

Successful Parenting Today

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Note: When this Letter refers to children, it is referring to all minors, including teens.

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Dearest Family,

In this Letter I want to address a couple of **mindsets regarding our children and their upbringing**. We need to change these in order to be successful and up to date in our parenting, and to give our children the best upbringing we can.

2. I won't get into every aspect of parenting in this Letter. There are almost innumerable parenting lessons and concepts that are important, but in this Letter I'm only addressing a few issues that we have seen the need to change or clarify as part of the change program, and which tie in with other changes and so are necessary to address right away. This Letter isn't the all in all on parenting, and Lord willing, in the future there will likely be more counsel and changes that touch on parenting and our children.

3. This Letter also won't include all the practical tips and instruction that could accompany these topics. It is in your court to pray about this counsel and apply it as the Lord leads you. There are tremendous resources

available—both Family produced, as well as non-Family produced—that you will probably find applicable in this new context.

4. A resource at your fingertips that is full of excellent counsel on raising children, developing character, setting boundaries, communicating about tough issues, and more, is *Raise 'em Right*. You might consider it dated since it was printed so many years ago and in a different era of Family history, but I think you'd be surprised at how appropriate much of the counsel is for today and the needs you're facing with your children. I encourage you to check it out and study the book summaries that are applicable to your needs. It could be a very helpful tool as you think and pray about the principles of how to best prepare your children for life and keep them strong.

5. As a last introductory point, when we address the Family through GNs and Family-wide counsel, we are addressing a wide audience. Within the Family we have a huge range of backgrounds, perceptions, and experiences.

On the topic of parenting, for example, we have among our FGAs those who have not only raised families, but who are experienced grandparents, shepherds, and experts in the field of parenting. We also have second generation parents who have varying levels of experience, some of whom are also experienced parents and have a grasp on some of the nuances that are unique to raising children today. We have people who have recently joined the Family and have very different life experience. And we have third generation parents, who have grown up with completely different backgrounds and experiences, and thus have different needs.

6. What speaks to one person seems elementary to another. What seems too general and lacking in practical detail to one person makes perfect sense to another. What seems just barely touched on to one person seems overexplained to another. These things are unavoidable when addressing such wide and varied subjects as the GNs cover.

7. If something seems unclear, or if you feel the need for further counsel and direction on a particular topic, do further research on it, ask the Lord for His personalized counsel, and talk with others who are experienced and can give you additional help. If something seems overexplained or as if it's stating the obvious, please don't feel bad or like Peter and I are unaware of the wealth of experience you have and all that you could offer on the topic. Please understand that we're addressing a wide range of perspectives, so what is needed information and very helpful for one person might seem obvious to someone else.

One Wife and parental responsibility

8. One of the ways our Family culture has developed over the years is in the way we approach raising our children within a communal structure. Living communally has the potential to offer wonderful benefits for children. They are blessed with the opportunity to receive

a wide variety of input from other members of the Home; to benefit from the strengths and skills of others in the Home; to have more variety in their lives when it comes to those they live with and can do fun things with at home, to name just a few.

9. The Lord gave Dad the One Wife vision in 1972, and the concepts of impartiality, responsibility to the Lord and His work first, and the responsibility of caring for our Family children being shared between all capable members, have developed over the years. The essence of the One Wife vision is seeing ourselves as one family, God's family, and demonstrating that love in our care for each other. The One Wife model of sharing responsibility and having impartial love is certainly the ideal. The Lord has often told us that the powerful love that enables us to live communally, to care for each other's children, to bear each other's burdens, to love impartially, is an example of the culture of Heaven.

10. We see that impartial and unsurpassed personal love reflected in the Lord's words to us, His instructions to us, His actions toward us. His love for all mankind is great and unconditional and never-ending. He loves each of us just as much as He loves the next person, and yet He loves each of us as if there were only one of us. That's one of the wonders and mysteries of the heavenly culture and our Husband's beautiful love. That is the kind of love He has encouraged us to strive to emulate in our relations with one another.

11. When it comes to living that kind of love and shared responsibility, it is a high standard to reach, because as humans, we're naturally selfish, we give importance to the things that we feel ultimate responsibility for, and we have a hard time caring impartially. Yet, our efforts to live the One Wife vision in our Homes and in raising our children have brought some outstanding benefits—to the children, to the parents, and to the Family overall. We believe

in unselfish love, in helping each other bear responsibility, and we've made a lot of progress in practically applying those perfect concepts in an imperfect world.

12. At this point in the Family, as we are examining all areas of Family life and culture and determining what the Lord wants us to carry into the future and what we need to adjust, the Lord has shown us that we need to place more emphasis on parental accountability when it comes to raising our children. This doesn't mean that we are abandoning the One Wife model, but rather that we need to clarify and underscore the parental responsibility side. We need to correct any misconceptions we may have developed over the years, specifically that the One Wife model is expected to substitute for the responsibilities that parents carry. Along with the collective care and responsibility that all bear in the One Wife model, parental responsibility and care is extremely important to fully meeting our children's needs.

13. At this point we are not changing policy regarding Home accountability and how it relates to parental responsibility. We are simply explaining the need for parents to have more awareness of their responsibility in parenting; the need for parents to take on greater responsibility in their parenting in situations where they have not done so sufficiently; and to make it clear that Homes need to respect that and allow for it, because there are new factors entering our children's lives.

Setting your child's moral compass

14. As a parent, you are responsible to set your child's moral compass. To do that, you have to give thought and consideration to what qualities or values are important to you, and what you want to pass on to your children—for example, the qualities of being like Jesus that are outlined in the Bible and the Letters, or qualities that you have seen and admired in others.

15. Some parents haven't given this much thought personally, because many of our values

have been established in the Word and we can tend to take for granted that our children will pick them up eventually. There has also been a lot of emphasis in the Word on the One Wife vision, on all the children in the Home being "our" children and the entire Home contributing to their care, education and training. Some parents have perhaps assumed that their children would automatically learn all that they needed to learn, simply through their interactions with others, their education, living in a Family Home, and reading the Word that is published for their age.

16. Let's talk about that for a moment. It's true that "it takes a village to raise a child," as the saying goes. No parents, no matter how loving, diligent, talented, and attentive, are capable of imparting and teaching everything to their children. Within our Family fellowship and communal Homes, we have a collective wealth of knowledge, skills and experience that our children can benefit from. Each person who has the willingness and aptitude to contribute to the children's upbringing and pass on what they can to the children plays a valuable role in raising them. That hasn't changed.

17. However, this should not and does not minimize the importance of parents taking responsibility for their children. Of course, because there is shared responsibility, there has to be give and take on both sides. The parents shouldn't feel that the Home must accommodate their every wish concerning their children, and vice versa. There needs to be lots of humble, loving communication. I'll admit that's a tall order and not easy. But it's necessary if you want things to go well and for your children to gain maximum benefit from the situation.

18. When the Lord gives you children, He is giving them to you, the parents—to raise, to care for, to love, to nurture, to educate, to shape their character, to prepare them for life. Many other people can help in this monumental task, and some people will play vital, irreplaceable roles—such as dedicated teachers, people your children are close to and look up to, role models,

friends, grandparents or grandparent figures. But none of those important roles are meant to replace the role of devoted and focused parents.

19. As a parent, you are ultimately responsible for your children—for their education, for their training, for their well-being—and that responsibility is lifelong. This is a role that the Lord gave you when He gave you your children. In order to play this role well, you need a vision and a plan of what your priorities are for your children's care and training and education, and you need to take responsibility to see that they are receiving those fundamentals.

20. What are the things that you feel are most important for them to learn? What are the qualities that you feel are vital for them to develop? I'm not talking about skills or talents or vocations, although you might have some goals for helping them develop their interests along those lines as well. I'm talking about character development, setting their moral compass, and helping them to develop the fundamental characteristics that are necessary to lead a happy and successful life, regardless of what path they choose when they grow up.

21. Once you have a vision for what values your children need to learn, you need to regularly assess whether their needs are being met and whether you are making good progress toward reaching those goals. Are you spending enough quality time with them? Are the other people who they spend time with contributing to their development? Are they having experiences that will shape their perspectives in a godly way and that help them to understand the lessons they are being taught?

