

PARENTING IS A MINISTRY SERIES

Craig Caster



Loving Communication is volume 2
in the Parenting Is a Ministry series.

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Loving Communication

Parenting Is a Ministry Series

Volume 2

For Traditional, Blended, and Single-Parent Families

Craig Caster

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

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Preface

Most parents would agree on at least two things: raising children can be wonderful *and difficult*. Adjustments must be made for the uniqueness of each personality, and keeping children entertained can be a challenge. But the real bummer is discipline. Couples must work as a team, single parents are working without backup, and every parent faces the challenge of protecting and training each child from birth to adulthood. *When, where, how, how much, how often, how long, and is this really working* are just a few of the questions crowding the thoughts of a parent staring into the face of a precious, disobedient child. The truth is, most parents today are not sure where to turn, believe their own parents did just an okay job, and feel poorly equipped themselves.

But there is help for those who will listen. God, the creator of all things, has not left us without guidance. He is the creator of the institution we call family and has given us clear instructions in His Word on how to be successful. We need to take this seriously because we have an enemy. The Bible tells us that the devil, Satan, is working against us and would love to break down the strength of the family, which is also an attack against the church, society, and our Christian witness to a lost world. But God, knowing all our needs, gives us both His Word and the Holy Spirit, which is enough to win any battle.

Sadly, most Christians are not aware that the Bible is relevant for raising children, so they turn to past experience or worldly philosophy for help. But now is the time to listen and seek God's wisdom and guidance to strengthen our families. If we are not willing to submit to our Creator, then what can we expect for the future? When we operate outside of God's will, the result is chaos and destruction. It may come slowly, so we hardly notice, but the end is pain.

The Parenting Is a Ministry series will help you learn God's plan for raising children. Whether you function as a traditional family, blended family, single-parent family, or grandparents raising grandchildren, God's parenting principles are effective and conclusive. We are all God's children, parent and child alike, and He would never leave us without the possibility of a joy-filled, successful life.

May God bless you through His wonderful, life-changing principles and bless your family as you allow Him to transform you into the parent He desires you to be.

Pray this prayer together.

Dear Lord Jesus, we are asking for Your help and wisdom to be parents who honor and glorify You. Please give us the faith to trust You and the grace to change those things we are doing wrong. Help us start doing Your will in the way we love and train our children. Amen.

Introduction

This workbook is designed to bring you onto the path of discipleship, which means walking in God's principles. When we use words like *walk*, we hope you understand that living in these principles is just as fundamental as learning to walk.

The goals of our workbook are:

1. to show you that God provides principles for parenting,
2. to equip you with tools and applications for applying these principles, and
3. to guide your family into the forgiveness, healing, and unity that comes through obedience to God.

Family Discipleship Ministries exists to help educate the body of Christ in vital areas. Failure in discipleship is directly related to failure in parenting. And how do we know this? By what we have seen, experienced, and found in proven statistics today.

The Process

The study is divided into four volumes. Start with volume 1 and continue through each volume in order. Skipping to a volume or section that sparks your interest is tempting but not advised, because each volume and lesson build upon one another. For example, you really want to master disciplining your child so you move ahead to that study, but there are biblical principles that must be learned before you can discipline in a godly way. Work toward completing one lesson each day for five days. Building daily study with consistency is a key to spiritual success.

These principles have been tried and proven successful. I have experienced it in my own life, my own family, and also through the lives of countless people in counseling and parenting classes. Please understand, this is *not* a "Five Easy Steps to Parenting" manual. Biblical discipleship is challenging work and will require you to change some of your attitudes and behaviors. The process will require commitment and sacrifice to successfully implement the principles.

Starting Each Day

- View each daily study as time spent with your God, and expect Him to speak to you through His Word.
- Start each day with prayer, asking God to reveal where you need to change and to empower you to apply what you are learning.
- Have a reflective mindset. Do not rush through the material just to say you finished it. Give God time to speak to you, and meditate on what you learn.

Things to Note

- This work is a new priority and will require dedicated time. The lessons are to be done daily. If you miss a day, *do not skip it*, but work to complete all lessons in order.

- At times we start projects and do not finish. Consider the importance of your parenting responsibility and make a decision to faithfully complete this study. Pray about your priorities and what you are placing ahead of this commitment. Enlist the help of an accountability partner for prayer and study if necessary.
- If married, your spouse is an essential partner in this effort. Study together or separately, but always discuss what you have learned as it relates to marital and parenting issues and changes.
- Lessons may vary in the amount of information presented. After you complete each one, look ahead to the next lesson to plan your time with God and get the most out of it.
- Space is provided for answering questions and recording your thoughts and prayers. If you have downloaded and printed this workbook, we suggest you put it in a three-ring binder and include additional paper for personal journaling and notes.

DIG DEEPER

This section marks an opportunity to read Scripture and relate it to the subject being presented. During this discipleship process you will become more familiar with the Bible, biblical principles of parenting, and what God expects from you as a parent.

Self-Examination

As you study biblical principles, this section provides time for self-examination, finding areas where personal improvement is needed. Space is provided for listing insights, confessions, and prayers for strength and wisdom to make those changes. One aspect of the discipleship process is personal accountability. If God reveals that you have sinned against your spouse or children, confess your sin to them and ask for forgiveness. Practice this regularly even if it is not noted to do so.

FACT FILE

Boxes like this one provide definitions of words or phrases from the Bible. We have taken great care to use well-known, theologically sound Bible dictionaries and commentaries for clarity, referenced when possible. Many of these definitions appear in *Appendix T: Glossary*.

ACTION PLAN

After you study the biblical principles, this section challenges you to take action and apply what you have learned to your life. To be true disciples we must understand that God not only desires that we grow in knowledge, but He also requires that we live it out.

Appendix Resources

Please take advantage of the appendices at the end of the workbook. They are there for your growth, and we refer to them throughout the workbook. Before you begin this wonderful journey, please fill out *Appendix A: Parent Commitment Letter* (volume 1).

Leader's Guide

A leader's guide is available at FDM.world under Free Ministry Downloads. All materials on our website focus on discipleship and are provided free of charge.

Lesson 1

What's Love Got to Do with It?

As a family counselor I hear many kids say, "I feel like my parents don't love me." Yet virtually any parent questioned would emphatically state that they do love their kids. The problem is, parents sometimes act without love. The frustrations and difficulties of parenting can bring out the worst in us. We do and say things that are the opposite of love. Over time, if a parent is not taking responsibility and asking for forgiveness, a child will not feel loved.

As we look at biblical love, Jesus gives us insight into what He expected of His disciples, which still applies to us today. Notice that Jesus did not make a suggestion, but a commandment.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

Self-Examination

According to verse 35, how does the fulfillment of this commandment relate to your relationship with Christ and others, especially your children?

God tells us that we cannot express this love without His help. Notice the connection between God's Word and the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives:

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever. (1 Peter 1:22-23)

The word *sincere* means without hypocrisy. This sincere love is made possible only by abiding in Christ and obeying the truth through the power of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in every believer. In a previous study we learned that 2 Peter 1:3 says Jesus's, "divine power has given to us all things . . . through the knowledge of Him." And that knowledge comes through God's Word.

DIG DEEPER

Describe the four ways God is telling us to love others, including our children.

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.
(Romans 12:9)

And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:8)

For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.
(Hebrews 6:10)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. (1 John 4:7)

What Is Biblical Love?

Biblical love is not based on feelings, nor does it come naturally. We are naturally selfish and self-centered. Biblical love is an action—based on choice. This type of love is supernatural and can only come from a heart that is yielded to God, because it comes from Him. To truly, sincerely love our children, we must first love God and yield our hearts to Him.

In our culture today, the word *love* is tossed around so much that the meaning has been cheapened. We use the same word to describe how we feel about God, our children, and certain foods. Most parents will eagerly testify that they love their children. But the only standard by which we can measure real love is the Word of God.

Two words translate to “love” from the Greek into the English Bible: *agape* and *phileo*. *Agape* is choosing to love unconditionally, while *phileo* is conditional love. We have *agape* love because “the love [agape] of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5).

God has called us to love His children with agape love—a sacrificial love that is not withdrawn if the loved one fails to live up to demands or expectations. Agape love is based on the value God has placed upon our children, not on their personalities, strengths, weaknesses, or failures.

It is impossible in our own strength to love with God's agape love. But praise God! When we receive Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to live in our hearts. If we yield and die to ourselves, the Holy Spirit will love our children through us. Because biblical love is not based on feelings or emotions, it is something that you *do* (a verb, not a noun) and can only be described by seeing it in action.

Learning to show God's love to our children is essential. The good news is, if our foundation of intimacy with Jesus Christ is properly laid, we are capable, in God's strength, of building the supports of love our children need. Failure is not an option. We can all start somewhere, and that point comes when we realize that loving our children comes from a heart surrendered to God. It is a behavior we must choose, seek, learn, and grow into. We all love our children to a certain extent, but we want to pursue *excellence* in love.

FACT FILE

Agape—The response of God's heart toward unworthy sinners. Agape is God's love demonstrated in self-sacrifice for the benefit of the objects of His love. "God's essential quality that seeks the best interests of others regardless of the others' actions."¹ "It involves God doing what He knows is best for man and not necessarily what man desires. ... His son to bring forgiveness to man."²

Phileo—The response of the human spirit to what appeals to it as pleasurable. "Phileo seems to be clearly distinct (from agape) and speaks of esteem, high regard, and tender affection and is more emotional."³ Phileo is friendship love, determined by the pleasure that one receives from the object of that love.

Paul knew the people in Philippi loved one another, but he encouraged them to press on further:

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.
(Philippians 1:9-11)

Notice that Paul did not pray for them to *feel* like loving, which will be described more in the next lesson. This is a prayer of action we can use to pray for ourselves. Two phrases show us how to use this as a prayer:

1. "That your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment" (verse 10). To *abound* means "to have excess," more than enough love. *Knowledge* (*epignosis* in Greek) means "to know something intellectually, but then act upon it." *Discernment* means "to have insight, or the capacity to understand, and make a decision concerning behavior that flows from knowledge." The prayer is to know how to love biblically and then live it out.
2. "That you may approve the things that are excellent" (verse 11). *Approve* means "to continually put to the test, examine prior to the approval of action." Agape meets the qualification of being excellent, the standard of God's Word, which is a sincere love.

May God fulfill this in you as you study His Word. Using the verses from Philippians, write a personal prayer on an index card and ask God to make it true in your life. For the next few lessons, use the prayer card to begin your study time. For example:

Lord Jesus, I am asking for this love to flow through me at all times. I want to overflow with Your love in all the situations I face each day. Lord, help me to never make an excuse for an unloving thought, word, or deed toward my children. Please give me Your discernment on how to share this love in all situations I face as a parent. Jesus, please be glorified in all I do in front of and to my children. Amen.

DIG DEEPER

Explain how to apply these exhortations to your children.

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. (Colossians 1:9)

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:2)

Finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:10)

Lesson 2

The Uniqueness of Our Children

An important principle, sometimes overlooked, is that God creates each child to be unique. My daughter, Katie, was so shy, from the time she could walk until she was five years old that she had to be physically connected to either my wife or me if we were in a public place. She would not leave our sides. Even at a place like church where she knew so many people, she would literally run ten feet just to switch from my hand to her mom's. It was a little weird at times.

On Fridays when Katie was in kindergarten, they had praise and worship for the whole school, about four hundred students. When worship started, the kids would be screaming, "Praise the Lord!" It was like a nightmare for Katie. She would cover her ears and put her head down, fighting the feelings of panic. Even the daily routine on the playground, with fifty kids throwing balls and yelling, was difficult for Katie. She would sit at a table, coloring and talking with the teachers.

When she was five years old, we took her to Disneyland, and it was anything but the "Happiest Place on Earth." Katie did not like it. It took nearly five hours for her to relax in the crowd. That's just the way she was. Thankfully, with age, she became much more confident.

Yet my boys were completely different, nothing like Katie. My son Nick was the complete opposite. We had to chase him around all the time, calling, "Get over here, young man!" because he always wanted to be independent.

Many friends and family members noticed Katie's behavior, which seemed strange to them. What if my wife and I had become embarrassed or impatient and ignored her needs by saying, "Will you stop it? Let go of me! Stand over there. The boys never did this." If we had shunned her, what would have happened? We could have hurt Katie deeply and caused possible long-lasting damage, simply because we refused to accept her unique emotional needs.

God Created Them

To have a deep appreciation for each child, we must always keep in mind *Who* created them. Yes, we are participants in the creation of our children, but God is the Creator. Genesis 1:26-27 says, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.' . . . So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." God formed man out of the dust (Genesis 2:7), and then He said it was "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

Our children are created in God's image, and we need to value them that way, even with their imperfections and unique personalities. It does not matter if you are a traditional, blended, single-parent, grandparent, or even foster family, we all share the responsibility of having God's children in our homes and need to value them as He does.

We must also keep in mind that God makes each of us with a unique personality. Ever notice how one child learns faster than another? One may be sensitive, another energetic, and yet another

relaxed. You notice this in the Bible with Jesus's twelve disciples. Peter was brash, always speaking up, while John, known as the apostle of love, was depicted leaning on Jesus's breast.

In Psalm 139, David praised God for making him.

For You formed my inward parts;
You covered me in my mother's womb.
I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Marvelous are Your works,
And that my soul knows very well. (verses 13-14)

One commentator wrote concerning this passage:

David now turns to consider His power and skill. And the particular phase of divine omnipotence he chooses is the marvelous development of a baby in his mother's womb. When conception is made, it is like a speck of watery material smaller than the dot over this *i*, and all the future characteristics of the child are programmed – the color of their skin, eyes and hair, the shape of their facial features, the natural abilities they will have. All that the child will be physically and mentally is contained in that fertilized egg.⁴

This cannot be clearer. God made each of us who we are, from birth, and He loves us. Yes, our children are born sinners just like us, and they need to be lovingly trained and disciplined. But it will always be in the context of who they are, and always with love.

DIG DEEPER

Describe how the psalmist's attitude toward God's creation (including our children) could help you embrace your child's uniqueness. What should your attitude be?

For You, Lord, have made me glad through Your work;
I will triumph in the works of Your hands. (Psalm 92:4)

O Lord, how manifold are Your works!
In wisdom You have made them all.
The earth is full of Your possessions. (Psalm 104:24)

The works of the Lord are great,
Studied by all who have pleasure in them. (Psalm 111:2)

When does God's plan for His children begin?

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;
Before you were born I sanctified you;
I ordained you a prophet to the nations. (Jeremiah 1:5)

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me
through His grace. (Galatians 1:15)

We can agree that each of us is unique. It should be no surprise that our children are very different from us, and from each other. To love them properly, we need to become students of our children—to accept their personalities, understand their needs, and learn to communicate with them in a loving way. And never forget to show affection to them, which can even be according to their personalities. If we do not apply ourselves to these areas of parenting, serious problems can occur.

Many parents, without knowing or recognizing it, can grieve a child's spirit and damage their self-worth. By misrepresenting the Lord, not loving a child and adapting to their emotional needs, parents can prematurely erode their own influence over that child.

ACTION PLAN

List the characteristics that are unique to each of your children and take it to God in prayer. Then discuss together if married. For example:

Lord, my child is shy and at times she is very fearful. I know You have made her that way, so please give me Your wisdom. Show me (us) how to minister to her in a way that will honor You and meet her needs. Amen.

Throughout this series, you will learn more about how to love your children God's way. Commit it to prayer, and He will be faithful to provide the wisdom and strength you need to make changes.

Loving Communication Takes Time

Another important aspect of loving a child is to spend time with them. In today's world, we are pulled in so many directions by jobs, ministries, hobbies, and recreation, little time is left for the children. Even parents whose kids are in soccer, softball, or other sports can be at risk. Sports are good, but some people take them to the extreme. If you have one child who is a sports "nut," but the other three are not, what are you communicating to those three when you spend all day Saturday and Sunday, like a taxi cab, driving the "sport" around while they stay home? Worse yet is when you drag them along and make them sit in the bleachers. We must find a balanced way to love each of our children, based on their own interests.

In our society, many mothers work outside the home. Please understand that I am not putting down working moms. The area where you live can dictate the need for a two-parent income. But the question is: When working parents come home, where are their hearts and minds? "Kids, leave me alone for a while. I need my space." We can be tired, so be honest with yourself about being available to them. If you are not, there are going to be problems.

Loving our kids is not necessarily affected by the fact that we work but by our behavior revealed. Working mothers in the United States spend just 104 minutes per day in one-on-one communication with their children, while fathers spend about 59 minutes per day.⁵ For parents with multiple children, that time per child can decrease.

Statistics show that children watch approximately four hours of TV per day,⁶ while teens spend an average of seven hours per day on their cell phones.⁷ Is it any wonder that the media is proselytizing and infecting our children's minds with worldly views? Loving our children and meeting their emotional needs means sacrifice, giving of ourselves, and being available for them. Adapting to their interests may be reading a book to them, playing catch, or walking the dog. It takes time, but parents will also reap the new rewards of really getting to know their children—and enjoying them.

The Most Powerful Motivator

There are four basic needs that motivate all humans. First is love, the most powerful motivator. Second is physical needs: food, warmth, and safety. Third is pleasure: physical satisfaction, recreation, possessions, and getting things we desire. Fourth, and least powerful, is pain and fear.

When it comes to motivating children, parents often lean most heavily on pain and fear. Isn't that interesting? The reality is that love is a far more powerful motivator. Love will motivate our

children to make the right decisions when they are not in our presence, especially when they become adolescents. Our love is the most powerful motivation for them to say, “No, I don’t want that” or “I won’t do that.” Our love for them is the key.

God is our example, and it is “knowing that the goodness [lovingkindness] of God leads you to repentance” (Romans 2:4) that we need to embrace. Since it was God’s love and goodness that brought us to the point of repentance, should we not do the same with our children? What was the motivation that caused Jesus to come down and die for us? John 3:16 tells us it was His love for us that motivated Him to die on the cross.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what the Bible says about acting out of love. What are the reasons and results, and how can you apply this to parenting?

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved. (2 Corinthians 12:15)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. (1 John 4:7)

In our next lesson, you will learn to train your children by establishing rules, discipline, and punishment. But remember, effective training must be done in love and motivated by love if we are doing it God’s way. This is difficult for parents because it requires sacrifice. For love to be genuine, it must be demonstrated. Aren’t you thankful that God didn’t just *feel* love for us? Aren’t you glad He *demonstrated* that love? He asks us to follow His example by going beyond feeling love to demonstrating love.

Lesson 3

Reacting versus Responding

Reacting is not a purposeful or proactive state of mind and can inevitably turn out to be a negative action. Loving someone will not be of great quality if we are merely reacting to that person.

Reacting in the Flesh

As Christian parents—ministers to our children—reacting in a negative way is sin and a misrepresentation of God. We should not be negatively reacting to our children in any circumstance. Reacting takes no thought. It's a “no-brainer” response when the mind is motivated by the flesh. We simply go with whatever comes to mind. Reacting is from our sin nature (the flesh) and is not a demonstration of self-control, which is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23).

When kids do something wrong, parents can react in the wrong way with the first thing that comes to mind, which is often shouting harsh words, using disgusted or frightening facial expressions, or even physical violence. Other tactics are silence, rejection, and alienation. The list of sinful, reactionary expressions toward our children can get pretty lengthy. These are not loving and do not qualify as godly training.

We must remember every day that we are the most powerful influence in our children's lives. Every time we get angry, or react to our kids in a negative way, we should visualize pulling a sword out and slicing their hearts. Of course, we do not see the damage immediately, but it is truly taking place. In addition, when we do not deal properly with that damage, infection sets in and brings bitterness, then resentment, and when our kids become teenagers, we pay the price.

As a counselor, I have seen hundreds of Christian boys and girls with broken hearts. They are so infected and full of pain. Sadly, the parents who raised these kids never even realized the damage they were doing to their children by repeatedly reacting in the flesh instead of responding in love.

Reacting to circumstances with a burst of emotion takes no time or effort. It is instantaneous. Proverbs 15:1 says, “A harsh word stirs up anger.” Yet the Bible says we are to eliminate harsh actions from our behavior: “But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth” (Colossians 3:8). We must accept this truth and make a conscious decision to stop every sinful reaction toward our children. Even Christian parents react in the flesh toward their kids and never take responsibility for their behavior.

DIG DEEPER

List each negative attitude or emotion and link it to the outcome. If any of these are in your life, identify how you need to change.

FACT FILE

React—To act in response to a stimulant or to stimulus, to act in opposition.⁸

Reacting in the flesh—A Christian reacting to a situation in a sinful manner, in the habit of their old fallen nature, or reacting in their own strength and understanding rather than the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;
Do not fret—it only causes harm. (Psalm 37:8)

That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. (Ephesians 4:22)

For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. (James 1:20)

It is honorable for a man to stop striving,
Since any fool can start a quarrel. (Proverbs 20:3)

A stone is heavy and sand is weighty,
But a fool's wrath is heavier than both of them. (Proverbs 27:3)

Responding in Love

When we are responsive, we are being acceptant, persuadable, or behaving in a positive way, which is the opposite of reacting. Responding takes thought. We must use our minds and will. Scripture commands us to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Responding also takes self-control. We must bring our will under subjection to the power of God, which allows the fruit of the Holy Spirit to blossom. “The fruit of the Spirit is love,

FACT FILE

Respond—To react positively or favorably.⁹

Responding in love—For a Christian, this means responding to a situation with the inward guidance, love, wisdom, and power of the Holy Spirit.

joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). In addition, Scripture says we must add self-control to our foundation of faith.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. (2 Peter 1:5–7)

Self-Examination

List some of the negative facial or verbal reactions you use with your children.

