

Family Connection



"Love GOD, your God, with your whole heart: love him with all that's in you, love him with all you've got! Write these commandments that I've given you today on your hearts. Get them inside of you and then get them inside your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night. Tie them on your hands and foreheads as a reminder; inscribe them on the doorposts of your homes and on your city gates." Deut. 6:5-9—The Message Version

There are certain events that remind us of the limited time we have to say what we need to say to those we love. For instance, funerals often times prompt us to think of the many "if only I had said..." moments in our lives. The sadness of those moments is compounded when they involve a family member. Most parents figure out one way or another that their time with their children is limited. Reflecting on the past, "empty nesters" often give testimony that their children were born, grown, and gone in what seemed to be the blink of an eye.

The fact is none of us knows how many days the Lord has given us so we must not neglect any of the days we have. Parents, have you said to your children what you need them to know? Husbands and wives, have you said to your spouse the things they need to hear? We must be realistic. We cannot treat every conversation as if it were the last one we were having. If we did that we would drive our family crazy. However, the culture in our homes must be one where loving words of encouragement are regularly spoken.

Romans 12:9-10 says, "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor." We often think of these words as being fleshed out in the church which indeed they must. But we learn these habits most effectively at home. That little phrase, "Outdo one another in showing honor," is powerful. Few things call for a daily assault against self-centeredness more than the discipline of outdoing each other in showing honor. Can you imagine a family where there is a culture of showing honor? Where children gladly honor their parents? Where parents bless their children with affection and encouragement? This is the grace and mercy of the Lord Jesus made audible through the words we speak.

The following ideas will help you seize moments to affirm the members of your family:

1. Date Nights:



Schedule dates with each member of your family. Moms and dads need one-on-one time with each child. Husbands and wives certainly need to keep dating each other. When you take your child out be sure to focus on them. Don't smother them but try to talk about things that matter to them. Make lots of eye contact and tell them clearly things about them that you value and appreciate. Focus on character issues not just on the things they do well. I could say to one of my children, "I love the fact that you are so interested in spiritual matters. I can tell you love God. I love the fact that you are sensitive and kind. I can tell it really bothers you when someone is left out or is hurt. That tells me you really care about others." Our children share us with so many different commitments. One-on-one time is irreplaceable.

2. Encouragement Notes:

Keep blank notes on hand. Write a love note to your

spouse and leave it for them in a special place. Don't wait for an anniversary or birthday. If they worked especially hard one week or had a particularly tough day, pull out the notes! Another idea would be to have each member of your family write the other family members an encouraging note emphasizing the things they appreciate about them. Gather together at the dinner table or in the living room and read the notes to each other. That may be really odd at first especially if you don't have a habit of affirmation in your family but don't get discouraged. Stick with it. It will be well worth the effort.



3. Encouragement Seat:

Schedule a game night. As you sit around playing a board game stop the action at one point and instruct one of your family members to sit in a particular chair. At that point have the other family members tell the one seated in the chair those things they love about them. Continue this throughout the game. Stop every 10 or fifteen minutes to have someone else sit in the chair to be affirmed. Before long that chair will become known as the encouragement seat. Challenge the members of your family to outdo one another in showing honor.



Two principles to keep in mind as we seek to affirm and encourage those who are closest to us:

Look for "walk by the way" moments.

In Deuteronomy six the people of God are reminded of their great confession of faith, the Shema: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (vv. 4-5). God's people are then told to press these words upon the hearts of their children. "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (v. 7). I am challenged by the fact that we can diligently teach our children to love God in ordinary "walk by the way" moments. Think about how many of these informal moments we have with our kids. We drive them to soccer practice, pick them up from school, play catch, go shopping, and gather at the dinner table. May we seize those moments. May we look upon those times as precious and irreplaceable opportunities to teach our children diligently to love the Lord their God.

Leave no encouragement unspoken.

Often times we think of things we would like to say or certain virtues we know we need to affirm in our spouse or kids but then we fail to do it. During the day if something comes to mind that you truly are thankful for or appreciate in your loved ones write it down and tell them about it the next time you see them. Always assume that your children or spouse needs to hear something encouraging from you; because they do.