

Unconditional Love In The Context Of Child Rearing

[Part 2]

Conveying unconditional love to our children can broadly be classified into four areas.

1 Eye Contact

Have you noticed that as soon as a baby is able to focus with its eyes it will seek another pair of eyes to lock on to and expresses joy when it makes this contact.

If the only concentrated eye contact we have with a child is when we want to make a strong corrective point. This can be very disastrous to our loving relationship with that child.

Or, if we deliberately avoid eye contact with a child as a form of punishment, this is cruel and devastating to the child, an incident that a child will never forget.

Eye contact should be a much-used love-giving route to a child.

2 Chronicles 16:9 [New King James] *“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars.”*

This knowledge can be a strong loving bond we have with our Creator God.

Proverbs 5:21 [New King James] *“For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and He ponders all his paths.”*

This constant awareness is a very strong influence on the way we live our lives, [**Proverbs 15:3**].

We have to admit we like people who are able to maintain a pleasant eye contact with us, especially if accompanied with pleasant facial expression such as a smile.

If when we are talking to someone their eyes are constantly roaming around the room as they are conversing with us makes us feel insignificant and unwanted.

This is greatly exaggerated in the mind of a child.

We should be glad of all the reminders we are given by the Creator God in His Word, the Christian Bible, how His eyes are on us constantly showing His great concern for us and the value He places on us individually.

Good eye contact with a child makes them feel special and loved.

Remember children learn most by role modelling, that is, they pattern themselves after us, their parents.

Observe the eye contact of an unpleasant, obnoxious child, their eye contact with us will be very brief.

When we observe their parents we will find the same lack of eye contact in them.

A child who has inherited from their parents poor eye contact with other people will find it difficult for people to relate to them.

This will be a great disadvantage in their future life.

Failure to thrive syndrome –

Research studies in a paediatric ward of a University Hospital came to some very interesting conclusions.

This failure to thrive syndrome was found in children as young as 6-12 months, they ceased to develop normally, stopped eating and growing naturally, became listless and lethargic for some unknown reason.

The study found out that in most cases the parents had rejected, often unconsciously, the children. Providing the child with food, clothing and warmth but constantly avoided eye contact and physical contact was limited.

Eye contact and the learning process –

Teachers have found some children have difficulties in making and maintaining eye contact with them, along with this goes an anxious, fearful and immature attitude. They have to be coaxed to speak, and have great hesitancy to respond to suggestions and questions.

As a result of this great difficulty in learning.

The problem is only overcome if the teacher is able to develop good eye contact with the child over a period of time.

As the child's fears and anxiety fades, their ability to learn will increase.

2 Physical Contact

It may seem an obvious way of conveying love to a child is by physical contact, yet studies have shown that most parents **only** touch their children as necessity demands.

Helping to dress or undress, washing, etc. you do not often see parents, on their own volition or "*out of the blue*" take an opportunity to gently touch their child.

Not just hugging and kissing, but any type of physical contact.

A touch on the shoulder, gentle poke in the ribs, tousle their hair or "give me five" hand slap.

We have in this simple action a way of assuring our child's emotional security and their own success, in their future relationships.

This works with adult people as well.

Have you ever tried the "touch with your change experiment?"

Every time you receive change from a salesperson, make sure that you actually touch their hand as you receive that change, then notice the change in that person's attitude towards you over a period of time. They will remember you the next time you call.

You will receive better service and a smile.

I remember one rather plump and unattractive teenager at a petrol filling station that I used had a change of character as a result of this simple “*touch with your change*” experiment.

When I first met her she was glum and discontented with what she called a dull and boring job, now she wears a radiant smile and wants to be a “*full-time*” attendant at a petrol station.

I now meet her smile as I drive into the forecourt and she saves me any unclaimed gift tokens from other customers.

She even now talks about her home life and holidays.

All the result of “*touch with your change*” experiment.

Mark 10:15-16 [New King James] “*Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.*’ And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.”

Notice the “*hands on*” approach that our Saviour Jesus Christ made with children, but also with adults who were going through times of trial.

Matthew 8:2-3 [New King James] “*And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.’ Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*”

No-one else would touch a leper but Jesus Christ knew that touch was part of the healing, giving the man’s confidence and self-worth, for he was not untouchable as far as Jesus Christ was concerned.

Other examples of touch being part of healing – **Matthew 8:14-15; Matthew 9:29; Matthew 20:34; Mark 7:32-33.**

We all need this physical contact with other people, especially at the beginning and end of our lives.

As a boy grows up the need for hugs and kisses decreases but the need for physical contact does not.

Playful wrestling, back slapping, playful boxing, “*give me five*” such precious moments are limited but must **not** be missed.

As a girl grows up the need for physical contact, especially the more affectionate type, increases in importance.

A girl may **not** show this need as much as a boy but if neglected it will be detrimental to her future affections towards others.

For a young girl this eye contact and notably physical contact is a desperate need, especially from her father.

I personally feel, and have personal experience to back it up, that much of the future success of a woman in marriage is dependent on the relationship she had with her father as a young girl.

It is vital for a girl to feel okay about her being female, especially if she has a brother.

The more stable her sexual identity, the better she will be able to withstand the peer pressure of male friendships, for a young girl receives this sexual identity mostly from her father.

This need for unconditional love, eye contact and physical contact becomes greater as the girl grows and approaches her teens.

