

Raising Positive Children in a Negative World

By Eddie Spencer

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children, instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). As we bring our children up in the Lord, we are commissioned to teach them the Scriptures and model the truth of Christ. As a part of bringing our children up in the Lord, we are to raise them in a positive and healthy home. How can we raise positive children in a negative world?

First, to use a phrase by Chuck Swindoll, “we must flex those fun muscles in the family.” Laughter and fun cultivate the soil from which relationships grow. *“A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones”* (Prov. 17:22). Joy is not only good for the soul, but for relationships within the family. Fun times create memories which bond our families together. Laughter can lighten a discouraging circumstance. Joy is a remedy for defensiveness and exasperation in the family. The cliché is true, “The family that prays together stays together.” Equally true, the family that laughs together grows closer together.

Secondly, if we are going to raise positive children in a negative world, we must cultivate a positive perspective. If there are any people on the face of the earth who should be propagators of a positive attitude, it should be Christians. The Bible teaches us that God is sovereign and that we are His children. This means, *“...if God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”* (Rom. 8:31, 32, 28).

Not only does the Bible tell us that God is sovereign and that we are his children, but Christ the King dwells within those who have entrusted our lives to Him. *“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith”* (Eph. 3:16-17). The fruit of His presence in us is *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.* (Gal. 5:22-23).

God’s Word fashions our attitudes with the truth of His sovereign goodness, the reality of His life within us, and the promise that one day when Christ returns *“the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever”* (Rev. 11:15). *“...And since you are a son, God has made you also an heir”* (Gal. 4:7).

I am not advocating a happy, sappy, superficial Joel Osteen-like version of a positive attitude. Nor am I denying the difficulties of life, relationships, and the negative realities of this world. I am simply reminding us that Christian parents should be raising positive, hope-filled children because God is God and we belong to Him. His Son, our Savior, dwells within us and He is coming again to

rule and reign for eternity. As we learn to trust Him, it is impossible to be without hope.

Thirdly, if we are going to raise our children without exasperating them, we must commit ourselves to authenticity. The Message paraphrases the third Beatitude, *“You are blessed when you are content with just who you are, no more or no less, then you become proud owners of everything that cannot be bought.”* People who are comfortable and content with who they are, make others feel “at home.” Parents, we need to model authenticity with our children. For example, when we do not know what we are doing, we should acknowledge it. When we are afraid, we must admit it. Children need to know that parents can be afraid. As a result, when they become afraid, they will feel free to express their fear. When you are wrong, ask for their forgiveness. Be real; authenticity is honesty.

Fourthly, avoid moodiness in your family. Moodiness steals joy and kills communication. When dad is irritable, mom is overly intense, and the children become defensive, the message is clear — “Don’t mess with me.” In this environment, feelings get internalized, conflicts are swept under the carpet, and relationships begin to break down. Communication gets reduced to negative looks, frowns, shrugs, and sarcastic put-downs. Everyone becomes exasperated.

Lastly, practice the restoring power of a look, a word, and a touch. A look can kill and discourage. A look can affirm and restore. When my boys were young, I taught them how to wink. From time to time after an emotionally exhausting day when we would sit down to a meal together, Robert or Andrew would look over at me and wink. Immediately, my empty tank would begin to fill. Effective listening and communication begins with looking each other in the eyes.

Words are powerful. *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger”* (Prov. 15:1). *The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit”* (Prov. 18:21). Be careful what you say. Practice the power of kind, positive, and loving words.

Finally, practice the power of a touch. Jesus Himself demonstrated the power and love of God by a simple touch. He brought healing, but even more powerfully, He brought hope from His embrace. A hug, a kiss, and a gentle pat on the shoulder can emotionally refuel an empty tank.

Parents, do not exasperate your children. Instead, flex your fun muscles, cultivate a positive perspective, commit yourselves to authenticity, avoid moodiness, and practice the power of love—demonstrated by looks, words and touches. You can raise positive children in a negative world!

Great Peace in the Lord,
Eddie