

Love and Limits

When a family is blessed with children, believing parents accept them as God's gifts (Ps. 127:3). Children bring additional work to the family, but much more than that they bring joy and blessings. The mother and father's job is to teach and raise the child in such a way that they become rooted and grounded in God's kingdom and are taught the mysteries of living faith (Eph. 6:4). The guidelines and values of a believing home are based on the teaching of God's Word.

The parent's responsibility in child rearing includes teaching the child what is right and wrong and the setting of limits. Setting limits is one of the hardest things parents have to do. It would be much easier in some cases to simply allow children to set their own expectations and boundaries. Yet the child doesn't know what is best for them; they need clear expectations and consistent boundaries set by a loving parent. Limits allow the child to feel the love and protection of predictable rules and routines.

Limits Are Love

How we function as parents is influenced by our own life's experiences. How we were raised and when and where we were raised are all factors that play an important role in child rearing. Thus, we see the challenges of two people with different life-experiences raising their children together. Children accept limits better when the parents' expectations are stated clearly and directly. The best parenting choices are rarely made under pressure or when children raise challenges. Through mutual discussion, parents need to agree upon what limits are best for their children.

No two children are alike; what works for one child may not work for another. How often have you tried to apply a parenting technique that worked on an older child only to find that it didn't work well at all with the next one? Parenting is a lifelong job of trials and errors, and hindsight is always perfect.

Values of the Home

Parents must be clear about their own values. Children watch us closely. It seems that children learn as much or more from our actions than our words. Not long ago I visited with a young father who was very involved with video games. He would spend hours of his free time playing games. One evening as he was ready to play, one of his children came to where he was playing. He asked his child to leave because he thought the game he was playing wasn't appropriate for his child to watch. It was then that he realized the danger to his own faith. Neither did he want this matter to confuse his child.

Social networking can also cause distractions in our homes. It can become so consuming that although we live in the same house we seldom communicate with each other. Social relationships may not only affect the children but also the parents. If we or our children spend hours on the Internet instead of interacting with the family, we all lose. Too quickly the years slip by and before we know it our children are grown and gone. When we look back, has anyone ever said that they spent too much time with their children, or visited with them too much? May God help us to cherish the time we have together.

Above all, the tone of the believing home is forgiving love. When as people we fail and fall into sin, we can nurture one another with the gospel of the forgiveness of sins.

Discussions of Faith and Life

May God give us situations where it is possible to discuss all matters of faith and life. In visiting it is important to identify sin. In the world around us there is much teaching about moral relativism, which blurs our sense of right and wrong. This can also affect in the teaching of values in our homes. We need to adhere to the clear teachings of God's Word. This Word gives direction to the tired parent who often faces the questions of how to raise children and what to teach them. The psalmist with encouraging words writes, "We will not hide them (Scripture) from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" (Ps. 78:4,7).

Jeremiah also encourages, "Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jer. 6:16). It remains important to turn to God's Word for guidance in raising children.

Eric Jurmu

Discussion questions:

- Discuss the setting of limits in your home. Are they necessary?
- Is there a right way and wrong way of setting limits in the home?
- What are the dangers of not setting limits in the home?
- At what ages should limits be applied?

