

Love and Authenticity in the Family

By Eddie Spencer

“We loved you so much we not only shared the gospel with you but ourselves as well, because you had become so dear to us.” (1 Thessalonians 2:8)

In the book of 1Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul is encouraging new converts who are suffering trials, giving instruction for godly living, urging Christians to hard work, and giving assurance of Christ’s glorious return, as well as other matters. In the above verse, Paul expresses his fond affection for these Thessalonian believers. He also provides us truths applicable to our family life.

First, love expresses itself in sharing the gospel of God’s love. *“We loved you so much that we were delighted to share the gospel of God with you...”* God’s Word invites us to share the gospel in our family. It is spiritually tragic when parents give their children every opportunity to excel and succeed, yet neglects the life of their child’s soul. There is no more important work than to train our children in the faith. The spiritual training of a child has to be nurtured, watered, and slowly grown. It does not always involve fun and momentary, existential pleasure or instantaneous results.

Share the gospel of Christ in the family. Do not cram it down the throats of your children or other family members. Love and live the gospel. Give your children opportunities for Christian community and growth. Let your children see you growing in your relationship with God. Sunday worship and spiritual training are not just another activity on our list of activities. It is about imparting a spiritual legacy to our children.

Secondly, love one another enough to live authentically. *“We love you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well...”* We love one another by living authentically. Authenticity seeks to be intentional and committed in our communication.

There is something unhealthy in a marriage when a married man feels more freedom to talk honestly with a colleague than his wife. It is not healthy when other women become emotional surrogates for a wife because she feels her husband will not listen much less understand. Why do our children open up with teachers or coaches, but put up walls with us?

One reason is unrealistic expectations in our families. It makes it harder to be real and honest. It is easier to put on a false façade or just shut down. Learning to live honestly and authentically not only tears down the walls of denial, pretense, and avoidance, but it also creates a sense of the family as a refuge. Authentic loving is loving the spouse and children we have, not the ones we think we should have.

Loving each other means learning to be flexible with one another. Every family has an emotional culture. In the stress of doing life, a culture of uptightness can seize the family. When dad is tense, mom feels worn out, and children are moody, feelings get internalized

and communication is replaced by sarcasm, while cooperation is replaced by selfishness. We need to lighten up.

The Psalmist says, "*Cease striving and know I am God*" (Ps. 46:10 NASB). Our pace of life is not only an enemy of our relationship with God, but with one another. We are striving so hard to accomplish things our culture deems significant that we forget what God deems eternal, the life of the soul and our relationships with one another.

I have learned that I can do a lot of things. I have also learned that many other people in my life can do many of the things that people want or need for me to do. But there is only one man in the whole world who is called to be my wife's husband and my children's father. That person is ME.

Your challenge is the same.

Great Peace in the Lord,
Eddie