22. Your children won't learn the important values in life if they are not taught. They learn by watching, yes. They learn by your example—very much so. But they also need explanation. They need to be taught. They need healthy discussion and conversations that give them a foundation in what is right or wrong, and help them to understand the reasons why. They need clear boundaries that are upheld. They

need to be instructed in their work and habits and approach to life. They need to understand that there are consequences when they make the wrong choices.

23. Our One Wife approach to raising our children has, over time, in some ways or in some situations, eclipsed the responsibility that lies with parents to impart these core values and principles to their children. As I said above, the communal setting and our One Wife approach has tremendous advantages. We don't want to negate or lose those. But we need to clarify that Home responsibility for our children does not replace the need for parents to take responsibility for their children, to be aware of their needs, and to be committed to meeting their needs.

24. Parents don't have to be the primary caregivers for their children in order to be involved and aware. Thankfully we have a wonderful support system in the Family that is a blessing to children and parents alike. The love and unselfishness of those who aren't parents but who help to care for your children is an outstanding feature of the One Wife vision, and the giving of those selfless individuals contributes to your children's upbringing in invaluable ways. We have Family educators and caregivers who consider it their calling to help train our Family children. I absolutely cannot say enough about how valuable they are, how much they give, how grateful I am to them for the way they enhance our children's lives.

25. But regardless of how much others in your Home are involved in caring for your children, regardless of what your Home does or doesn't do, you, as parents, are responsible for your children and their care and upbringing. You are parents for life. You are responsible to chart a long-term course for raising your children, and you're responsible to see that they're getting what they need. When it comes to your children and their needs, the buck stops with you.

26. The same is true of the Word that is available for our children and young people,

and its role in providing moral and character training for them. The Word is tremendous, and the way Family publications are illustrated and prepared for the various age groups is wonderful, it's priceless. But no amount of written Word can replace the need for you to teach your children those principles, to talk about those principles with them, and then to be examples of applying the principles in the Word so that the children see that it's not just something written in a book, but it reflects your personal beliefs and convictions as well. Our Family publications don't replace the need for you to assess your children's needs and teach them the Word that meets their needs for that day, that week, that phase of their life. Family publications also don't replace the need for you to delve into the Bible and the basics of Christianity with your children and to teach them the fundamentals so that they have a strong, solid foundation.

27. Family publications are a tool, but they aren't the all-in-all teachers of faith, Christian life, and character building on their own. It's not until your child is much older, more experienced, and spiritually mature that they are able to read the Word and apply it on their own. It takes time to learn to understand and apply the Word, and again, those are skills that are patiently taught—primarily by you, dear parents, and also by other teachers, friends, grandparents, and those who have a positive influence on your child's life.

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it (Pro.22:6).

Don't let the past hinder you from giving your children the best today

28. Another mindset that is a hindrance to good parenting in the Family today is the fear of repeating mistakes that were made in the past. This is a common fear that influences all

parents, whether in the Family or not. Any caring parent has the tendency to focus on avoiding those elements of their upbringing that weren't ideal or negatively impacted them in some way; that's a natural and even God-given response, as you seek to raise your children in the best way possible.

29. But I believe that this deep concern, or fear, in some cases, hinders some of you from being the parents you want and need to be. You are concerned about not being too strict, so you don't give your children sufficient discipline. Or you want your children to have opportunities that you didn't have, so you allow them exposure to influences that don't wind up contributing positively to their character and development, or that are even inappropriate for their age.

30. For Family-raised parents, I think there is a very real danger in this mindset if it is too broad, or you don't clearly define what it is you're trying to avoid. If you have a general idea in the back of your mind that you're trying to avoid something that was out of balance in your upbringing, or that you want to do better in some areas, you need to take time to define exactly what those areas are, to ask the Lord about them and get His take on them, and assess whether it is indeed something that needs to be avoided for your children, or whether it's just something that you can do a little differently in order to get the results you're after.

31. For example, if you don't like to make definite rules or give clear guidance to your children, because there were times when you were a child that you felt too boxed in, you risk giving your children too little discipline and guidance, going too far to the extreme of leniency or delinquency, and depriving your children of extremely important aspects of their training.

32. In order to avoid this backlash, I suggest you parents take some time to work through any issues you have regarding your upbringing, clearly define what it is you want to avoid with your children, and figure out how to avoid the

specific matters you are concerned about, while still giving your children the well-rounded and godly foundation that they need and deserve. They need boundaries, they need clear moral guidance, they need shepherding. Even if it is given in different ways and via different methods, they still need it. Don't let the past hinder you from giving your children the best today.

Sheltering versus strengthening

33. Another issue that needs some adjustment is the way we approach keeping our children's faith strong. We talked briefly about this in "Education for Life." Until now, for the most part, our approach has been to try to protect our children from anything that we felt could hurt their faith or future discipleship, or that would encroach on or taint the positive, godly, faith-filled environment that we want them to experience within our Homes.

34. Protecting your children spiritually, physically and emotionally is certainly one of your parental duties. It's part of your God-given responsibility to nurture and raise your children, and especially when they are young, they do need sheltering from some things. You are meant to stand between them and danger. You are meant to protect and shield your children from the evils of the world. That's part of your job as a parent. Up to a certain point it's wise to try to provide a buffer from negative experiences.

35. But part of helping them to grow and mature is preparing them to stand on their own, teaching them how to make the right choices in a variety of situations, and allowing them to have the exposure or experiences that will bring their lessons to life. Since it's not realistic to entirely shelter your children, the sooner you can teach them how to be discerning and make the right decisions on their own, the safer they will be and the better prepared they will be for the decisions they alone can make.

36. A practical example of this is if you have a pool on your property. You need to build a fence around it to avoid accidents, but you'll

also want to teach your child to swim, and over time help him become a strong swimmer. The fence is protecting him initially, but you're also preparing him to handle water safely by teaching him to swim.

37. We need to take on a much more proactive stance in preparing our children to have strong faith. The world is changing and has changed. The Family is changing and has changed. Yesterday's approach won't work for today and tomorrow. Here are some of the reasons why.

1. The world has changed

38. While it might have been possible to shelter our children from many negative influences in the past, it's not realistic to think that we can protect them today from coming in contact with all of the influences we'd rather avoid. The Internet and the media in all its forms are pervasive, and the general culture of the world has changed, and the influences of the world—those that are good, or can be used for good, and those that are negative and evil and truly something to avoid—are everywhere. Children will be exposed to a range of influences in the course of growing up, and the wisest thing we can do is focus on preparing them to "choose the good and eschew the evil" (1Pet.3:11), demonstrate personal conviction, and have a clear sense of right and wrong.

2. Inclusive culture

39. The Lord wants us, as a Family, to become more inclusive and welcoming of those He is calling to serve Him in some way, and those He wants us to reach with His love. We're focusing on how to relate to those the Lord wants us to minister to, how to welcome them and work together with them in winning the world, even if they don't feel called to embrace all of our beliefs or drop out and serve the Lord full-time with us.

40. We're opening up our fellowship and lives to those the Lord is asking us to feed

spiritually, realizing that those who are called to serve the Lord full-time and embrace all of our beliefs may be few, but there are many who feel called to some measure of service or embrace some of our beliefs, and we need their help to get the job done.

41. We're changing some of our rules and culture in order to better meet today's needs, and part of that is making our Homes more open, more inclusive and welcoming of those the Lord wants to bring into our fellowship. That means that all of us—adults and children alike—will have more interaction and contact with those that the Lord is calling us to minister to. These people may not share all of your values, and their children probably won't be raised the same way yours are. You need to be prepared for that.

3. From inward focus to outward focus

42. The era of being internally focused and looking primarily at our internal needs is past; we are now focusing much more on the job that we are on Earth to accomplish. While we definitely want to keep our Homes and spiritual lives strong and healthy, we are now looking at how to do that while also accomplishing the mission.

43. We are no longer trying to pull the Family out of compromise, nor are we attempting to become ever more isolated from the world in order to be strengthened internally. Thus some of the Lord's counsel that was given in previous eras is no longer applicable to today's needs, and we must recognize that.