ACTION PLAN

Write a prayer asking God for His grace to faithfully ask forgiveness when you fail in this area.

Finally, responding rather than reacting takes time. It may take as long as counting to ten, or it may take much longer. In volume 4, we will learn about discipline, including the importance of never doing it in anger. Sometimes the ability to respond with appropriate discipline requires a parent take a time-out. Perhaps walk away from the situation and pray. Ask God for the wisdom to respond in a way that honors Him and lovingly encourages your child.

The heart of the righteous studies how to answer. (Proverbs 15:28)

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.
(James 1:19–20)

Scripture tells us not to react in the flesh but to respond thoughtfully with love. Remember, our purpose is to glorify God. Even during discipline, even when our kids are failing, even when they do not want to listen, even when they are challenging us. Even then, we need to respond in love. Remember that it is God’s will we are fulfilling, not our own.

DIG DEEPER

Describe our responsibilities concerning love.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (John 13:34)

But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.
(Colossians 3:14)

But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—
Christ. (Ephesians 4:15)

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere
love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart. (1 Peter 1:22)

And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a
multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:8)

The Strong-Willed Child

Proverbs 14:29 says, “He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly.” Reacting rather than responding demonstrates a lack of understanding in us, and it promotes continued foolish behavior in our children, especially with the strong-willed child.

During the first five years of my oldest son’s life, I frequently reacted to his strong-willed behavior like a raving maniac. I was angry, and I abused my authority. Finally, God got through to

me, “Craig, would you ever put gasoline on a fire when you’re trying to put it out?” I thought, *Of course not!* Again I heard God’s voice, “Every time you get angry and your son knows it, you are provoking him to continuous folly in his behavior.”

Scripture reveals that when we exasperate a child, those with a strong will push right back. Ephesians 6:4 says, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” This verse says “fathers” because they are given responsibility to govern the home, but the principle is for moms too. The command is: “Do not provoke.” There is no exception clause here—or elsewhere. The acceptable option is to train them, which will be described later, in depth. *To provoke to anger* (*parorgizo* in Greek) means “to move someone to the point of anger” or “to provoke to anger, irritation, or resentment.”¹⁰

When God commands us not to do something, and we do it anyway, it is a sin. No parent likes it when a strong-willed child refuses to listen or obey. But the Bible encourages us to always respond in love—or Christlikeness. Hebrews 10:24 presents *provoke* in a positive way, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.” *Stir up*, sometimes translated “stimulate or provoke,” is *paraxusmos* (Greek) and refers to the act of encouraging someone to good behavior. What we really want to do is “stir up” love, which stimulates good behavior in your child. This is the “fire extinguisher” of love.

Personality comes from the way God wires us. Those strong-willed individuals are the Peters and Pauls of the world. We need people like them in our lives, in the kingdom. They are the people who, when they are trained right, cannot only press on through great opposition but also bring others through with them. Victory comes by responding to truth, using self-control, and not being driven by our feelings and emotions. For us as parents, truth means our response comes from a heart and conscience trained by the Word of God. Deuteronomy 27:26 says, “Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law by observing them. And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’” *To confirm* means God’s Word has come into our hearts and dictates our behavior.

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:36–39)

In this passage, God emphasizes the importance of love and the value of human life. When we love and value someone, we treat them accordingly. Obviously, we can choose to fail by not loving, even though we are called to serve as a minister and example of Christ to our children.

Here is an example of acting in the opposite of love: It is a heated moment after your child just did something foolish, and you are having an intense debate. The phone rings, and you stop to answer it (a friend). “Hello. Oh *hey*, everything’s okay. I’m fine. How are you?” You seem happy to hear from them and your tone of voice turns instantly pleasant. What did you just communicate to your child? The person on the phone is more valuable.

Sadly, we do that, never thinking twice. When our kids are little, before their cognitive skills are developed, they see it plainly: Mom or Dad likes other people more than me. This common occurrence, even in Christian homes, is one reason we find many kids struggling with self-worth.

Love Is a Choice

The Bible says we are to “put on love.” It is a choice, not a feeling. Feelings may follow, but first we must act in obedience to the Word of God. “But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Colossians 3:14). The word translated *love* here is agape. *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* says this about agape love: “Contrary to a popular understanding, the significance of ‘agape’ is not that it is unconditional love, but that it is primarily a love of the will rather than of the emotion.”¹¹

Agape love means responding to our children as if we love and value them, even when we are upset with their choices. We may have negative thoughts, but we still respond with love and patience. We are learning self-control, the art of quenching our flesh, so we avoid saying something foolish, judgmental, mean, or unkind. This is the fruit of the Spirit, not the fruit of self. This love does not come naturally.

Biblical love is not based on feelings. It is a choice to submit, or yield, to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. We all recognize it—the conviction telling us when we are out of control (Ephesians 4:29–32). Agape love is the decision to value another person, perhaps a child, when our own comfort is disturbed. Romans 13:8 says, “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.”

Communicating love starts in the heart. Learning to respond in love rather than react from the flesh is a process. I no longer react in anger to my children but respond in love. Praise God, my oldest son has not held any unforgiveness toward me for the many mistakes during his first six years of life. God has healed his memory of my angry, sinful behavior.

If you are trapped in a reactive, sinful pattern of behavior, take heart. You and your child can experience similar healing. In the next lesson, we will deal with changing that reactive behavior to a loving response. It is important to understand, however, if you choose to continue reacting negatively, you will pay dearly later, and so will your children.

Lesson 4

Love Is Patient

Most of us believe we know how to love our children. But we can only prove it by comparing our type of love with the love described in God’s Word. The most complete passage on this topic is found 1 Corinthians 13, which describes both what love is and is not. While we study the principles in this lesson, we will be evaluating our knowledge and behavior in relation to God’s revealed wisdom on love.

As we go through this process, please keep in mind that God loves you, and His instruction is meant to encourage, not condemn. It is Satan, our enemy, who wants us to feel condemned. The Holy Spirit ministers to us by revealing areas where we need change, and our job is to receive that conviction. God wants us to understand the difference between conviction and condemnation and that there is “no condemnation to those who are in Christ” (Romans 8:1).

Think about why you began this material. God has been waiting to share these things with you. Tell Him, “Okay, God, I am ready. As You reveal truth to me, where I am doing something wrong, I pray that You would bring conviction and place a desire in my heart for change.”

In 1 Corinthians 13, God uses verbs to explain love—not adjectives—because *agape* love can only be described by observing it in action. Love is not something we merely define. It is something we *do*. It is not just a feeling or an attitude. It is an action that centers on others, not on self.

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love 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; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.
(1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

As we look at ourselves in relation to these aspects of love, giving special attention to the way we love our children, it will be helpful to look at what love is and is not.

Love Is Patient

The Scripture tells us love “suffers long” (or “is patient” in NASB and NIV) and commands us to do so. The opposite of longsuffering, or being patient, is impatience. Love is not impatient. If we put selfish, unrealistic expectations on our children, and then become angry when they fail, we are being impatient and failing to love them properly by God’s standard.

Parents complain: “My three-year-old constantly leaves messes and doesn’t want to obey.” What do you *expect* of a three-year-old?

FACT FILE

Longsuffering or *patience*—To be long-tempered, the opposite of hasty anger, instead it involves exercising understanding and patience toward people. It also requires that we endure circumstances, not losing faith or giving up.¹²

Others reveal: “My teenager never wants to do chores, and it makes me so angry. It’s hard to be patient when he won’t do what I ask!” But is that a surprise? How have you trained your child? Often the response is, “What do you mean ‘trained’? I just expect obedience.”

No wonder he’s fourteen and acts like he’s six—because you placed expectations on him and never trained him to meet those expectations. By reacting in anger, you are actually creating an angry person within your child (Proverbs 15:1), and you are influencing him to go out and do the same (Proverbs 22:24–25). Who should break this cycle? Who is responsible? Your fourteen-year-old son or you?

The love we show our kids must be longsuffering. Whether it is the “terrible twos” or the “challenging teens,” love means dying to self as we patiently teach and guide them into maturity. From the time we bring them home from the hospital, it seems that they just want, want, want. Everything is, “Mine, mine, mine.” But we cannot be impatient. Love requires patience.

This is a good place to stop and reflect on your relationship with the Lord. Before you came to Christ, God was patiently leading you to a place where you would surrender to Him, and even now God is being patient with your ignorance and disobedience.

Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? (Romans 2:4)

Remember 1 Corinthians 13:4 also says love “suffers long,” which is derived from the above word “longsuffering.” Notice that the longsuffering and goodness of God lead us to repentance, not God’s anger and impatience. Should we not demonstrate the same attitudes to our children?

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

Oh, how *truly* longsuffering God is toward us!

~~ACTION PLAN~~

Identify three areas where you are impatient with your children, then ask God to forgive you. Also ask your children to forgive you (be specific to each area). Follow up by committing these areas to prayer, asking God for strength and wisdom to change.

Keep in mind, some children will require much more patience than others. My son Nicholas was a strong-willed child. He required much time from my wife and me and ten times the amount of energy compared to our other children. It was constant. He would wake up in the morning, and by 9:00 a.m. my wife and I would think, *Oh my gosh, he's beating to a drum, but it sure is not ours.* Sometimes we would discipline him ten or even twenty times in one day, while our other kids might have required one or two.

Loving Nicholas was indeed hard work during those times. Often our thoughts were, *I'm sick of this! Why can't he just obey the rules? Why doesn't he just grow up?* We would stay up until all hours of the night discussing him, "What are we going to do tomorrow? God give us strength!" Loving Nicholas properly required a tremendous amount of patience.

For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.
(Romans 15:4)

DIG DEEPER

Paul prayed concerning the quality of love and patience we need in our hearts. What is the source of this love?

Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ. (2 Thessalonians 3:5)

ADHD/ADD

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which includes the former diagnosis of attention deficit disorder (ADD), is a genuine disorder causing inattention, distractibility, poor working memory, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.¹³ Some children truly have ADHD, but it is my experience over the last twenty-five years that approximately 85 percent of these diagnoses are false. This is especially obvious when considering the questions asked by a medical professional regarding their child's behavior, while never asking about the parents' methods of showing love and training them. In addition, they never consider how often the parents react to a child with anger, exasperating them and provoking their behavior to continuous folly.

It is questionable why the number of children diagnosed with ADHD is increasing. Current reasons seem to be that they do not sit in class and listen to the teacher or have had zero training at home other than yelling and screaming. With no consistent loving discipline, it is no wonder children act the way they do. After closely examining their discipline style, I have told many parents, "It's not that your child has ADHD, but the problem is your ignorance or unwillingness to love and train them according to God's will."

When parents are blessed with a strong-willed child, they can be led to believe that treating the child medically is the solution. In most cases, the greatest problems are parental ignorance or unwillingness to yield and obey God's commands. Consider the terms *battle of the wills* or *power struggle* in relation to parenting. These can lead to a disorder in children that we have named UADD, or unwilling-attention-deficit disorder. And if a child does not have UADD, then it is often called LOPD, lack-of-parenting disorder, or a combination of both.

If your child has been diagnosed with ADHD, please do not think you must immediately take them off medication. Instead, apply the principles you are learning throughout this study. You might find that ninety days from now, you can wean them off that medication, and perhaps you will discover they never needed it in the first place. I have witnessed this many times. Pray about it.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what these verses say about longsuffering patience, love, or both.

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus. (Romans 15:5)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness. (Galatians 5:22)

That you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Hebrews 6:12)

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

Lesson 5

Love Is Kind

Being kind to someone is measurable. It is not a feeling lacking substance but something that is tangible to see, hear, or feel.

A good illustration of this word is when Christ used it of Himself, saying, “My yoke is easy [*chrestos*] and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). True love motivates us to act in merciful goodness toward our children so they can see Christ in us, an example of a loving and kind minister of God.

FACT FILE

Kind—Chrestos (Greek). To do good; denotes being gentle, merciful, sympathetic, gracious, and good natured in contrast to harsh, hard, sharp, bitter, or cruel. Also expresses the idea of moral excellence.

“Love is . . . kind” (1 Corinthians 13:4). The opposite of kindness is being unkind. Love is not unkind. Unkindness is allowing oneself to be provoked, angry, yelling, judging, ignoring, comparing our children to their siblings, and acting as if their failures are a threat against our parental authority. God will use our children’s mistakes and failures to accomplish His will in our lives, to transform our character as needed. He will use our child’s weaknesses to reveal our own weaknesses. If we refuse to accept and work with God in those difficult areas, we will also miss opportunities for God to work on our own weaknesses.

We must remember that our homes are a training ground. *All children* are born without godly character. They do not arrive with traits of maturity. The Word tells us, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child” (Proverbs 22:15). The emphasis here is that all children are born with a sinful bent. Understanding this, we can learn to discipline them in a loving way.

Proverbs gives us a picture of their lack of maturity, which puts a big responsibility upon the parents (19:18; 22:6).

- Children lack judgment (10:21).
- Children enjoy foolishness (10:23).
- Children are gullible (14:15).
- Children avoid the wise (15:12).
- Children are proud and haughty (21:24).
- Children despise good advice (23:9).
- Children make truth useless (26:7).
- Children repeat their folly (26:11).
- Children trust in themselves (28:26).
- Children vent their anger (29:11).
- Children cause strife and quarrels (22:10).

- Children stir up anger (29:8a).
- Children go their own way (15:21a).
- Children lash out when they are discovered in folly (17:12).
- Children are endangered by their words (18:6-7).
- Children walk a troublesome path (22:5a).
- Children must be guided by hardship at times (26:3).
- Children persist in foolishness (27:22).

This does *not* mean all these negative character traits will manifest themselves, but it does give us a description of immaturity—foolishness. The good news is, the Bible provides the help your children need to develop character and maturity through proper teaching and godly discipline.

Why do we act surprised at childish behavior? And why do we think anger makes our discipline more effective? Many people were raised this way and are just repeating behavior learned from their own parents. That is the way I was raised. There was a time I believed if I wasn't twisting my face and raising my voice, my discipline was not working. However, where is that behavior commended in the Bible? Nowhere. In fact, James 1:20 states the exact opposite: "For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God." What are we trying to produce?

I was in a restaurant restroom washing my hands years ago when an extremely agitated man came bursting through the door. He was herding his nine- or ten-year-old son, who was obviously on the verge of losing his dinner. The dad threw open a stall door and pushed the boy inside, all the while yelling, "Hurry, hurry, hurry. Are you going to throw up? What's wrong with you?"

Apparently the sick boy supported himself by leaning his hands on the toilet seat. The dad yelled, "Don't touch the toilet seat!" He grabbed his son, ran him over to the sink, and began frantically washing his hands, complaining, criticizing, and judging the poor boy. This out-of-control father, upset because his dinner was interrupted, made a big, embarrassing scene in front of me, an absolute stranger. I could only imagine what went on in the privacy of his own home.

I felt like handing the guy my card and telling him that soon he would have an angry adolescent on his hands and probably need some counseling.

We must learn how to discipline with no sinful expression, without our hair standing up or our veins popping out. And as we submit to the Lord, we can do it. Remember that acts of love and kindness are to be done out of obedience to the Lord. When we love Him and abide in Him, He empowers us to do these things. It is *not* about feelings, because at times we do not *feel* like loving.

The sad reality in many Christian homes is that parents show more contempt and more unkindness toward their own children than they do anyone else on earth—reacting in the flesh instead of responding in love (truth). We must cooperate with God by allowing Him to first train us, and then take responsibility when we are unloving.

Paul gave some pointed instruction in Ephesians 4:31–32: “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

Notice what needs to be put away. There also is the command to “be kind,” *chrestos* (Greek), which is a behavior we are to pursue and *continue* to pursue.

ACTION PLAN

List those things you need to “put away,” ask forgiveness from God, and then ask God to show you how to proactively be kind to your children. Pray for the faith to trust Him and keep at it, even though you sometimes fail. Ask for His grace to always ask for forgiveness when you fail. This is the only way you will experience godly change.

DIG DEEPER

What does the Bible instruct us to do toward others and our children?

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another. (Romans 12:10)

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering. (Colossians 3:12)

But the fruit of the Spirit is . . . longsuffering, kindness, goodness. (Galatians 5:22)

What is desired in a man is kindness. (Proverbs 19:22)

Lesson 6

Love Is Not Selfish

Being a parent is self-sacrificing.

Love Does Not Envy

Parental jealousy, or envy, can result when a parent had a painful childhood and their child has an easier life or is excelling in areas in which they did not excel. For example, a young daughter has a great relationship with her mother. Once in high school, she becomes a cheerleader, very popular, and is receiving much attention from guys. Gradually she pulls away from Mom while gaining many friends her own age, which is entirely normal. Mom begins to feel loss, then regret, as she looks back on her own teenage years. As she compares her life to her daughter's, jealousy and resentment begin to surface until Mom's attitude becomes full-blown envy.

FACT FILE

Envy—Discontent or uneasiness at the sight of another's excellence or good fortune, accompanied with some degree of hatred and a desire to possess equal advantages; malicious grudging.

Another common example is a dad whose son is getting bigger. He's a football player and feeling pretty cocky about himself, a typical teenager. Excitedly he reports to his father, "I bench pressed 150 pounds today, Dad!" Dad callously reacts, "So what. At your age, I was doing more." Amazingly, we behave like that when we envy our kids. We must guard our hearts against these things.

Are you blessing and encouraging your children in all their gifts and talents? Are you excited about their accomplishments? Are you cheering them on? Are you talking about their successes, or are you only pointing out the negatives, the bad things? We need to recognize the gifts our kids have and exhort them often.

Self-Examination 1

Is there a particular child to whom you have shown contempt or envy? If so, explain.

DIG DEEPER

Instead of turning to envy, we need to act according to God's wisdom.

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.
(James 3:17-18)

List some of the characteristics of wisdom from this Scripture.

Describe what kinds of actions result from envy.

But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. (Acts 17:5)

But Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them. (Mark 15:9-11)

ACTION PLAN

List the natural gifts and talents each of your children have. Then ask God for His grace to praise your children for these gifts this week.

Love Does Not Parade Itself or Brag

Love does not parade itself, or brag, saying things like this: "You know, when I was your age I had it much harder than you. I didn't even have a dad!" "My dad used to beat me with a belt." "I never

got a ride to school. I had to walk both ways, uphill, in the snow.” “I had to do all the chores.”

FACT FILE

Brag—To talk about oneself, or things pertaining to oneself, in a boastful manner; to boast.

These types of statements often occur when we are disciplining our children or when they are complaining. But these testimonials do not motivate because they are bragging. A synonym for the word *brag* is “windbag.”¹⁴ Is that what we want to be? Of course not. Bragging is not discipline, nor should it be part of it. Do we honestly think our teenagers can relate to our childhood? They cannot.

Truthfully, it is hard not to pull this card when our children are complaining and whining, “Ohhhh, I’ve got to walk to school,” when school is two blocks away. Most kids are lazy; this has not changed. Socrates made a statement around 400 BC that says in part, “Children today are tyrants. They contradict their parents, gobble their food, and tyrannize their teachers.”¹⁵ Some things never change. No matter how tempting, we must choose not to brag but to encourage them.

The Bible says of bragging, “Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips” (Proverbs 27:2). We do not ever need to impress our children with how great and wise we are, nor belittle them to show them how important we are, saying things like, “I never talked to my parents that way when I was your age.”

For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.
(2 Corinthians 10:18)

Self-Examination 2

Is bragging a technique you use during discipline or a way to try and motivate your children? If so, explain.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what these verses say about exalting ourselves in front of others—our children.

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. (Romans 12:3)

For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (Galatians 6:3)

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. (Philippians 2:3)

Love Is Not Puffed Up or Arrogant

We are not to be dictators, brutally or arrogantly ruling others. God wants us to train up our children, not control them. Our attitude must reflect that we are acting in their best interest in every situation, helping them mature and develop godly character. Our children should feel like they are part of a team, working together with us in this journey of raising them, not soldiers in an army.

FACT FILE

Arrogant or proud—To be conceited; feeling or showing self-importance, disregard for others. *Prideful*; giving oneself high rank, or an undue degree of significance.

Some parents miss this point. Men who have been in the military or were raised in a military family often try to implement a drill sergeant type leadership. Godly leadership is not a gestapo approach, such as maintaining an attitude of secret police and looking for a way to trap or catch a child doing something wrong. When parents tell their kids, “I know you’re lying. I’m going to catch you,” and then they plot and plan how to succeed, it is not a biblical approach and will cause resentment that drive your children away.

Many teenagers think their parents are always trying to just catch them. That is not teamwork, but more like a dictator, the police, or an enemy, hoping to be the victor in battle. Can you imagine a quarterback saying to a lineman, “I’m watching you,” or the lineman to the quarterback, “You’d better throw the ball to the guy I want, or I’m going to let this defender cream you”? What kind of teamwork is that?

We must always remember a primary principle of godly parenting: we are ministers. We must view our position in the family as a divine calling from the Lord and do all for His glory, not ours. Jesus was with His disciples when two of them asked if they could sit, one on His right hand and the other on His left, in God’s kingdom.

Jesus responded to them:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be

first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:25–28)

The words *servant*, *served*, and *serve* are derived from the Greek word *diakonos*, translated “minister” in some verses of the New Testament. A slave was someone who had no rights of his own but was devoted to the will of another. Jesus was not condemning authority but emphasizing the proper use of authority. Jesus had all the authority in the world, but His attitude was to serve and fulfill the “Father’s will.” Parents have God-given authority, but how we exercise that privilege is of the utmost importance to God, as we are His ministers.

