



ASSISTING SINGLE PARENTS IN BUILDING RESILIENCE

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The Text

“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3: 13,14 (NKJV)

Introduction

When you hear the term “single parent,” what image comes to mind? Describe exactly what you see in your mind’s eye. Perhaps our attempts towards judging present a picture that is far from accurate. Did you imagine a person of courage and resourcefulness? What about a person who exhibited resilience? What is resilience, and how is it built?

Resilience is defined “as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. As much as resilience involves bouncing back from these difficult experiences, it can also involve profound personal growth.” (APA, 2021)

Our scripture verse reminds us of the importance of forgetting what is behind and pressing on. The ability to press on regardless of the past is resilience in action. There is little doubt that most single parents may be in a situation that has



demanded forgetting the past and pressing on. As leaders, how may we be a part of assisting single parents in the process of building resilience?

Perhaps you have heard rude or judgmental comments from others, even church members, towards or about single parents. Leaders, you were called for such a time as this. Some people are prone to make assumptions about the life of others, their financial status, or even their character, without ever knowing the actual story. This may seem unfair, and it is. But we cannot allow someone else's uninformed opinion and misguided judgment to define who we are or how we feel. As a leader, you can educate others and be a part of revealing the true picture of the love of God along with the strength, resilience, and resourcefulness of single parents.

There are a multitude of different routes that takes one into single parenthood. For some, single parenting is a path they purposefully chose. Others may have had difficult journeys strewn with heartbreak, abuse, loss, or grief. Some are parenting alone because their spouse has died suddenly, some were cheated on, and others abandoned. Still, others are parenting alone because they have fled a domestic violent situation or a partner with addiction. The point is that every situation is unique, and the reasons that led to becoming a single parent vary from person to person.

Some admit they do not tell someone they meet for the first time they are a single parent for fear of being labeled or judged. There may also be critical remarks made by relatives, colleagues, acquaintances, or church members. Others say they have been dropped from their social circle or no longer invited when other families get together for meals and outings, including social events at church. Let's repeat what we said earlier...God does not give one's neighbors, friends, family, or even their church family the role of judge!

Discussion Questions for Leaders

1. Share a time when you witnessed a church member speaking negatively about another.
2. Did you speak up and respond to the person?
3. If not, why not? If so, what did you say?



Setting Boundaries

Single parents deal with so much, and the last thing on their to-do list should be dealing with the misplaced judgment of others. Yes, it is hard to listen to hurtful words, and at some point, single parents may even stop being shocked by the rude things people say and how some people treat them differently.

Learning to set appropriate boundaries can help deal with negative emotions. Here are seven tips to share with single parents to put those boundaries in place:

1. **Stop the negative self-talk.** Do not let the criticism of others affect how you talk to yourself. Stick some positive affirmations on your bathroom mirror, read them at the start of each day, memorize them, and repeat them to yourself if those negative thoughts begin to creep in.
2. **Focus on good friends.** Think about those true friends you have and surround yourself with them. Do not surround yourself with so-called “friends” who continue to fill your ears with negative talk.
3. **Focus on what you got right for today.** It is easy to make a list of all the things you wish you could change about the day; however, why not focus on what you got right? Think about the successes in your day, recount them each night before you go to bed, and thank God for each victory.
4. **Honestly express your thoughts.** Do yourself a favor and clear out all your frustrations in your heart and mind. Talk to one of those good friends, write in your journal, blog about them, or go to a counselor. Let go of all the negative thoughts and feelings, clean them out, and try to replace them with positive practices that refuse to let them back in.
5. **Be self-aware.** If you are experiencing negativity, stop and think about what is causing that feeling. Is it bad friends? If so, you need to stop hanging around them. Are you watching too much media that continues to portray negative images? If so, turn off that television. Are you spending too much time sitting around and engaging in negative self-talk? If so, it may be time to get up and use that energy for more positive things. In other words, try to identify the things that are leading to your negative feelings and emotions and replace them with more positive activities.



6. **Go outside.** Negative talk from others or yourself will eventually bring you down. Hit the reset button by going into nature. Go out into the fresh air, breathe deeply, walk, talk with the Creator, and you will feel the anxiety begin to melt away. Exercising in the fresh air is one of the best things you can do to begin to look at things in new ways.
7. **Develop boundaries, walk away, and speak up.** You can choose who to spend time with, who you are going to listen to, and what subjects you will allow conversations to cover. You can say, “NO” and you can walk away. If someone says something out of line about your family or your circumstances, tell the person to stop. Sometimes a person needs to be confronted in order to stop their rude comments.

Admit When You Need Help and Get It!

Healing years of emotional pain does not happen overnight. We all want immediate results, but please understand that this process is a journey. There may also be barriers that prevent someone from getting professional help, such as time, lack of insurance coverage that means out-of-pocket expenses, or childcare.

There are times when talking to a trusted friend, or a minister may be exactly what is needed. However, there are other times when talking to a family member may not be in one’s best interest and they may need more intensive, objective, and professional help.

Here are some signs to share with single parents that may indicate a need for outside professional help:

1. **You cannot remember the last time you had a good night’s sleep.** The constant cycle of a lack of sleep is a clear sign that things are not working, and you need outside intervention. Your health will soon deteriorate, and this will only make matters worse.
2. **Your networking is not working.** Every attempt at talking to a friend or family member leaves you feeling more discouraged. Perhaps they are too close to the situation and unable to be objective. It may be time to bring in a neutral party.