44. The Lord is giving new counsel that applies to this current era of the Family—an era of more openness, more focus on witnessing and ministering to the lost and spiritually searching, and more personal responsibility for our spiritual lives and relationship with Him.

4. Changes in education policy

45. If your children start going to classes or attending school outside the Home, that will also affect their needs. It will particularly change

what they will be exposed to and potentially influenced by when they're away from home, and therefore it will also change what they need from you during the time that they're at home with you.

Children are not born with knowledge of the virtues. They must learn what they are.

Attaining virtue is like so much else in life: It takes lots of practice. By putting virtues into action over and over again, we help them take root. Eventually they become second nature—they become part of one's character.

Your family is the first and most important school of morality. Home is where your child comes to know right and wrong through the nurturing and protective care of those who love him/her more than anyone else. Teachers should be allies in this endeavor, but they cannot be substitutes. Schools cannot replace parents in the crucial task of molding character in the young.

Teach your children to care deeply about the good.—William J. Bennett, *The Educated Child*

Raising well-rounded and prepared children

46. Among other things, we want to cultivate in our children an accepting, respectful, forgiving, understanding, loving, humble, and welcoming nature and character. We want to help them grow to be like Jesus, free of self-righteousness and condescending attitudes toward others. We want them to take on His unconditional love and faith for people, and His desire to help everyone to know Him personally.

47. Imparting these life lessons cannot happen solely in the classroom. It takes real world experience—meeting people, talking with them,

seeing their differences, learning to find common ground, adjusting the message and delivery of the Lord's love according to the need, communicating with your children about their interactions with others and being an example that you want them to follow—in order to learn these lessons of life. This will more naturally be a part of our children's lives as we open our Homes more, as we include others more in our lives and Homes, as we share our lives and Jesus' message of love with those the Lord brings across our path.

48. These “life lessons” are learned over time, and require lots of communication and discussion and experience in order for our children to understand and to grow in these areas. But these experiences and lessons will make them wiser, stronger, more well-rounded, more mature, more perceptive and understanding, and will help them to be much better equipped for life. Experience is good for our children and prepares them for life, if we help them to learn through it.

49. What does it mean to prepare children for life? It means giving thought to how to help your children progress through the natural stages of growth and development, being aware and abreast of what their peers are into or facing, and preparing your children for times when they may have to face similar things. It means teaching your children to have courage when they're faced with difficult situations, and how to approach new situations responsibly and with confidence. It means that rather than sheltering your children from the negative influences in the world today, you teach them how to judge what's right and wrong, and how to act with integrity, self-discipline, conviction, love, tolerance, and strength of character.

50. These are life lessons that you impart to your children not simply to protect them from the possible negative influences they may encounter during childhood (whether from attending school, from the media, or from peers and friends), but because they are components of good character that will help to set your child's moral compass for life. Those childhood character-building lessons will serve them well throughout life, and

you parents are key instructors in educating your children in this way, because through imparting your personal convictions and values, you are helping your children to find the right direction in their life. It's a weighty responsibility, but well worth the effort if your children are taught to make their way through the negative or questionable aspects of society, accurately judge right from wrong, and base their decisions and actions on godly ethics and perspective.

51. Teaching children moral values is a challenge that parents face the world over. Every concerned parent in society has to train their children to hold to their values and convictions and beliefs even when exposed to influences that would not be tolerated in their own home, but which are simply a part of life once children attend school, have friends from families that don't share a similar faith or moral code, etc. Preparing your children is essentially teaching them how to act and behave outside of the “safety” of their home or family structure, how to respond to circumstances with moral conviction, and how to cope when they're away from their parents, as they face the realities of the world.

Taking an aware and realistic approach

52. If you have an unrealistic perception of how much you need to shelter your children to prevent their being exposed to all or most of the negative things in the world, it will prevent you from honestly facing the questions and needs they already have and walking them through the issues.

53. Your children are probably already facing more negative influences than you realize. In fact, they may even be seeking out questionable or negative input—because they're curious, and because it's readily available through the Internet, media, news, or from peers and siblings, etc. You might not realize all that they're coming in contact with, especially if you feel that you're doing your best to shelter them. Thus they might not be getting the guidance from you that

would help them to put their experiences and negative input in perspective.

54. Whereas if you're focused on preparing them, you'll be more tuned in to the questions they might have. You'll be more prepared to give thoughtful and balanced answers. You'll be more realistic in acknowledging the variety of influences that your children are coming in contact with and the effect it is probably having on them, and thus you will be more in tune with what their needs might be, or more aware of the guidance and input they might need.

55. Our children already face many influences, and they will face more in the course of life. Some will be positive, some will be negative, and many will be somewhere in between. Taking on the mentality of preparing them for life will help you to accept that you're not able to protect them from ever coming in contact with the negative, but that you are able to guide them when they do come in contact with it.

56. You might want to discuss or brainstorm some of the new factors that might enter your children's lives as a result of having more contact with those you're ministering to, or from new education opportunities, and also due to the ongoing technological advances in the world, so that you can be thinking and praying about how to prepare them or guide them through these things as the need arises.

57. If you haven't been focused on this aspect of parenting, you might also want to spend some time discovering what your children are already facing that you might not have been aware of. You could talk to others that your children interact with and ask them for their opinion. Being prepared is far better than being surprised, and by giving time and thought and discussion to the possibilities, you can be better prepared for the various scenarios your children might face in the future, or that they are possibly already facing.

58. For example, your children will make new friends who don't have the same background and training that they do, or

who might not know the Lord at all, and thus your children will face a different kind of peer pressure. They might desire more or different material things, or compare with aspects of life outside the Family. They might question certain Family or Home rules and need a new understanding of why the rules are in place.

59. There are also definite negative influences that they will come in contact with or be exposed to that you will need to prepare them for and have good communication about, such as drugs, depression, eating disorders, negative or immature attitudes about sex, dark or rebellious attitudes, ungodly perspectives on life, etc. These are evils of the world or ungodly influences that your children will have to face at some time or another, so it's important that they are prepared. While it's very natural to be concerned about your children coming in contact with these types of negative influences, having an approach that is rooted in fear won't help you to be realistic in preparing your children. If your children are prepared, then coming in contact with or getting to know people who are involved with these things doesn't have to be a negative experience. It will be a learning experience, no doubt, but it doesn't have to weaken them or hurt their faith.

60. Thinking that you can keep your children from having to face the negative or difficult things in life is unrealistic and will not serve you or them well. It's far better and more realistic to prepare them to make good decisions, and to guide them through the influences they'll face. In so doing, you are essentially offering them better protection than would be possible to provide through sheltering them.

61. It's only natural that children will sometimes make poor or wrong decisions, because they're experimenting, and still learning to apply the training you've given them. That's why your active involvement in their lives as they encounter influences, fulfilling your responsibility to counsel them through the questions and help them determine how to make

good decisions, provides them with ongoing “preparation training.” It’s teaching them how to live the theory of their character education in their everyday lives.

Adjusting your parenting to meet your children’s needs today

62. Your Home’s witnessing and focus on the Offensive will continue to open new avenues for growth and interaction with others for your children. This will potentially be a very good and healthy change, but it’s a change that you need to recognize and adapt to. As a result, it’s likely that there will be things that you’ll want to do differently in your parenting.

63. Your children will need more open lines of communication with you. They will need guidance and input on issues that may not have come up previously. They will need Word time and spiritual feeding that’s targeted to their needs, including the new experiences they’ll be going through. They will have questions that they may not have had before.

64. Guiding and steering your children in this way is part of their training as witnesses, and it’s also part of giving them a good foundation in discerning right from wrong, teaching them what it means to be a true Christian, a person of character, and preparing them to make wise decisions throughout life.

65. We need to get used to the idea that our children will have increased contact with the world. You have to realize that this is par for the course as you go about accomplishing the mission, and that, as long as you adjust your parenting and perspective, it will help them to grow in new ways, develop their character and conviction and maturity, and give them new life experiences.