God tells pastors to minister, not as “being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3). In the same way, we should be ministering to, not ruling over, the flock God has committed to our care. God has not charged us with a task but entrusted us with a great responsibility. We must be concerned that we exemplify Him, not become a tyrant.

An arrogant man stirs up strife,
But he who trusts in the Lord will prosper. (Proverbs 28:25 NASB)

Self-Examination 3

Are you a dictator at times, talking down to your children instead of to them, making gestapo-like comments? ___ Yes ___ No

Describe what the Lord has revealed to you.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what the Bible says about pride and arrogance and how they could affect our parenting.

The fear of the Lord is to hate evil;
Pride and arrogance and the evil way
And the perverse mouth I hate. (Proverbs 8:13)

When pride comes, then comes shame;
But with the humble is wisdom. (Proverbs 11:2)

By pride comes nothing but strife,
But with the well-advised is wisdom. (Proverbs 13:10)

But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:
“God resists the proud,
But gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6)

Lesson 7

Love Behaves

We don't know the depths of our depravity and sin nature within us, but God knows how to reveal it to us. It is what we do after we fail to love our children that matters.

Love Does Not Behave Rudely, Is Not Unbecoming

Love does not embarrass or demean a child. Parents can do this by discussing a child's failures or shortcomings with others or by being angry or critical when disciplining. This would include scolding, lecturing, and spanking in front of other people, including siblings.

Many parents give themselves permission to openly discuss a child's behavior without regard to who is listening. Moms, not to pick on you, but this is common when you tell your friends, "You won't believe the day I had. First my son did this, then he did that, then he did this." Your child may be nearby, listening as you expose his sins and failures.

FACT FILE

Rude—Characterized by roughness; harsh, severe, ugly, indecent, or offensive in manner or action.

Edification—*Oikodome* (Greek). To build up for the spiritual profit or advancement of someone else, also used to indicate building up a house or structure.

But Paul exhorts us: "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29). We must see that there are times to exercise restraint and "let no corrupt word proceed out of" our mouths.

Why? Because it does not build up, rather it brings our children down. It really qualifies as gossip, which is rude, harsh, unkind, and is the opposite of building up. We must consider, *Are my next words going to build my children up, draw them to Christ, and impart the grace of God to their ears?* Now that's love.

Even at church people go on and on about a child's mistakes while the child is sitting right there. Yes, there is a time and place for us to seek counsel, but we must never casually expose their sinful behaviors publicly to anyone. Never.

DIG DEEPER

Describe how this proverb relates to this subject and meditate on it.

He who covers and forgives an offense seeks love,
But he who repeats or gossips about a matter separates intimate friends.
(Proverbs 17:9 AMP)

To cover means “to put a lid on it, conceal it.” Why would we want to do that? Because loving a child seeks the best for that individual. To quote a noted Christian scholar, “Someone has said, that, if tempted to relate unsavory things of an absent person, it is well to ask mentally three questions: Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary?”¹⁶ Let’s add one more question: Would it edify the person we are talking about and those who are listening?

This caution never means we ignore our children’s sin or failure to obey by covering it up. Read, from an analysis of Proverbs 17:9, how one author explains covering a transgression:

To cover a transgression, however, does not mean to make light of sin and allow iniquity to go unrebuked in another. It is, on the contrary, to go to the erring one personally in tenderness and brotherly kindness; to seek to exercise his conscience as to that in his course, which is bringing dishonor upon his Lord. If such a mission is successful, the sin should never again be mentioned. It is covered, and none other need know of it.¹⁷

Our children know our faults, don’t they? They have seen and heard things you and I have done wrong at home. Could you imagine if one Sunday morning at church the teachers who were watching your beautiful little children said to them, “We’re going to have prayer time, so anyone who wants to come up and pray, come on up.” So your little eight-year-old boy goes up and says, “Lord, I pray for my mom and dad. They yell, they argue, they scream, and they use bad language.” How would you feel? You might be so embarrassed that you would probably quit going to that church. If we do not want our children to expose us like that, it stands to reason they do not want us to do it either.

Self-Examination 1

Are there times when you are rude or harsh to your children? ___ Yes ___ No

What behavior has the Lord revealed that needs changing? Write your confession.

Love Does Not Seek to Have Its Own Way

We cannot insist that our children do only what we think they should do, or not do, when it comes to nonmoral issues.

A couple came in for counseling, and it was obvious that the mother was trying to control the family, which included the children’s interests. She vented about how angry she was with her fourteen-year-old son. In the process of her venting, she brought up the subject of paintball, and she said, “My son wants to play paintball. Paintball is so bad. I think it’s so wrong.”

FACT FILE

Seek your own way—A person who pursues what best fits their own interests without any concern of how their actions or ways affect others; unwilling to receive input, which includes instruction from God’s perspective.

I asked the father, “Dad, what do you think about it?”

He replied, “Well, I think it’s okay.”

She jumped in, “I think it is wrong. You shoot at people in paintball!”

I said to her, “I play paintball and have shot my kids many times! It’s great fun. We love playing paintball. Your son is different from you. Have you noticed?”

I know my wife would never play paintball with our boys and me. It is not her “thing.” As a helpmate, a wife can lovingly express her concerns without trying to feminize her husband—or son. Many times I took my shirt off after playing paintball and had bruises on my body, so she asked, “You liked that? Didn’t it hurt?”

I replied, “Oh yeah, it hurt. But if it didn’t hurt a little, then it wouldn’t be so fun. I think it’s great fun, and so do the boys.”

That same mom did not want her son to have a skateboard. She said, “All skaters are bad. They wear their hats backward and have sagging pants.”

I understood that she didn’t like it, but I explained that it’s not about her. I then said to the father, “If you think it’s okay, you need to step up and lead. Tell your wife you believe this is okay and that she needs to trust you and not treat your son with contempt because he wants to enjoy things boys naturally like to do.”

Working Together

My older son is a surfer. When he got his driver’s license, he could not wait to drive to the beach and surf. My wife was naturally concerned about him driving there on his own. Her input was, “I think he should not drive outside our city for at least the next six months.”

I replied, “Let’s give him a couple of months. After he has some experience, I will let him drive me to the beach and see how he does. If he does fine, I will let him drive to the beach alone.”

Part of not seeking to have one’s own way is that the parents are seeking to get each other’s input.

Plans are established by counsel;
By wise counsel wage war. (Proverbs 20:18)

Without counsel, plans go awry,
But in the multitude of counselors they are established. (Proverbs 15:22)

We must be careful to not let our selfish opinions, fears, or what we like and dislike dictate what we allow our kids to do. They are different from us. We need to let them pursue their interests within the context of morality and safety.

Husbands, in the spirit of teamwork, it is important to let your wife express her concerns and to involve her in family decisions. Husbands and wives need to work together to come up with plans and solutions, but the final decision lies with the father in these situations.

DIG DEEPER

How do these verses illustrate adapting to the interests of our children?

Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests.
(Philippians 2:4)

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. (Philippians 2:3)

But through love serve one another. (Galatians 5:13)

Find a Compromise

Parents have told me, "I don't let my kids listen to that 'rock junk.' I know it's Christian, but it has an evil beat." Is there really such a thing as an evil beat? Can you find that in the Bible? There are evil lyrics and evil actions, but there is no such thing as an evil beat. Kids like a wide variety of music, which may be different from our tastes. If it is Christian and the lyrics are okay, then what is the problem? Try to find a way to compromise without compromising your faith.

DIG DEEPER

Describe how these verses relate to evil, unwholesome lyrics.

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. (Ephesians 4:29)

But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. (Colossians 3:8)

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,
O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)

We should be flexible about the things we allow our kids to do, not controlling them for the wrong reasons. Instead we should help them enjoy their interests, paying close attention that we never compromise our faith or what the Bible stands for by letting them pursue activities that are morally wrong.

It is good to participate with our kids in their interests when possible. During my son's teens, I would go surfing with him in the wintertime: fifty-four-degree water with six-foot waves. On many occasions, just getting out past the waves nearly killed me. I was freezing half the time and I was exhausted, but praise the Lord, I was out there with my boy having fun. On some of these surf outings, I would rather have been doing something else, but he asked me to join him. So we went together.

Each child is different. When my daughter was young, she liked to jump on the trampoline or take our dog for a walk. Neither were activities I would choose for enjoyment, but that wasn't the point. We were just spending time with each other, doing what she wanted to do.

When my daughter was ten years old, she wrote me a Father's Day card, explaining why she loved her daddy:

These are the reasons I love you, Daddy.
Number 1, you go on the trampoline with me.
Number 2, you take me to Dairy Queen. [Okay, I like this one—it's not a sacrifice!]
Number 3, you take my dog for walks with me.
Number 4, you play soccer with me.
Number 5, you take me on bike rides.
Number 6, you take me on a motorcycle ride.
Number 7, you read with me.
Number 8, you make me breakfast.
Number 9, you play cards with me.

Notice that every reason she listed was an action. I was giving her my time. Love is all about action, which includes time spent together. Every child needs it, and we need to remember and practice this continuously. The best defense against our kids pulling away from us too soon is to launch a strong offense by spending time with them, both individually and as a family.

Another important aspect of relating to children is showing proper affection. Often dads say, "I'm not a hugger." I respond, "But it's not about you. It really doesn't matter if you're a hugger. True love is a sacrifice and is all about the other person. You have a child who loves you and needs to be hugged. Do something about it."

Dads, you may tell yourselves that Mom has been making up for your lack of attention, but it does not work that way. You need to get rid of whatever fear or stubbornness you have and say, "I am going to become a hugger." Then ask God to change your heart and make you a hugger for your hugger kid.

Some moms have a problem with hugging, but the same principles apply. Moms usually have a natural affection toward their children, but past issues (especially unresolved ones) can affect their freedom to show love in this way. If so, this needs to change and can change with God's help.

DIG DEEPER

Read about Paul's actions toward the people in Thessalonica:

But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8)

What was his attitude and actions toward this church?

Read about Jesus's action toward children and what He expected others to do:

Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them, "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me." (Mark 9:36-37)

What was Christ exhorting His disciples to do with children?

Our Differences

My older son Nicholas was never much of a hugger. His way of receiving affection was to jump on my back and wrestle with me. So we wrestled often. My son Justin, as a teen, would still lie on my lap, pleading, "Scratch my back." Many nights after we would say our prayers, Justin would lay right next to me for twenty minutes so I could rub his head, scratch his back, or rub his feet. He loved it.

Each child is different, and it is important to treat them that way. But all need special affection. Many parents who struggle with this have never prayed about it. They have never asked God to change them, or they have put off examining themselves to understand why it is so difficult.

Self-Examination 2

If that is you, stop and ask God to help you in this area. Write what He revealed to you.

We must remember that it is not about us. If you feel uncomfortable, begin pleading, "God, change me." It is not your will, but God's will. We need to glorify Him, even when it comes to showing affection to our kids. Past issues may be the cause of your difficulty. Perhaps you had parents who did not show affection or even abused you physically. If you are harboring bitterness or have unhealed wounds caused by a parent(s), and have not forgiven them by trusting the Lord with your past, then this issue can be a "grace clogger" in your life.

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.
(Hebrews 12:14-15)

God can heal the pain and wants to deliver you from the emotional damage. If you do not trust this to Him in prayer, and in obedience seek a new attitude, your negative behavior will become a destructive force to those around you.

See *Appendix E: Trust and Forgiveness* for more help in this area.

God wants to pour His transforming power into our lives, making us tenderly affectionate toward the children He gives us. But if we do not obey the Lord by forgiving our parents, this will block our ability to change. This is a common problem. We must die to our flesh and let go of the offenses that cripple us, for the love of God and our children. Only then will we freely give them affection in the ways they need to receive it.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what these verses mean and how they could apply to parenting.

For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (Matthew 16:25)

Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. (1 Corinthians 10:24)

Have you been seeking to have your own way at home? ___ Yes ___ No

If so, write your commitment to change, asking God for strength to follow through.

Lesson 8

Love Does Not

Parenting is not keeping score or having favorites.

Love Does Not Think Evil

We cannot keep score of our children's failures with a mind to harass them with it later. Sadly, this is a common method many parents use during discipline. Failure is part of a child's life, and many parents, instead of just disciplining them for that failure, place the incident in their "back pocket," only to pull it out and use it against them later. God's Word says love "thinks no evil" (1 Corinthians 13:5).

FACT FILE

Thinks no evil—Logizomai (Greek). Used as an accounting term, meaning to put things together in one's mind, to count or add up, to occupy oneself with calculations.

An example would be when your teen asks if he can go with a friend to the school football game, and your response is, "No! Remember what you did last Tuesday? Sorry. You aren't going anywhere." This method of discipline is wrong and can promote resentment. It is the opposite of love. Love keeps no record of wrongs.

Wrongs need to be dealt with immediately—and with explanation. What happened last Tuesday should have been covered then, handled with godly wisdom, and discharged. Developing feelings of anger and resentment that remain over time is destructive to relationships and results in ineffective discipline. Feelings are good passengers, but poor drivers. We must let truth, not our feelings, dictate how we respond to our children, even when it comes to disciplining them.

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.
(Hebrews 12:14–15)

To become defiled means that because we have harbored bitterness about something our child has done, we begin to spill poison that infects and hurts those around us. Parents who entertain thoughts of evil toward their children and stew upon their failures often begin to ignore them. Or the parent may pout, stay angry for days, use unkind words, or compare them to siblings. These practices are the opposite of love. Many parents never consider the fact that they are practicing the opposite of love. We must choose not to think evil but meditate on what is good.

The NASB version of 1 Corinthians 13:5 says, love "does not take into account a wrong suffered," and NIV says, love "keeps no record of wrongs." The Living Bible says it in a special way: "It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong." That is the real meaning of 1 Corinthians 13:5, and that is how we must behave. Love forgives and releases the past issues.

Unforgiveness is like a poison one takes hoping to hurt the *other* person. Truly, unforgiveness is like a cancer. If we allow it to, it will devour us from the inside and infect everyone around us in a negative way.

As a parent, we have opportunities to forgive our children, sometimes daily. Many parents have the wrong perspective when it comes to their children breaking a rule or disobeying. God wants us to see a child's foolish act or failure as an opportunity to train them, not for us to become personally angry or hurt.

When someone wrongs us, God says, "You ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him" (2 Corinthians 2:7-8). Notice the process: forgive and then reaffirm your love.

How often should we forgive? Always. "Seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22). God's Word is clear on this.

DIG DEEPER

Describe how we should forgive others.

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

ACTION PLAN

Have you been following Christ's example of forgiving, forgetting, and thinking good thoughts toward your children? ___ Yes ___ No

If not, list the areas where you are failing to forgive your children. Ask God's forgiveness and pick a time to ask your children's forgiveness.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what the following verse means and how you can apply it to parenting.

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

Love Does Not Rejoice in Unrighteousness

Love does not rejoice in iniquity. This is a command from 1 Corinthians 13:6. It is like God is saying, “Don’t even think about it.” That is the emphasis.

Perhaps you have said to your child, “I told you so! You deserve what you got. I told you that you would get in trouble. I was right!” When a child makes a mistake and is caught, we should never act happy that they are in trouble or hurt. God does not want us to react to our children in the flesh. He wants us to respond in love, even when they deliberately do something foolish.

FACT FILE

Not rejoicing in iniquity—When you see someone fall into sin, or make a mistake, you are not happy or vindictive toward them.

Mock—To boast, to scorn, deride or be inflated.

Favor—Delight, pleasure, or acceptance.

Because of our fallen nature, there is a mean streak in us that sometimes takes pleasure when someone is suffering from foolish choices. All we have to do is turn on the TV and watch the latest reality show where people are laughing at, or at least being entertained by, the foolishness of others. “Well that person deserved what they got.” When this attitude creeps into our homes, it has devastating effects on our children, and us, because we are misrepresenting God. It totally blurs and corrupts what love is.

As parents, we must deal with the foolishness of our children daily. The question is, how are we going to represent God during these times? Consider how we want God to treat us when we fail to glorify Him and or not do things His way.

The Bible gives us strict warning concerning how we handle sin:

Fools mock at sin,
But among the upright there is favor. (Proverbs 14:9)

We need to adhere to the latter part of the verse so when our children fall into sin, they find favor with us from a heart of compassion that lovingly disciplines them.

Caught in the Act

When a woman was caught in the act of adultery, the Jews brought her to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” (John 8:4–5). Verse 6 says the Jews were testing Jesus, but they also were rejoicing that she was caught in the act and were looking forward to stoning her. (Where was the offending man?)

Many times we catch our children in the act of sinning, perhaps lying to us, and what should be our response? Jesus answered this for us in verse 7, “He who is without sin among you, let him

throw a stone at her first.” Jesus then started writing on the ground, and it is believed that He was pointing out the accusers’ sins. One by one they all left because their hearts were convicted (verse 9). Then Jesus spoke directly to the woman, saying He did not condemn her and this was her opportunity to “go and sin no more” (verse 11).

At times I was happy Nick got what he deserved, but I did not show it. It’s wrong to even think it. We need to exercise self-control. Proverbs 24:17 says, “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles.” Since we are not to rejoice when our enemy falls, how much more should we not when are children fall?

In the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32), we get a glimpse of a father’s heart toward a son who falls into sin, which is a picture of our heavenly Father’s heart. When his son finally decided to return home, the Bible says, “And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him” (verse 20). There was not any superior morality over his son’s fall, instead he embraced his son and kissed him. Many parents still need to develop this type of compassion.

When we ignore God’s Word or resist the guidance of the Holy Spirit and fall into sin and error, God does not rejoice. Instead, His heart is broken over our foolishness and rebellion. When we find ourselves not practicing love with our children, we must confess this to God, asking Him to forgive us, then repent and turn from this sin. God will change our hearts as we confess and obey Him. Remember that God is using our children to transform us into His image.

The biblical explanation of mercy is that we do not receive the penalty for our sin because of the work of Christ and His grace. But the Bible also tells us that God disciplines His children, meaning you and me. Showing mercy does not indicate a lack of discipline, which is necessary, but means that we discipline with love for the best interest of the child. Discipline done properly is an expression of love.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what God’s Word says about mercy and compassion and how they relate to parenting.

Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. (Luke 6:36)

Blessed are the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy. (Matthew 5:7)

Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not.
They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies.
(Colossians 3:12)

Let not mercy and truth forsake you;
Bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart. (Proverbs 3:3)

Lesson 9

Love Rejoices

Thank God that He does not focus on our failures, but His mercies are new every day. As parents we need to glorify our heavenly Father and not focus on our children's failures. We must focus on what God says they are—a gift from Him.

Rejoice in the Truth

Love rejoices in the truth. When we fail to praise our children and instead constantly point out their faults, we are not rejoicing in the truth. When parents come in for counseling, I ask them, "If your teenager was here and I asked him, on an average day, how much of your conversation with your parents is positive versus negative, what would he say?"

FACT FILE

Rejoicing in the truth—To have great joy, able to rejoice at what is true based on God's promises.

Positive communication is, "How are you doing? You look nice. What happened at school today?" Negative is, "Stop that, leave your sister alone! Do your homework! Take out the trash!" or any form of lecturing.

Quite often parents respond, "That's an easy one. It's 90 percent negative. Every day." Days turn into weeks, and weeks turn into months, all the while we are poisoning our kids, sinning against them, not loving them, because we are consumed with pointing out what they are not doing right and not thinking about praising them for their successes. We need to be actively thinking about the good things in our kids. I know it can be hard with those strong-willed children. I remember telling Nick many times, "You're strong-willed; that's good." That's all I could come up with! Some days I turned to prayer to come up with something good to say.

If this negativity is sending your family in the wrong direction, turn it around. When you have your family prayer time, take a moment and say, "Okay, everyone, say something good about each other." Make it a fun thing. Get the whole family started on looking for the good things in one another. It is so important that we work together as a team. Dad or Mom, you start it off.

Keep Each Other in Check

I tend to micromanage. The minute I walk into the house, I notice what's out of place, correcting everyone's faults. "Who left that on the floor?" True, the faults need to be fixed, but we must do it with loving discipline and training. We must keep ourselves in check in this area.

My wife has been such a blessing to me in this area. She encouraged me to walk into the house and relax without saying a word about what is out of place or what didn't get done. This allows me to let the kids come around and visit for a while before I begin pointing out what needs to be done. I also have found that my drive home from work is a wonderful opportunity to turn the radio or music off, and turn to God, so I can prepare my heart to meet the needs of my family. Remember, home is our first priority, and we live this out by being ministers of the Lord to them.

Imagine really rejoicing in your child and being creative about finding ways to do that. Writing to them is a great way to communicate love. My wife was putting away some clothes in my older son's drawer and found every letter I had ever written to him. Praise God they were good letters! I did not say, "You little brat . . ." Instead, the letters were filled with, "I love you. You're making me so proud. I am so happy to see your gifts and your talent in music." My wife and I cried as we read through them. He had saved each one, and so had my other son.

God has given us such powerful influence as dads and moms. We need to use that power to bless and praise our children. It makes such a difference. We must study our children, learn their strengths, and praise them for their qualities and good deeds.

Self-Examination 1

Do you struggle in this area? ___ Yes ___ No

If so, list at least three strengths you have seen in each of your children. Ask God to show you the best time and way to communicate this. It could be through a letter or a conversation out for a special dinner. Ask God to help you be observant of your children and learn how to praise them.

~~ACTION PLAN 1~~

Work together as husband and wife to encourage each other in this practice. Discuss some ways you can help each other in those challenging parenting moments and list them here.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what these verses say about rejoicing in the truth and what is good and how these principles apply to parenting.

