



## ***How To Keep Loving Your Family***

***...Even When You Don't Understand Each Other.***

**Three biblical principles to apply when you feel like trading in your family.**

By Kurt von Schleicher

I was driving my pickup truck through the church parking lot this afternoon to do some more Tuesday-maintenance upon our campus here, when a mother and some soaking-wet students went to work on cleaning my vehicle (without being asked). Actually they did this for all the teachers today and I was so impressed with the thoughtfulness. I know how busy everyone has been, as we all have endeavored to finish the year strong in Christ. In a day when extra time is at a very high premium, this was very touching and impacting! I know for a fact that the children, the teachers and the parents of *Calvary Chapel Christian School* have worked very hard this year—all year. And some have even discussed with me the details of their own end-game challenges. I really feel for them and pray for them.

I've learned a lot of things since becoming a husband, a father of three active, adventurous boys and a principal [...never thought that last change would happen]. But of all the things I've learned, this one has helped me the most: **No matter how much you love your family, there are going to be stressful times when relationships are tested, but the most important thing is to keep Jesus first and seek Him diligently before the day's activities get rolling and literally swallow you up.**

But you might say, *"Keeping Jesus first! Man, that's easy for you to say. Kurt, you work at a church where God lives every day. I work in purgatory with angry, juicy sinners!"*

I hear you, but think for a moment about Mary in the gospels sitting at Jesus' feet. Her sis wanted her "serving the Lord more" and was all worked-up about it, yes, because Mary was taking time to be alone with Jesus ...when there was righteous stuff to do. Charles Wesley made this statement: *"Faithful to my Lord's commands, I still would choose the better part; serve with care-full Martha's hands—surely but first with loving Mary's heart."* There's always going to be time to do the righteous stuff and we're ready to do it if first we've prayed. Remember what Jesus said, ***"Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs, and he will give you all you need from day to***

*day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern. ‘So don’t worry about tomorrow’*” (Matt. 6:32b-34a NLT). That’s what she was doing, making God and His stuff her first concern and someone was ticked off about it. Let them be, if they must.

**If you’re too busy for Jesus, you’re too busy!** We’ve got to take time for our relationship with Him.

And as we conclude our normal school year, it’s so important for us all to do this. I want to challenge everyone involved with this Christian school to keep their priorities in the proper order: **God first, spouse second, children third, ministry and work fourth.** Man, I feel so sorry for people who can’t relate to the loving fatherhood of God in their lives because of some mean, corrupted example of a dad that raised them. Our warmhearted caring Papa, longs to extravagantly lavish upon us His loving kindness, goodness and mercy! If only we’d take the time to let Him.

Let’s all invest in our spiritual-walk and proceed in the Spirit no matter what others might say. Let’s remain committed to Christ and also lovingly defer at home, to keep our love for family members—intact.

## **1.) Choosing to Love Them**

You might be thinking, “How is it possible to love someone when you’re having a hard time feeling like you even like them? How do you demonstrate your love for all your children when you feel like setting them adrift on the next available iceberg?” Hey, at times they can feel like this about you too so be gentle. I have one son who recently ran away for two and a half weeks. He said he needed his freedom and didn’t want a curfew anymore. And how do you stay in love with your wife (or your husband) on those days when you can’t even seem to carry on a civil conversation?

Sometimes when things get tense, my wonderful wife Liney (who truly is a much better Christian than I), will stop and say to me pointblank: *Do you want to fight, or do you want to pray?* Man, I just love that, and after we sit down to pray together, it seems like the weirdness just evaporates and it’s impossible to fight. I guess the answer lies in a true understanding of what love is biblically. Today, while reading in Colossians three, I found a new perspective on what it means to love others.

***Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*** —Col. 3:12–14 [emphasis mine].

I’m struck as much by what Paul didn’t say as by what he did say. He didn’t say “fall in love” or “stay feeling in love” or even “try at least to like them.” He said to “put on love.” To “clothe yourselves [in love].” Like an old suit, we should “put on love”—drape it over our bodies and souls, letting it envelop us like a warm, woolen shawl. God is Love, so to me this verse means PUT ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST! LET HIM LOVE OTHERS THROUGH YOU.