66. We have to face any fears we may have regarding our children having input from non-Family sources. Instead of trying to shelter them by shutting out or disallowing everything that we feel could taint or harm them spiritually, we need to realistically acknowledge what areas they will need help with, what new challenges it will

bring into their and our lives, and prepare them accordingly. We need to focus on helping them to develop personal conviction, teaching them how to make good decisions even when faced with peer pressure or other difficult situations, and building lines of open communication so that you will be able to shepherd them through the circumstances they will encounter.

All thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children (Isa.54:13).

Boundaries and rules are part of teaching your children to make the right choices

67. As you adjust your mindset on these issues, keep in mind that just because your children will have more contact with those in the world, and thus more input on issues from other perspectives, that doesn’t mean that you should stop trying to protect them from the negative influences that are avoidable. You shouldn’t do away with boundaries that are necessary to keep them safe. Every responsible parent sets boundaries for their children. (And in our communal Homes, there are some rules agreed upon by the Home, which everyone in that Home abides by for the sake of safety, unity, and harmonious living.)

68. Although you recognize and accept that you won’t be able to protect your children from everything, your duty as a parent includes setting rules and boundaries that help them to make the right choices. They will come in contact with things that you don’t agree with; that is something you have to accept and prepare for. But that doesn’t mean you have to relax your stance on what is or isn’t acceptable, or consider it inevitable that you’ll have to lower your standard on important issues. That isn’t the case.

69. While we need to be “in” the world in order to accomplish our mission, that doesn’t mean that we want to become more like the

world, or consider it inevitable that we will partake of its evils. Our children need to know how to relate to those in the world and how to be loving, tolerant and understanding of those who have different beliefs or standards. They need to learn how to benefit from the good and worthwhile things in the world, but they also need to learn to have conviction and a firm belief that just because someone else is doing something, that doesn't make it right or okay for them.

70. All good parents—Christian and non-Christian, Family and non-Family, nonreligious and people of faith—set boundaries and teach their children to abide by them. If parents want to raise their children with a healthy standard of morals and values, they set boundaries for them. Expecting your children to abide by a certain standard, and establishing consequences if they don't, is not unique to the Family or to our Christian faith. It's part of parenting. It's good to remember that and also to explain that to your children.

71. In fact, if you were to discuss with your children some of the rules that children of other faiths adhere to, it might help them to realize that they're not in a unique situation, and that it's not weird that you have certain rules that you expect them to keep. Jewish children eat kosher food. Muslim children wash before they pray. Some Christians believe that it's wrong to play cards or to dance. It's normal to have religious beliefs or convictions and to stand by them.

72. Those are faith-based examples, but there are also practical ones that vary from family to family, issues that parents have conviction about and rules that they feel are necessary—such as not allowing their children to go out alone, or eat junk food, or browse the Internet, watch TV*, have a cell phone, requiring that they be home at a certain time each day, or not date, or not get body piercings or tattoos till they're a certain age, and the list goes on. *(See "[Hollywood Stars Turn Their Back on the Small Screen.](#)")

73. Parents have all kinds of rules for their children, and it's fully within their prerogative to set those rules and enforce them. You should

explain to your children that some of the other children won't understand why you have rules for certain things, and some may try to mock them or make them feel bad about it, but that doesn't make your rules or beliefs weird or wrong. If you can help your children to understand these things, and put it in perspective for them, it will help them to have more conviction.

74. However, in order to cultivate conviction in your children about upholding the rules and the principles that you consider to be right, you need to be convinced of them yourself, and you need to set an example for your children in your actions and character. Even if a rule is in place because it's an overarching Family rule, or it's a Home rule, you still have to have personal conviction about it as a parent if you want your children to have conviction about it. You should be able to tell your child, "As your parent, I support this rule. I expect you to abide by it; it's for your good." If there are rules that you don't feel that way about, that is an issue to resolve yourself first, because you must have personal conviction in order to impart understanding and conviction to your child.

Before we preach about virtues to our children, we must ask ourselves whether we really model these virtues in our own lives.—Johann Christoph Arnold

75. As the dynamics of your children's lives change, whether they start going to school outside the Home, or make new friends, or enter a new stage in their development, you need to be prepared to review your rules and determine which ones are important and necessary for your children's health, safety, and spiritual well-being, and which ones may not be necessary. You may need to be willing to make some adjustments in the rules or guidelines that aren't important, while standing your ground and being realistic and consistent on the ones that are important. You want to keep your children safe, while also

being realistic about their maturity and what you can expect of them.

76. It's important that the boundaries are realistic, and it helps if your children understand and can see the need for the boundaries. For example, understanding that the rules are in place to keep them safe, or healthy, or to protect them in a specific way. Setting boundaries for your children and keeping to them is a test of parenting, but if you handle it with prayer and openness and good discussion with your children, it is a healthy and vital step in their strengthening.

77. You need to be able to explain to your children why certain rules are needed, why those rules are important to you, and why they're important for them to abide by. It will help to build their convictions if they can understand your reasoning and even agree with it. You need to think and pray about the scenarios and choices your children are facing or will be faced with in the future, and set standards for what's acceptable. It's best to do so with your children. If they are able to participate in setting the rules and boundaries with you, they're more likely to respect the rules and show conviction in keeping them.

78. It will also help your children to mature if you trust them and show confidence in their ability to make age-appropriate decisions for themselves, ones that they're ready to make and that you've already given them sufficient training in, or that aren't deal breakers and don't put them in danger.

79. You can't expect your children to embrace all your personal convictions across the board, especially not without question or a time of testing or trying things themselves. Imposing your beliefs on them simply won't work, as you've probably already found. Part of preparing your children to be wise and savvy adults who know how to make good decisions is allowing them to explore the decision-making process, giving them good input and support, and trusting them to make age-appropriate decisions within safe boundaries.

80. You'll probably need to work on cultivating a new level of openness with

your children. As you know, when it comes to communicating with your children about issues that are important to both of you, there are ways of going about it that can make it a much better experience, such as responding calmly to their outlandish statements, flexibility in your rules and expectations when warranted, and drawing the line between what things are important for their safety and well-being and what things are just your personal preferences and not actually such a big deal.

81. When you take on the mindset of preparing your children rather than sheltering them, there is still a need for boundaries for your children. More than ever, it is important that the boundaries are clear and realistic, and that your children understand as much as possible what the purpose is for obeying and abiding by the rules. This will likely force you to reevaluate what you expect of your children, to readjust some of your rules, and to explain some things to them again. That's good. It will help things to be clearer to them. It will give them more understanding. It will help you to see which rules could be modified or made more realistic, and which ones might need to be clarified or even made more stringent.

82. There is a difference between sheltering your children and giving them clear boundaries. Reasonable rules and boundaries are a vital part of childrearing—not to mention life in general. They are not passé or obsolete, and it's not unrealistic to expect your children to abide by them. You have the authority and duty as a parent to enforce the boundaries and consequences when necessary.

83. Clear boundaries and consequences and a realistic standard of right and wrong are extremely important in preparing your children for life. As your children's circle of friends and input expands beyond your Home and Family members, it's important that they know what is expected of them, that they understand the reasoning behind the rules, and that you are consistent in enforcing or monitoring those rules. Having clear boundaries for your children is not a part of the past that we are leaving behind. Your children need boundaries

to keep them safe, to teach them self-discipline, to prepare them for life.

84. Your attitude should be, “My children are going to be exposed to more input of all kinds—good, bad, and in between. They need a solid foundation of what is right and wrong to come back to. They need my guidance and support as they learn and take in new information. My job is to help them to be strong enough to make the right decisions in changing circumstances and conditions.”

Goals for your children, and the reason you want them to stand strong

85. Something else we need to change is the thinking that an indicator of being a “successful parent” and training your children “right” is measured by their choice to stay in the Family.

86. Some children will choose to remain in the Family, some will not. If you train your children to know the Lord, to be loving, kind, unselfish, self-disciplined, honest, and to have integrity, that is succeeding with honors as a parent.

87. In the past we had hoped that many more of our young people would stay in the Family. We planned for that, we tried to shelter them from anything that would pull them away from being a missionary, we hoped and prayed that they would follow in our footsteps.