3. **There was/is physical and/or emotional abuse.** There is no way you should allow this behavior to continue without getting help and finding safety immediately. Physical, emotional, and verbal abuse should never be tolerated. It is not how God would want His daughter to be treated. Even if it is not occurring in the present, you may need professional help to overcome the effects of past abuse. Also, one's child may benefit from counseling if this has been the family's experience.
4. **You are afraid to say certain things in your family.** When you do not feel comfortable sharing your feelings and thoughts without being demeaned, criticized, judged, or bullied, something is terribly wrong. You need a safe place to talk.
5. **You deny, excuse, or choose to ignore the signs of problems such as drug or alcohol abuse.** Substance abuse is an indication of greater problems than simple emotional distress or fatigue. Perhaps you excuse your behavior by saying things like, "I can stop anytime; I am not addicted; I will stop as soon as my parenting situation stabilizes." This is the height of denial and a key indicator that outside help is needed. Once again, the child may benefit from counseling if this has been the family's experience.
6. **You have a recurring thought that your child would be better off without you.** These kinds of negative thoughts are a result of much deeper problems that need professional help. All of us have occasional thoughts that perhaps we are not the best parent; however, when it becomes a daily obsession, this is a key indicator that one needs professional intervention.

If a person needs new eyeglasses, would they break the bottoms out of two glass bottles, get some wire, and make their own? Would one perform a root canal on their own molar with a new power drill? Would you take out your own appendix? Of course not. So, why is it that we are reluctant to seek professional help when we need it? Ahh, there we have that word again... STIGMA! AS leaders, we need to help break down these barriers and stigma.



Discussion Question for Leaders

1. Who do you think single parents most often talk to when they need a listening ear or advice?
2. Do you think someone in the family is always the best person to talk to?
3. What steps can you take to help single parents seek help when needed?

God Chose You!

All parents have felt inadequate at times, regardless of their situation. All parents have yelled, have said the wrong thing, wished for a do-over or lost their patience. And every time the guilt comes crashing down, we are tempted to think that, because of our perceived deficiencies, we will ruin our child forever. Having these feelings is not unique to single parents.

It is far too easy to think that someone else would do a better job of parenting. But here is the beautiful part! NO parent is perfect. We all have flaws. We all have our good days and our not-so-good days. There will always be days when we wish we could rewind the clock and have a do-over.

Living in a culture driven by constant connectivity and social media does nothing to help the situation. All we need to do is scroll through Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, etc., and we are reminded how “perfect” all the other parents are. There are the ones whose kid always looks picture-perfect, whose hair and makeup are daily done to perfection, whose homes are spotless, who make delicious homemade meals and do craft projects with their kids each afternoon. Just keep in mind that things are not always as they appear. Things that look perfect on social media are not perfect in reality.

No one is the perfect parent except God the Father. Understanding that God chose them for the divine task of parenting can be life-altering. Imagine that God wrote the following letter to single moms and dads:

My Beloved Single Parent,

You are chosen, you are enough, and you are mine. My love for you is fierce. I am proud of you. I see your heart, the way you seek me, and your devotion to raising your child. Well done, my child.



My child, you are a delight to me. I chose you at the foundation of the world, and I have sanctified you for a great purpose. Beloved, I stand, ready to join you on your parenting journey. The path may be blurry before you, but it is in my sight, and I can see the finish line. I will carry you when you are weak, give you strength, and you will not fall.

Beloved child, you are enough. I have chosen you to parent your child. You belong to me, and I call you worthy. My promise is to give you hope and a future. Do not waste the blessing of time by worrying about tomorrow, for I have already taken care of all your needs.

With my limitless and everlasting love, I will meet the needs of your child also. They will lack nothing. I am sufficient. Their identity is in Me, their provision is in Me, and their future is in Me. I have set them apart for a great purpose. I have tremendous plans for the future of your child.

Watching you raise them delights me. I have chosen you to raise this child. You are the warrior fit to sharpen them, instruct them, direct them, prepare them, train them, and prepare them to face the world. No weapon formed against them will prosper, for they belong to me.

My darling single parent, do not forget that you are a treasure to Me. You are of inestimable value, and I will never stop loving you!

My Beloved, you are mine forever.

Your Heavenly Father

Conclusion

The truth is that, sooner or later, all families may face trauma, adversity, or other stressors. The good news is that God offers a roadmap for adapting to life-changing situations, pressing on, and emerging even stronger than before. That is resilience defined!

So, what can you do as a leader? We must educate those under our care to show love and compassion without being judgmental. What amazing grace and what amazing love Jesus has for each of us, regardless of our backgrounds. In God's



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sight, single parents are precious, honored, and loved beyond measure. He treasures and loves each with a love that has no limit.

In addition, we must have a compilation of existing resources in our community at our disposal to share with single parents. Every community is unique, and often, a list of resources may be exactly what the single parent is needing.

Above all, model the amazing grace and love of Jesus! It will be contagious as others see Him reflected in your actions. Single parents are raising the next generation, and we need to be there to walk beside them so they, along with their child, will be in heaven.

References

American Psychological Association (APA). (2021). *Building Your Resilience*.
<https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience>