindset of the world. In such an environment of associations, 'submission' is seen as a negative step compelled by the absence of any other option. Meekness, in the sight of the world, is weakness. In the biblical vision, however, it is the other way round. Meekness is proactive. It is basic to the strategy of redemption, regeneration and wholeness. It is pregnant with spiritual energies and purposes. That is why in the biblical vision the ultimate authority and power belong to the 'Lamb that was slain', the paradigmatic embodiment of meekness. The assertion in the beatitudes that 'the meek shall inherit the earth' makes eminent sense in this light.

Negativity is the heritage that the Fall has handed down to us. Satan's goal in seducing Eve was to orient the human species towards negativity and rebelliousness towards God and one another. Negativity to God is the mother of all negativities. It makes us negative towards everything else in life. The mission of Christ was to set people free from the dungeon of this negativity (Lk. 4:18) and to lead them to fullness of life. Jesus was not only wholly free from negativity but also vibrant with a positive and pro-active Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the quintessence of the positive. That is why, according to Jesus, the Spirit is the Enabler. Satan, in contrast, is the Dis-abler. He is the Spirit of ultimate negativity. His prodigious energies are directed towards the opposition and frustration, if possible, of the good intentions of God. To acknowledge Jesus as the head of our homes is to commit ourselves to fostering a positive domestic culture. The training and motivation to do what is good as well as reject what is evil should be deemed the basic ingredients of Christian family culture.

The idolatry of materialism. Materialism is the cultural expression of spiritual negativity. The fact that the culture that has arisen from this outlook is a canvas of prodigious activity and achievements does not prove the contrary. That is why the account of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11) is situated at the beginning of the Bible. That 'heaven-kissing tower' is a landmark, the most grandiose enterprise, of human negativity. In itself it may seem a sublime eruption of creativity in the domain of culture. But seen in the light of the people's attitude to God, it emerges in quite a different light. Read sensitively, the text reveals the fact that the people of Babel envisaged the tower to be a substitute for their God-centredness. Till then, God was the point of cohesion for them as a people. Their motive in creating the tower was to engineer a secular alternative to this God-centredness. That being the case, the tower was essentially a monument of negativity; and it stands to logic that it collapsed into confusion and disunity. If this aspect of the episode is

overlooked, the account of the Babel tower would carry weird overtones about the nature of God. God is not anti-progress. Nor is He hostile to human creativity. But God does not condone negativity. That is because He is the perfection of positivity. It is this that makes creativity possible at all. But creativity is vulnerable to negativity, given the reality of sin and the consequent alienation of humankind from God. Since the Fall, the satanic spirit of negativity has infiltrated the domain of matter. The apparent matter-spirit duality itself is a product of this aberration. Biblically, matter is not evil in itself. It cannot be; for it is God's creation. In the context of human stewardship, however, the domain of matter can be animated either by the Holy Spirit -the Spirit of positivity- or by Satan, the spirit of negativity. Materialism is a reflection not on the intrinsic nature or scope of matter. It is, on the contrary, an outworking of the mindset, or the overarching vision that shapes our attitude to the domain of matter. It is in its attitude to God that the negativity of materialism reveals its full scope.

But negativity does not always parade or advertise itself as negativity. Instead, it puts on the garb of positivity; for deception is an aspect of negativity. However, its true colours can be recognized in the light of primary goals. As is to be expected, the negative mindset will fiercely contest every assumption that goes against its own inclinations. For example, the materialistic outlook will argue against the basic spiritual assumption that God-centredness is a pre-condition for human fulfillment. It will advance the counter-assumption that the life of a man consists in the abundance of his possessions. So a correct diagnosis of the spiritual malady afflicting a home is possible only when there is clarity on what is the basic purpose of family life as well as the nature and significance of family as an institution. The biblical article of faith in this context is that family is a God-created institution and that a sense of spiritual mission underlies its scope and purpose. Materialism is inherently negative to this article of faith. To be negative to God is to be 'positive' to whatever is anti-God. That is why Paul argues that friendliness to world is enmity to God, and vice versa. Materialism marginalizes the human. It makes relationships subservient to material possessions, and corrupts family into a domain of camouflaged loneliness. It substitutes ownership for fellowship and reduces a human person to a body, leaving the soul famished. It stifles the spirit of compassion, and impoverishes the domestic culture. It fills the home with anxiety, grievance and frustration even if they are not acknowledged and addressed in honesty. The biblical idea of stewardship as applied to family urges us to be vigilant against the idolatry of materialism without becoming negative or negligent towards the material and physical aspects of life.