How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!
How great is the sum of them!

If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand;
When I awake, I am still with You. (Psalm 139:17-18)

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.
(Romans 12:9)

See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both
for yourselves and for all. (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. (3 John 4)

Bear All Things

We must avoid criticizing or neglecting our children because they have failed to meet our expectations. We may expect them to talk, act, and perform the way we want them to so they are not such an inconvenience. But parenting takes time. It is work, it takes sacrifice, and it is a God-given task. If we are not careful, resentment can creep into our parenting style. *Bearing all things in love* means accepting our ministry as parents—the good, the bad, and the challenging—and behaving with godly love. This includes seeing our children’s failures and faults as opportunities to train them, not to criticize or deliver harsh, self-righteous lectures.

FACT FILE

Bears all things—Stego (Greek). To hide, to conceal. Love hides the faults of others or covers them up.¹⁸ It keeps out resentment as the ship keeps out the water, or the roof the rain.¹⁹

Do our difficult children know through our daily actions that we accept them? Do we show a willingness to love them and work through that strong will? Do they see a willingness to give our extra time and energy? Or do they believe we don’t like them, or maybe like them less than their siblings?

Does a five-year-old strong-willed child understand why he thinks and processes situations the way he does? Of course not. He does not understand why a parent says, "Don't cross that line." He may think, "My parent doesn't think I can, so I must show them I can." They do not know why they are wired the way they are. When we constantly get angry and resent the way God made them and the extra work it takes to parent them, the message is we love them less. That is their perception.

Instead, we have got to say, "Okay, God, You brought me this strong-willed child. I've got to accept this and endure this in Your power and might, not mine." Remember God's plan in our transformation. His ways are perfect.

Self-Examination 2

What has the Lord been revealing in you that is not of God through this child, and how do you need to change?

Remember, our children are born foolish. It is the parents' responsibility to actively love, guide, teach, and discipline them through the different stages of life, without becoming resentful of their natural growth process or the personality God gave them. As this study progresses, we provide biblical tools to help lead your children to maturity, all to the glory of God.

DIG DEEPER

What principles can we gain from these verses to help with our parenting?

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. (Romans 15:1 ESV)

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2 ESV)

Self-Examination 3

Do you have resentment because of the personality God gave your children?

___ Yes ___ No

If so, list the issues and then make a plan for responding to them in love.

Believe and Hope All Things

Love has a way of believing the best in people even when your feelings tell you otherwise. *Believe* is a verb, which calls for action no matter how we feel. The last principle we learned was to *bear*, or be willing to cover, our children's mistakes with love. Now we must believe and hope the best for them and maintain a hopeful attitude. We need a willingness to always pursue a trusting relationship, even when there has been dishonesty. Many parents doubt what their child says before they know the facts. Some say, "My kid's a liar. I can put up with anything, but when they lie, ohhh."

FACT FILE

Believing—Pisteuo (Greek). Having faith in, or to be firmly persuaded in something. It indicates an attitude of expectant hope.

Consider this, do you always ask for forgiveness from your spouse or child when you misrepresent God in your behavior toward them? Jesus said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him" (John 14:21).

The perspective that lying is "the mother of all bad things to do" can exasperate our children and provoke them to continue that behavior. Yes, lying is a sin and needs to be corrected, but we cannot elevate lying above all other sins. We must unemotionally discipline them. But we can have a rule that states: if you lie, the consequences are double. More on this in volume 4.

Often in cases where kids are constantly lying, the parents need to make the first changes. They must quit getting angry, being judgmental, and saying things like, "I don't trust you" or "I know I'm going to catch you." Love hopes all things, not doubts all things. Our attitudes can influence us to constantly doubt our children and even want to give up trying to help them. Entertaining thoughts like *How many times will I have to correct this behavior?* does not come from hoping all things but comes from wanting to give up. A love that believes and hopes all things can only come from God through an abiding relationship with Him.

DIG DEEPER

Identify the specific principles in these verses that will help us have hopeful and believing faith.

But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26)

For we walk by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7)

Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:5)

~~ACTION PLAN 2~~

Are there ways in which you have given up believing and hoping in your child?

Yes No

If so, list the issues and ask the Lord to heal your unbelief and help you with a plan to reassure your children that God is going to work these things out.

Lesson 10

Love Endures

Love endures all things. This verb indicates that love abides, stays strong, and holds its ground. This is not only important for the parent, but the parent must encourage the child to stay strong.

Love does not give up or tell a child we just can't take it anymore and then let the house run amuck. We need to be faithful to support our children in all seasons of life. We should not play "head games" or treat them with contempt.

We must maintain our responsibility as ministers, continuously exercising patience and disciplining them properly in love.

FACT FILE

Endure all things—Hupomeno (Greek). To abide under, to bear up under, suffer, as a load of miseries.²⁰ Also patient acquiescence, holding its ground when it can no longer believe nor hope.²¹

My son Justin never seemed to mind spending hours doing homework. Neither my wife nor I could relate to that. We both disliked homework while growing up. Nick, on the other hand, hated homework and tried to avoid it like the plague. From the time Nick hit junior high all the way through the end of high school, if we did not sit with him while he did his homework, he would never do it. So every night my wife and I shared this often unpleasant homework time with Nick. One of us would either finish the dinner or do the dishes while the other sat with Nick.

A single mother came into my office complaining about the same situation. She said, "Every night when I come home from work, I'm so tired, but if I don't sit down with my son, he just dillydallies and takes one hour's worth of homework and makes it three hours. Every night I'm yelling and screaming at him and he won't change. It is ridiculous." Then she made a comparison, which we should never do as parents, and said, "I've never had to sit down with my older son. He comes home and just does it. I'm so upset, what do I do to fix it?"

"Sit down and do his homework with him," I calmly replied.

"But aren't I supposed to train him?" she said.

"Yes, but right now he needs you," I answered. "His actions are saying, 'Mom, I need you to sit with me. I need your help. I need your structure in this area.'" I also told her, "You can't compare him to your older son. Instead, remind yourself every night, 'This is my time with my son,' and do his homework with him. What else are you doing that is more important?"

The poor woman had spent the first eight years of this kid's life comparing him to his brother and being angry every night instead of just sitting down and helping him with his homework.

We must endure these situations. Children who struggle academically or are strong-willed take more time and energy. The question for us is, do we accept the children God gave us and the ministry He put before us? He will give us the strength to do it if we ask Him and quit complaining.

Quality Time

Another way to endure with our children is spending quality time. How much one-on-one time do you get with each child? This area takes creative effort, especially as they get older. When my children were teenagers, I learned to actively pursue them. It was easy when they were younger because they would pursue me. As a family, we often went camping, fishing, and enjoyed other outdoor activities. But as my children matured, their sphere of activity widened into activities that didn't include parents. Beware of taking this personally, being offended, and pulling away. Parenting is not a popularity contest. We will always be their parents, which will never change, but the relationship does change.

To spend time with our kids, we must meet them where they are and be willing to join the activities they individually enjoy. Nick and I are both very physical, so finding activities we enjoy doing together was easy. But with Justin, it was a different story. I have always been active: riding motorcycles, surfing, and diving. Justin likes to read, do puzzles, and play video games, and he enjoys acting. I had to adapt to Justin's interests to spend time with him. I endured his differences and learned to appreciate his interests.

Years ago, I took up the hobby of sailing, and Justin began to go with me. At first, he wasn't excited, but we spent many hours doing it together. I had to make an effort to plan trips tailored to the interests of each unique child. Most of the time, these types of activities don't just happen. That puts the responsibility on us. And remember, love reaches out expecting nothing in return. We do these things for our children because we love them. Jesus is our example.

Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:28)

My daughter, Katie, liked to jump on the trampoline. In the beginning I could do flips and twirls; however, by the time she was seven years old, about fifteen minutes of jumping and bouncing was all my old knees could handle. But I endured and adjusted for her. If we love our children, we need to make time to be with them.

ACTION PLAN

Are you pursuing spending time with your children? ___ Yes ___ No

Are you willing to participate in—and enjoy—activities that you would not ordinarily choose for the sake of spending time with your children? ___ Yes ___ No

List some of the activities each of your children enjoys.

How much time do you spend enjoying these activities with them? If you aren't, identify when you are going to spend time with them, and make a commitment to do it.

Ask God for His insight and help. If married, discuss this with your spouse, and write the things you can do to spend more one-on-one time with your children. You can use the suggested activities list below to get started.

Suggested Activities

Bicycling	Flying kites	Skiing
Board games	Hiking	Sporting events
Boating	Jumping on a trampoline	Surfing
Canoeing	Kayaking	Swimming
Card games	Mountain biking	Tea parties
Crafts, painting, sewing	Movies, plays, concerts	Video games
Dining out	Playing ball	Walking the dog
Diving	Reading books	Window shopping
Fishing	Rock climbing	Working out

These are just some examples. Let the Lord speak to you personally about how the biblical truths of 1 Corinthians 13 should and can be lived out in your own home. Observe your children and their unique talents and interests. Remember, this together time is for love and may be geared more to your child's interests than your own.

Do What Comes *Unnaturally*

Much of the time, problems raising our children come from ignorance and disobedience: we do not know how to discipline them properly or how to view their failures, foolishness, and the choices they make. But once we learn how to relate to them with godly love, apply the principles of godly discipline, and work together as a team, much of our frustrations will be alleviated.

Love never fails. When someone mistreats us, God can empower us to do what comes supernaturally, not naturally. When someone does not live up to our expectations, we want to

react in the flesh, the natural way. But God says, “No, as My ministers, I want you to respond in a supernatural way.” Our example is Christ, the way He has and will always respond to us.

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:29–32)

This passage describes the kind of love God has called us to as parent ministers. If God gave us a command He could not enable us to fulfill, that would make Him a liar. But He does not lie. If we are discouraged, fail, or find this too difficult, God does not want us to feel condemned. He wants us to pray and ask Him for the power to love our children the way we should.

Whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. (John 16:23)

God chose us to be parents knowing how foolish and selfish we are. But He does not do it with the idea that we will stay that way. He gives us His supernatural Word, but we must dig into it and build a strong foundation of faith so the Word can transform our hearts. And God is always present to help us succeed, to guide and empower us. He declares our victory through His promise when He says, “I will give you the ability, through the power of the Holy Spirit, through your intimate relationship with Jesus, and faithfully taking responsibility when you fail to glorify Him through forgiveness, to accomplish every single command” (Philippians 4:13, my paraphrase). Praise God!

Lesson 11

Communication Is Essential

We can communicate without saying a word. However, it is impossible to truly communicate without listening. When God gave us two ears, He had more in mind than just framing our faces. We have two ears and one mouth for a good reason.

FACT FILE

Communication—Exchanging thoughts, messages, or information.²²

If communication requires listening, then it also involves being attentive. To achieve loving communication with our children, we must listen to them attentively. Because situations requiring disciplinary action can produce strong emotions in both parents and children, we must consider the effects of different types of communication.

Ways We Communicate

Visually

The most powerful communication is expressed through facial expressions, the messages others see on our faces. Statistics state that this accounts for 55 percent of our communication,²³ so we must be very aware of facial expressions when relating to our children.

Consider this example. Driving home one night with your children in the back seat, somebody cuts in front of you, nearly causing you to swerve off the road. You yell in frustration, “You stupid blank, blank, blank,” while your face reflects the anger you feel.

When you arrive home, the kids are buzzing from eating cookies and candy and do not want to get in bed. You tell them once to go to bed, and they do not, so you put on the same angry facial expression that appeared when the guy cut you off and yell, “I told you to get in your bed right now!” Your children’s perception at that moment is that you see them, or value them, the same way you did that stranger who nearly ran you off the road. *Ouch!* Our facial expressions can be sinful and unloving—a stare or a glare—and are a major part of what we communicate. We need to watch what “we say” with our faces.

Is an angry countenance common for you during discipline?
 ___ Yes ___ No

DIG DEEPER

Describe how these verses relate to you personally. Be specific. Then write a prayer for each one asking God to help you change this.

The north wind brings forth rain,
 And a backbiting tongue an angry countenance.
 (Proverbs 25:23)

FACT FILE

Countenance—*Paniym* (Hebrew). The literal meaning of face (Genesis 43:31; 1 Kings 19:13); also the reflection of a person’s mood or attitude, such as being defiant (Jeremiah 5:3), ruthless (Deuteronomy 28:50), joyful (Job 29:24), humiliated (2 Samuel 19:5), terrified (Isaiah 13:8). Scripture gives us examples of a bad countenance (Matthew 6:16) and a good one (Psalm 4:6).

He who is slow to wrath has great understanding,
But he who is impulsive exalts folly. (Proverbs 14:29)

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.
(James 1:19-20)

An angry man stirs up strife,
And a furious man abounds in transgression. (Proverbs 29:22)

Vocally

Tone of voice comprises 38 percent of our communication.²⁴ When we raise our voice during or for discipline, we are communicating anger. So when we are twisting our faces with anger, resentment, or disappointment and elevating our voices, we are communicating at 93 percent in an unloving, sinful way. Why do so many parents do this, and even make it a part of their discipline? This comes from our flesh and the devil. This type of communication from parents has destroyed many lives. Remember James 1:20: “For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” An attitude exists behind our tone of voice and facial expressions. Anger surfaces when we react with feelings and emotions instead of responding in love.

Self-Examination 1

Is raising your voice common during discipline? ___ Yes ___ No

If so, write a prayer of repentance to the Lord.

Verbally

Surprisingly, verbal communication accounts for only 7 percent of all communication.²⁵ For those who have picked up the bad habit of lecturing, may this fact help you quit. If you lecture, all your children hear is blah, blah, blah. This bad habit erodes your good relationship and your influence.

Children must know what they did wrong and what the discipline is, but lengthy explanations of what you perceive their motives were or how it may affect their future is not effective discipline—it is lecturing. In most cases parents are just blowing off steam or seeking revenge toward their child for making them do their job of parenting, but these are wrong sinful motives.

Consider an average day. What percentage of one-on-one communication with your child is positive, and what percentage is negative?

Negative communication sounds like this: “Don’t do that. Why did you do this? I told you to clean your room. Pick up after yourself. Leave your sister alone. Take out the trash.”

Positive communication sounds like this: “You look nice. How was school today? How are your friends? What would you like for dinner tonight?”

If a parent is communicating one-on-one with a child ten minutes per day, and 75 percent is negative, how much positive communication is taking place?

Parents are the most influential people in a child's life. If the most influential person in your life primarily gave you orders or lectured you, accused you, and talked down to you, how would you begin to perceive yourself?

As mentioned earlier, many teens think their parents don't love them and don't care about them. Many believe this because their parents are communicating negatively or sinfully on an ongoing basis. It is no wonder that so many kids are struggling with self-worth. A child's self-worth comes from how their parents show love, care, and value to them. When you and I misrepresent God daily, we create what I call the EDTNI syndrome: Emotionally Deprived Through Negative Input. So many kids are struggling with this. And those who are affected most negatively give in to all types of sinful temptations as they deal with their hurt. Eventually, when they become parents, they often repeat the same negative behavior with their own children.

Self-Examination 2

Consider your relationship with your children. List how many minutes of one-on-one communication you have with each child per day and what percentage of that communication is negative and positive.

Many adults are still struggling with emotional scars due to the negative treatment they received from their parents. If this is striking a chord with you, turn to *Appendix E: Trust and Forgiveness* to learn about biblical forgiveness and how to put the past behind you permanently.

Lesson 12

The Heart of Love

What comes out of our mouths reveals what is in our hearts. Because sanctification is a process, and God often uses our children to reveal to us where we need to be transformed, we can say things that are unloving.

Jesus's words provide valuable biblical principles about the heart:

But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. (Matthew 15:18)

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. (Matthew 12:35)

In Matthew 15:18, Jesus said the words that proceed from your mouth can defile both you and others. God is concerned about what comes out of our mouths, but the bigger issue is the source of evil. In Matthew 15:19, God revealed some evil thoughts and deeds that may come from the human heart. What we need is a transformation of heart so what comes out of our mouths will be good.

FACT FILE

Defile—To pollute, render impure; or corrupt.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

Matthew 12:35 says we each have a treasure in our hearts, which can be either good or evil. Here *treasure* means “the storehouse of the mind,” where thoughts and feelings are kept. Many of us have “evil treasures,” or issues that have not been resolved. When we get saved, we have a new heart (Ezekiel 11:19; 18:31; 36:26; 2 Corinthians 5:17), but this does not mean the old habits of evil communication have vanished. There is a process of change as we reject the bad and develop “good treasure.” This goes back to the idea of building on our strong foundation. As we seek God’s will by putting the Word of God in our hearts, good things will come out. Day by day, as we fellowship with God through study and prayer, we are building up our “good treasure.” Only the Word can give us a definition of what is good and evil, and only God can truly change our hearts.

DIG DEEPER

Note the examples of good and evil treasure and the result of each.

Your word I have hidden in my heart,
That I might not sin against You. (Psalm 119:11)

The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom,
And his tongue talks of justice. (Psalm 37:30)

The tongue of the righteous is choice silver;
The heart of the wicked is worth little. (Proverbs 10:20)

The words of the wicked are, "Lie in wait for blood,"
But the mouth of the upright will deliver them. (Proverbs 12:6)

ACTION PLAN

Has your daily devotional time been meaningful? Yes No Consistent? Yes No

If not, write a commitment and plan to change.

Our Value of Others

Loving communication is Christ-centered, not self-centered. It is the decision to place value on another person. "Behold, children are a gift of the Lord" (Psalm 127:3 NASB). The word *gift* is also translated *heritage* (ESV, NKJV), which suggests something that is passed down by a will or legal document, like an inheritance or property (Ezekiel 48:29). In this case, it is children that have been given to us by the Lord. This means toddlers are a gift, and teens, and even children that are not biologically yours.

Consider this example of valuing others. If you invited your pastor over for dinner, would you find out his favorite dish before he came? Would you clean your house? Would you be careful not to say the wrong thing so you didn't offend him? Would you make sure your kids were going to behave? How would you dress? You would put your best foot forward because you value your pastor. He's probably a good guy and is worth valuing—but not more than your children.

Our kids know when we are devaluing them. Sadly, many parents do not even consider their actions. Valuing someone is a choice, and God's Word says every child is a gift from God. Because He has placed high value on our kids, we must choose to always treat them that way and take responsibility when we don't by asking for forgiveness.

DIG DEEPER

Identify these parental attitudes about children.

But Esau ran to meet him [Jacob], and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, "Who are these with you?"

So he said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant."
(Genesis 33:4-5)

Then Israel saw Joseph's sons, and said, "Who are these?"

Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me in this place."

And he said, "Please bring them to me, and I will bless them."
(Genesis 48:8-9)

Self-Examination 1

Are there times or situations when you devalue your children by your behavior? ___ Yes ___ No

Identify when this happens and ask God to help you change your perspective to be godly.

It Is a Learned Skill

Loving communication is a choice to be Christ-centered. The Bible instructs us to “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 13:14). It is a command and a responsibility. Putting on Christ is a conscious decision we must make all the time whether we feel like it or not. This type of love can only come from Him, which takes us back to our strong foundation. First John 2:10 says, “He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.” *Abiding in the light* means abiding in Christ, which means dying to self-will and becoming more alive to Christ’s will.

Many parents know they need to stop sinful communication with their children yet do nothing about it. It is God’s will that we communicate love, so asking Him to change us is a guarantee that He will work to bring it about. Scripture says, “The heart of the righteous studies how to answer” (Proverbs 15:28), indicating that righteous communication is learned and deliberate. “The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds learning to his lips” (Proverbs 16:23). This confirms that communication skills are progressive and can be learned. Notice again that the mouth reveals what is in the heart. God’s blessing comes through righteous communication because we are being obedient to His will (Ephesians 4:29). And this communication will be persuasive, accomplishing its purpose. It is through loving communication and proper training that we will successfully persuade our children to do what is right.

Self-Examination 2

Consider the verses above. Describe how they apply to communicating with your children.

To establish loving communication, we must begin to look at our children through a different set of lenses. God wants us to see our children through His eyes (as a gift) and through what His Word says. Christian author Warren Wiersbe said, “Ministry takes place when divine resources meet human needs through loving channels to the glory of God.”²⁶ Parenting is a ministry, and our communication needs to come from the divine resources God has given us. But it must always be with the intent of glorifying Him, reflecting His character. Our divine resource is that abiding relationship in Christ, the rock-solid foundation upon which we build.

Dedicate Your Children to God

We can follow these principles faithfully, and our children could still choose to live sinful or immoral lifestyles. There is no guarantee that they will turn out right. God gives them free will, or choice, just like He gives us.

FACT FILE

Train up—Chanak (Hebrew). To dedicate or set aside for divine service.

Train up a child in the way he should go,
And when he is old he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

Many people think this passage offers a guarantee, but that is not the emphasis of God's Word here. When interpreting Proverbs, we must understand that phrases like this are probabilities, not guarantees. However, we must put forth maximum effort to raise our children in the will of God and pray without ceasing for their development in righteousness.

This idea was used regarding Solomon and Israel dedicating the house of the Lord (1 Kings 8:63). We must always be mindful that our children are not our own, but the Lord's, and we need to treat them that way. We must dedicate them back unto the Lord.

Dedicating our babies is an important event. We stand before the entire congregation publicly declaring that our children are not ours—they are His—and we will treat them that way while they are in our care. God is saying just that in this passage: our children are His. But this dedication is not a disclaimer: "Here, Lord, they are Yours now." Within this dedication is the awareness of a God-given responsibility to love, guide, and train our children. As Ephesians 6:4 states, we are to "bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord."