88. Our culture has developed in such a way that many parents today hope intensely for their children to follow in their footsteps as missionaries in the Family, and are disappointed or feel like failures as parents if their children choose another path in life. This hope or desire is often woven throughout the decisions parents make for their children, the boundaries they implement, and their reactions to issues that need to be addressed. It affects their relationship when their children indicate they might want to pursue a different career. It has become a handicap and is keeping some parents from being as effective and well rounded as they could be in their parenting.

89. If your main priority as a parent is for your children to stay in the Family when they

grow up, it won’t allow you a clear perspective on your role as a parent, and on what each child needs to learn in order to be prepared for whatever choices they will make when they get older. You need to step back from that singular hope for your child and establish what your broader goals are as a parent. To see our parenting goals more clearly, we need to change our expectations that our children will automatically continue in the Family when they choose their path in life. We need to change the mindset that equates success as a parent with whether or not our children choose a missionary career.

90. Do we want our children to love the Lord? Yes. Do we hope that they will choose to serve Him in some way? Yes. Do we want them to be loving, kind, generous, unselfish individuals who are concerned about others and know how to meet others’ needs? Yes.

91. But we must accept that their path in life is theirs to choose. They may choose to be a full-time or part-time missionary with the Family, or they may choose a secular career. They may support the mission financially or with their prayers or influence in the community. They may choose not to support our mission at all, but will help people in other ways—through being a generous and loving person, volunteering occasionally, or lending support to others who are also working to make the world a better place. We need to understand that those are perfectly acceptable choices. They may not be the choices you’d prefer, but we must realize that our children have freedom of choice.

92. If you are raising and training your children with the primary hope that they will choose to stay in the Family, you will very possibly be disappointed, because less than half of our children choose to become or remain missionaries in the Family. But if you can expand your vision and look at the training they will need in order to grow into loving, godly people who know the Lord and can share His love with others or manifest it in some way, that will help you to define your parenting goals more clearly,

your goals will be more reachable, and you will probably have a better long-term relationship with your children as a result.

93. At the end of the day, even if your children go on to make choices that you're not proud of, that doesn't change your love for them.

You are their parent, and you don't have to change your relationship with them just because they do something you don't agree with. At some point your grown children will likely do something that you expressly do not agree with. You can choose to let those choices ruin your relationship and distance you from each other, or you can choose to love them anyway, to agree to disagree on those points, and support them all you can in whatever ways are possible for you.

94. Even if you do your best to train your children in character and principle, as they become adults, their choices are theirs to make, and some won't make good choices. They might choose paths that do not help improve people's lives, or that are actually destructive or hurtful to themselves or others. For some, it might be a phase or a temporary path, while others might choose a lifestyle that is not at all what you would have wanted for them, and that you actually feel is wrong. That is a heartbreaking aspect of parenting. While no parent is perfect, you do your best, and then when your children grow into adulthood, you have to step back and accept that their choices are theirs. Your job is to prepare them as well as you can, and then to accept that there are choices that only they can make.

95. Your children will choose their own path in life. This is something that all parents face. You can let their choices bother you and disappoint you and alienate you from them, or you can choose to love them unconditionally, to be proud of them in the ways they do well, to offer advice when they ask for it, and be wise enough to know when it's best to say nothing.

96. How you react to your children's choices will largely determine the relationship you will have with them. If they feel loved and that you trust them to live their own lives, they will most likely

respect you in return. If you make them feel that you're disappointed in them, that they're failing, or that you're not accepting of their choices, they'll likely pull away, reject your counsel, and will not want to have a close relationship with you.

Destiny

97. As you know, there is quite a lot in the Word about our children's destiny. There are many places in the Letters where the Lord indicates that our children have a beautiful destiny in His service, that it is part of their heritage from birth. While it's comforting to know that our children will always be the Lord's—just as anyone who receives the Lord is always His child, regardless of the choices they make—we have interpreted the promises from the Lord about our children's destiny in a way that has made it very difficult for us to accept their choices in life when they want to pursue a path other than missionary service in the Family. It has caused many parents to feel that their children were choosing “less than the best.” Though it's natural to feel disappointment when your children choose something other than what you may feel is the best choice, having the theological pressure of believing that they are missing the Lord's will or calling by doing so, only amplifies those feelings into heartbreak and a sense of failure on your part and theirs.

98. Peter and I have spent some time talking and praying and hearing from the Lord about this, and the Lord has indicated that we need to change our stance on this issue.

99. ▶ Our children are the Lord's forever. They were born into a family—within the greater Family—that knows the Lord, and because they have received

Him in their heart, they will never be lost to Him, nor to you as their parents. You will be in Heaven together forever, and we have all eternity ahead of us. There is true destiny involved—they are the Lord's forever, He chose them to be born into a family that knows Him, and they have His presence with them eternally.

100. ▶ This earthly life is a fraction of eternity. This life is given to us to make decisions, to have experiences, to learn lessons that we could not gain any other way. Our children may eventually choose to serve the Lord or others in some way, even if they don't make that choice presently. In some cases the best path for them, and the experiences and choices they need, may not be in the Family. We don't know what the Lord's eventual plan is for them, so we cannot judge that. We know that He will work within their choices, He will continue to love and care for them, He will give them the experiences they need in this life.

101. ▶ Our children have free choice, just as each one of us has free choice. When they come of age, their life is before them and the paths of their life are theirs to choose. Some will feel called to be missionaries with the Family; others will choose other paths.

102. ▶ Our job as parents is to give our children a heritage of faith, love for Jesus, love for others, and an understanding of the Lord's presence in their life. If we do that, we have prepared them well for life, regardless of what choices they make once they come of age—and we have prepared them well for their future, both here and hereafter.

103. Peter and I understand that there is a lot of grief and heartache

associated with the experiences many of you have had with some of your children who chose different paths in life. Heartache involving your children is possibly one of the most painful experiences in this life. Feelings of failure, regret, sadness, guilt and remorse can be overwhelming when you are a parent and are agonizing over issues having to do with your children.

104. God knows you haven't been a perfect parent, because no parent is perfect. But we believe that you have tried your best, and we're proud of every Family parent who has given their life, time, energies and strength to lovingly raising and caring for their children.

105. We are working on a series of Letters addressing our history, as well as our current stance, regarding former members. We pray that it will help bring closure and healing and hope for the future to those of you who are hurting, and to your children.

106. In the meantime, we hope you can adjust your perspective to see that if you love your children, if you worked to give them the best start you could, if you gave them all you could, then regardless of their choices or how things have developed, you have done the best you could. If you love your children—as we know you do—then no matter how difficult things may be or how estranged they may be at the moment, there is hope for healing, reconciliation, and a happy, positive resolution.

107. We pray that the adjustments in our Family perspective on this issue will help to bring the reconciliation, inclusiveness, forgiveness, and understanding that will lay the foundation for good relationships in the future.

108. Back to defining your goals as a parent today: If you can step back from the perspective of assuming or intensely hoping that your children will go on to be missionaries, and instead look at what they might need in order to be successful in life regardless of the choices they make, it will expand your vision and make you a more effective parent. The very same qualities that will prepare them to make wise choices in life, loving choices, unselfish choices, and to be discerning and aware, are qualities that will enhance and augment their career as missionaries, if that is what they choose.

109. We believe that we should continue to give our children an upbringing that enables them to pursue a missionary career. That is still a priority. But we're not giving it to our children for the sole purpose of grooming them to be missionaries. We're expanding our vision and giving our children what they need to do well in life overall. We want them to know and love the Lord, and to be able to give His love to others; to be kind and unselfish; to have godly values and integrity; to be understanding and tolerant and well rounded; to be experienced and educated and not naïve; to be able to have a positive influence on others. These qualities and character strengths will benefit them no matter what their profession.

110. Some parents have expressed that something that holds them back from upholding the boundaries with their children and imparting good discipline is the fear that their children will resent them, resent the rules, and eventually choose to leave the Family if they feel it's too restrictive.

111. If your vision is focused solely on keeping your children in the Family, when they go through a rough stage or are rebelling against the boundaries, you might feel that you need to back away from enforcing discipline or structure in their upbringing, and give them more freedom and liberty—because you want them to be happy, you want them to like the Family and want to stay.