The negativity inherent in materialism expresses itself as insensitivity towards God and human beings alike. This undermines the wholeness of family culture, as was the case with the household of Zacchaeus: the reason why his home needed salvation. Generosity, the freedom to give to the point of self-denial, is the antidote to the negativity inherent in materialism. Such generosity is the salt of our humanness and inward freedom. In contrast, the more we acquire overlooking our need to love and to be loved by God and our fellow human beings, the smaller we grow. The more we have, the poorer we get.

Spiritually mastering materialism, therefore, should be deemed an important emphasis in the formation of family culture. Special emphasis should be laid on this spiritual challenge today, given the global pervasiveness of materialism and its invasiveness sharpened by the media and communication technologies. The traditional ambivalence in our disposition towards God and Mammon seems to be now resolving itself in favour of the latter. This calls for a definitive commitment, the like of which Joshua made: "As for me and my family, we shall serve the Lord". (Jos. 24:15).

The aberrations of individualism. Individualism is the alternative to communitarianism. In the Bible, the Spirit is a community builder. The immediate effect of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of the

Pentecost was the formation of a caring and egalitarian community (Acts 2). The individualistic mindset that tends to focus on personal advantages, unmindful of its adverse consequences for the community, is necessarily disruptive. Historically, the atomized society has emerged in the wake of the rise of individualism, no matter what other blessings it has ushered in. Most likely, it was on account of its tendency to fragment and disable groups that Jesus insisted on the renunciation of the individualistic spirit -or self-denial-as the eligibility requirement for discipleship (Mtt. 16: 24). The material order is not distinguished for its capacity for cohesion. Holding everything together, the impulse to unity, is the work of the Spirit, and not of matter. Cohesion is the secret of life and fruitfulness. Whatever cohesion there is in the material order is on account of the ministration of the Spirit, whose presence and operations we tend to stereotype, despite the warning against doing so by Jesus Christ. (Jn. 3: 8).

Family is the embryonic community. It stands on the foundation of the human capacity and need to care and to share, without which we are not complete or normal as individuals. Ironically, individualism does not make for the formation of authentic individuals. The biblical worldview that sees human beings as created in the Image of God is committed to the promotion of human greatness. The Bible rejects individualism for its incompatibility with this goal. Individualism is misguided not in its purpose but in its strategies and approaches. Because it is so, its strategies defeat its purpose. Community is an important link in the strategy God has ordained for the empowerment and fulfillment of every individual; just as the creation of plants and trees was God's strategy for producing fruits and flowers. This foundational truth is not invalidated by the fact that in the fallen state there is a tension between the individual and community at all levels of its institutionalization, whether it be the family, the Church, society or the State.

It is significant that individualism tends to predispose individuals towards hedonistic tendencies. Hedonism denotes self-indulgence to the point of insensitivity to the well-being of the given human environment. Hedonistic individualism weakens the caring spirit of family culture, and impoverishes relationships. This, in turn, has a variety of consequences; and it is necessary to take cognizance of some of them.

Decline in parental authority. Individualism prioritizes the unfettered freedom of the individual and it is inevitable that this erodes traditional forms of authority, including that of parents. Without this in-built sense of direction, family becomes like a rudderless ship, adrift on the sea of life. This has serious practical consequences almost the whole of which are detrimental to the long-term well-being of children. They resent discipline and mistake license for freedom. Freedom to be wholesome must be continually engaged to purpose. Purposeless freedom degenerates into license. Discipline is the bridge between freedom and purpose. Logically, freedom divorced from discipline must contradict and annul itself. Family is meant to be a sphere of creative and purposeful freedom. It must be the school for training people in the art of exercising freedom purposively and wholesomely. Every home that takes itself seriously must maintain a culture wherein parental authority is respected and individual freedom exercised with discipline and responsibility.