We will not be held responsible for the choices our children make but for the choices we make in raising them. We are often so concerned about the mistakes our kids are going to make, and how they will embarrass us, that it dictates the way we treat them or do not love them as God commands. We must understand that the value of our children comes from what God has said, not their personalities, failures, or their stage of life. God said, "This is My gift to you."

At times I felt like wrapping up my oldest son and sending him back with a note: "God, I don't want this one. He is too much work." But I didn't have a choice in the matter, did I? Neither do you. God knew exactly what we needed. There is no exchange policy.

Does this change if you are a single parent, blended family, foster parent, or grandparent raising kids? No, it does not.

Self-Examination 3

Did you know that your children are gifts from God? ___ Yes ___ No

Do you always treat them that way? ___ Yes ___ No

That is our battleground. It is as if God is saying, "Here's My gift to you, complete with instructions on how I want you to handle it. Follow My directions because I'll be watching you." We should try our best and desire to do what God says. The instruction manual God gave us on how to treat our children is the Holy Bible. And Scripture says, "Love them; always treat them as a gift."

Respect Each Unique Personality

The second part of Proverbs 22:6 says, "in the way he should go." *The way he should go* is a Hebrew idiom that literally means "upon the mouth of his ways," or according to the demands of his or her personality, conduct, stage of life, or natural bent. We are to treat each one of our kids as a unique gift, embracing their individual personality. God wants us to adapt to the personalities He has given them.

Beginning with Adam and Eve, the first family, we see evidence of different personalities. Cain was self-willed and determined to go his own way, a strong-willed mule. Abel loved the Lord and was a sensitive, more compliant child.

Isaac's sons, Jacob and Esau, were twins. Jacob was a momma's boy, smooth skinned, and often in the kitchen. Esau was a man's man, rough, a hunter, a gruff guy. They were twins with different personalities and different interests. God has been doing this from the beginning of time.

Some parents who receive a strong-willed child or one with a disability feel that they have gotten the short end of the stick. God knows what He is doing. He does not make mistakes. Do you believe that?

As the Lord lives, who made our very souls. (Jeremiah 38:16)

God is the creator of the soul, which is the seat of the mind, will, and emotions. We had something to do with the color of our child's eyes, the curl of their hair, their size, and the color of their skin, but when it comes to their soul, we had nothing to do with it. Yes, they will pick up our traits, but their mind, will, and emotions are given by God, and He does not make mistakes.

We must quit blaming ourselves, our spouse, or our parents. Instead, blame God for the bent your child has, for their personality, because God is the one and only Creator.

For You formed my inward parts;
You covered me in my mother's womb. (Psalm 139:13)

God created your soul; He breathed life into you. The Word says all of us are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). When we get angry and resentful at our kids, and begin to misrepresent Christ, we are acting like He made a mistake. Colossians 3:21 says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." Yet many parents provoke their children by not practicing biblical love and not considering them to be gifts from God.

God gives us a clear picture of the natural consequences when parents practice unloving communication. If your child is discouraged, one of the most common reasons is our negative influence. We can drive them to despair. This is not to blame everything on parents, but we do play a key role in their lives as they are growing up, for good or evil. God gave parents tremendous influence, and He wants us to use it in the correct way—to glorify Him and do His will.

FACT FILE

Discouraged—*Athumeo* (Greek). Without passion, despondent, disturbed in mind; indicates loss of courage.

The root is *thumos*, which means violent motion or passion of mind, such as anger, wrath, or indignation. By putting the *a* (alpha) in front of the word, it becomes a negative, meaning "without."

Lesson 13

Failing to Love

There is a time and season for all things (Ecclesiastes 3:1), which includes the terrible twos and even the difficulty of adolescence. God designed these seasons. It is not a mistake. Even though Proverbs 22:6 is not a guarantee of success, it clearly indicates that we need to study each child; adapt to their unique personality; and be willing to accept the fact that one may need more instruction, discipline, and time than another. Some are going to take a lot more time and energy. When we follow the will of God in our parenting, we are not provided a guarantee but a promise to receive all the grace we need to do it correctly.

Self-Examination 1

Reflect on this truth. Perhaps you believe God made a mistake by giving you that child. Before you continue with this study, write your confession to the Lord. Ask God for the strength to see your child's unique personality as His perfect will.

We must always keep in mind the influential power God has given us over our kids, especially us dads. Our influence is like no one else's. Our children's minds are like recorders, and for the first twelve or thirteen years they are on "record." But when they hit adolescence, they switch to "playback." At that point, we are often just reaping what we sowed during previous years.

If we truly love God and our desire is to serve Him, we will not focus on the distinctions of a child's individuality, personality, failures, or stages of life. We will not let these things dictate how we react to them. As a minister for the Lord, we must not be ruled by our natural temperament, but by God's Word and the Holy Spirit.

DIG DEEPER

Describe how these truths from James relate to your communication with your child.

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.
(James 3:17-18)

Beyond Ourselves

I remember watching my wife deliver Nick. The pregnancy and delivery were so hard, it was scary. He was even stubborn about being born. I could just imagine him in there screaming, “No, I’m not ready to come out!”

My wife struggled for almost nine hours, then finally the doctor picked up some scary-looking forceps. I immediately got queasy. He started to pull, and all I could think was, “Hey, Doc, you’re going to pull his head off!” Suddenly I heard a *pop*, and there was Nick’s head. He came out screaming, telling everybody right from the start, “I’m in control, and I am angry at you all.”

After I cut his umbilical cord, the nurse placed him on the scale, and my son thrust his arms, arched his back, and almost flipped over. The nurse cried out, “Oh my gosh!” and jumped back. That was the first sign we were in trouble.

From the time he was one year old, he would not take a nap unless he was sick. The minute the sun was up, he was up. He had more energy than any human being I ever knew. He was also bent and determined, “I’m gonna rule and do what I want, when I want.” That is the way God wired him. He is a true strong-willed child.

Parenting is a ministry. It is not always easy or convenient and can be downright exhausting. Sometimes the daily grind can push a parent to the edge of insanity, but raising our children is one of the most important and rewarding things we will do in this lifetime. Our obedience to the Lord and the sacrifices we make will be turned into blessings.

To be a minister means to go beyond our natural selves—our weaknesses, prejudices, and selfish expectations—and operate by the power of the Holy Spirit. Apart from a parent’s submission to Christ, this is impossible.

Self-Examination 2

Consider these questions before continuing. Ask God to show you how to love your children His way. Note your thoughts below.

- How can we love our children who don’t always show love in return?
 - How do we keep our own temperaments from clashing with our kids’ temperaments when they disobey?
 - How do we trust God’s perfect plan in our transformation when He is using our children’s personalities or failures?
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Reasons We Fail to Love

Parents beware: the battle is on. God designed the family unit and desires to use it for His glory. Therefore Satan has made families a target for destruction. We must understand the battleground, a place where Satan would like to stop the godly transformation of parents as well as the rearing of godly children. We may erroneously believe it is “them” (the kids) against “us” (the parents) rather than being alert to the tactics of our real enemy.

The Bible teaches that our battle is spiritual, and our enemy is Satan (Ephesians 6:12), not our children or our spouses. Let us look at four common reasons why parents fail in the area of loving communication:

1. Unforgiveness—Not forgiving someone who has offended or sinned against us
2. Spiritual warfare—Not realizing that the source of many negative thoughts is Satan
3. Persecution—Feeling self-pity rather than seeing trials (with our children) as part of our growth in righteousness
4. Selfishness—Shirking responsibility by not being a minister (servant for Christ) to our families

Just as God created physical laws to govern the universe, such as gravity, the Bible contains God’s spiritual laws designed to govern all mankind, believers as well as nonbelievers. We do not think about it, but all these forces are at work every single day. And God’s spiritual laws are as absolute and nonnegotiable as His physical laws. Just like we understand gravity and would not jump from a ten-story building, when we follow spiritual principles, there is safety on the path of righteousness, and we experience God’s blessings by living in His promises.

Unforgiveness

The most common way we fail to love is unforgiveness. We do this by storing hurts or voids from our past. *Hurts* are things others have done wrong to us, and *voids* are those things people did not do for us that we needed. A void could be a parent who did not show proper love through kind words or time spent together. These hurts and voids can cause us to harbor bitterness or resentment toward them.

Harboring bitterness toward parents, an ex-spouse, children, a current spouse, or anyone else blocks the transformation of character that God desires for us. Bitterness cuts us off from the grace of God needed to walk and grow spiritually and causes us to contaminate others (Hebrews 12:15).

FACT FILE

Voids—Something that has been left out.

Bitterness—Something distasteful or distressing. It is a root that causes bitter fruit, such as anger, hatred, resentfulness, and blindness, and keeps one from seeing God’s perspective in situations.

A child has certain developmental emotional needs that must be nurtured through loving authority, with consistent proper discipline. If these needs are compromised or not provided, a void is created within the child. This often occurs because parents do not understand their God-given responsibilities or the extent of their influence for good or bad. Most children cannot identify what is missing, but they will instinctively try to fill it with something.

A lack of real love and proper discipline can make a child vulnerable to addictions or emotional and psychological problems that lead to destructive behavior. As you move through these lessons, you will receive biblical instruction which, when followed, can produce a healthy relationship with your child and an emotionally healthy person in your child.

DIG DEEPER

Self-seeking means we are not trusting God and forgiving those who hurt us, and we are excusing any ungodly thoughts, words, or deeds that are coming out of us. God says we must forgive, but our hearts say they must pay.

Describe the consequences God brings.

Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.
(Hebrews 12:15)

But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek. (Romans 2:8–9)

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:
“My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
For whom the Lord loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives.” (Hebrews 12:5–6)

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. (Galatians 6:7)

The Spiritual Law of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is one of God's spiritual laws. The most common way a parent fails to love a child, or communicate love, is by unforgiveness. Often parents are still suffering from the negative experiences of their own childhood. They were treated in an unloving, angry way and may still be harboring bitterness or hurt. But deliverance is available. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." We are given this wonderful promise that once we are saved, our life becomes new. This means new abilities and new potential for righteousness but in no way indicates that past issues no longer have any effect on us. Growing spiritually is work, a process of applying biblical principles and depending on Christ's nature within us to be our strength.

Dealing with Past Hurts

We deal with hurt in various ways. A natural self-defense mechanism is to repress the memory of past hurts and act like they never happened. We try to follow that old adage that says, "Time heals all wounds." But the Bible teaches that to be healed, we must forgive those who offended us, face the truth, and release others from blame. When we do not forgive, a root of bitterness settles into our hearts, which troubles us and defiles those close to us, including our children. When parents yell, judge, lecture, or do not follow through with discipline, it is often an indication that they have forgiveness issues with their own parents. Or if they are treating their children with harshness, it could be from abuse they received.

Because we live in a fallen world, we are sinners who were parented by sinners. Many adults in the body of Christ carry hurts or voids from homes where there was drug use, abuse, divorce, rejection, molestation, mistreatment, neglect or abandonment, and lack of proper loving discipline. Many will testify that it was the trauma of childhood that caused them to seek Christ.

When we are hurt emotionally, especially by a parent who has tremendous influence over us, it can create various negative and destructive, even addictive, behaviors. Many adults confess that from adolescence they became involved with drugs, alcohol, pornography, and unhealthy relationships while trying to cope with hurts and voids. Most had no idea why they were doing it or what was the root cause.

Many teens today are struggling due to lack of love, affection, and correct parenting, which has created voids and hurts. Some are attempting to fix it with drugs, pornography, unhealthy relationships, anorexia, bulimia, overeating, self-harm, and many other counterfeit "antidotes" that Satan provides. All too often counselors focus on correcting bad behaviors and choices instead of looking to God's provision of forgiveness to take the pain away. It is possible to become a Christian and repent of destructive behavior, still not understanding or addressing the root cause and allowing the stronghold to remain.

If you are stuck in this rut, unable to grow in Christ, repeating the sinful, unloving habits of your parents, then examine yourself and ask the Lord to help you work through the pain in your past. This is not to blame anyone for our behavior but to find understanding as to why we are stuck in this stronghold.

The Biblical Antidote

Thankfully the biblical antidote for past hurts or voids in our lives is found in God's Word. To *forgive* means "to let go or send away," which is what Christ has done with our sins (2 Corinthians 5:21). He paid the price to redeem us from our sins at the cross (Ephesians 1:7). When God forgives, He casts "all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19).

As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:12)

I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake;
And I will not remember your sins. (Isaiah 43:25)

God no longer holds our sins against us. He does not meditate upon them because He makes a choice to remember them no more (Jeremiah 31:34). God is omniscient (all-knowing). He does not forget, but He makes a choice to cast our sins into the sea—true forgiveness.

The Bible commands that we forgive others as God forgives us.

Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. (Colossians 3:13)

FACT FILE

Complaint—Faultfinding, blaming, or holding grudges.

Our human nature is to hold grudges or "stuff" bad memories (suppress or ignore) and make excuses for our parent's behavior: "I know they loved me and did the best they could." "It's better now and I don't want to rock the boat by bringing this old stuff up." But only through forgiveness can we be freed from what was done or not done. The standard for our forgiveness is "as Christ forgave you." We must choose to cast the offense into the sea of forgetfulness. If bitter thoughts return, we refuse to meditate on them, rather dismiss them as already forgiven.

This principle is laid out in what is traditionally known as the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13). Verse 12 says, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." We are to pray, "Lord forgive me my sins as I forgive those who sin against me." This prayer provides a pattern for us when communing with the Lord and is right in the middle of Jesus's teaching of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). When we are asking God for His grace and to forgive our sins, to have mercy and compassion on us, there is a direct connection to us receiving and having mercy and compassion on those who have sinned against us. We must be willing to forgive.

Choosing to Sin

We carry out sin in two ways:

1. Sin of Commission—We sin acting out of our own authority. God says, “No, do not do that,” and we do it anyway. For example, God says, “Don’t steal” (Ephesians 4:28), but we steal. It is doing the opposite of what God’s Word says or instructs.
2. Sin of Omission—We sin by not doing what is right by God. He commands us to do something, and we decide to not do it. Or, out of ignorance, we don’t do what God’s Word instructs us to do. For example, God says to forgive, but we refuse to. We treat our children according to what we feel is best or what we feel at that moment, not doing God’s will.

For the Christian, ignorance of sin is no excuse, whether it is the sin of commission or the sin of omission. God has given us His Word so we may know what God’s will is and what it is not. Therefore it is so important to be in His Word, daily abiding in Christ.

But what if we make a choice to not forgive? Verses following the Lord’s Prayer state:

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14–15)

This fundamental principle of Christianity is often overlooked. Please notice the “if” clause, which means there is a condition to forgiveness, both positive (verse 14) and negative (verse 15). The positive is that if we make a choice to forgive others, He will forgive us. That is a promise. Romans 4:7 says, “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.” The negative is that if we make a choice to not forgive, God will not forgive us. This also is a promise, but what does it mean?

Please understand that this is not a condition for salvation. It does not mean: if you forgive someone else, God will forgive and save you; if you do not, He will not. Jesus is talking about believers coming to Him and asking to forgive their sins. If they chose not to obey, it will affect their fellowship with God, His empowering grace, and their sense of feeling forgiven themselves. But once we confess and obey, we are restored to fellowship.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

An unforgiving heart hinders our fellowship with God and man and will bring chastisement. The unmerciful response of the unforgiving servant is an example. In Matthew 18:21–35, a king called a servant to pay a debt so large it was virtually impossible. The servant fell before the king and begged for mercy. The king had compassion and forgave him the whole amount. Then the same servant went out and demanded payment from a servant who owed him. When this servant begged for patience, the forgiven servant cast his debtor into prison. When the king heard about it, he was so angry at the unthankful, hard-hearted man that he delivered him to the torturers for

chastisement until he could pay all. Jesus said, “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (verse 35). When God forgives our sins in Christ, we are forgiven an unpayable debt, so we must forgive others or chastisement will follow.

Not a Feeling

Some beliefs about forgiveness have no biblical basis and are more related to emotions. When God speaks about forgiveness, He commands us to forgive despite our feelings. Feelings are unstable and will not lead to true forgiveness. Let’s face it, going to a parent and telling them God has revealed some hurts and voids from your childhood may be extremely difficult. When you have been hurt by someone and harbor bitterness toward that individual, it may seem that bringing up something negative will jeopardize the current relationship. But you need to remember that you are not going with a “complaint” but with a heart of forgiveness (a gift). It can be challenging, but we need to be obedient and trust God.

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.
(Luke 14:26–27)

Let’s understand what Jesus is saying here. The word *hate* simply means “to love less.” His command is to love Jesus above everyone. These verses apply to situations just like this. When the Lord reveals that we need to forgive someone, our alliance to Jesus is tested. If we love Jesus supremely, then our bitterness, stubbornness, or human sentiments for how it may affect that person now will not hinder us from being obedient to God’s desire to set us free. It is a faith issue.

God does not say the offender will acknowledge, take responsibility, or ask forgiveness after you have approached them. Many times people go with the expectation that the offender will fess up and admit wrongdoing. But they cannot be expected to be of the same mind. They may still be blinded or hardened. Your offender may want to argue, deny, or justify their actions. Jesus alone can heal and fill those voids, not your offender. The offender’s words or actions do not bring the healing. It is your obedience to God by His grace alone that you are healed. But some people are saved through this process, and even entire families enter the reconciliation process.

God says that despite a person’s disposition or circumstances, we simply must forgive. Romans 12:18 says, “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.” It is our responsibility to be the reconciler, to live at peace as best as we can. You can reconcile in a letter, by telephone, via email, or in person.

It is hard to forgive, but it is harder *not* to forgive. A readiness to forgive others indicates that we have truly repented and received God’s forgiveness. A broken heart toward God cannot be a hard heart toward others. Pride, fear, and loving God less are the real reasons we will not forgive others. Refusing to repent, demanding rights, and defending yourself are indications that selfish pride is ruling your life, rather than the Lord. If fears and what-ifs are controlling you, pray for the faith to trust and obey God. The unforgiving servant from Matthew 18 warns that an unforgiving heart will put us in an emotional prison.

See *Appendix E: Trust and Forgiveness* for more about how to forgive.

~~ACTION PLAN~~

If this applies to you, write your plan and commitment to forgive someone. Be sure to include the date when you will do it, and then follow through.

Lesson 14

Spiritual Warfare

The second common reason we fail to love our children is persecution or opposition from Satan or one of his demons.

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (Ephesians 6:11)

The Enemy has been around since before time began. He tempted the first family (Adam and Eve) to fall into sin, and it worked (Genesis 3:1-7). His plan has not changed. The Enemy is devising ways to attack us, to bring distractions, dissensions, and divisions into the home. He is in the business of setting us up for failure.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what kind of war we are fighting in the passages below and what we are supposed to do about it.

FACT FILE

Wiles—Methodia (Greek). Indicating craftiness, cunning, and deception. The English word *method* is derived from this Greek word. The term was often used of a wild animal that cunningly stalks and then unexpectedly pounces on its prey. Satan's evil schemes are built around stealth and deception.²⁷

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Ephesians 6:12-13)

The Battleground

Be constantly aware that you are in the midst of warfare, and your heart and mind are the battleground. We must weigh every thought that comes into our minds against God's Word.

Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5)

In this context, *bringing captive* is capturing our ungodly thoughts and making them obedient to Christ and His Word. Satan hates us, and hates our kids, and the last thing he wants us to do is successfully represent Christ to our children.

FACT FILE

Bring captive—To capture or subdue a prisoner and lead him away into captivity.

Satan wants us to be mean and harsh and use our God-given influence for his evil will. When a Christian parent misrepresents Christ at home and shows contempt toward their kids, they can become a tool to push them right into the hands of Satan. Sadly, many Christians are doing just that without realizing it.

We must find God's heart and put to death anything that is not of Him. Once we become a Christian, "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). We now have the Spirit of God dwelling in us (Romans 8:9), which guides us through the Word to be like Christ.

Self-Examination 1

Why is it important to be in the Word each day?

Our Three Sources

Our minds receive thoughts from three sources.

The first source is our own soul, psyche, or self.

These are thoughts related to our own needs, feelings, and opinions. We know when our thoughts originate from our own soul because they are dominated with words like *I, me, or myself*. "I don't like having to deal with my strong-willed child." "I want to have my own time." These are our own thoughts and feelings. The Bible clearly says that our mind has to be transformed (Romans 12:2), renewed (Ephesians 4:23), and guided by the Word of God, because it "is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

The second source is the Holy Spirit.

Our minds can also receive thoughts or messages from the Holy Spirit.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.
(1 Corinthians 2:12)

As we walk in an abiding relationship with Christ, He fills our hearts with the truths of His Word. As we meditate on His righteousness, our minds become open to the Holy Spirit and we hear words of guidance, encouragement, wisdom, and instruction. We can know when we have received a thought from the Holy Spirit because it is scriptural, true, edifies, draws us to the Lord, and is never contrary to His Word. How comforting to know that, as children of God, we are not left to our own understanding. God desires to speak to us and will speak to us through His Word and by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The third source is demons.

Finally, our minds receive thoughts from demons. Even believers who love the Lord Jesus can experience spiritual oppression, having demonic thoughts bombard their minds. Peter is a perfect example.

Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!”

But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”
(Matthew 16:22-23)

Notice that Jesus rebuked Peter because he was “not mindful of the things of God.” Peter wanted to stop Jesus from going to the cross, but Jesus recognized that these thoughts originated from Satan and needed to be dealt with immediately.

We know a thought has demonic origin when it falls into one of the following categories: lies, condemnation, or temptation. Ask God to reveal if any of these categories are affecting your thought life now.