112. But if you have a broader vision of preparing them for life, it's more likely that in those difficult times you'll have the conviction you need to stand by the rules and help your children learn the discipline that they are going to need whether they stay in the Family or not. You won't be afraid of "losing them," because you'll know you can't lose them—they're always your children, you will always love them, and even if you go through rough patches together, or they choose to leave the Family or pursue a different path, it won't change the fundamentals of your love for them and your desire for them to do well.

113. At the core of why some parents try to shelter their children, and why they are conflicted on discipline issues or on how to help their children through the difficult teen years, is their fear that their child will leave the Family. In some cases, when it's apparent to your child that you are afraid of "losing" them through their leaving the Family, it can almost become something your child knows they can use as leverage to try to step across the godly boundaries you've set for them. If they're not happy with something you're doing, they can say they want to leave the Family, knowing that it will have an impact on you and on the rules and how much conviction you'll demonstrate in upholding the standard.

114. Whereas if you keep the broader picture of the preparation your children need for life, training your children to do well regardless of what path they choose, it will bring the basics more into perspective. Love, self-discipline, respect for others and working well with them, communication skills, obedience, and diligence, are universal keys to success which your child needs to learn. The lack of those qualities will disadvantage your child irrespective of their career choice. Keeping that in perspective will increase your conviction as a parent to impart these things to your children, and not worry if they hit a few rough stages or decide they want to leave the Family. They need to learn those lessons whether they stay in the Family or not.

115. You owe it to your children to raise them to know the Lord and His love, to have a healthy fear of Him, and to be kind, honest, loving, disciplined, hard-working individuals. That needs to be your focus—above your desire to see your child choose to be a missionary, or to go on to a particular profession. Your overriding obligation before the Lord is to put the needs of your child first, to do what’s best for that child. And that will be very difficult for you to do if you are preoccupied with your child choosing to be a missionary with the Family, or making a particular career choice.

116. You should make your parenting decisions based not on wanting your children to remain in the Family, but on your values as a parent and the strength of character and spirit you want them to develop and carry throughout their lives, regardless of what path they will choose to take.

117. You should be able to tell your children and teens that the rules and boundaries that you set for them are your personal beliefs—things you feel they should or should not do, for their own good, in preparation for the rest of their lives. If you don’t have personal conviction about certain rules you’ve made, then you should examine whether those rules are really necessary. Of course, everyone in the Family has to abide by the Family’s governing documents—the *Charter* or the MM statutes or the FM statement—and you also need to be mindful of the laws of the land in which you live. But even in those overarching rules, you should be able to explain to your children and teens with conviction why they are or aren’t allowed to do certain things.

118. Your goal as a parent should be to give your children the tools—the character building, the academic education, the spiritual training, and the life skills—that they will need whether they stay in the Family or not. With that approach, they will be well prepared for a missionary career or a

secular one. Essentially, that’s the goal and your responsibility as a parent: to give your children what they need to do well in life regardless of what career path they choose.

The reality is that whether you do or don’t discipline your child, you educate him to a particular set of values. Discipline and order are part of the natural laws of the universe. The child who has not been disciplined with love by his little world (the family) will be disciplined, generally without love and not always in a fair manner by the big world.—Zig Ziglar, *Raising Positive Kids in a Negative World*

Although love is essential to human life, parental responsibility extends far beyond it. Love in the absence of instruction will not produce a child with self-discipline, self-control, and respect for his fellow man. Affection and warmth underlie all mental and physical health, yet they do not eliminate the need for careful training and guidance.—James Dobson, *Dare to Discipline*

The greatest social disaster of this century is the belief that abundant love makes discipline unnecessary. Respectful and responsible children result from families where the proper combination of love and discipline is present.

Discipline and love are not opposites; one is a function of the other. The parent must convince himself that punishment is not something he does to the child, it is something he does for the child. His attitude towards his disobedient youngster should be, “I love you too much to let you behave like that.”—James Dobson, *Dare to Discipline*

Spiritual foundation stones come before spiritual calculus

119. As you think about and consider how you might need to broaden your vision as a parent, or more clearly define your parenting goals, I'd like to encourage you to think and pray about how to impart the spiritual foundation principles of our Christian faith to your children.

120. We in the Family are blessed with an immense amount of spiritual truth and insight. The Lord has revealed so much to us about the spirit world, the spiritual warfare, how to use the spiritual weapons, and spirit helpers, etc., that we sometimes neglect to review or strengthen our implementation of the very basics of Christianity: love, kindness, integrity, unselfishness, gratefulness, honesty, obedience, and doing things for Jesus just because He asks us to, just because we love Him.

121. Don't get me wrong. I love the spiritual knowledge we have been so richly blessed with, and I thank the Lord for it every day. But in some ways it could be compared to spiritual calculus—advanced, amazing, and when it's needed, there's no substitute for it, but it's not what you start with when you teach your child spiritual arithmetic. In some cases our children are lacking in the foundation stones of Christianity, which is what they will need to be able to stand on when they're faced with tough choices. Christian virtues are a very big part of their testimony, and should be a strong point in their life and witness. Having a foundation in the basics of their faith and the principles of a godly life is what will prepare them for life. It is what will give them the strength and wisdom to live “in the world but not of the world.”

122. When it really comes down to it, it's not the theological knowledge of spirit helpers and hinderers, or how many keys someone has memorized, that will make them a good and loving Christian. Rather, it's how much we are a reflection of Him in our daily lives, how much of His love, understanding and answers we have for those who need Him, and our humility and

wisdom in imparting His Spirit, nature and truth. The spiritual warfare is an indisputable part of our lives, and we need to know how to fight and win in the spirit—that's why the Lord has given us information about the spirit realm and spiritual weapons. But we can't let that eclipse our foundation in the basics of a Christian life and testimony, and why we do what we do.

123. Maybe you have assumed that if a subject was important to cover with your children, it would be covered in current Family publications. But the fact is that not everything can be covered in our Family publications—and there isn't even a need to try to cover everything that way, because there already exists a wealth of very helpful material written by wonderful Christians and people of faith, which you can take advantage of in your parenting.

124. The Family has a lot of advanced spiritual truth. But that doesn't mean that other basic topics are less important. In fact, in raising your children, the basics are the most important. For example, the tenets of our Christian faith and our testimony as Christians. Or stories of Christians through the ages who lived their faith and brought many to Jesus. Or the basics of the Bible. Or topics like conviction, honesty, integrity, kindness, love, unselfishness, and other character strengths.

125. There are also excellent books on parenting, teaching, communicating with children (some of the best of which are condensed in *Raise 'em Right*), that are very helpful to study as a parent, and that will help you to do a better job with your children.

126. All that to say, there are many topics that we haven't covered extensively in our Family publications, or not recently, because it's not necessary to address them ourselves when other experts and professionals have done a great job explaining the topic and offering helpful solutions.

127. Our Family culture has not encouraged a lot of use of outside resources, except what has been recommended by the Family. We had concerns about people becoming tripped off in

untested theories, or becoming weakened in faith through taking in too much of the world's input. But again, that is part of our culture that we need to change during our change journey. There are still dangers in embracing untested theories or allowing your faith to be weakened if you give too much weight to what man says over what the Lord says. But there is also a lot of good that can be gleaned if you will be wise and prayerful in what you take in, and there is a lot of godly material written by dedicated Christians or other wise professionals that we can benefit from—in our parenting, in our professionalism, in matters of health, in fulfilling the mission, in the materials we make available to our children for study and reading, to name just a few examples.

128. As you think and pray about what your children need in order to be well prepared for life—both now, with more contact and interaction with those outside our Homes, and in their future, regardless of the career they choose—give ample focus and attention to the spiritual foundation stones and the precepts of our Christian faith. Read the Bible together with them. Talk about these basic principles. Live them together, and discuss real-life examples. If you build their spiritual foundation well, they will be able to return to it over and over again as a standard for a happy life, whether they choose a missionary career or a secular one.

129. Giving your children the foundation stones of a godly life is your job as a parent. Teaching them to put others' needs above their own, to be honest, kind and respectful, to love the Lord and fear Him, to respect His spiritual laws, will prepare them to do well no matter what choices they face throughout life. And that, dear friends, is successful parenting.

(Jesus:) I will bless you as you put your all into your kids and give them the time and attention they need and deserve! (ML #3491:172.)

