

Chicken Soup for the Family

Brothers, opening our eyes, we can see that the family is in serious crisis. This being the case, as followers of Christ and defenders of the Domestic Church—the family—let us launch a concerted effort to save our children, save our grandchildren, by the means of saving our families. Pessimism, cynicism, and skepticism must not reign in our hearts, but rather confidence and hope that we can help construct a better world by striving for better, more holy families.

Therefore, here are ten “**vitamins**” to keep healthy our familial body. By this we mean to offer ten concrete suggestions to help all of us purify, improve, and perfect our families. Saint Pope John Paul II expressed this truth so clearly: The family is the basic building block of society... and... As the family goes, so goes the society. Hopefully these suggestions will truly make a difference in your struggle to form a good family. Never forget the consoling words of the Archangel Gabriel to Mary that we read in the Annunciation: Nothing is impossible with God.

Family Prayer

One of the primary reasons for fights, quarrels, bitterness, coldness, and eventually separations is the lack of prayer in the family. What oxygen is to the lungs, so prayer is to the soul. Prayer should be at the very center and heart of family life. Remember the words of the famous Rosary-priest, Father Patrick Peyton: The family that prays together, stays together.

The Father as Head of the Family

When possible, the Father must be the head of the family; the Mother should be the very heart of the family. A family without a head is a Frankenstein; a family without a heart is dead. May the Father assume the role of Spiritual Leader of the family! If you like, the Father should be the priest of the family. This means, the Father should say Yes to life. The Father should love his wife and children. The Father should be the spiritual leader of the family and this means the leader in the prayer life of his family. The most splendid example for the Father should be the best of Fathers, good Saint Joseph!

Forgiveness and Mercy

In many families coldness, indifference, and even bitterness permeate the entire family fabric. Why? One of the reasons is due to a lack of forgiveness. Family members must be merciful and forgive, and not just seven times, but seventy times seven times—meaning always! If we want to be forgiven, then we must forgive from our hearts. The Our Father commands this: *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.*”

Winning and Victorious Words

The British poet, Alexander Pope penned these words: “To err is human, to forgive is divine.” Family members, cultivating true humility of heart, must learn to say these words: “I am sorry...” and equally important: “I forgive you!” These words said often and with humility of heart can save families!

Servant Attitude

Jesus, Son of the living God, washed the feet of the Apostles at the Last Supper. He Himself stated: “The Son of man has not come to be served, but to serve and give His life in ransom for many.” (Mt 20:28) Each and every individual family member must not look to be served, but to be always ready to serve the other members in the family. Love and service are really synonymous.

Express Gratitude

Even though it is small, and at times, seems to be almost insignificant, these two words can add a condiment to the family recipe, and these two words are Thank you! Saint Ignatius of Loyola asserted: “The essence of sin is ingratitude.” Cultivate in your families an attitude of gratitude! In sum, what do we have that we have not received from God? Only one thing: our sins—these we chose for ourselves. God loves a humble and grateful heart!

Take a Break From Gadgets

A key time in family life must be the meal time. Normally it is when the family connects, comes together to share experiences, to spend time with each other, to bond with each other, in a word, to grow in love with each other. Our Lord’s Last Commandment was: “Love one another as I have loved you.” (Jn 13:34)

There is a comic strip with a family all sitting together on the same big couch. The Father is watching TV, the mother is on her tablet, the son is playing a computer game on his laptop, the teenage daughter is sending a text from her phone, and the family dog has earphones on. We laugh at this, but we also weep, because we can see our own family in this comic strip. Therefore remember, at meal times—even though it might be a mere 20-25 minutes—no phones, tablet, computer, radio nor TV. Each person has infinite value, and their soul being immortal will live forever; the computer screen and all other electronic gadgets will come and go and be disposed of!

Learn to Listen

How hard the art of listening really is, especially with family members. We all tend to be in the fast-lane, frenetically rushing from one activity to the next like a chicken with it’s head cut off. As such we fail to listen attentively when a family member wants to talk to us. I invite all to seek out Harry Chapin’s song Cats in the Cradle. In short, this song woefully mourns the sad fact that Fathers never really connect with their children because they are simply too busy! Son, I will listen to you, but later... Later never becomes a reality; then it is beyond his grasp!

Celebration

The famous Catholic author Jean Vanier, who founded a group working most especially with the handicapped, and with forming families with handicapped members, made this discovery: families are called to celebrate! Birthdays, Anniversaries, Holidays such as Christmas and Easter, and many more—all are festive and exuberant moments of celebration in the context of

the family. We should celebrate the other in the family—especially their Birthday, Baptism, and Saint Day! Therefore, if you want to inject a good dose of joy in your family, get in the habit of celebrating! Saint Paul exhorts us in these words: “Rejoice in the Lord always; I say it again: Rejoice in the Lord.” (Phil. 4:4)

Marian Consecration

In my time meeting with the Marist Missionary Sisters of Waltham, Massachusetts, I was presented a means to arrive at the very Heart of Jesus. They do this by spending time together meditating upon the 20 mysteries of the Rosary, followed by a meditation on the Seven Sorrows of Mary, each with a commentary. All the members of the family will formally consecrate themselves, individually and as a family, to Jesus through Mary. Our Lady will then be at the very heart of their family. Our Lady will produce abundant fruits in their family: peace, joy, love, happiness, sharing, understanding, patience, purity, meekness, kindness. In a word, by consecration to Jesus through Mary, families will become sanctuaries of true holiness as Jesus commanded: Be holy, as your heavenly Father is holy. (Mt 5:48) You can lead your family in such a way. I am convinced that if families truly allow Mary to take root in the center of their lives, she will help their lives be turned from water into wine, and family members will truly be able to live out the greatest commandment of Jesus: Love one another as I have loved you! (Jn 13:34) I hope and pray that all will take these Ten Vitamins to Vitalize and form vibrant and holy families!