

# Do You Love Me?

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**CAUTION: THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE MIGHT BE DETRIMENTAL TO YOUR FREE TIME, YOUR GOLF SCORE, AND, FOR SOME, EVEN YOUR CAREER GOALS.**

Parents, what is the most important thing you can do for your children? Provide for them financially? give them a stable environment? schedule quality time with them?

Reading parenting books and magazines might lead you to believe that at least some of the above are the most important things you can do for your children. But I have it on good authority that the number one thing you can do for your children is something else altogether. My authority is the Bible.

## **God's Relationship With Us**

The Bible tells us that our relationship to our children is analogous to God's relationship with us. Christians call God their Father; He calls them His children. Is our relationship to God based on His providing for us financially? His giving us a stable environment? What about scheduling quality time together? If so, what happens to our relationship with God when our finances go down the tubes, when our world becomes unstable, or when circumstances prevent our having quality time together? Yes, there are Christian writers and pastors who say that such circumstances might truly result in our drifting away, becoming weak in the faith, and even losing our salvation. That's why they stress these peripheral concerns—prosperity, financial investments for Christians, having peace of mind, handling stress, spending a specified amount of time in prayer each day. Some of these things can sometimes be useful, but those who try to base their relationship with God on them are dead wrong.

Now, if you look at the title of this article, you might guess that love is the answer, that what is most important is that we love our children. You would be only partly right. The answer is that we are to love our children as God loves us, and we are to show it. So please bear with me as I use some Scriptures to show you how God loves us, and then I'll show you how to apply God's parenting methods in your relationship to your children.

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## **God's Unconditional Love**

How does God love us? God loves us unconditionally. That is, God sets no conditions or requirements on loving His children. He loves them no matter what. Notice Ephesians 1:3–7:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved: in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.

Stop and think about what this says. It says that God chose us before the foundation of the world. He predestinated us to be His children, not according to our works or how good we are, but according to "the good pleasure of his will." It says that our heavenly Father accepts and redeems and forgives us "according to the riches of his grace." This is unconditional love.

Romans 5:10 states:

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Jesus died for us while we were enemies, no conditions. 2 Timothy 1:9 clearly states that our works had nothing to do with God saving and calling us (both of which, of course, are acts of love): "Who [God] hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

We read in Ephesians 2,

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit

together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. (verses 4–9)

Yes, even while we were yet sinners—totally depraved and unable to do anything to save ourselves—God loved us, had Jesus die for us, and raised us together with Jesus to new life. God's love, being unconditional, did not wait for us to fulfill some condition. While we were sinners, He loved us, had Jesus die for us, had us hear the Gospel, regenerated us and gave us the faith to believe the Gospel, justified us, and reconciled us.

Due to absolutely nothing about us, we are special to God. We Christians, His church, are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9). What's more, God's love will never fail. It will never end. Nothing will ever separate us from His love: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

In John 6:37–40, Jesus says,

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

Again, Philippians 1:6 says, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." It is a popular message today that God turns from us when we sin, and that we must win Him back by our works (repentance, contrition, law keeping). As the Scriptures above show, this is a false gospel. God's love for us is unconditional and never fails.

## **God Demonstrates His Unconditional Love**

Nevertheless, despite all of God's unbounded and unconditional love, we could easily lack assurance if we were unaware of God's love. If we are to feel secure in God's love, we must know about it. Fortunately, our heavenly Father has left us abundant evidence of His love.

Romans 5:8 tells us, "But God commendeth [demonstrates] his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." 1 John 3:16 is similar: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." God makes his love for us perceivable.

He tells us that when we want to communicate with Him, He will listen. James tells us to, "draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8). Jesus says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7). You might want to find the many similar Scriptures that promise us that God hears and answers our prayers. So, we see that God loves us unconditionally, and He gives us ample evidence of His love. Now let's apply this to our relationship to our own children.

## **Showing Your Children Your Unconditional Love**

Just as God's love for His children has no strings attached, so must be our love for our children. Of course, you might be thinking that your love for your children is already unconditional. Maybe so, but are you showing your love in a way that comes across to your children as unconditional?

We are making a big mistake if we allow our children to feel we love them only when they are well behaved or do well academically, socially, or on the playing field. And yet, especially in our hyper-paced world, we are continually tempted to virtually ignore our children for our work and other concerns while we lavish attention and praise only when they have done something outstanding. Even worse are the times we give them our undivided attention only when we are correcting them for poor behavior. By putting ourselves in the position of responding to only the good and bad peaks in our children's behavior, and not being proactive in demonstrating our love to our children, we are teaching our kids that our love is conditional.