That’s something I can do. I may not always be able to “feel” love or “be” in love, but I can certainly ***“put on love.”*** I can take all the characteristics of love that are found in first Corinthians thirteen (and other places) like: compassion, kindness, humility, self-

control, gentleness, and patience—and cloak them over my bad thoughts and poor non-pastoral-like-attitudes. I can choose to love, even when I don't feel like it.

## 2.) Bear with One Another

One overwhelming truth about love is that it is something we must work at every day. ***“Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”*** (Eph. 4:2–3).

Liney and I have our share of strong disagreements (she's a very strong-minded German girl), but we have also learned some valuable principles about patience and kindness that have greatly strengthened our family and marriage. We are far from perfect, have a lot to learn with not much reading time anymore, but the first principle is that we always work toward resolving conflicts.

Early in our marriage we noticed that many of our disagreements were reoccurring ones. Mostly, they revolved around two or three specific issues. In the throes of battle, it always seemed much easier to drop the issue altogether than try to find a workable solution. The trouble is, unresolved conflicts do not go away, and they just get shelved until the next confrontation.

As hard as it may seem at the time, conflict resolution is a crucial step to keeping love alive in a relationship. We need to be very honest with each other without wounding each other.

Pastor Bill and Lynne Hybels (who I don't always agree with on some local church subjects), in their book *Fit to Be Tied*, encourage couples to schedule a “formal peace conference” in a quiet setting to discuss unresolved conflicts. They also lay out some specific rules for the dialogue. Although these principles are aimed at couples, they can be applied to friction between other family members or school relationships as well.

First, **begin with affirmation**. Before jumping into the problem, reaffirm your love for each other. *“You know I love you so much, and I would never do anything to damage our relationship, but I think we need to get real about something important...”*

Second, **be willing to take blame**. An open heart and mind are crucial to the success of your peace talks. Unless both parties come to the table with a spirit of reconciliation—each willing to accept his or her share of the blame—much of the conflict will remain unresolved. We all have blind spots, and we need to realize that others can see things we can't even see in ourselves.

Third, **express hurt instead of hostility**. In the Hybels's words, *“Hurt is a legitimate response to disappointment and offense, and it should never be denied or kept hidden inside. But hurt becomes a problem when people let it build up inside and turn into anger.”*

Forth and finally, **make your statements clear**. Don't be afraid to own your feelings; let the other person know specifically what happened when you got hurt. Avoid finger-pointing and making grand accusations like, *“You never...”* or *“You're always so insensitive to my needs.”*

Instead hold the conversation to the actual behavior and facts like saying, ***“I felt hurt when there was no call home about you running late.”*** I hate to admit that I’ve blown it in this area more than once too. In the “Name of Jesus” I’ve been out helping others and too clueless to call my wife at home. But, it’s much easier to deal with honest and concrete disappointments than vague generalities, so own it and make it plain.

Not all conflicts can be resolved through planned, time-alone-discussions. There are times when a family may need the help of trained, Christian marriage or family counselors. Some hurts run much too deeply to treat on our own. The Lord will lead you.

### **3.) Forgive One Another**

Whether the transgression centers on a simple, thoughtless word spoken in haste, or a full Wednesday-night-on-the-way-to-church-blow-out that puts Mt. Saint Helens to shame, Liney and I like to forgive and forget when it’s all over. We apologize for what we’ve said or done. And we don’t let the matter drop until we’re sure that both of us have truly forgiven each other.

Pride so often convinces us that apologizing is a sign of weakness, when it is actually a sign of great strength. The person who can ask for forgiveness, even while feeling certain the other person is in the wrong, is one who truly commands our respect. Our relationships should always take precedence over who is right or wrong.

When I’m having trouble forgiving others, it helps to remind myself how much I have been forgiven. God says, ***“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more”*** (Heb. 8:12). He also stipulates, ***“But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins”*** (Matt. 6:15). The great God who forgave me, can give me enough grace to do this for others ...if I will only take hold of it.

