



# *ABBA Ministries*

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*Illuminating Life through Scripture*

## Sibling Rivalry

Sibling rivalry is as old as the human race. While parents dream of brothers and sisters who are best friends, supporting and defending each other, sharing secrets together, and always enjoying each other, reality proves itself differently. Sibling rivalry is the jealousy and competition that naturally builds between family members when parents fail to take specific steps to reduce such friction.

Sibling rivalry stems from three basic motivations: desire for attention, desire for power, and desire for ownership. While each child desires all of both parents' attention, settling for a perceived equal amount is impossible because each child perceives him/herself to be cheated. Personal power, as with adults, creates tension through comparison as measured by all the "ests", i.e. prettiest, strongest, smartest, etc. And ownership rights are easily blurred as toys, clothes, games, and other items are passed on to each child in succession.

While all this points to a terribly bleak picture, it is also comforting to know that a parent can do many things to ease the tensions which so naturally build in a family.

First, parents need to spend time individually with each child. Whether you develop the tradition of eating breakfast out once a week, each week with a different child, or taking a walk or bike ride through the local forest preserve with a different child each time, parents need to spend time alone with each child. Family times, everyone together, are also important, but nothing can replace the feeling one gets when mom or dad are there with each child alone.

Second, comparisons between children should be avoided at all costs. The easiest traps to fall into are comparison about physical characteristics, intelligence, and athletic ability. Parents need to communicate love for each child as they are, giving each praise and criticism when appropriate or necessary.

Third, reinforce the idea that respect for each others' property is necessary for each family member without any favoritism being shown. If one family member wishes to use another's baseball mitt, common courtesy dictates that you ask before using it. If one family member breaks or loses another's favorite toy, its only fair that he/she replaces it.

Finally, parents must also learn to ignore some of the fighting and arguing that goes on. Stepping in only when necessary to maintain respect and safety, parents should otherwise allow siblings to solve their own problems and thus gain valuable experience in how to get along in the world with others.

Sibling rivalry is inevitable, but it can also be maintained at healthy, manageable levels.