

Love with both Eyes Open (Parenting Edition)

By Dana Chau

One of the Bible's most important themes is love. But most books on parenting are about behavior modification. Discipline. Or helping parents cope with the demands children create in their lives.

Allow me to suggest that the Bible is a timely book for parents. But don't limit yourself to the texts that speak to parents and children. Open yourself also to God's instruction for interpersonal relationships.

Philippians 1:9-11.

This is Paul's prayer for Christians. And Christian parents are included. He prays that we would grow in love. Not just any kind of love, but love that has both "eyes" open.

The first "i" is intelligent. Verses 9 and 10.

Paul says it is *"love that does what is best for others without contradicting God's will."*

Let's consider **one component of intelligent love: God's will.** God's will can be found in the Bible. In the life of Christ. Learning the instructions and examples from the Bible will help us here.

So loving your child involves more than "not sparing the rod." More than "training up your child in the way he should go."

Loving your child avoids the bad example of Isaac's favoritism of Esau. Loving your child applies the Golden Rule: "Do to others what you would have them do to you (Matthew 7:22)."

If you want your child to show respect, you first show respect to your child. If you want your child to have good manners, you must demonstrate good manners. Loving your child is modeling as well as teaching.

God's will also comes to us through His Spirit's prompting. Often after I've been impatient with my children, I would hear the Spirit say, "If I were impatient with you the way you are with them, you would be discouraged. You would feel unloved." And I would then ask my children to forgive me.

Another component of intelligent love: Best for the other. To know what is best for others, we need to know what led up to their reaction. We need to understand their temperament. We need to know what is developmentally normal for the particular age.

Here's what I propose. To love intelligently, we need to gather intelligence. Gather it from the Bible. From the life of Christ. From the Holy Spirit's prompting. And from experience.

Be a student of your children. Observe. Ask them questions: "What helps you feel loved?" "What would you like me to change about myself?" Get ideas from other parents or books. Write down what works in a notebook. Review these entries. You are creating the owner's manual for each child.

The second "i" is "inviting." Verse 11.

Inviting our children to God. Point to the Greatest Lover of all. True love must invite people to God.

I have a friend whose email signature has this quote: "Life is designed to be a series of opportunities to point to God's glory."

Paul might say: **Love** is designed to be a series of opportunities to point to God's goodness."

How do we do this practically? One way is through prayer with our children when they misbehave. Rather than interrogating, reprimanding or jumping to conclusion, embrace your child and pray, "God, we know you love (Child's Name), and so do I. Help us calm down and"

After all, don't we need all the help we can get in our parenting journey? I do.