### **4.) Pray Together even if you Don’t Feel Like It**

Matthew 18:20 says, ***“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”*** Nothing will bring a family closer together during times of conflict than to pray in faith together.

While reading the Bible I noticed an interesting aspect of a familiar story. In Mark 9, Jesus found His disciples arguing with the teachers of the law after they had unsuccessfully tried to drive out an evil spirit. ***“What are you arguing with them about?”*** Jesus asked. ***“I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not,”*** a man answered.

Jesus then cast the evil spirit from the boy, and afterward was asked by His disciples why they had failed. ***“This kind can come out only by prayer”*** (some manuscripts add ***“and fasting”***), He responded (Mark 9:14–29).

How many times, I wonder, does Jesus find us arguing, fighting and name calling when we should be praying or fasting instead?

When Liney and I would find ourselves at odds—with each other and with our kids we gather into a circle and pray. Praying together as a family with great candor has really taught our kids the lesson that there is never a time to hide anything from the Lord and that He is the Solution no matter the problem. Some of our unbelieving relatives who visit have tried to find friction in our home through inquiry and to this day

it really bugs some of them to discover that our home-life has been and is pretty peaceable.

*“Even though your kids will consistently do the exact opposite of what you're telling them to do, you have to keep loving them just as much.”* —Bill Cosby

*“Children are not casual guests in our home. They have been loaned to us temporarily for the purpose of loving them and instilling a foundation of values on which their future lives will be built.”* —Dr. James C. Dobson

*“A loving heart is the truest wisdom.”* —Charles Dickens

*“Loving people live in a loving world. Hostile people live in a hostile world. Same world.”* —Wayne Dyer

Liney and I pray together that the Lord will guide us toward a more loving and understanding relationship. We pray that He will be with us in our marriage and our work-a-day-world, helping us to remain focused on His will and direction. And we pray that He will fill us with his agape love, patience, and kindness. It is nearly impossible to come away from a time of deep, meaningful prayer with a feeling of anger or resentment.

## **5.) Recognize the Enemy**

On days when I'm tempted to hand my family over to the highest bidder, I stop and remind myself who the real enemy is. Whatever the grievance, whatever words of anger and resentment, you can bet that Satan is at the helm. He is the one to blame. My quarrel is with him and his pesky little imps, not my family.

But I can refuse to be manipulated—refuse to let him take control of my heart, mind and tongue—even on the way to church. And I can instead let the Spirit of God control how I act and react toward those I love most.

***“A part of kindness consists in loving people more than they deserve.”***

***--Joseph Joubert***

***“God's chief emotional attribute is L-O-V-E. God is love and He gives us the ability to love each other. He ultimately hopes we'll come to love His Son. Yes, He created us with the ability to have meaningful and loving relationship with Him and those in His eternal family.”*** --Chuck Smith, Sr.

***“We don't need to love ourselves as a precursor to loving God or those in our family—we already do love ourselves.”*** --Greg Laurie

A Behavioral Psychologist once told me that (and I can't stand typical psychobabble because much of it is unbiblical) *“The emotions of a person will eventually follow the motion. If you choose to act out anger, you will soon feel angry. If you choose to give away love, you will soon feel loving. Love is a choice. It's easier to act your way into a feeling, than to feel your way into an action.”* How contrary to what most in the world would say as they tell us to vent the fury. Aggressively sowing to the Spirit helps! It helps so much to stay in the Word, to memorize the Scriptures and even pray the Scriptures God-ward according to our respective needs.

Listen, it is possible to truly love our wives and children on those days when we don't particularly feel like being around them. Even at the end of the school year! We can do it in Jesus! We can't do it on our own. We must draw upon God's power. Only if we are willing to learn patience, bear with one another, forgive one another, and clothe ourselves with compassion and kindness can we pull it off. Yes, as we let the Lord—not Mr. Lu Cifer—take control of our hearts, minds, tongues and attitudes—total control moment by moment. We can finish strong, in the One who is Strong.