Self-Examination 2

Ask God to speak to your heart about these truths.

The devil . . . does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.
(John 8:44 NASB)

What was revealed to you about lies?

The devil and Satan . . . the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. (Revelation 12:9, 10 NASB)

What was revealed to you about condemnation or accusations?

And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” (Matthew 4:3 NASB)

What was revealed to you about temptation to sin?

Our Thoughts

When we are tempted with lying thoughts (versus biblical truth), condemnation, or invitations to sin against God and others, it is certain that we are experiencing spiritual warfare. We cannot avoid the fiery darts of the Evil One (Ephesians 6:16). However, we can control what we do with those thoughts. God says we must take every thought that comes into our minds and weigh that thought against the Word of God. If a thought does not pass the test, God says we must purge it from our minds immediately.

“Bringing every thought into captivity” is a discipline that must be practiced continually. Sin is conceived in your mind before you act upon the temptation. Therefore you must practice this discipline if you are pursuing holiness. God gives us a specific checklist in Scripture:

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

If we are ignorant of this battle and or not actively fighting it, it will be the Enemy’s opportunity to come against our families. Keep in mind: the Enemy is always scheming, plotting to find some method to make us fail as parents.

The following story illustrates this truth. As you read, highlight or underline where ungodly thoughts come in to see how the Enemy is working. We have studied the difference between reacting to a circumstance and responding in love. Responding takes thought (think first), self-control (bending our will to the Holy Spirit), time, and is not dictated by feelings or emotions. Also note when reacting or responding occurs.

Years ago, I went to pick up Nick from a junior high youth group he was attending. I got there early and was waiting in the church parking lot when an old friend arrived to pick up his son. When he saw me, he jumped out of his car and ran up to my window.

“Hey, Craig, did you hear what happened? A group of kids, including your son and mine, ditched youth group tonight and are down the street at some girl’s house playing basketball. Man, when my son gets here, I’m gonna really let him have it!”

When I asked him how he got this information, he explained that his wife’s friend, who lives next door to the house where the kids were playing basketball, saw his son and called his wife.

“Can you believe our kids?” he said. “I’m a lay pastor at my church. Can you believe how embarrassing this is for me? The whole church will know! He’s really gonna pay for this!”

I had counseled this man years earlier and lead him to the Lord. As this man went back to his car, these thoughts filled my head: Gosh, I'm a pastor. What does this guy think of me? I can't believe Nick would do this. What about my reputation? Does he think he can get away with sneaking off? He thinks I won't find out? This is it! When he gets here, I'm gonna let him have it!

Satan was bombarding my mind with judgmental, evil accusations and temptations. I didn't know the truth about the situation, only hearsay from an upset father. Before I knew it, I was agreeing with Satan's accusations against my son, and I was tempted to let my son have it. My own prideful concerns about what this guy thought of me were fueling my anger. My carnal nature was having a field day! This situation was the catalyst, and Satan was trying to capitalize on it. Satan had set me up. He dangled the hook in my face, I took it, and he was reeling me in.

Thank God for His grace and mercy. The Holy Spirit brought remembrance of my own youth: "Craig, how many church groups did you get kicked out of when you were a kid? What things were you doing when you were thirteen? When you were Nick's age, did you even go to youth group?"

I took some time and prayed for strength and wisdom to deal with this situation correctly.

Nick finally arrived and came up to the car asking if I could give his friend a ride home. I agreed, knowing I shouldn't confront him in front of another kid.

Within a few seconds, Nick told me, "Hey, Dad, I have to tell you what happened tonight. We didn't go to youth group because they were having a graduation ceremony, and the leader said we didn't have to attend if we didn't want to, but we needed to call our parents. One of the kids lives down the street and asked if we wanted to play basketball at her house, so we did."

I played dumb, as if I didn't know what had happened, then responded, "You know, Nick, we've never had this happen before. Next time you decide not to be where you are supposed to be, we want a phone call. Let your mom and me make that decision. You don't have the authority to make those decisions yet."

He didn't give me any excuses but agreed that he would call next time. That was it. It was over. He learned to call next time, and I had another victory in bringing my thoughts captive to Christ.

The following day, one of the mothers of the kids from the youth group called my wife. She said her daughter was one of the kids in this group that left to go play basketball. Her daughter told her that as they were walking back to the church, they began discussing among themselves how they were going to lie to their parents. She explained what Nick said to them, "Don't lie, you guys. Why would you lie? Just tell the truth. Our parents will find out anyway!"

I can only imagine if I had let Satan have the victory, reacted to my son in anger, and embarrassed him in front of his friends. How I would have felt after learning how my son encouraged the other kids to tell the truth? This is how it works. Satan loves to get in the middle of our daily interaction, flinging his fiery darts of lies, condemnation, and temptations that divide our homes. Parents, when we are not obedient to bringing our thoughts captive, we can open the door for Satan's oppression.

Self-Examination 3

Reflect on what you have learned about how Satan attacks our minds. What are some of the lies or fiery darts the Enemy has shot at you regarding your children?

Lesson 15

Persecution and Selfishness

We also fail to love our children due to persecution and selfishness.

Persecution

The third common reason that we fail to love our kids is persecution or opposition. Scripture tells us how to respond to opposition:

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:43–45)

What do loving, blessing, doing good, and praying for our enemies have to do with parenting? As you will see, the principles laid out in this verse have everything to do with our mindset toward our children.

Sometimes it seems like our kids are the enemy. We feel like they are deliberately going out of their way to irritate us, but even if they are, God tells us how to respond to them. Proverbs acknowledges that children can have a negative effect on us, so we should expect to have opposition at times, which feels like persecution, when raising our children.

FACT FILE

Persecute—To pursue in a manner to injure, grieve, or afflict; to oppress; to set upon with cruelty; to cause to suffer.

A foolish son is the grief of his mother. (Proverbs 10:1)

A foolish son is a grief to his father,
And bitterness to her who bore him. (Proverbs 17:25)

He who begets a scoffer does so to his sorrow,
And the father of a fool has no joy. (Proverbs 17:21)

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child. (Proverbs 22:15)

This feeling of persecution comes when our children challenge us, refuse to respond to our correction and training, rebel against our authority, or resist our love. They often act like enemies and treat us like we are their enemies. Naturally, most parents take this personally and can become discouraged or even harden their hearts. Instead of responding in love, parents can react, and love is lost in negative feelings and attitudes.

ACTION PLAN 1

God gives us a way to overcome these sinful reactions by following the principles in Matthew 5:43–45. Each of these instructions is a command to do—and continue to do. Enemies are people you would not want to be around, which occasionally applies to our children. Write your personal commitment to do each one from verse 44 as it applies to your children.

“Love your enemies.”

Love here is *agape* (Greek), and as explained earlier this type of love is primarily of the will instead of emotions. No one really “feels” like loving an enemy. One author says, “It is not the same as natural affection because it is not natural to love those who hate and harm you. It is a supernatural grace and can be manifested only by those who have divine life.”²⁸ This can only come through your strong foundation of abiding in Christ.

“Bless those who curse you.”

Blessing is the idea of bestowing a gift, and what gift could be better than love? *Cursing* is using words that hurt. We cannot let words cause us to react and strike back in anger, but we must respond in love. (Tools to discipline in love are provided in volumes 3 and 4.)

“Do good to those who hate you.”

There may be a time when your child says they hate you or puts on a defiant face when you discipline or say no to something they want to do. But you must not lash out. Look and pray for a way to “do good.” Responding in love may take a little time, but it shows you have self-control and that you are committed to glorifying God.

“Pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.”

Spitefully has the sense of misusing, insulting, or falsely accusing. It does not take long in parenting to see this dark side come out in our children. Jesus gives the command to pray because many times it’s the last thing we do.

Three Reasons to Pray

1. Prayer means you are asking God to bring change to you and your children, that He would open their eyes and empower them to be obedient.
2. Prayer means you are dependent upon God and not your own strength and wisdom, but you are asking for His wisdom in the situation (James 1:5–8).
3. Prayer changes your heart. The best way to change your attitude to agape love is to bring a child before the Lord in prayer. And since it is a command to pray and continue to pray, God slowly softens your heart so you start loving them like He does.

Take a moment to pray:

Dear Lord, I thank You so much for the children You have given me. I know You created them, and they are gifts from You. I ask You to help me to know how to love them the way You do even when I do not feel like it. Lord, I need Your strength and Your wisdom to respond in 1 Corinthians love to each opposition my children will bring. Help me to know how to bless and do good to them. Transform my heart. And, Lord, give me a heart to pray for my children daily and even minute by minute. I pray that You would change my children from the inside out, that they would have a heart of wanting to be obedient to Your Word, and as I instruct them biblically, they would embrace You. In Jesus’s name I pray. Amen.

As a parent and a minister, this is the way God wants us to respond to our kids.

For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps. (1 Peter 2:20–21)

God says we are blessed when we are persecuted for Christ's sake or for our obedience to Christ. We are stewards entrusted by God to carry His message and plan to our children by word and by deed (our actions). Parenting can include suffering. At times it is difficult, but the Word tells us: "For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil" (1 Peter 3:17). God will bless us as we remain consistent and faithful to obey Him. We are stewards, entrusted by God to carry His message to our children.

Paul gives us some encouraging words to keep the focus off ourselves and instead focus on pleasing God.

But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.
(1 Thessalonians 2:4)

FACT FILE

Steward—Overseer; manager; one who acts as a custodian, administrator, or supervisor.

As God's stewards over our families, we must examine our hearts and motives daily, with pleasing the Lord as our main objective. Our motive should not be to succeed at being good parents or even to raise good kids but to please God. As He examines our hearts, God is faithful to reveal to us what He sees.

Selfishness

Finally, the fourth common reason we fail to love is selfishness. Again, 1 Corinthians 13:5 tells us that love "does not seek its own." But because we are sinners, we are selfish by nature and we love conditionally.

We do not realize how selfish and conditional we are until our children come home from the hospital and we begin to raise them. If they do not live up to our expectations, what do we do? "That's it; you crossed the line now, buddy." We react.

But God tells us we must not put selfish expectations on our kids. Even though our children do not want to listen, and they do not want to be trained, we need to train them faithfully without our anger and selfishness dictating how we respond to them. Perhaps your first child was a wonderful, easy, pleasing kid. Then the next one you believe is a Tasmanian devil, and you spend so much time comparing the two. "Why can't you just be like your sister?" Remember, one will never be the same as the other. We cannot put selfish demands on our kids.

Scripture says God tests us. He examines our hearts and shows us how conditional and selfish we are. Our focus must be to please God. The test comes when we must choose to be selfless or to extend love. To love others (our children) is the overarching factor in obeying God's Word.

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:14)

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. (Romans 13:8)

In order for this to happen, self has to be submitted to Christ, which is why He said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). Denying self and taking up one’s cross means putting our selfish expectations and ways to death for His ways—living for Christ. We are transformed through a purifying process as we raise our children.

Removing the Dross

Selfishness is purged out of us like metal is purified. In order for metal to be purified, it must be placed in huge vats with extensive heat. As the metal inside becomes red hot, all kinds of black stuff, called dross, begins coming to the surface. The dross is the impurity inside the metal, which is then scooped off the top to make it pure.

God clearly did this with His people Israel. Notice that the result of purging is positive; it gives us the ability to offer righteousness to the Lord.

I will turn My hand against you,
And thoroughly purge away your dross,
And take away all your alloy. (Isaiah 1:25)

He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver;
He will purify the sons of Levi,
And purge them as gold and silver,
That they may offer to the Lord
An offering in righteousness. (Malachi 3:3)

God does the same thing to us. He brings about circumstances in our lives that “heat us up,” and guess what comes to the surface? Our impurities. If we fail to remember that God is transforming us (Romans 12:2) and using our children to reveal our selfish condition of heart, we will then blame our sinful actions on our children. God wants us to understand and embrace this truth and deal with the dross properly. God wants to deal with your heart because “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind” (Jeremiah 17:9–10). God wants to change us from the inside so we can apply it outwardly and reflect Him.

God knew every mistake we would ever make when He chose us as parents. It’s good to know He is not going to apologize to our children for picking us. It is imperative every time we do fail as parents, when we get angry and react in the flesh, that we take full responsibility. We need to go to the Lord and say, “God, I’m sorry. I blew it.” And then say to that son or daughter, “Honey, what you did was wrong, but the way I reacted was wrong too. Please forgive me.” We still discipline them, but we take responsibility for misrepresenting Jesus and ask for their forgiveness as well.

That, my friend, is acting in love. That is how the dross is scraped off and we are transformed. If we do not do those two things, it is like taking a big spoon and stirring the dross back into us, which is guaranteed to resurface.

My son Nicholas was sent by God to reveal what an evil, selfish, and angry person I was. It was the greatest miracle to me when I could look at Nick, when he made a mistake or challenged my authority, and calmly say, "Poor choice," without any emotion. To not scream or want to take his head off. Praise God! He had proved Himself true. I had prayed for it. Once I began to take responsibility for my failures, I witnessed God's transformation in me. I had to learn not to put my selfish unrealistic expectations on Nick, accept how God was using him to reveal my sin, and obey God's discipline of me by asking for forgiveness.

My son witnessed his daddy change right before his eyes. Yes, it took a season for this to take place. It did not happen overnight. Today, Nicholas has strong faith and a healthy fear of God because, in part, he witnessed his father's transformation. This is one of the greatest examples of discipleship we can give our kids.

God is purging us. He is heating us up and revealing our ugly, selfish conditions. We cannot run away from this process. We must embrace it and take responsibility for our transformation to occur.

Self-Examination

Describe some of the "heated moments" with your children and what they reveal about you. Then take them to the Lord in prayer.

If you have found room for improvement while learning how to properly love your children, your first step must be admitting it to the Lord: "I need help. I have failed. I need to change, God. I misrepresent You by _____. I'm sorry."

Then write a commitment to change in the area of loving your children. What things did the Lord bring to your mind? Pray about a time (soon) to ask your children to forgive you. Loving our children is essential to successful parenting. We cannot allow anything else to take precedence.

~~ACTION PLAN 2~~

To see clearly which areas we need to improve, we must do some self-reflection. Complete *Appendix F: Effective Listening Self-Evaluation*. Then complete *Appendix G: Improving Your Loving Communication*. If married, do them separately and then discuss the results to encourage each other through your transformation.

If you need some additional help to develop a loving relationship with your children, review *Appendix H: Showing Love to Your Child*.

Appendix Resources

These appendices are included as additional resources. They are found throughout all four volumes, but not all appendices are included in each volume. If you wish to review a specific appendix, find where it is located in the list below.

Appendix A: Parent Commitment Letter	Volume 1
Appendix B: Committing Your Life to Christ	Volume 1
Appendix C: Developing Daily Intimacy with God	Volume 1
Appendix D: Recommended Books	Volumes 1 & 3
Appendix E: Trust and Forgiveness	Volume 2
Appendix F: Effective Listening Self-Evaluation	Volumes 2 & 4
Appendix G: Improving Your Loving Communication	Volumes 2 & 4
Appendix H: Showing Love to Your Child	Volume 2
Appendix I: Essentials for Single Parents	Volume 3
Appendix J: Parenting the Blended Family	Volume 3
Appendix K: Leading a Child to Christ	Volume 3
Appendix L: Inappropriate Entertainment	Volume 3
Appendix M: Disciplining Behavior	Volume 4
Appendix N: Rules and Consequences	Volume 4
Appendix O: Positive Reinforcement	Volume 4
Appendix P: Chore List	Volume 4
Appendix Q: Questionnaire for Teenagers	Volume 4
Appendix R: Questionnaire for New Adults	Volume 4
Appendix S: Parent Self-Evaluation	Volume 4
Appendix T: Glossary	Volumes 1-4

Appendix E

Trust and Forgiveness

Psalm 139 teaches that God knows each of us intimately, that all our acts and thoughts are known to Him even before they are known to us. Before you opened your heart to God, by accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior, He knew you would come. God is not willing that any should perish; however, through the exercise of free will, He gives every individual the freedom to reject Him.

Trusting God with Our Past and Trials

All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
 But He does according to His will in the host of heaven
 And among the inhabitants of the earth;
 And no one can ward off His hand
 Or say to Him, "What have You done?" (Daniel 4:35 NASB)

You have searched me and known me.
 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
 You understand my thought from afar.
 You scrutinize my path and my lying down,
 And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.
 Even before there is a word on my tongue,
 Behold, O Lord, You know it all. (Psalm 139:1-4 NASB)

FACT FILE

Sovereign—Possessing supreme power, unlimited wisdom, and absolute authority.

God created Adam and Eve, and He gave only one restriction: do not eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. But they were deceived by Satan and, in disobedience, chose to eat the fruit of that tree. This brought the curse of sin on all mankind. In Adam, God gave mankind the freedom to choose good, but he turned to evil. Therefore all who now choose to be reborn as God's children, by faith in Christ, still live in a fallen world and are touched by the evil around them. If God shielded His children from all trouble and evil, people would only be motivated to turn to Him for the guarantee of an easy life. In fact, this is the very argument that began the historic show down in heaven between God and Satan concerning the life of Job.

Then Satan answered the Lord, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face." (Job 1:9-11 NASB)

God allowed Satan to test Job's faith through the loss of his possessions, his children, and finally his health. God is a loving Father and does not bring evil into our lives; however, for His purpose and for our ultimate good, He allows us to be touched by trials. Job continued to trust God throughout his suffering, which ultimately resulted in a deeper, more intimate relationship with his Creator and complete restoration of blessing.

Job questioned why God was allowing him to suffer. God had declared Job a righteous man in Job 2:3, so he asked why. For several chapters he agonized over the reason for his trials. God never answered directly but turned Job's attention to His power and glory, which is displayed in creation. Job's search was eventually satisfied through deeper understanding of the greatness of God. Just like Job, when we experience trials, we look for an explanation. And so it is with our marriages and the trials that seem so overwhelming. One of the many lessons we can learn from Job is that *why* is the wrong question. We should instead ask God *what*.

What Are You Trying to Teach Me?

What is Your will for me in this season of suffering?

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.
(James 1:13-14 NASB)

Then Job answered the Lord and said,
"I know that You can do all things,
And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. . . .
I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;
But now my eye sees You." (Job 42:1-2, 5 NASB)

Is any of part of your life beyond God's power, wisdom, or authority? Why or why not?

What circumstance in your life did God not know beforehand that you would face?

In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.
(Ephesians 1:11 NIV)

How should you respond to life's disappointments, difficulties, suffering, and trials?

If God knew all that would happen before we were born, then it follows that, through His foreknowledge, we were predestined through His grace to live the life given to us. God does not keep trials or evil from touching us, or prevent our bad choices, but He does promise to work all for good in the life of those who are committed to Him.

And we know that God causes all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son. (Romans 8:28-29 NASB)

You can choose to either harbor bitterness toward parents who disappointed you, a spouse who deserted you, friends who failed you, or a drunk driver who killed a loved one. Or we can place our faith in a sovereign God.

When we come to Christ, we trust God with our eternal destiny. We must also trust Him with our past and present circumstances. Christ can comfort and strengthen us both in and through our trials and can bring good out of bad. It is only through our faith and obedience that God can and will give us peace and bring praise, honor, and glory to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Describe what these verses mean and how they can be applied to your personal circumstances.

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:6-7 NASB)

Our Trials and Tribulations

God's Word teaches that trials and tribulations are part of the Christian life.

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

Jesus tells us that we can have peace and that He has overcome the world, but amid trials we ask, "Why? What is God's purpose?" Just as the refiner places crude gold into a crucible and administers heat to bring dross (impurity) to the surface, God allows His beloved children to go into the crucible of suffering to be refined and transformed into the image of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness. (Malachi 3:3 NASB)

If we trust ourselves to God's goodness and purpose, our hearts will become permeated with the love, hope, and confidence of Jesus Christ. Others will see the righteousness of Jesus Christ being worked out in us.

Remember Romans 8:28–29? God does not say *some* things work together for good, but *all things*. The key is faith; if we choose to believe God's promises and trust Him in all our trials and tribulations, we will be victorious, and God will be glorified. In this passage, "to those who love God" refers to those who have received Jesus as Lord and Savior, which includes an understanding that God's purpose in this life is to deliver us from the power of sin, which translates to becoming one who can choose righteousness over evil, glory to God.

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.
(2 Corinthians 2:14 NASB)

Are you willing to trust God with the trials and challenges in your life? ___ Yes ___ No

Are you willing to allow God to transform your life through these trials? ___ Yes ___ No

Are you willing to trust God as you work through these hurts and trials in your life?
___ Yes ___ No

There are times, says Jesus, when God cannot lift the darkness from you, but trust Him. God will appear like an unkind friend, but He is not; He will appear like an unnatural Father, but He is not; He will appear like an unjust judge, but He is not. Keep the notion of the mind of God behind all things strong and growing. Nothing happens in any particular unless God's will is behind it, therefore you can rest in perfect confidence in Him. —Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

The Cost of Unforgiveness

When a debt is forgiven, the right to payment is given away. The word *forgive* literally means "to give away." If someone injures me and I forgive them, I give away the freedom to continue being angry and resentful. This breaks many strongholds that lead to emotional and psychological problems. Forgiving someone means giving our hurts to God, letting Him take them away from us. In this way we give away any resentful thoughts we may have and eliminate acts of retribution.

As God pardons us, we give a pardon for the offense. In fact, God commands that we forgive others as He has forgiven us. The word *pardon* is derived from Latin, *perdonare*, meaning "to grant freely." True forgiveness is undeserved, unmerited, and free. It is not our place to decide what is just or fair—we are called to forgive. In Scripture, to *forget* means "to let go from one's power."