Such showing of conditional love may at first result in well-behaved children. After all, they have learned that good behavior or superior

achievement earns parental affection. But they have also learned to be insecure. They will come to believe that if they don't continue to perform to your standards, they will no longer have your love. This can lead to multiple emotional and behavioral problems. Notice: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:18-19). If you do not show your children that your love for them is unconditional, they will fear losing it. And notice that the above passage says, "We love him, because he first loved us."

Before I continue, I want to give you some recommended reading. Dr. Ross Campbell admirably covers the subject of demonstrating unconditional love to our children, and the possible consequences of not doing so, in his books, *How to Really Love Your Child* and *How to Really Love Your Teenager*. Both books are usually available in Christian bookstores, sometimes available in regular bookstores, can be ordered from Amazon.com, and used copies are available from Half.com. I recommend these books as some of the best parenting information I know of. I say this because most of Campbell's basic premises agree with the Bible. Unfortunately, he also uses some unbiblical psychology, apparently agrees with dating (a relatively modern, unbiblical practice that all too easily leads to immorality and later divorce), ignores homeschooling, and contradicts his foundation that God's love is unconditional by preaching an Arminian gospel that makes God's love conditional.\*\* Despite these flaws, I believe you will gain much from these books.

So how do we avoid giving our children the impression that our love is conditional? Saying, "I love you," is important. We should say it frequently. But it is not enough. Remember, God demonstrated His love to us even while we were sinners. We must actively show our love to our children, and Campbell is right on the mark when he says we must fill their emotional tanks through eye contact, physical contact, and focused attention.

God has not given our children into our care to put them into daycare centers, send them off to school, and otherwise ignore them while we pursue our careers and higher income (and feel we have fulfilled our duty by scheduling "quality time," whatever that is, with them). Yes, I understand that there are single-parent and other situations when daycare and school are necessary. Whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, however, we parents, not someone else, are responsible to convey unconditional love, God's love, to our children. We can do

this through their emotions by our deeds, and to their intellect through teaching them the Bible. Yet, since children are largely emotional beings, if we don't first supply their emotional needs, our Bible teaching may fall on deaf and, eventually, rebellious ears.

Notice how the Bible supports having eye contact, physical contact, and focused attention. Psalm 32:8 says, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." When you speak with your child or when your child speaks to you, make eye contact with the child. Don't do this only when correcting the child, and don't do this only when praising the child (which will be interpreted as conditional love). And, as much as appropriate, accompany the eye contact with a pleasant expression.

Physical contact is also necessary. In Mark 10:13–16, Jesus not only allowed the little children to come to Him, "he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them." You will also find many places in the Bible where physical healing is done with a touch, and where angels comforted those disturbed at their appearing by touching them. I'm not saying that touching of itself heals, only that appropriate touching adds comfort.

Jesus did not withhold physical contact even with His adult disciples: "Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.... He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it?" (John 13:23, 25). If this physical contact (which, I hope I needn't point out, was not at all sexual) between Jesus and His disciples (who were, in some ways, like children to Him) was right, how much more the physical contact parents should have with their children? Touch your children often.

The third way to fill up a child's emotional tank is through focused attention. Sadly, focused attention is especially difficult to give our children in our frenetic world. We must do it, nonetheless. When we pray, God pays attention to us. Because He is God, He has the ability to also pay attention to untold numbers of others who are praying to Him at the same time. Even so, His attention is focused. He does not miss something you say because He is distracted by something else. When you pray, you have God's attention. As a human, you don't have the ability to hear many people at once. So, to give your child focused attention, you must pay attention to him or her alone.

Give your child your focused attention when he or she comes to you and wants to speak with you. Turn to your child, look him or her in the

eye, and pay attention. By giving your child eye contact, physical contact, and focused attention, you can turn most occasions with your child into quality time. But you must also take the initiative and create time with your child. Set aside time to be with your child, to give your child eye contact, physical contact, and focused attention. Campbell gives some ideas of how to do this in his books.

Please make the effort to show your sons and daughters unconditional love. The rewards of your children knowing without doubt that you love them will be priceless.

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\*\* For example, on page 126 of *How to Really Love Your Child*, Campbell writes, "...this is the way God loves us—unconditionally." Yet Campbell makes God's love conditional on pages 124-125 by saying, "He [God] gives directions to be carried out, yet gives amazingly wonderful promises to those who are willing to obey.... If we want what He wants, a loving, caring, Father-child relationship with Him—we must accept His offer" (Ross Campbell, *How to Really Love Your Child* (Wheaton, IL.: Victor Books, 1977, emphasis mine).