

FROM OUR HOME

The Hearts of the Fathers

Malachi 4:6 "He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

To some fathers it may seem strange that a father's heart would have to be turned to his children. Some fathers seem to naturally enjoy a healthy relationship with their kids throughout the years.

However, it is much more difficult for other fathers. They may have once dreamed of playing catch with their kid some day, or of reading *The Hobbit* together on the couch, but it never quite worked out like that. They brought babies home from the hospital that were interested in nursing, not football. In fact, the whole first year of life seemed to be mommy's special time of bonding. Certainly things would get better with age... wouldn't they?

As their babies grew, bonding with their children did not become any more natural. When their babies cried, they wanted their mommies. When they got hurt, they wanted their mommies. When they needed comfort, they wanted their mommies. In fact, they always wanted their mommies.

Some of these dads gave up. They felt out of place, unneeded, and even a little rejected. They felt that since mommy seemed so gifted at parenting, they should just

step back and get out of the way. They gave themselves to their careers, their hobbies, and even their churches, but they never learned how to connect with their kids. The time for reading to their kids came and went, and passing the football together never quite interested them or their children.

If you're one of those dads, something needs to change. Your heart needs to be turned back to your kid, and your kid's heart needs to be turned back to you. It may seem awkward for you, but you've got to connect with your kid no matter what it takes.

Let me give you the secret for connecting with your preteen child. It's wrestling. You don't need to know how. You're bigger. You'll figure it out. Get down on the floor, and in a taunting tone, say something like, "Come 'ere boy. Let me show you the double leg grab pull down flip around." If he squeals with laughter, take him down. If he runs, hunt him down.

I don't mean to imply that wrestling is all that there is to connecting with younger kids. That would be absurd. There is also tickling. Tickle a lot. Tickle their feet, their arms, their legs, their necks. Some people think that too much tickling is cruel, and those people should be thankful that I was not their father, because I would have tickled such silly notions right out of them.

Of course these two keys to parenting can also be combined. Unlike collegiate wrestling, tickling is the ultimate goal of the match. You don't take them down so that you can count to three; you take them down so that you can tickle them.

I hope you know I'm not kidding. It obviously doesn't have to be wrestling and tickling but you've got to connect with your kid. Get down on the ground and spend

Parenting in Love

an hour with your child. Get at his level and wrestle or play Legos®. Build a model, have a pillow fight, or play Hot Wheels®. Try to be a kid for a little while.

You don't have to be Super Dad. You don't have to be too creative. They just want you. They want your time and your attention. Give them your heart, and they'll give you theirs in return.

Strong Moms and Involved Dads

There are two common fatal blunders that many parents make. One is that they are too soft on their kids and don't correct, train, or discipline them enough. The other is that they don't express enough love to their kids. Many people seem to think they need to stress one or the other, as if love and discipline were two opposites. *That is wrong thinking.* Love and discipline go hand-in-hand. The Bible says that "If you love your children, you will correct them."²² A balanced parent is one who shows love through affection and discipline. Most parents need to greatly increase their efforts in one of these areas. They may think they are being loving by being overly permissive, or they may be strict without expressing love, but they need to be strong in both love and discipline.

Ofentimes each parent is weak in one of these two areas. The typical pattern is that the mom is not as strong as she needs to be and that the dad is not as involved or loving as he needs to be. If you've ever watched Nanny 911 or Super Nanny, you've seen this played out in almost every episode. While you might think this is the perfect balance, the reality is that

²² Proverbs 13:24 (NCV)

Premeditated Parenting

your kids will someday evaluate you on an individual basis. They'll say things like, "Dad was never around," or "Dad never once said, 'I love you.'" They aren't likely to say, "Dad was never around, but Mom made up for it by always being there for me." Kids don't get enough love from mom; they need it from dad too. The same goes for discipline.

We'll deal with discipline in much more depth later on, but what do you think happens when a parent is strict without also being expressively loving? You guessed it. The kids pull away. As a friend of mine says, "Rules without relationship results in rebellion." If a child doesn't sense a strong message of love from you, then he will naturally pull away from you when you give him instruction or correction.

A healthy spiritual home desperately needs the balanced presence of both love and discipline. Does your home have a balanced presence of both love and discipline?

Balance Correction and Positive Input

1 Peter 4:8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

I was once taught that you should praise someone more than you correct him. I don't know whether or not that is the perfect balance, but it is valuable to know that there is a need for balance and to figure out what that looks like for your own family.

I remember a regional manager I had in high school when I worked as a cook in a restaurant. He was a perfectionist to the extreme. Nothing was ever done to his satisfaction. He corrected everything I did. Nothing was ever done fast enough or well enough. Even when I would stay late to help he'd be upset that I was costing the company overtime. There was just no way to