Take Time to Love!

By Maria

FD/MM/FM 3786 7/09

1. Hi, dear ones. I want to talk to you about a topic that is quite familiar to all of us: love. As much as we've heard about love—its value, importance, and its wonderful effects—we could still do a lot better in making it a strong point in the Family.

2. I have received some heartbreaking letters recently that bring out some lacks in this area quite clearly. After reading them, I was tempted to be upset at first, because there's nothing that disturbs me so much as people being hurt, discouraged, disillusioned, or heartbroken due to circumstances that could have easily been improved with a little more love. It saddens me greatly because I feel it's unnecessary hurt, it's unnecessary discouragement and pain, and I wish those involved didn't have to experience it.

3. But when I was praying about what to say on this topic, the Lord reminded me that love is one of those basic, fundamental principles that we can tend to forget when we get so busy. I believe that we all want to do well and grow in being more loving. Very few people are actually mean or unloving on purpose. Yet it's so easy to let the priority of love get crowded out in a multitude of business. Or it's easy to fall into measuring the behavior of others and subconsciously deciding who you think is worthy or deserving of your love and sacrifices and who isn't. Those are natural, human tendencies, but that doesn't change the fact that when you lack love, when you don't manifest love, it can have terrible consequences. It discourages your brothers and sisters. It hurts your sheep. It disillusiones your new disciples. It damages your testimony.

4. I'll share with you a couple of examples of the letters I've recently received—and I've received many more than the ones I'll mention here.

5. One woman explained a brief history before sharing her heart about her current circumstances. She joined the Family decades

ago, raised a large family, and they have been FM for many years. Some of her children have joined FD Homes as they have come of age, and recently she separated from her husband and joined another Home with her two youngest daughters. These two daughters have never had much interaction with other Family members and haven't received a lot of Family training. The mom honestly explained that they have a lot of "learning gaps." However, in their new Home, her girls have had some difficult experiences when being corrected strongly in public. The girls are shy, and these public corrections have been terribly humiliating for them. They are trying to fit in and learn, but they are young teens, not very self-confident, and this is making it pretty difficult for them. The mom wrote, asking if the Family could be made aware that young people who are rejoining (or in this case, who have never lived in a communal Home) have needs similar to new disciples who have never been in the Family. They have questions, and they need basic Word classes about such topics as the Endtime and Family beliefs. She explained that some of those who join the Family, or rejoin, are coming from broken backgrounds, are not used to being away from those they love and are close to, and they could really use love and understanding and support—the kind of love that we should be known for in the Family!

6. For another example, I received a letter from a young woman who recently joined the Family. Her parents were in the Family many years ago, but she had never lived in or even visited a Family Home. All she knew about the Family was what her parents had told her—that it was a place of so much love and joy. They spoke very highly of the Family. So when she came of age, she packed up and left home and went to join the Family—all this having never visited a Family Home! Isn't that beautiful? She heard the Lord's call and followed!

7. However, that's when her letter becomes heartbreaking, because she explains that she

hasn't found the love that her parents talked about. When she arrived at the Home, some of the adults didn't even hug her and people hardly greeted her. Thank God the children hugged her! Here she was in a new country, she didn't speak the language, she was in a Home that she had never visited, with people she had never met, and no one even talked to her at dinner or stayed with her after dinner. She was shown to her room and then left alone. She was sad, confused, and didn't know what to think.

8. Here is the amazing part: She has stayed, dear Family, in that Home, for over a year. Despite hardly being cared for or taught, never given a Bible class, and only read with twice in all that time, she has stuck it out because she wants to serve the Lord. She gets a lot of credit for that! Here's an excerpt of her letter:

9. I thank the Lord for the voice of His Word, and that He gives us understanding and speaks to our hearts. He can make things clear, but I truly believe that someone who just joins and is a babe needs someone close to explain things, to help them to understand, and to answer their questions, because we do have a lot of questions when we join. I did need someone, and I think it's the same with all new disciples. The way of life is completely different and everything is new. You need someone to show you the *Charter* and to explain the rules and guide you. Everything that I read—the *Charter*, the GNs, Letters, everything, even how to witness—I learned on my own.

10. When I joined, I didn't expect to see a perfect schedule or saints, but I did need to feel loved. I needed to see God's love—the love that I was told about, the love that motivated me to join the Family. All I expected was to see people who were happy that I was joining them.

11. I know the Family is made of humans and that no one is perfect. I'm so far from being perfect, and I make so many mistakes,

Lord help me. But in a way, you do expect a certain standard. I just wasn't expecting to feel like running away as soon as I came in the door.

12. [Speaking of a fellow disciple who was discouraged and disillusioned and leaving the Family due to a lack of love and care:] I think it's sad how, because of the bad example we sometimes are when we act unlovingly, people feel like the Lord has failed them and that all they ever hoped for never existed. They figure that if they can't find it here, there is no hope for love anywhere else. But it's not the Lord that has failed them; it's those of us who have failed to be Jesus to that person who really needed it. I don't think excuses make a difference after that or really count at all.

13. [People have explained to me] that the Home was lacking personnel [when I arrived], that they were going through a hard time, and that they were not doing so well spiritually. But when I joined the Family, I didn't even know what a battle meant. I didn't know what Family life was like. I didn't know anything. I was just expecting to feel the Lord's Spirit.

14. When someone meets you or comes to your Home, I believe that you are the Family to them. The impression that they get from your Home is the impression that they get of the overall Family. If someone feels unloved when they're visiting you, and then you say that you acted that way because you're going through a difficult time or your Home is lacking personnel, I think that that person really doesn't care why you did it; all they know is that [a lack of love] is what they felt.

15. Another letter I recently received was from a young person who has been away from her family and on a remote mission field for four years. She loves the witnessing, but she doesn't feel like she has any friends or anyone

who needs her or appreciates her just for who she is. She's discouraged and lonely. She's from a large family, and all of her brothers and sisters are out of the Family, and they all live near each other. She's feeling so alone—even though she's in a Family Home—that she's wondering if she'd have more love if she left the Family and went to live near her siblings. She said she feels that if she left her Home, she doesn't think anyone would even miss her.

16. It breaks my heart to hear of people who haven't felt the love they needed, deserved, and expected to feel from fellow Family members. I'm sure it hurts your heart too.

17. Of course, I'm sure that if you asked any of the other parties in these accounts what happened, they would have a lot to say as well. No situation is ever one-sided, and everyone has their perspective and feelings and reasons for the situations they're in, or why things played out the way they did. I'm not able to visit these Homes and see the situations firsthand, or even communicate with all the parties involved. I'm sure there are lacks on many sides. I imagine that there have been some misunderstandings. Perhaps there have been elements of sensitivity or self-righteousness on the parts of those who've felt unloved. I don't presume to know, nor am I passing judgment on who is right or wrong.

18. But, you know, someone doesn't have to be perfect in order to deserve your love. They don't have to be a perfect winning team member. They don't have to be faultless, or always cheerful, or always humble, or always loving, or a tireless worker, or have a personality that makes them easy to like or get along with. In fact, I'm sure none of us are all of these things all the time, because no one is perfect. And yet, as representatives of Jesus, our job is to love. It's what we do. Love is what our mission is all about. Love is the trademark of the Family—or it should be! "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one for another" (John 13:35).

19. I think we might all need to ask the Lord to take our self-righteousness down a few notches and refill us with His love and His perspective for our situations. In the midst of fighting for a winning team and trying to accomplish everything that you have set out to accomplish, it's easy to get negative about one another at times, or a little judgmental. It's an occupational hazard to size up your co-workers, assessing whether or not you'll make it as a winning team, and measuring whether everyone is doing their part, and without realizing it, sometimes slip into a negative mindset about your brothers and sisters.

20. Being negative about each other, of course, doesn't make things any better. It doesn't strengthen your unity, or help anyone to feel like working harder or sacrificing more or taking the humble seat. It becomes a vicious cycle of judging and criticizing and measuring, rather than the strengthening cycle that the Lord intends of helping one another, loving each other through your bad days—which everyone has—forgiving each other your mistakes, safeguarding each other in your weak areas, and showcasing one another's strengths. Love begets love. It inspires others to give their best. It brings down the Lord's blessings. And it makes you happy. When there is a lack of love, it's usually a cycle too. A lack of love creates more problems, which perpetuates even more lacks in your love.