Decline of the caring culture. The foremost casualties of hedonistic individualism are the capacity to care and the compassion that underlies it. The caring orientation functions on the equilibrium between the interests of the individual and of the group. The group most immediate to every individual is the family. The inability to care for others is pathological; for it results from the loss of the equilibrium between the self and the other, due to self-absorption. In traditional societies like ours, mothers carry the burden of caring for the family as a whole. They have been the fountain-springs of the caring culture over the centuries. The fact that this has been taken for granted, and the crucial importance of women's role in the well-being of family overlooked, makes women skeptical of the fairness of family as an institution. The way forward is

not for women to relinquish their role as care-givers, but to train the rest of the family, including husbands, in the art of caring. Whatever might be the twists and turns in the cultures of the world, caring will remain indispensable. There is no spiritual tradition in the world that does not insist on the duty to care. As for Jesus, he was emphatic that he came "not to be served, but to serve." (Mk. 10: 45).

Erosion of relational skills. Materialism and individualism tend to undermine the human capacity for responsible relationships. Materialism inhibits relationships by making the human subservient to material possessions. Individualism does so by promoting the myth of individual self-sufficiency. In contrast, the spiritual vision sees life in terms of inter-dependence, the model of which has been defined by Jesus himself through his invitation, "Abide in me, and I in you." It is on this principle of inter-dependence that the idea of personal responsibility rests. Personal growth necessarily involves the enlargement of one's circle of responsibility. Growth, in other words, involves a process of social integration which must begin at home. The neglect or disruption of this integrative process leads to serious flaws in character-formation. This is seen to be at work in the formation of the 'addictive personality,' which disposes individuals towards abusing relationships not less than substances like drug and alcohol. An individual is humanly crippled if his capacity to enter into wholesome relationships is not developed adequately. Parents who fail to incorporate relational nuances in the family culture do a disservice to their children, unknowingly. Individualism results in the erosion of the capacity to relate, patiently and fairly. It creates a culture of organized lovelessness to which family too falls a prey. The healing of this cultural pandemic can happen through a spiritual regeneration of family culture.

Focus on pleasure. Hedonistic individualism prioritizes the consumption of pleasure. Pleasure works at variance with purpose, except when the purpose is only the consumption of pleasure. It strengthens the stranglehold of self-centredness on the individual, which proves subversive to justice in relationships. Pleasure is to the materialistic culture, what joy is to its spiritual counterpart. Pleasure is self-centred. Joy is a shared experience. The role of others in the context of pleasure is mostly instrumental: they are the means for attaining pleasure. Joy is born out of the communion of the self and the other. It is a product of relational equilibrium, which is the substance of righteousness, of doing unto others what we would that they should do unto us. Thanks to the myths of the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the individual, pleasure usurps the place of joy as the goal of life. The disruptiveness this holds out to the stability of family cannot be exaggerated. Pleasure is disruptive, while joy is integrative. The spiritual regeneration of family must involve a shift from pleasure-seeking to the creation and sharing of joy in the family context. Joy is the fruit of love; whereas pleasure is the offspring of self-love. But the desirability of shifting from pleasure to joy will not be either obvious or acceptable to a person as long as he subscribes exclusively to the tenets of hedonistic individualism.

Coping with differences. Greater impatience with differences, and the corresponding preference for sameness, characterize the individualistic outlook. This has adverse consequences for relationships and for family as an institution. The training to cope with differences is, hence, an emphasis that needs to be incorporated into a spiritually healthy family culture. On account of narrow religious conditioning that attaches exaggerated importance to sameness, people's tolerance level has declined. In public life this leads to increasing intolerance and the reduction of the space for the different and the diverse. Diversity then breeds insecurity, as is evident in the Indian context today. Religious diversity that has been till recently hailed as India's uniqueness, is now seen by many as a weakness and liability. The project to homogenize culture and religion parades itself in revivalist robes as nationalistic resurgence. The inability to live with what does not conform to one's own likes and dislikes turns into a blast of intolerance in

various walks of life. In respect of the training to cope with differences, the joint-family is arguably superior to the nuclear family, no matter what other advantages the latter may have. Parents need to expose their children to diversity of persons, situations and experiences to enable them to grow up in a balanced way. In terms of their milieu of growth children in nuclear families, especially in the urban context, are less resourceful than their counterparts in joint families and rural contexts. This has serious life-long implications that should not be overlooked. In the context of inter-personal relationships, the inability to cope with differences aggravates personal incompatibility-related problems. Those who do not have the spiritual grace to relate to diversities make a virtue of taking everyone else on their own terms, mistaking this flaw in personality formation either as strength of will or as smartness. The harmony of the different, indeed of the contrary, is a greater source of enrichment than the coming together of the similar. Birds of the same feather may flock together; but nothing of worth may ever emerge from it.

