

## Real Love: Parents, love your children

Message for Sunday, June 10, 2018  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Psalm 139:13-14, Romans 5:8, 1 Corinthians 13:7, Proverbs 13:24

### Children's Message:

**Proverbs 28:13, New Living Translation:**  
People who cover over their sins will not prosper. But if they confess and forsake them, they will receive mercy.

When I was ten years old, I did a very bad thing. I was with Steve and Greg, two brothers who lived across the street from me. We thought we'd have some fun playing with fire.

We had some matches, and took a pail from our garage. We lived on the edge of town, and beyond that was the prairie (we lived in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan). We walked out beyond the houses, out far enough where no one could see us (so we thought).

We set the pail upside down over the dry grass. One of us lit a match, and threw it under the pail. Our plan was to wait until the flames had burned all the grass under the pail, and then died. So when we lifted the pail, we would have a nice round circle of burnt grass.

The problem was, we didn't wait long enough. When we lifted the pail, a roaring blaze sprang up at us. We tried stomping out the flames, but there were already spreading to the surrounding dry grass. Within seconds we had a prairie fire: a wall of flame pushed by the wind, burning everything in its way. We ran away, back to our homes, telling no one.

Thankfully the fire department was there within a few minutes, and had the fire put out before it got to farmers' fields.

The second problem is that someone *did* see us. Not well enough to identify us, but the word got around that "three boys started the fire."

That's the bad part. Now here's the sad part. My parents asked me if I knew anything about the fire. I was afraid, and I lied: "No, I don't know who did that." I didn't tell them the truth about that day until I was in my twenties. My parents all along were pretty sure it was me and Steve and Greg; they knew us well, but they didn't know for absolutely certain if it was us.

But here's the thing: if I had confessed and said, "Yes, that was me out there," they would have punished me, all right. But they would have also said, "We're very disappointed in you, and you will have to pay for what you did. But we want you to know that we still love you, and we're glad you're our son."

So instead of telling the truth and hearing them say that, instead I lived in fear for more than ten years: afraid that they'd find out.

We all do bad things. That's sad. But the *really* sad part is when we don't confess, and receive forgiveness and love.

**Message:** "Real Love: Parents, love your children"

Let's say you have a beautiful china plate you inherited from your grandmother. It's the only thing of hers you have, to remember her. It's precious to you. One day your young granddaughter is visiting, and acting pretty wild. You tell her to go outdoors and play, but as she does a cartwheel down the hall, she knocks the china plate off its hook, and it smashes to pieces on the floor. What do you do?

This message today is one in a series on Real Love. We know Jesus' command to love people, but what does that look like in specific situations—such as raising children? How do we love children so that they are the fully developed people God created them to be? Today we're going to look in the Bible to find some of the things that every child needs.

Anyone who spends time with children can use these principles: parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, teachers, Girl Guide leaders, etc.

### 1) A healthy self-image

**Psalm 139:13-14, New Century Version:**

You made my whole being; you formed me in my mother's body.

I praise you because you made me in an amazing and wonderful way.

What you have done is wonderful. I know this very well.

You—and every other person—are the handiwork of the Creator. You are special. Understanding that truth is a key to having a healthy self-image, and a healthy respect for all other people. Perhaps the

single most important job of bringing up children is to build their self-image.

Psychologist James Dobson put it this way:

**A child's self-esteem is extremely fragile, and you must do all you can to build it up. On the other hand, their will is virtually indestructible: you can mold it and shape through discipline. Indeed, you *must* mold their will, if they are to ever become mature. But treat their self-image with tender loving care.**<sup>1</sup>

Every child needs to know that they are special, that they are a wonderful creation, that they are loved.

How do you do that? You have to tell them, you have to show them.

- ) With words: talking, writing notes.
- ) What kind of words? Encouragement, kind words, appreciation, affirming. Say "Thank-you," even when it's household chores they're supposed to do. Tell them you thank God for them.
- ) Without words: hugging, kissing, holding.
- ) Spend time together. Just enjoy their company—with younger children, watch their faces, watch them crawl, read a book out loud. With older children, play games, go for walks together, work on a project together.

## 2) Unconditional love

Giving children love is included in the previous section on self-image. But there's more to it than just love: children need unconditional love.

Conditional love is when they are loved if they meet certain conditions. Example: "You put away your toys! Good girl! Oh, I love you."

One way to tell the difference: are you still able to say, "I love you" as you sweep up the pieces of that beloved china plate?

God shows us unconditional love.

**Romans 5:8, New International Version:**  
**God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

The reason why unconditional love is so important is security. Our salvation does not depend on us being perfect; Jesus is the key to our salvation. In the same way, children need to know that they will be loved even if they're not perfect. They need unconditional love.

How do you show unconditional love? Here are three ways.

### a) Forgiveness

Let's go back to that beloved china plate which once belonged to your grandmother. You warned your granddaughter to be careful. But she ignored you, and now that plate is in a hundred pieces. It is irreplaceable. What do you do?

Forgiveness doesn't say, "Oh don't worry. It's only bits of clay and paint." That would be lying. Forgiveness says, "You know how precious that plate was to me: it's all I have left from my grandmother. I'm very, *very* unhappy with you right now. There will be consequences for what you just did. But I want you to know that I forgive you and I still love you."

Those words are absolutely priceless in the ears of a child. For that matter, hearing those words is priceless no matter what your age is.

### b) Never give up

When you love someone, you never give up on them.

**1 Corinthians 13:7, New Revised Standard Version:**  
**Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**

Your child may rebel against everything you value and believe, may follow a lifestyle that you find repulsive. But you never give up praying for and hoping for your child. This leads into a similar item...

### c) Acceptance (but not necessarily approval)

What about the son or daughter who is going down the wrong path? How do you respond?

<sup>1</sup> I saw this on a video by James Dobson many years ago, and have never forgotten it. But I can't give the exact source.

With unconditional love. To be precise, you continue to accept that person as your beloved child.

A lot of people have trouble with this, because they think that accepting = approving. This is not correct.

### 3) Discipline

Disciplining children is not the opposite of loving them. It is *part* of loving them.

**Proverbs 13:24, New Living Translation:**

**If you refuse to discipline your children, it proves you don't love them; if you love your children, you will be prompt to discipline them.**

The purpose of parental discipline is to help children become mature. It *isn't* to show them who's boss, to go on a power trip.

A number of years ago the Minnesota Crime Commission released a report in which they said,

**Every baby starts life as a little savage, completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it: his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toy, his uncle's watch. Deny these and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness that would be murderous were he not so helpless. This means that all children, not just certain children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centered world of infancy, given free reign to his impulsive actions, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer, a rapist.**

Disciplining children averts long-range disaster. Without correction, children grow up with no clear understanding of right and wrong, and with little direction to their lives.

But here's a warning: don't discipline when you're angry. Let's go back to grandmother's china plate. When your adrenaline is pumping, your cheeks are flaming red, your hair is standing on end—in other words, when you're really upset about something, then you're no longer thinking rationally. Your emotions are in control, and you're likely to do or say something you'll regret. Better to say, "Go to your room. We'll talk about this in 15 minutes." Then, when you've settled down, you can calmly talk about behaviour and consequences.

Remember: discipline is part of loving children. It helps them know right from wrong, and is a lesson they will use for the rest of their lives.

That's a picture of what love looks like with children. Children are a gift from God, and we honour God as we cherish these precious gifts.