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## A GROWING TEAM AND FAMILY

A marriage made in heaven still has to live in the realities of an all too real earth with its conflicts and pains.

We began our married life sharing a team house and, despite the obvious inconveniences, community living helped us break some of the selfishness that Western married life can create. Although it is important for couples to have their own space and intimacy, it is also important to leave space for others. If the marriage monopolises all the time and energies, it reduces the potential for making disciples of others.

Another early marriage memory was spending a month touring Britain in an Iveco van with two other folks promoting the work of Horizons via a multi-media presentation. It was Sylviane's introduction to fish and chips, English humour and endless cups of tea from our various hosts around the country.

Our team in France increased rapidly and we needed to find more accommodation. We were also asked to take on leadership of this growing team. So much for the tradition of not having much responsibility in your first year of marriage!

One morning I was reading through my Bible when a verse from 2 Kings 4 v 16 seemed to speak deeply to me:

*"About this time next year, you will hold a son in your arms…."*

I knew inwardly that the Lord was speaking about our first child and I was able to believe and lay hold of this promise.

Needless to say the next September Sylviane gave birth to our son, David, in Avignon hospital. I held him in my arms and praised God! In fact I was so excited on my way home that I got lost! A first child is an amazing challenge and experience. As young parents you have everything to learn. It's incredible that God entrusted his only Son to the care of a young couple. The salvation of mankind hung on such a slender thread. Yet, by the grace of God, Joseph and Mary coped… and so did we.

Although no one knows the Heavenly Father except by revelation, every father gets his own personal revelation of parenthood via his children. David taught me so much.

One night I was laying in bed, the gentle arms of Morpheus having cradled me into a place of tranquillity, when suddenly my personal nirvana was shattered by a strident scream and raucous crying!

"Waahh! Waahh!"

Thinking I was being attacked by some demonic banshee, I quickly awoke only to realise that the baby was crying! Being slightly less than the ideal husband, I quickly nudged my wife in the ribs, waking her up and saying,

"Hey! The baby's crying. You'd better go and get him!"

And my wife being the epitome of virtue replied,

"It's your turn!"

She turned over to regain the comfort of pillow and blanket.

I crawled out of bed. The clock seemed to gloat as its luminous hands shone out 2.00 am. I had a headache and felt awful. I walked zombie-like towards the bedroom from where the crying was growing in intensity.

"Waahh! Waahh!"

The crying was building to a crescendo. I gingerly unpeeled the sides of the nappy and pulled it back. My worst fears were confirmed. My sense of smell went into overdrive and the huge mass of pooh which confronted me seemed to go beyond the realms of nature. How could so much come out of one so small? My headache was getting worse, every nerve of my body was crying out for sleep, and as the wailing grew I said out loud,

"Ah! Who'd be a father!"

I wasn't expecting an answer, but suddenly the atmosphere became electric as the Lord broke into my heart speaking clearly to my inner man. In spite of the crying a secret place of stillness opened within me and I distinctly discerned the following words echoing down from the heart of eternity.

"I'd be a Father… I was willing to leave heaven, become a man and save you from the mess of sin you were in."

I was deeply touched by this revelation. I realised that so often I myself was covered in the mess of sin, crying out to my heavenly Father. How grateful I was for his care and concern.

I quickly gathered the smelly nappy up and threw it away into the bin. I didn't spend hours pouring over every detail of its content but simply got rid of it! Why do we spend so much time analysing our sins rather than simply getting rid of them at the foot of the cross? I then got some cotton wool and that super white baby-cleaner liquid and in the words of the famous boxer, Henry Cooper, 'splashed it all over!'

The baby stopped crying, obviously feeling better at being clean. I couldn't help but think of the verses in the Bible, which speak of being cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

That historically shed blood is now applied as a cleansing balm by faith and repentance. Why stink when you can be clean? I put a clean nappy on the baby and picked him up and held him tightly in a warm and intimate embrace. He started to gurgle a smile and our eyes met in a covenant of love.

"Ah! It's not so bad being a father after all,"

I thought.

And the Father's voice, blown on the wings of the Holy Spirit, seemed to come again bringing words of encouragement.

"You see, even your sin and repentance gives me an opportunity for deeper fellowship and communion with you. If you love your own son in this way, how much more will your Father in heaven, seek after your heart."