Focus on fellowship and togetherness. Several factors work together today to dilute the togetherness that should characterize family life. The rise of urban culture and individualistic freedom, the need for both parents to work in order to maintain a certain lifestyle, and, above all, the addiction to the media, turn a home into a practical arrangement for meeting basic physical needs, but very little else. The life of the individual today has come under increased exposure to worldly, centrifugal pulls. In such a situation, it is all the more necessary to strengthen the family culture emphasizing the richness of togetherness and the joy of caring and sharing. Relationships can grow and deepen, and emotional needs addressed, only through togetherness. Where this is compromised for the sake of alternate advantages or exigencies, children suffer from emotional and relational deficit leading to a variety of long-term handicaps and likely aberrations. It is now fairly well-known, for example, that the under-development of a person's emotional resources could predispose him to criminality. Our sense of fellow-feeling, which is the fountain-spring of compassion, needs to be nourished through fellowship and togetherness.

Home and creativity. Most people associate family life only with the routine of daily life. They tend to take their homes for granted, and remain blind to the larger scope and significance thereof. Out of this arises the logic, for example, of the need to look outside of one's home for special opportunities, either to develop one's skills or to give expression to one's creativity. Parents, for example, who pressurize teachers to secure for their children opportunities at school for developing their talents, do precious little to encourage their creativity at home. Ironically, most people think of creativity in stereotypical ways. To them creativity means taste for activities like music, painting, theatre etc. The essence of creativity is the ability to transform whatever a person handles. Because we are created in the Image of the Creator, creativity is basic to our being. When creativity is excluded from life and work, boredom results. Every human being has a need to be creative and innovative. This truth needs to be recognized and responded to at home, the nursery of life.

In conclusion, family must be seen as a garden for all-round growth. Jesus grew up, fortunately, in such a home. Even as he developed physically, he also attained personal stature, intellectual maturity, social grace and, above all, spiritual depth. This can happen only if a wholesome and spiritually sound family culture is maintained at home. This is no easy task, especially at the present time. It calls for a purposeful partnership between the spouses. Parents, by being 'proper helps' to each other in making their homes joyful places for wholesome growth, value formation and personality development, can be a great blessing in the life of their children.

When all these are overlooked and parental responsibility is reduced to enhancing the financial status of the household in order to acquire objects of desire, the worldly achievements of parents become

counter-productive. Increasingly, the stock of parents falls in the eyes of their own children precisely because they have been successful materially at the cost of everything else. It is part of human nature that we value what we do not have and are indifferent to what we do have. Children are no exception to this. They lose the appreciation progressively for what parents make available to them and judge them in terms of what they do not have, which is, in many instances, personal stature and spiritual authority. The family culture we evolve and maintain must be such that it can address the many nuances of a wholesome personality formation, first, of parents and, then, of children.

A REAL HOME:

A REAL HOME is a playground. Beware of the house where no rough-housing is allowed and no cries of glee are heard.

A REAL HOME is a workshop. Pity the child who is unfamiliar with wrenches and hammers, knitting needles, thread, screwdrivers and saws.

A REAL HOME is a forum. Honest, open discussion of life's great problems belongs originally and primarily in the family circle.

A REAL HOME is cooperative. Households flourish in peace when the interest of each is the interest of all.

A REAL HOME is a school. Many of life's most important and lasting lessons are learned here, both early in life and later on.

A REAL HOME is a temple, where people are loved and respected and where life is appreciated, in the recognition that life in all its parts is a gift of God, with our family being our personal and most precious gift.

-Anonymous

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/valsan-thampu/family-culture/>

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