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Discipline with Love and Conviction

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Discipline with Love and Conviction

God's Word instructs us to love one another (1 Peter 1:22). Nearly every parent wants to give his or her children tender, loving, and sacrificial care that flows out of a heart of love; but even the most dedicated mother or father cannot do this unless God is the source of that love. This is because God is love, and as we walk in His love, it will flow to our children through us.

God does not leave us without guidance. In fact, the biblical standard for love is described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. It has 15 components: suffers long, is kind, does not envy, does not parade itself, is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil, does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth, always bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

God is love, and He is the source of all love. All good things flow from Him. Love is not something we can work up; it is something we receive from Him. Love is a spiritual matter and not just a set of attributes we try to display. Love is not merely the actions that parents do. Actions do not necessarily equate to the presence of love, because actions may be performed without love being the motivating reason. Sometimes our actions are actually out of a sense of duty or need for conformity, or as a means of achieving personal gain.

Therefore, love is not something we do; it is something within us. Do children know the difference between actions that are motivated by a loving spirit and a set of empty procedures? Certainly they do! They may not be able to verbalize what they know in their hearts to be true, but they will respond to the emptiness all the same.

It is also important to remember that love must not be withdrawn. When this happens, people are hurt and God's purposes cannot be accomplished.

Parents' love must be constant and unconditional. It should not be related to a child's behavior in any way. Just like we must be able to rest in God's love for us as we grow and mature in Him, our children must be able to rest in our love for them. For children to grow up healthy and confident, moving peacefully along the pathway of God's perfect plan for their lives, they must be secure in their parents' love for them.

Love can (and should) be the basis from which parents operate when they help their children learn and consistently repeat appropriate behavior. Even guiding children away from unacceptable behavior can be accomplished with ease when love is the parents' motivation.

In any given situation that involves guiding children, adults will be forced to make decisions about how they will respond to their children and their actions. There will be many possibilities to choose from, many of which will not be beneficial to the children. Only a heart of love and reliance on God for His love and wisdom will consistently lead the adult to respond in ways that are mindful of the children's developmental level and truly in their best interests.

Unfortunately, many parents and caregivers excuse their own bad behavior by blaming their own actions on the behavior of the children. However, children and teens should not be controlling the emotions of the adults. It is the adult's responsibility to be Christlike in every situation, regardless of how the child is behaving.

However, love does not mean inaction or allowing children to take charge! And it does not mean that a parent can withdraw from fulfilling his or her responsibilities. Parents must lovingly help, guide, or redirect their children when they misbehave. Even a child's most obnoxious conduct can be dealt with in a gentle, but firm, way.

What is the difference between gentle firmness and hostile firmness? Your spirit. You know the difference—and so do your children!

Because it is not born out of love, hostile firmness will injure your child. There are many inappropriate ways for an adult to, in a spirit of hostility and anger, strike a child. These unbridled reactions may take the form of physical slaps and blows that are administered violently and mindlessly. Or a child may be stricken down with sharp words or stinging silence. Certainly God has placed these children in our care, and this is not what He wants our children to receive from us. If this is what the children are receiving from our hands and from our mouths, then this is what they are receiving from our hearts.

If our hearts are full of hostility, we will give hostility to our children. In turn, if our hearts are full of love, we will give them love. When our spirits are full of love because we have received love from God, our children will learn and experience the

nature of Jesus Christ—who lives in us. When Jesus Christ reigns in the hearts and lives of the parents, the home will be a safe place in which children can flourish and grow.

Our children must be able to rely on our consistency in the same way that we rely and put our trust in the fact that God is consistent.

All parents will have moments of desperation when they must call out to God to help them. What do we do when a hostile spirit grips us and we react in selfish ways that hurt our children and other people around us?

We must repent—we must turn from our sinful ways. We must ask God for His forgiveness and His grace. And yes, something else is required. We must admit to our children that we were wrong, and if other people have been affected by our hostility, we must confess our fault to them. We must also ask those we have injured to forgive us. This will teach our children that we are serious about obeying God’s Word. It will also make it very clear that the type of behavior we exhibited is not something that should be copied.

This is the time for retracing our steps to find out what led up to the outburst. Oftentimes during this prayerful time of self-examination, God will show us that somehow we have been neglecting our relationship with Him. When we focus on him and submit our ways to His, our repentance and renewed relationship with Him will yield the fruits of righteousness. Every area of our lives will reflect our rediscovery of how His love flows through. You may be a parent who is full of questions about how to guide your children. Be encouraged by the fact that these very questions are a reflection of your love for your children!

Does this mean that our children will enjoy being corrected by us? No. Being corrected is not a pleasurable experience! However, when it is an expression of our loving spirit, it will ultimately yield good fruit in them ... and in us. Hebrews 12:11 tells us, *“Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”*

Your task is not to keep your child smiling today at any price. Instead, God has given you the responsibility of helping your child become a mature and responsible person who loves the Lord with a whole heart. By having a loving spirit when difficult

situations arise, you are guiding your children with your love and leading them to the source of all love.

Praise for a job well done reassures a child. Admonition for a job poorly done lets him know he is not learning well.

Most people dream of having a home that is full of peace, love, joy and tranquility; however, frustration often results when they examine the disparity between what is and what could-or should-be. Many parents feel overwhelmed, frustrated, and even inadequate when they take time to assess their homes and realize they are not happy ones.

God does not expect you to parent alone! He is watching over you and your children. Families are in constant change. Over time, a wide variety of different interests, needs, and capacities will emerge in the individual members of your family. Without His spirit, the task of being a parent would be truly overwhelming. But you are not alone! By His Spirit, you can rely on God to make you sensitive to the individual needs of each member of your family. As you pray and seek God's ways, He will give you love for your children. You do not have to pretend to have the fifteen components of love that we noted earlier. God is the source of love, so look to Him for the love that you need!

Whether we realize it or not, we are constantly teaching and modeling behavior in front of our children. This is why good parenting is a matter of whether or not your spirit is surrendered to the Spirit of God, and is not limited to a set of skills and procedures. A parent cannot pretend to be loving or pretend to lead a godly life all day long, day in and day out. At some point the pretense will be uncovered and your real spirit will be revealed-usually under pressure. Children are watching and listening to their parents and other adults much more than most of us realize!

Parenting cannot be haphazard. In fact, the very essence of guiding children implies a purpose and a goal. It suggests that parents assume responsibility for influencing their children and for making their learning experiences effective.

You should keep in mind that children develop in accordance with their own individual, God-given timetables; however, basic knowledge of child development will enable you to provide the tools, experiences, and guidance that your child generally needs at a given age. As you study and put into practice your own ideas

and some of the procedures that have been successfully used by other adults, you will gradually acquire more and more skill in the art of arranging experiences that foster wholesome and happy development in your children.

Without conviction, you will back down from doing what is best for your child. A child's resistance to adult authority is one area that calls upon a parent's resolve. Because every child will test the limits to their freedom of choice, parents should not be surprised when the child resists guidelines or expectations. Know what you plan to do when this happens—before it happens!

Constant attention to our children is one of the toughest tests of character and spiritual stamina. Know your child, foster open and honest communication within your family, study up on appropriate developmental stages for your children, and trust God to give you His wisdom and love to guide your children. Steadfastly love your children, confidently trust in God's guidance, and stay true to the parenting plan that you and your spouse have agreed upon.