21. Instead of looking at what your brothers and sisters are "producing," or how much you feel they're giving, or how worthy they are of your love and sacrifices, ask the Lord for an infilling of His unconditional love.

22. Don't put the doorknob too high, dear loves. If you do, no one will be able to reach it. No one will measure up. None of us are good enough.

23. Jesus' love is strong enough and pure enough to withstand our human faults and sins and mess-ups, which are many. Ask the Lord to give you some of that kind of love—love that loves whether or not you naturally click

with the person, whether or not you feel you have the time to spare, whether or not you feel the person is worthy or deserving of your love, whether or not you feel their need is great. Love that loves even if someone is disturbing your personal space or changing your perfect plans. Love that appreciates each person for who they are—someone that Jesus loves and that He has put beside you, and wants to love through you. Love that loves even if the person is late or selfish or rude or unkempt or disorganized or just plain in the wrong.

24. There are many reasons, of course, for a lack of love. Being judgmental or self-righteous is one.

25. Pride is another. You can only be truly loving when you are doing the humble thing. It often hurts your pride to be sincerely loving.

26. Stress is a real killer of love. At the time, nothing seems as important as what is stressing you. Stress certainly pushes love down on the priority list.

27. Self-centeredness is another. When you're focused on your own needs and what you want to do, you can't even see the needs of others, much less be bothered to fill them.

28. Lack of faith is another, thinking that giving to others (of your time, affection, friendship or anything) will cause you to lose in some way.

29. Resentments, hurts of the past that you don't let go of, hurts that are unforgiven, those can hinder your ability to love for a long time—until you are willing to leave the past behind and risk trying again.

30. Laziness is another big one—just not caring; expecting someone else to make the move or give the love that's needed to others.

31. Selfishness is another, feeling that what you already do is enough; filling the need is not your job, you already work hard enough, sacrifice enough, give enough.

32. There are many reasons not to love, and each one is justified if you're only willing

to love when it's easy. But when you hear the heartcries of those who have been hurt by a lack of love, when you see the suffering that a lack of love causes, you realize that excuses don't really matter. You get a little glimpse of how the Lord sees it.

33. Dear Family, I cannot emphasize this point enough: All our hard work for the Offensive is nothing without love. All your sacrifices are worthless without love. All your strenuous efforts are of no avail, they're completely useless, without love. Love has to be your driving motivation. Love has to be what compels you. And love is what will keep things in balance. Love is what will guide you to stop what you're doing and help someone else because they have a need. Love will give you the strength to press on when that is the greatest need. Love will help you see your brothers and sisters through the Lord's eyes and be willing to do whatever is necessary to show them the Lord's love.

34. That's what Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians 13—without love, it's nothing. And that's what these heartbreaking letters that I have been receiving are saying, in modern terms. "Without love, it is nothing. It will come to nothing. It will amount to nothing in the end." Lack of love can negate all your sacrifices and hard work. It can make everything you're working so hard for worth nothing. It can blacken your testimony. It can nullify your witness.

35. We can be working hard, praying for fruit, doing our best to bring it in, but if we don't have love—real love, genuine love, love that lasts through imperfections, trials, bad days, problems, unpolished people, and all the rest, we're not going to accomplish anything. "Without love, it profiteth nothing" (1Cor.13:1-3).

36. All of the changes and progress we are trying to make as a Family are great, but if we don't overcome this very bad "habit" of a lack of care and concern for others—a lack of love—all of our "perfect" professionalism and progress and modernity will amount to nothing.

37. I know that no one in the Family is trying to be unloving. In these few examples I mentioned, the people in those Homes were probably just trying to get the job done and might have just lost a bit of perspective. It's possible that those who were the recipients of the lack of love were pretty difficult to get along with. Maybe they didn't go about things the right way. Maybe they lacked in communication skills. But does that really matter? Is the Lord's love that fragile? Is our love that fragile?

38. In our lives for the Lord, we can be pretty sure that everyone is trying to do the right thing or they wouldn't be here. So it behooves you to give each other the benefit of the doubt, and realize that one of the contributing factors to a lack of love is simply getting too busy, too focused on reaching your goals, to the point that you don't take time to nurture and cultivate love—love between you, love in your own hearts, love for Jesus, and receiving His love for you.

39. If that rings true for you, please step back, reevaluate things, talk about it as a Home, and factor in some time for love. Just consider that taking time to love is part of being fit to do your job as the Lord's representatives, because without love, you won't reach your Offensive goals. It's as simple as that.

40. Ask the Lord to teach you how to love. Learning to love is an art; it's not a natural human quality. It's supernatural. It's heavenly. That means you have to put some time and thought and prayer into it if you want it to be a reality in your life. You won't get better at it automatically.

41. If you want to grow in love, you're going to have to make time for loving in your life. Look at your life and your goals, and factor in some time to love.

42. Factor in time for friendships—not just with those you're closest to or who you naturally get along with, but time to build friendships with those you work and live with.

43. Factor in time for unselfish, sacrificial, going-out-of-your-way type love, when you do

something for someone that is just to make their life easier and show them you love them.

44. Factor in time to relax with Jesus, and your loved ones too.—Praising Him, loving Him, remembering how wonderful and unconditional and forgiving His love is, and asking Him for more of it to be manifested in your life.

45. Factor in time to be healed and cleansed spiritually if you've gotten off track in this area. You may need to ask for forgiveness. You may need to ask for prayer. You may need to make some changes in your life.

46. Take some time to read on the subject of love. I'm not repeating everything on love that's worth repeating in this short post. There's already a lot of beautiful counsel in the Word that is very applicable, and that will help you to make these changes if you truly desire them and are willing to change. I'll include a list of a few things you can start with, including two beautiful comps done by the International CS board that I'm happy to be able to share with you.

- “The Big Two, Part 1”
- “The Big Two, Part 2”
- “It's All About Love” ([ML #3733](#))

47. Now that you have been working with clearly articulated goals and strategy plans for over a year, I think you're starting to see more clearly how long it takes to accomplish things, and you are probably beginning to be more realistic in your planning and objectives. Winning the world is going to take time, training your children is going to take time, reaching your Home goals is going to take time. Getting frantic and rushed about any aspect of the work is not going to help. Pushing so hard that you don't have time for love is going to be counterproductive. Expecting so much from your teammates that they can't help but disappoint you and fall short of your expectations is just going to be frustrating for all of you. Being negative and judgmental

about one another's weaknesses is not going to help anyone improve.

48. As Dad would often say, “May we always be known for our love.” That's something that Peter and I would like the Family to be known for too. We all want that. I think that's something we all want said of us—that we are loving, that we make it easy for others to be good. But I'm afraid that some of us have lost perspective on the priority we need to give to growing in love. We are all going to need to make some changes in our lives and modus operandi so that much more of Jesus' love is flowing through us and overflowing on to our brothers and sisters who need and deserve to receive Jesus' love through us, and onto our sheep and those that the Lord wants to reach and win. Love is a vital ingredient of the mission. The mission is built on love—Jesus' love, and His desire for everyone to feel and receive His love.

49. I think we all need to take a step back, as I said, and realize that we're going to be working hard for Jesus until He comes back and lets us know that the job is done. Meanwhile, the Lord wants to bless you with the love and camaraderie that you need in order to be fulfilled and happy. He wants to use you as a vessel of His love to others. He wants to pour through you. He wants to stretch you and make you capable of loving so much more greatly than you thought you were capable of. Nothing precious comes easy, and bonds of love, gifts of love, sacrifices of love, are no different.

50. Jesus has called and chosen you as His representative of love. He has faith that you can be that for Him. Whenever you feel lacking in love, remember that our Husband has more to give you, and His love never runs out.

51. Love is a miracle. Ask Him for a miracle, for more of His nature, and then act as if you have all the love needed to make the right choices, the unselfish, loving, humble choices, the hard choices. And the Lord won't fail. He'll fill your heart to overflowing. You can never outgive Him!