When we refuse to grant forgiveness, there is a price to pay. Unforgiveness, being unwilling to let go of offenses when we believe another person has wronged us, results in a negative emotional condition. The most common is resentment, which means "to feel again." Resentment clings to past hurts, reliving them over and over. Resentment, like picking a scab, prohibits our emotional wounds from healing.

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled. (Hebrews 12:15 NASB)

Bitterness is like a deep root taking hold in the human heart, which then grows and produces fruit. However, rather than nourishing others, this bitter fruit defiles both us and others.

Most people do not readily admit to harboring unforgiveness, resentment, or bitterness because they only recognize it as a logical emotional response after being hurt. They see their condition as justified and seek others to listen to their complaints or sympathize with them. Ephesians teaches that there will be undeniable evidence in an individual's life that the bitter tree of resentment is growing within their heart.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. (Ephesians 4:31 NASB)

Are any of these common in your life?

- Pride
- Self-righteousness
- Self-pity
- Emotional disturbances
- Anxiety, tension, or stress
- Health problems
- Eating disorders
- Unhealthy sense of self-confidence
- Lack of trust in relationships
- Lack of intimacy in marriage
- Sexual dysfunction
- Judgmental or critical of others
- Ultrasensitive and easily offended
- Absence of peace or joy
- Feeling distant from Jesus
- Afraid to lead as a husband
- Afraid to follow as a wife

FACT FILE

Wrath—An outburst of a strong, vengeful anger or indignation, seeking retribution.

Anger—A state of mind marked by fretfulness and reacting to life's challenges with frustration.

Evil speaking—Unkind words, verbal abuse against someone, clamor, slander, wounding someone's reputation by evil reports, backbiting, insult and defamation.

Malice—Hateful feelings we nurture in our hearts. A desire to see another suffer or to separate ourselves from that person, not wanting to work toward reconciliation.

Why Forgive?

Along with the emotional and social devastation that results from unforgiveness, we are indebted to forgive.

God commands it.

Obedience to God is not optional. Deciding when we will and will not obey His commands leads to an unfruitful, ineffective, and spiritually barren life.

But love your enemies, and do good . . . and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:35–36 NASB)

And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. (Mark 11:25)

In forgiving, we bear the image of Jesus.

As Christians, we are called to carry the name of Christ to a lost world. In fact, the term *Christian* means “little Christ.” Christ demonstrated forgiveness, came to this earth, died to establish forgiveness for the guilty, and commissioned the church to proclaim forgiveness. To bear His image we must be willing to forgive others as He forgives us.

Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”
(Luke 23:34)

The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. (1 John 2:6 NASB)

Forgiveness breaks the cycle of pain, blame, and strongholds.

Forgiveness brings healing to a hurting person and functions as an antidote to the poison of bitterness. However it does not address all issues of blame and fairness but often disregards those altogether. The hurt and resentment is left behind with God, while obediently offering forgiveness brings freedom and enables one to start over in a relationship.

This truth is demonstrated in the life of Joseph, found in Genesis 37–45. Betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery, he refused to allow the root of bitterness to take hold in his life. After years of separation, when the family was reunited, Joseph testified of the healing work God had done in his life through forgiveness, demonstrated by the names of his sons.

Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” He named the second Ephraim, “For,” he said, “God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.”
(Genesis 41:51–52 NASB)

In this passage, *forget* does not mean cease to remember. It means “to let go,” or cease to let hurts control present life. Joseph’s fruitfulness was directly related to putting his trust in God’s sovereignty and forgiving others. Instead of multiplying his hurt by feeling it again and again (resentment), Joseph chose to trust God as the overseer of all events in his life.

Unforgiveness imprisons us in the past and locks out all potential for a fruitful life.

During Joseph’s years in Egypt, he allowed God to heal a heart that had been broken by his own brothers. Later, when given the opportunity, he demonstrated his healing through acts of love, forgiveness, and grace to his brothers.

Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life . . . and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. . . . He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him. (Genesis 45:5, 7, 15 NASB)

There was no blaming and no explanation demanded, only the voice of mercy and forgiveness. The way was cleared for Joseph and his brothers to be reunited and begin a new relationship.

Forgiveness loosens the stranglehold of guilt in the offender.

In the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:7 NASB)

Forgiveness brings freedom to all involved. God set Joseph free, but his brothers would have carried their grief to the grave if Joseph had not forgiven them. We forgive because God forgives us in Christ. That same forgiveness, undeserved and unearned, is what we owe to others. It relieves the oppressive burden we know as guilt.

If Jesus had not extended kindness and forgiveness to sinners, we would all forever exist in the stranglehold of guilt. He made the first move toward us, which made it possible for us to be reconciled to Him.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the removal of enmity, the resolution of a quarrel. It implies that the parties being reconciled were formerly hostile to or separated from one another. Any successful reconciliation will be accompanied by kindness and peace rather than anger and turmoil.

FACT FILE

Reconcile—To restore to a right relationship, to settle or resolve differences.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:31-32 NASB)

Reconciliation is to be sought out for family members and other believers in our lives. In all our relationships outside our immediate family setting, respectful boundaries and maintaining a healthy relationship are important.

However there are some cases or situations where reconciliation is not necessary, possible, or even needed, such as an emotionally or physically abusive parent or ex-spouse or a random person who hurt you or a loved one (a rapist, a drunk who hurt or killed a loved one, an old teacher or coach who verbally hurt you, etc.).

Scripture instructs us to put away all bitterness, to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving.

How do we put away bitterness?

How do we reconcile with someone whom we have offended?

How do we repair the hurt we have caused others?

How do we forgive someone who has offended us?

How can we change our own feelings about a wrong done?

If You Need to Be Forgiven

As an act of the will, you must do four things.

First, confess your sin to God, ask Him to forgive you, and ask His Holy Spirit to fill your heart with His love.

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered. . . .
When I kept silent, my bones grew old
Through my groaning all the day long.
For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.
I acknowledged my sin to You,
And my iniquity I have not hidden.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. (Psalm 32:1, 3-5)

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:12)

Take a moment right now and cry out to God. Ask Him to forgive you, to fill you with His Holy Spirit, and strengthen you to obey.

God alone forgives sins. He forgives and He forgets. By faith, accept God's absolute forgiveness and cleansing.

Forgiveness is not an emotion. . . . Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. —Corrie ten Boom

Second, if possible, go to those you have wronged, humbly make confession, and ask for their forgiveness.

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.
(Matthew 5:23–24)

Write your commitment to obey Matthew 5:23–24.

Write the names and a brief description of what needs to be said for forgiveness.

Six of the most powerful words in the English language are, *I was wrong. Please forgive me.*

Don't let distractions or other obstacles delay this act of obedience. Share your decision with a trustworthy Christian friend, asking them to pray with you and hold you accountable to follow through on this commitment. It is best to seek forgiveness face to face. However, due to logistics or a possible confrontation, you may need to communicate on the phone or in writing. If the person you have wronged has passed away, simply go to God with your confession.

Third, spend time daily with the Lord in His Word and in prayer.

One of the many negative consequences of not seeking or giving forgiveness is a hindered relationship with God. Praise the Lord that He never leaves us or forsakes us, but our own hearts can grow cold and distant, thus affecting our intimacy with Him. God designed this consequence to motivate us to practice forgiveness.

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)

Write your decision to spend time daily with God by reading His Word and in prayer and meditation.

Fourth, ponder the meaning of the cross and the sacrifice Jesus made for your sins.

For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:3-5)

Take a moment right now to thank Jesus for all He has done for you, for forgiving you for all your sins, for His perfect plan of transforming you into His image, and for the gift of His Holy Spirit.

If You Need to Forgive

As an act of the will, you must do two things.

First, pray and ask God for the strength to obey and to forgive.

Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt . . . if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done." (Matthew 21:21)

God promised to give us the strength to move mountains. This may be your Mount Everest!

Whenever I see myself before God and realize something of what my blessed Lord has done for me at Calvary, I am ready to forgive anybody anything, I cannot withhold it. I do not even want to withhold it. —Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

We know it is God's will that we forgive others. Be confident that when you ask for this strength, it will be granted.

Second, communicate your forgiveness to the person or persons.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. (1 John 5:14)

Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. (Romans 14:19)

Desiring Reconciliation

In Matthew, the Lord Jesus was asked an important question. “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” (Matthew 22:36). His response revealed an essential truth: “Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37–40). Jesus Himself said our love for others is equally as important as our love for Him.

We want God to forgive us, and we ask for this regularly and depend on it. God shows His love to us, and we are to respond by first loving Him and then loving others. This verse is *not* encouraging a love that would put us in conflict with God’s desires or will for us, but it says that all love we show toward others should be within the scope of our obedience to Him. We must not put our own desires or the desire to satisfy others above our obedience to God.

But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, “Raca!” shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, “You fool!” shall be in danger of hell fire.
(Matthew 5:22)

Let’s bring some clarity to the words in this verse. To be “angry with his brother” means treating someone in thought, word, or deed in an unloving way. Even believers treat loved ones in an unloving way and excuse it rather than seek reconciliation.

The word *raca* means “to hold someone in contempt, judge, or believe them to be worthless or less than yourself in some way.” The word *fool* means “one who is morally worthless and undeserving of salvation.” These are serious charges that many believers are aiming at others for one reason or another. The Lord says, “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

We are to glorify or *reflect* Christ to all with no exception. Lingering thoughts or behaviors toward others that are unloving or not Christlike are inexcusable and require repentance both toward God and the person.

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.
(Matthew 5:23–24)

When do we go to the altar? This refers to our fellowship with Jesus, our time in prayer and thanksgiving and asking petitions of Him, our daily acts of devotion and desire to abide in Him.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

To abide means “to dwell with, to live in a constant awareness of being the temple of the Holy Spirit.” And it says that *if* we do it, we will bear much fruit; for without His grace we can do *nothing*. *Going to the altar* refers to our fellowship with Jesus and our ability to receive the grace necessary to bear fruit and obey His will.

Examining Ourselves

When we owe someone forgiveness, either by the asking or giving, God says we first must clear this up before we can expect His blessing and grace. What are the *gifts* to bring in Matthew 5:23? Bringing sacrifices to the temple was a common practice for the Jews as part of atoning for their sins. Our gifts today are praise, tithes, worship, obedience, and service to Him. Yet Jesus said He will not receive these gifts if you owe anyone reconciliation.

Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
As in obeying the voice of the Lord?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
And to heed than the fat of rams. (1 Samuel 15:22)

Service and work for God will not fix this problem. We are exhorted to examine ourselves before we take communion.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:26–32)

How often do Christians partake of communion without first examining their hearts to see if they are harboring bitterness or have sinned against someone and have not repented or do not plan to be reconciled?

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.
(Romans 13:8)

FACT FILE

Reconcile—To make things right; to change one’s feelings or perspective toward another; or to pay a debt owed.

A Debt Owed

As Christians we have a debt to pay that God Himself says we owe to others: to love them in thought, word, and deed. This also includes forgiving those who have hurt us. Many Christians are harboring bitterness, resentment, or unforgiveness toward someone and justifying these feelings because this person has not yet paid any consequence or taken responsibility for their behavior. But we *will* be hurt by others, even those who are supposed to love us, either ignorantly or deliberately.

The word *forgive* is a verb—an *action*. God is using His Word to speak to you right now, revealing truth that requires action. Forgiving is not easy. It can help to seek the support and accountability of a mature Christian to encourage you to follow through.

Write your commitment to forgive the person or persons or to ask for forgiveness for what God revealed to you. Give yourself a deadline to follow through.

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
(Matthew 6:14)

In some cases, due to logistics, cost of travel, safety to you, or the ability of the other person to be quiet long enough to let you say what you need to say, a letter, email, text, or phone call may be the best option.

Communication Reminders

Keep these points in mind when either speaking or communicating in writing.

1. You are doing this out of obedience to your heavenly Father, who loves and cares for you.
2. He wants you to be free from the bondage and oppression you have been experiencing as a result of unforgiveness.
3. You do not have to rehearse every detail of their offense against you.
4. Many times the other person may be unaware of what they have done to hurt you.
5. Do not compel others to admit their offenses.
6. God has called you to obey, not to be a prosecuting attorney, jury, judge, or to try and make them confess that what they did was wrong.
7. Keep it short.

8. In many cases, due to the high level of emotion, we can find ourselves saying things we didn't intend to say and undermine the purpose of the meeting, conversation, or letter.
9. Finally (if applicable), ask forgiveness for harboring bitterness toward them.
10. Remember that what they may have done was wrong and offensive, but bitterness and unforgiveness are equally wrong.

God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.
(Romans 2:16)

Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. (Romans 2:1)

The degree to which I am able and willing to forgive others is a clear indication of the extent to which I have personally experienced God my Father's forgiveness for me. —Phillip Keller

Maintaining Your Commitment to Forgive

You may encounter a battle between the Spirit and the flesh after you have asked for forgiveness or have forgiven another person.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:22–26)

The forgiveness experience will change you and your relationships over time. God has had a major victory in your life, bringing you to this place of surrender and obedience. But this is only the beginning. Now you must press in and work through the needed changes. This will require that you seek God daily for His strength to continue on your path of mercy and compassion.

For example, you might have forgiven a parent for being harsh and unloving and asked them to forgive you for harboring bitterness. Yet they may continue to be harsh and unloving. Your flesh may want to react the way you formerly reacted. God will be faithful to produce His fruit in your life as you surrender to Him moment by moment.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

You must keep in mind that your obedience in forgiving was not so the other person or persons would change. If they surrender their will to the Lord, they will experience God's grace, healing, and the ability to change. Only God can change our hearts and renew our minds, but it will only happen as we surrender to Him.

We are involved in a spiritual battle every day. The Enemy, Satan, does not want you to obey God or have victory over sin and hurts. He will attack your mind with memories, evil thoughts, lies, temptations, and condemnation. You must exercise mental self-control and remember what and whom you are battling!

“Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. (Ephesians 4:26–27)

This is the reality in which we live. Satan hates to lose ground in your life. He wants to rob you of God’s peace and joy.

Satan’s Destruction

Stop giving the devil opportunities to work his destruction in your life. Test each thought that enters your mind by God’s Word to see if it is from Him, from your flesh, or from the Enemy.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3–6)

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

Pray in every temptation, asking for God’s power to do His will.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

Resist and rebuke the devil in the name of Jesus. *Fight!*

Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil . . . dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” (Jude 9)

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God . . . casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. . . . Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith. (1 Peter 5:6–9)

I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices. (2 Corinthians 2:10–11)

God wants you to be victorious. Be aware of the devil's devices. Unforgiveness is one of his most powerful tactics to keep us in bondage. Jesus showed the importance of using Scripture to combat Satan's deceptions (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).

Develop an action plan by using any of the verses above, or the many verses in this study, to combat unbiblical thoughts and to set your mind on God's perspective. Write a verse on an index card and memorize it by carrying the card with you and reviewing it in the morning and night. Continue to add to your victory kit by memorizing verses. As you pray over and memorize Scripture, you are hiding God's Word in your heart (Psalm 119:11). This will be your victory.

Quote Scripture to replace evil thoughts, reinforce God's truth, and answer the Enemy as Jesus did. When Satan brought lies to Jesus, He said, "It is written" (Matthew 4:4, 7), and He quoted Scripture. We must do the same. Truth will *always* prevail.

Establishing Boundaries

You may need to establish boundaries. Asking for forgiveness or forgiving another does not give that person the right to treat you with disrespect or be harsh.

If your mother was harsh or manipulative toward you when you were growing up and she continued after you moved out, you need to set boundaries in your relationship (after forgiving her). Kindly explain that you want a relationship with her but need to establish boundaries to not be hurt by her. Perhaps you could add, "Mom, I need you to speak to me in a loving way, and I promise to do the same toward you. If either of us say something unkind, we need to express that the other person hurt us. Or if we wish to not talk about a certain subject, we need to honor that. If those boundaries are not respected, then I will end the discussion. Mom, the only way we can truly know if we desire to have a relationship is by the way we love and respect each other."

Unable to Reconcile

Sometimes it is not possible to reconcile. If the person you need to forgive is deceased or unwilling to reconcile, you can still forgive them.

Bitterness in the human heart lives on long after the object of that bitterness has died. It is important to view forgiveness as a powerful antidote to heal the human soul of unhealthy human conditions. If you choose to trust God and receive this "antidote," God will bring healing and even fill those voids in your soul. The death of the offender does not nullify God's Word.

True, biblical forgiveness requires us to take action. We must do more than agree in our minds or hearts that we should forgive. The Bible does not command us to merely *feel* forgiveness. We must exercise our will and follow through with our actions.

You must begin with confession to the Lord. It is helpful if you speak your confession out loud and verbalize your forgiveness of the deceased person in the presence of a trusted friend, spouse, pastor, or counselor.

FACT FILE

Confess—To acknowledge or disclose one's misdeed, fault, or sin.

Your Responsibility

You are only responsible for *your part* of reconciliation. Regardless of the position the other person takes, you must obey God by asking for forgiveness and giving forgiveness. If they refuse to grant you forgiveness, or they do not acknowledge their wrong toward you, God will still bless you for your obedience and pour out His peace, grace, and mercy upon your life. You will still experience His freedom from bondage.

You cannot place any expectations or requirements on the other person. Surrender all to the Lord and trust Him to work in your circumstances. We must not lean on our own understanding but obey and surrender to God and His will. He has given us spiritual laws to govern, protect, and set us free. His Word gives us understanding and instruction about how to follow these laws. Our flesh, pride, and fear may keep us from trusting and obeying God in these situations, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can overcome.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5–6)

Use the following prayer to guide you:

Lord Jesus, I pray for the strength to trust You in these circumstances. Help me to remember that I am doing this for You. I know You alone can heal me and others for the wrongs we have done. I pray for reconciliation with this person, but I know that I can only do my part. I pray for this person to surrender to You that You might be glorified. I trust You entirely with the results. In Jesus's name I pray. Amen.

Conclusion

It can be extremely difficult to forgive, but life is harder when we do not forgive because we are harboring sin and missing out on what Jesus did for us on the cross. Our experience of God's forgiveness is directly related to our ability to forgive others. A readiness to forgive others is one indication that you have truly repented of your own sin, surrendered your life, and received God's forgiveness. A surrendered heart toward God cannot be a hard heart toward others.

Pride and fear keep us from forgiveness and reconciliation. Refusing to give in or be broken, insisting on your rights, and defending yourself are all indications that selfish pride is ruling your life, rather than the Lord. When fear of *what if* is consuming and controlling you, pray for the faith to trust and obey God. Enemies are very expensive to keep. The parable in Matthew 18:21–35 warns that an unforgiving spirit will put you in an emotional prison.

The first and often the only person to be healed by forgiveness is the person who does the forgiving. . . . When we genuinely forgive, we set a prisoner free and then discover that the prisoner we set free was us. —Lewis Smedes

Appendix F

Effective Listening Self-Evaluation

Complete this self-evaluation to help you become more aware of your listening habits. Answer each question thoughtfully and honestly.

Communication Habits Revealed

#	Do You Do the Following?	Most of the Time	Frequently	Occasionally	Almost Never
1	Tune out your child when you don't agree with them or don't want to listen?				
2	Concentrate on what is being said even if you are not really interested?				
3	Assume you know what your child is going to say and stop listening?				
4	Repeat in your own words what your child has just said?				
5	Listen to your child's viewpoint, even if it differs from yours?				
6	Remain open to learning something from them, even if it seems insignificant?				
7	Find out what words mean when they are used in ways not familiar to you?				
8	Form a rebuttal in your head while your child is still talking?				
9	Give the appearance of listening when you are not?				
10	Daydream while your child is talking?				
11	Listen for main ideas, not just facts?				
12	Recognize that words don't always mean the same thing to different people?				
13	Listen to only what you want to hear, blotting out your child's whole message?				

Communication Habits Revealed (continued)

#	Do You Do the Following?	Most of the Time	Frequently	Occasionally	Almost Never
14	Look at your child when they are speaking?				
15	Concentrate on your child's meaning rather than how he or she looks?				
16	Know which words and phrases you tend to respond to emotionally?				
17	Think about what you want to accomplish with your communication?				
18	Plan the best time to say what you want to say?				
19	Think about how the other person might react to what you say?				
20	Consider the best way to communicate (written, spoken, and/or the timing)?				
21	Always care about your child's emotional condition when speaking to them (if they are stressed, sad, worried, hostile, disinterested, rushed, angry, etc.)?				
22	Adjust your communication to each child's personality?				
23	Assume your child knows and understands what you are communicating and/or communicated to them?				
24	Allow your child to respectfully vent negative feelings toward you without becoming defensive?				
25	Regularly make efforts to increase your listening efficiency?				
26	Take notes when necessary to help you remember?				
27	Listen closely without being distracted by surroundings?				
28	Listen to your child without judging or criticizing?				

Communication Habits Revealed (continued)

#	Do You Do the Following?	Most of the Time	Frequently	Occasionally	Almost Never
29	Restate instructions and messages to be sure you understand correctly?				
30	Have concern about why your child feels the way they do?				

After answering the thirty questions, complete the scoring index on the next page.

Effective Listening Self-Evaluation Scoring Index

Circle or highlight the number that represents the category you checked on each item of the *Effective Listening Self-Evaluation*.

