



The tsunami affected many. Many are asking where God is. Maybe that is why it happened – since we only look for God when we are in trouble, it came so that we do not ignore Him!

The New Year usually begins with lots of resolutions, only to be broken pretty soon. Well, Chinese New Year is coming, that means another chance! We long for chances after chances for the mistakes that we commit day after day. Maybe that's what our children want from us too – the unconditional acceptance, knowing that they will be accepted! If we as adults yearn that acceptance, what more our children!

The festive season is a busy period for many families. With it almost over, back to the basics – how is our couch time? No mood. No time. Our spouse is too demanding. Our children are too demanding. Our spouse is too lazy. We hear of marriages breaking up for one reason or another. What about this: a wife whose husband left her but she faithfully waited while bringing up the children. Decades later, the husband returned and the family is reunited? Sounds like a fairy-tale? No. It's rare though. That is commitment. That is faith in God. What makes one decide on marriage break-up and another to hang-on? What makes us have thoughts of "this stupid man/woman does not understand me" versus "I did not do justice to her/him. How can I show my love to him/her." What makes us give up our rights to be angry or to have our way and instead of saying, "It's about time you did that and I deserve to be pampered," to having the humility to say, "That's a wonderful thing you have done! Thanks so much!" It's about other-centredness. It's about having a strong marriage foundation so that the family is strong.

Q. Sometimes husbands and wives disagree on our discipline and argue in front of our children. Is that bad?

A. Yes it is. Especially when it is not resolved and each parent just go your own way. Children (even young ones) learn that right and wrong are arbitrary. If a mother is strict for example and the father is lenient, guess who the children will always approach for protection? If there is a disagreement, sort it out behind closed doors and present a united front. It's impossible, you say, because the truth must be adhered to! Well, there are times for example when a parent is too harsh on the kid, either verbally or physically (not to the point of abuse) which may seem unreasonable to one - Instead of stopping the other parent, let it complete, explain to the kid what wrong was done to end up having such 'punishment'. Once the kid is settled, away from the kid, the two adults can sit down and sort out what happened. What typically happen is one parent is so outraged that no communication can take place. See how important the couple relationship is? If we cannot control our anger, think along this line: if tomorrow my spouse is not around, what would I do? That will help!

Q. My husband refuses to help around the house. I am so tired each day after work. Is it wrong to expect him to help?

A. It certainly is not wrong to expect him to help. The point is: how is that communicated to him? A wife can nag at the husband and at best get a disgruntled helper who help once or she can pitifully look into the man of her life and say, "Dear, I know you love me very, very much and I am sure you would love to help me with the dishes tonight!" Now, who can resist that! It is the same principle with children. It is not wrong to expect them to be helpful or be disciplined but how do we as parents communicate that or train them to be so? Some husbands take longer (like decades) to respond while others are more sensitive. Each relationship is different. Remember the story above though and be encouraged!

Likewise many husbands come home from a day's work and expect a good meal to be there and children tidy and disciplined. He may just want a quiet evening and when he is met with screaming kids, well, it may not become a pleasant evening. Husbands can at the same time exercise self-control and ask themselves how they can be more loving besides getting annoyed. With both parents tend to be working these days, the time pressure is intense and is a source of tension. That is where the community can help – engaging family members staying near by, neighbours or friends in the vicinity to help baby-sit for a while.