#	Most of the Time	Frequently	Occasionally	Almost Never
1	1	2	3	4
2	4	3	2	1
3	1	2	3	4
4	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1
6	4	3	2	1
7	4	3	2	1
8	1	2	3	4
9	1	2	3	4
10	1	2	3	4
11	4	3	2	1
12	4	3	2	1
13	1	2	3	4
14	4	3	2	1
15	4	3	2	1
16	4	3	2	1
17	4	3	2	1
18	4	3	2	1
19	4	3	2	1
20	4	3	2	1
21	4	3	2	1
22	4	3	2	1
23	1	2	3	4
24	4	3	2	1
25	4	3	2	1
26	4	3	2	1
27	4	3	2	1
28	4	3	2	1
29	4	3	2	1
30	4	3	2	1
Subtotal				

Calculate your subtotals at the bottom, and then add them together for your grand total. Determine your listening level on the next page.

GRAND TOTAL _____

Listening Level

Write your score on the appropriate line below to determine your listening level.

110-120: Excellent Listener _____

99-109: Above Average Listener _____

88-98: Average Listener _____

77-87: Fair Listener _____

<77: Poor to Very Poor Listener _____

After determining your listening level, you may need to identify areas to change. Complete the companion worksheet next in *Appendix G: Improving Your Loving Communication*, which should be used with this self-evaluation when you see unloving communication being exhibited.

Remember: A true disciple of Christ is not simply trying to acquire intellectual knowledge. A true disciple invests himself or herself to learn and to live according to the principles God teaches in His Word. Your investment to learning and living according to the principles God reveals to you through this material will transform your life as God desires.

Appendix G

Improving Your Loving Communication

Complete individually, then review and discuss as a couple if married.

After completing *Appendix F: Effective Listening Self-Evaluation* and totaling your score, list by priority the areas you need to change.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Review what love is in volume 2, lessons 4–10. List by priority any unbiblical communication habits you have been practicing in your home. Pray for God’s grace and strength to change these.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Reconciliation

If you believe you have not been demonstrating loving communication to your children (or another person), follow the steps below to reconciliation.

1. Confess this to the Lord and ask Him to forgive you for not communicating love to His child/children.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

2. Ask God to fill your heart with renewed love for your child/children.

Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:5)

3. Go to your child/children and make an age-appropriate confession.

For example, "I love you, but I know I have not been showing you that love with my words. I have been impatient (unkind, etc.), and I need to apologize. Please forgive me. I love you, and I am so glad to be your mom/dad."

4. Pray with your child.

Commitment

Write a prayer of commitment to seek the Lord for His power to change these areas and to become the parent God desires.

Appendix H

Showing Love to Your Child

We can show love to our children in many ways, but the best way is by spending quality time together. Here are some suggestions. Review and discuss as a couple if married.

1. Attend their sports events, music performance, school plays, etc.
2. Find opportunities to trust your child by granting them a new area of responsibility.
3. Have a family picnic on a Sunday afternoon.
4. Walk in the rain and jump puddles together.
5. Listen to your child with all your attention.
6. Sit together and watch your child's favorite television show.
7. Skip rocks together on a lake, pond, or river.
8. Say, "I'm proud of you."
9. After your teenager comes in from an outing, have popcorn together by the fireplace.
10. Tell your child about the things you appreciate most about your own parents.
11. Have a family water-balloon fight (without you as the prime target).
12. Take an evening walk together.
13. Let your child catch you bragging about them to a friend.
14. Hug your child just because.
15. Postpone an appointment, and instead do something your child enjoys doing.
16. Surprise your child by giving them a day off from school and spend the day together.
17. Tell your daughter she is beautiful.
18. Tell your son he is handsome.
19. Give your child grace when they make a mistake.
20. Pray with your child every day.
21. Seize appropriate opportunities to ask your child for their opinion.
22. Write a note expressing your love for them.
23. Bake or buy their favorite cookies.
24. Make popcorn and enjoy an old movie together.
25. Take them out to a restaurant for breakfast or dinner.
26. Take up a hobby that they particularly like to do.
27. Start a new hobby together.

Appendix T

Glossary

These definitions are taken from *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, G & C Merriam Company, and *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, Spiros Zodhiates, AMG Publishers.

abide: To stay, remain, to continue in a place, to endure without yielding.

accountability: Subject to giving an account, answerable, a statement explaining one's conduct.

admonition: *Nouthesia* (Greek). Warning, exhortation, any word of encouragement or reproof, which leads to correct behavior (Ephesians 6:4). It is the idea of having a corrective influence on someone by imparting understanding.

affectionately longing or fond affection: *Homeiromai* (Greek). To long for someone passionately and earnestly, and, being linked to a mother's love, is intended here to express an affection so deep and compelling as to be unsurpassed (1 Thessalonians 2:8). Ancient inscriptions on the tombs of dead babies sometimes contained this term when parents wanted to describe their sad longing for a too-soon-departed child.

approve: To continually put to the test, examine prior to the approval of your action.

arrogant or proud: To be conceited; feeling or showing self-importance, disregard for others. Proudful; giving oneself high rank, or an undue degree of significance.

attitude: A posture or position; a feeling, opinion or mood.

bears all things: *Bears, stego* (Greek). To hide, to conceal. Love hides the faults of others, covers them up. It keeps out resentment as the ship keeps out the water or the roof the rain.

behavior: The act or manner of behaving.

believing: *Pisteuo* (Greek). Having faith in, or to be firmly persuaded in something. It indicates an attitude of expectant hope.

blamelessly: Faultless, able to stand a critics' scrutiny. As you move along in obedience to God's will, you are transformed into the image of Christ, and your godly behavior becomes evident to others.

brag: To talk about oneself, or things pertaining to oneself, in a boastful manner; to boast.

bring them up: *Ektrepho* (Greek). To nourish, rear, feed (Ephesians 6:4). To nurture, rear, to bring up to maturity such as children, in the sense of to train or educate.

charged, implore, urging: *Martyromenoi* (Greek). Implies the “delivery of truth” and was likely meant to convey the more directive functions of a father. A good father encourages and provides guidance, which the mother does also.

chastening or discipline: *Paideia* (Greek). Correction or training. There is a consequence for every offense; some type of training/correction will follow. Used in Ephesians 6:4.

cheat: To plunder or rob as when plunder is taken in war. Translated as “take you captive” in Colossian 2:8 NASB. In this case it is to rob believers of the complete riches they have in Christ as revealed in the Word, plus His power and intervention.

cherish: To give heed to, to pay attention to, to minister, to soften by heat, to keep warm as of birds covering their young with feathers (Deuteronomy 22:6), to cherish with tender love, to foster with tender care. Translated as “tender care” in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 NASB.

communication: The act of communicating is the exchange of thought, message, or information.

confess: To agree with God that what you did ignorantly or deliberately was a sin.

consequences: That which follows from breaking a rule. When you have a rule, there must be a corrective consequence for breaking that rule.

controlling: To exercise power over, to dominate or rule, to restrain, a restraining force.

countenance: *Paniym* (Hebrew). Has the literal meaning of *face* (Genesis 43:31; 1 Kings 19:13) but also means the reflection of a person’s mood or attitude such as being defiant (Jeremiah 5:3), ruthless (Deuteronomy 28:50), joyful (Job 29:24), humiliated (2 Samuel 19:5), terrified (Isaiah 13:8). Scripture shows a bad countenance (Matthew 6:16) and a good one (Psalm 4:6).

defiance: When a child rebels against the authority and the discipline that follows their foolish act of immaturity.

defile: To pollute, render impure; or corrupt.

devoutly: Holy, pious, sacred, dedicated to God. This describes your abiding relationship with Christ. When you are devoted, or dedicated to God, that relationship is the source of a sacred life.

diligently: Perseveringly attentive; steady and earnest in application to a subject or pursuit; prosecuted with careful attention and effort; not careless or negligent.

disciple (verb): Instilling God’s Word into our children’s hearts through example and instruction, teaching them to pray and how to have a relationship with God (spiritual training of morals and values).

disciple (noun): *Mathetes* (Greek). A student, learner, or pupil. But it means much more in the New Testament. It is a follower who accepts the instruction given to him and makes it his rule of

conduct. In Classic Greek, “an apprentice,” one who not only learns facts from the teacher but other things such as attitudes and philosophies. The *mathetes* could be called a “student-companion,” one who doesn’t just sit in class listening to lectures but rather who follows the teacher to learn life as well as facts and progressively takes on the character of the teacher.

discipleship/discipling: An intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip, and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to teach others as well.

discipleship (direct): Instruction-discipleship is the time you set aside to have devotions (Bible study) with your children. It is a planned activity that involves the family.

discipleship (indirect): Instruction-discipleship occurs when God presents an opportunity for an informal or unplanned discussion of spiritual things. This means the parent is paying attention, seeing those opportunities.

discipline (of children): Instilling character traits of a mature adult (Ephesians 6:4), which are morals, values, personal responsibility, and self-control; training behavior.

discouraged: *Athumeo* (Greek). The root word is *thumos*, which means “violent motion or passion of mind, such as anger, wrath, or indignation.” Adding the *a* (alpha) before it makes it negative, meaning “without” passion; despondent, disturbed in mind, and indicates loss of courage (Colossians 3:21).

edification: *Oikodome* (Greek). To build up for the spiritual profit or advancement of someone else, used to indicate building up a house or structure.

encourage or comfort: To inspire, support; console in time of trouble or worry, soothing encouragement designed to cheer up and to inspire correct behavior.

endure all things: To endure, *hupomeno* (Greek), To abide under, to bear up under, suffer, as a load of miseries. Patient acquiescence, holding its ground when it can no longer believe nor hope.

envy: Discontent or uneasiness at the sight of another’s excellence or good fortune, accompanied with some degree of hatred and a desire to possess equal advantages; malicious grudging.

exhort: *Parakleo* (Greek). To call to one’s side, to aid; to encourage, admonish, or exhort someone to do something. We are to come alongside our children and help them grow in the things of the Lord.

faith: *Pisteuo* (Greek). To have faith in, trust; particularly to be firmly persuaded as to something. This is more than just giving a mental assent; it means to act on what is believed.

foolishness: Lack of character, deficient in understanding, unwise, brainless, irrational, ludicrous, a lack of judgment.

forsake: To deny. Daily align our priorities to God's Word, which places His will over ours.

gentle: Seemly, fitting; equitable, fair, moderate, forbearing, not insisting on the letter of the law. Expresses that considerateness that looks humanely and reasonably at the facts of a case.

genuineness: *Dokimion* (Greek). Something that has been tested and approved. Used of metals that had been through a purifying process to remove all impurities.

glorify: To reflect, to honor, praise; to give esteem or honor by putting him into an honorable position.

head: The chief or lead person to whom others are subordinate. Metaphorically of persons, e.g., the husband in relation to his wife (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:23) insofar as they are one body (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:8), and one body can have only one head to direct it; of Christ in relation to His Church, which is His body, and its members are His members (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Colossians 1:18; 2:10, 19); of God in relation to Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3). God the Father is designated as the head of Christ (Colossians 2:10; Ephesians 1:22).

heart: *Kardia* (Greek). The seat of desires, feelings, affections, passions, impulses; the mind.

heart: *Lebab* (Hebrew). Mind, inner person (will, emotions). The word primarily describes the entire disposition of the inner person.

hurts: Can cause a person to harbor bitterness toward others. Can also affect our relationship with God and His sanctification process in our lives. If we allow a hurt to turn into bitterness, this will affect the grace of God needed to walk and grow spiritually, and it can negatively affect those around us. Hebrews 12:15 says, "Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled."

hypocrite: Someone who acts phony, or is a counterfeit; a man who assumes and speaks, or acts, under a pretend character.

impart: This verb has the idea of sharing something, which one already retains in part.

integrity: Indicates singleness of heart, not double-minded; one who walks according to God's will and exemplifies His righteousness.

justly: With integrity and honesty, just, uprightness of character and behavior, daily desiring to live life according to what pleases God. When you know the Word of God, you can judge what is right and wrong.

kind: *Chrestos* (Greek). To do good; denotes being gentle, merciful, sympathetic, gracious, and good natured in contrast to harsh, hard, sharp, bitter, or cruel. The idea of moral excellence.

knowledge: *Epignosis* (Greek). Thorough participation in acquiring knowledge, and applying it.

longsuffering or patience: To be long-tempered, the opposite of hasty anger; involves exercising understanding and patience toward people. Requires that we endure circumstances, not losing faith or giving up.

love: *Agape* (Greek). The response of God's heart toward unworthy sinners. God's love demonstrated in self-sacrifice for the benefit of the objects of His love, His Son bringing forgiveness to man. God's essential quality seeks the best interests of others regardless of the others' actions; it involves God doing what He knows is best for man and not necessarily what man desires. *Agape* is choosing to love unconditionally.

love: *Phileo* (Greek). The response of the human spirit to what appeals to it as pleasurable. Distinct from *agape* and speaks of esteem, high regard, and tender affection and is more emotional. Friendship love; determined by the pleasure that one receives from the object of that love. *Phileo* is conditional love.

make disciples (verb): *Matheteuo* (Greek). To make a disciple (Matthew 28:19; Acts 14:21); to instruct (Matthew 13:52) with the purpose of making a disciple. It is not exactly the same as "make converts," though it is surely implied. The term *make disciples* places somewhat more stress on the fact that the mind, as well as the heart and the will, must be won for God by instructing new believers on how to follow Jesus, to submit to Jesus's lordship, and to take up His mission of compassionate service. It also involves bringing people into relationship with Jesus as pupils to teacher and getting them to take His yoke of instruction upon themselves as authoritative (Matthew 11:29), accepting His words as true, and submitting to His will as what is right.

manipulation: To control or play upon by artful, unfair, and insidious means, especially to one's own advantage.

meditate: To moan, utter, or growl muttering sounds, like reading half aloud or conversing with oneself, interacting with the text so it would soak into your mind. As a tea bag soaking in water permeates the liquid, so meditating on Scripture permeates our minds. In the biblical world, meditation was not a silent practice.

minister (noun): A servant or waiter, one who oversees, governs, and fulfills.

minister (verb): To adjust, regulate, and set in order; to serve, render service to another; to labor for the Lord as a servant.

morals: Defined by what is right and wrong from God's perspective.

not rejoicing in iniquity: When you see someone fall into sin or make a mistake, you are not happy or vindictive toward them.

nurse: The act of nursing, suckle, nourish, train; something that nourishes, to supply with nourishment; to educate or foster, to further the development of someone or something (1 Thessalonians 2:7).

perfect or mature: *Teleios* (Greek). Goal or purpose; finished, that which has reached its end, term, limit; hence, complete, full, wanting in nothing (Ephesians 4:13).

perfectly trained: *Katartizo* (Greek). To put a thing in its appropriate condition, to establish, equip so it is deficient in no part.

persecute: To pursue in a manner to injure, grieve, or afflict; to oppress; to set upon with cruelty; to cause to suffer.

personal responsibility: The ability to take care of oneself; to follow through on things you have committed to do, or the things required, without anyone else having to prompt you; taking ownership, being accountable and accepting responsibility for your actions.

power: *Dunamis* (Greek). Dynamic strength or ability to do what only God can do.

punishment: A measured amount of pain to motivate, or the infliction of a penalty. Punishment is part of the overall discipline plan, but it is different from a corrective consequence. Punishment motivates a child to yield to parental authority and accept the corrective consequence.

purpose: An intended or desired result or goal.

react: To act in response to a stimulant or to stimulus, to act in opposition.

reacting in the flesh: A Christian reacting to a situation in a sinful manner, in the habit of their old fallen nature, or reacting in their strength and understanding rather than the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

rebuke: To convict, to prove one in the wrong.

rejoicing in the truth: Having great joy; rejoicing at what is true based on God's promises.

repent: To resolve; to amend one's life as a result of contrition for one's sins; to feel regret for what one has done or omitted to do before God. To turn around and go another direction; to change one's mind, will, and life resulting in a change of behavior; to do things another way.

respond: React positively or favorably.

responding in love: Responding with the inward guidance, love, wisdom, and power of the Holy Spirit.

revenge: To inflict injury in return for an insult.

reward: A great precious value.

rightly dividing: Cutting something straight as you would in carpentry, masonry, or with cutting a piece of cloth to be sewn together.

- rude:** Characterized by roughness; harsh, severe, ugly, indecent, or offensive in manner or action.
- rule:** To rule, manage, lead, shepherd, and guide. By implication this means to take care of something, to be diligent, to practice.
- scourges:** Entails all suffering God ordains for His children, which is always designed for their good. It includes the entire range of trials and tribulations, which He providentially ordains and which work to mortify sin and nurture faith.
- seek and set your mind:** Imperative verbs, indicating the action is a continual process. *Seek* means “to look for and strive to find.” *Set your mind* refers to the will, affections, and conscience (Colossians 3:1–2).
- seek first:** A command to do and never stop (Matthew 6:33).
- seek your own way:** Pursuing what best fits your own interests without any concern of how your actions or ways affect others. Unwilling to receive input, which includes instruction from God’s perspective.
- self-control:** The ability to govern oneself emotionally, physically, and spiritually; the ability to not always yield to the path of least resistance.
- self-seeking:** Doing things in our own way, using ours or this world’s wisdom in making choices.
- shutdown:** Room restriction with no friends, phone, radio, computer, games, or iPods.
- sin of commission:** We sin acting out of our own authority. God says do not do that, and we do it anyway. For example, God says don’t steal (Ephesians 4:28), but we steal.
- sin of omission:** We sin by not doing what is right by God. He commands us to do something, and we decide not to do it or, out of ignorance, we treat our children according to what we feel is best, *not* doing God’s will. For example, God says to forgive, but we refuse to.
- steward:** Overseer; manager; one who acts as a custodian, administrator, or supervisor.
- study:** Imperative verb; a command to do and to continue to do. Denotes a zealous persistence, to be diligent, to make every effort to do one’s best, to be eager and earnest in accomplishing a goal.
- submissive:** *Hopotasso* (Greek). A voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.
- thinks no evil:** *Logizomai* (Greek). Used as an accounting term, meaning to put things together in one’s mind, to count or add up, to occupy oneself with calculations.
- thoroughly equipped for every good work:** God intends for us to understand His will and be empowered to follow through in obedience.

train up: *Chanak* (Hebrew). To dedicate or set aside for divine service (Proverbs 22:6).

training: *Paideia* (Greek). Chastening, because all effectual instruction for the sinful children of men includes and implies discipline, correction, as the Lord approves (Ephesians 6:4). Discipline that regulates character. Also to cause to grow as desired; to make or become prepared or skilled.

transformed: *Metamorphoó* (Greek). From which we derive the word *metamorphosis*. To change into something entirely different, as a caterpillar to a butterfly.

values: Principles or actions you live by. Your behavior shows what you value most.

voids: Something that has been left out. God has placed within us emotional needs that are as important as our physical ones. If we do not have air to breathe, water to drink, and food to nourish our bodies, we will eventually die. God has placed emotional development needs within every child. If not met, they can cause serious emotional and psychological problems as an adult.

For example, a child has certain developmental emotional needs that must be nurtured through loving authority, with consistent proper discipline. If these needs are compromised or not provided, a void is created within the child. This often occurs because parents do not understand their God-given responsibilities or the extent of their influence for good or bad. Most children cannot identify what is missing—what the void is—but they will instinctively try to fill it with something. A lack of real love and proper discipline can make a child vulnerable to addictions or emotional and psychological problems that lead to destructive behavior. When followed, biblical instruction can produce a healthy relationship with your child and an emotionally healthy person in your child.

wiles: *Methodia* (Greek). From which we derive the word *method*. Indicating craftiness, cunning, and deception. The term was often used of a wild animal that cunningly stalks and then unexpectedly pounces on its prey. Satan's evil schemes are built around stealth and deception.

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About the Author

A fool. A student with dyslexia. A high school graduate with a third-grade reading level. An ignorant husband and abusive father. All described Pastor Craig Caster at one time in his life, but God had a different plan for him. Despite Craig's fear of public speaking, God called him to full-time ministry in 1994. He stepped out in faith without formal education or a seminary degree. He was ordained in 1995 and has since written four books; disciplined many men; counseled hundreds; led countless to Christ; and taught thousands through marriage and parenting seminars, men's retreats, and pastors' conferences throughout the US and internationally. All by the grace and power of God.

Although Craig gave His life to Jesus in 1979, his transformation started when he began to abide in Jesus and His Word daily. He truly believes Jesus desires a close relationship with each one of us. His life is forever changed because he pursues this relationship and is completely dependent on Christ.

Be Encouraged

If you are struggling to trust that God can work in and through your life, be encouraged by Pastor Craig's story. Don't let your past sins, learning disabilities, fear of teaching or speaking, or lack of education stop you from being obedient to the call of God on your life. God desires to make you His disciple, and if you are married or have children, He wants to form you into a spouse and parent who honors Him. His grace is amazing and limitless. He loves you and desires to be glorified through you.

God's Promise to You

Thanks be to God for His abundant promises and provision. Meditate on His promises from the words of "Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ."

To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:1-8)

About Family Discipleship Ministries

Family Discipleship Ministries (FDM), a nonprofit ministry established in 1994 by founder and director Pastor Craig Caster, strives to support, educate, and train the body of Christ to minister to families. To accomplish this goal, FDM offers workbooks, supporting videos, and online materials for individual study, small groups, home-group study, and one-on-one discipleship. They conduct seminars on marriage, parenting, understanding teens, and church discipleship planning.

FDM's ministry goal is to exhort, train, and equip leaders of Christian churches to develop a vision for discipleship and provide biblically solid workbooks to help them minister to their church families. Since 1995, thousands of people have completed the marriage and parenting classes, and hundreds of churches within the US and abroad have ministered to their congregations using FDM materials. Their ministry also helps many families through free online resources found at FDM.world.

FDM actively ministers internationally in countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Cuba, Mexico, Africa, Singapore, Japan, and China. Find out more at FDM.world.