The problem is that in our present-day society a father may feel increasingly uncomfortable about giving his daughter the affection she desperately needs from him in her pre-adolescent years, especially the physical contact.

Fathers forget this discomfort and give your daughter what is vital to her for her future success as a woman, especially in the context of a marriage relationship.

What is so sad in today's society is that many young and old people have to turn to animals, a pet dog or cat, to receive part of what they should be receiving from other human beings.

Eye contact and physical contact seldom require real sacrifice by parents or adults in our day-to-day contact with other people.

This next area in which we express unconditional love does involve sacrifice, sacrifice of lots of our time.

Opportunities to express unconditional love in the third way will come when we least feel like giving the time needed to succeed in this area.

3 Focussed Attention

What is focussed attention?

Focussed attention is giving a child or adult our full attention in such a way that they feel without any doubt that they are completely loved.

By being considered valuable enough in their own right to warrant our undistracted, watchful, appreciated and uncompromising attention, that they are the most important thing in our lives at that time.

This takes what I call "open-ended time," the person must know that we do have and be assured of the fact, that we have all the time available to resolve their need.

When a need comes up for a child or adult, they will first "test us" to see if we are willing to give them this "open-ended time."

If, because of situations beyond our control, we are unable to give this open-ended attention, be sure to specify a time, and be sure to honour that promise.

With a young child this must be at the very earliest moment, for they are as yet unable to visualise time, **not** having had much experience of time as adults have, an hour may feel like eternity to a young child.

Jesus Christ gave children and people in need top priority, far above His personal needs or desires.

Mark 10:13-16 [New King James] *"Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.' And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them."*

Notice that they brought the children to Jesus Christ, this must mean they had past experience of Him being a person who always had time for children and their need as well as adults in need.

Also notice “*for such is the Kingdom of God,*” we are to learn now in this life to give people in need priority for that will be our future job in the Kingdom of God.

The reprimand which the disciples of Jesus Christ received was for trying to prevent Jesus Christ giving His time and love to these people.

How many children were involved and how long it took we do not know!

John 15:13 [New King James] “*Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.*”

To lay down our life means to give our time to others, for time is our life.

John 13:34-35 [New King James] “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*”

If we are to be Christians in more than just name, it involves giving our time to fulfil the needs of others.

Many of which are just a need for “*focussed attention.*”

Psalms 127:3-5 [New King James] “*Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate.*”

A really loved child is a reward beyond price.

“*They shall speak with their enemies in the gate,*” imagine the effect on someone who is trying to cheat us when they see standing behind us supporting us three or more well-built young sons with rippling muscles and grim look on their faces, quite a deterrent to any enemy.

Every child or any other human being we have contact with should be made to feel that they are special, the only one of their kind.

Few people know or feel this in society today, but what a difference we can make if we, by giving people “*focussed attention,*” know that at least they are special in our eyes.

This could help them to understand how special they are in the eyes of their Creator God, which would bring about a wonderful change in how they live and value their lives and that of others.

Two words that I like to use to back up the love that God has created in me for other people are “*special*” as mentioned above, also “*precious*” as there is no other person like them in the whole of humanity.

Reasons we do not always recognise this need for focussed attention –

I would like to relate an incident in my church when we became aware of the plight of an elderly couple, both in their 80s and the husband wheelchair bound, the slightly younger wife very frail.

They were living on very restricted means and their house was in great need of re-painting.

A group of us in the church decided to help solve this problem. Three car loads of DIY men, led by one professional, early on a Sunday morning by appointment arrived at the elderly couple’s cottage.

While they watched in the garden on a beautiful summer's day, their house was transformed. The work took until dusk, then, tired and yet exhilarated by what we had accomplished, we sat in a circle around the couple and had a sing-a-long in which the couple joined with much delight.

After the perfect end to a wonderful day, we all arrived home in the "*small hours*" exhausted but happy.

A few weeks later I visited the couple to see how they were.

They were delighted with what we had done re-painting their house but uppermost in their memory and hearts was the "*sing-a-long*" we had with them in the middle of it.

They told me that they felt precious to us all and really part of the church, although they were unable to attend any services or other social functions, which had caused them to feel isolated.

When we expressed our love for them in a very practical way followed by "*focussed attention*" in which they were and felt to be the centre of our attention and very special to us.

It is difficult to give focussed attention because it takes time –

We all find it impossible to fulfil all our obligations in the time that is available to us.

Urgent matters will as a result be given priority.

This would be fine if all of these urgent matters were important, often they are **not**.

One example of this is the "*sacred*" telephone, I call it "*sacred*" because it seems to take priority over everything else. I've even heard of people getting out of a bath to "*worship*" the telephone. Mobile phones have **not** helped this priority problem.

This is part of the tyranny of the urgent too often winning out over what is important in life.

There is just not enough time in our short lives to be controlled by the urgent and still be able to look after what is really important.

Set our priorities –

We must determine our own priorities, set our own goals and plan the use of our time, in order to take care of important things, one of which is giving our children "*focussed attention*."

One thing I have noticed in my contact with many families is that the families that are happy, contented and united have similar priorities.

First priority – is ethical in nature, a strong religious faith and moral code. Placing the Creator God first and having a warm, close relationship with Him.

This is a wise and logical priority because it is only through the Creator God that we can have hope beyond this very short life.

Second priority – is with our spouse. It must be loving, loyal, warm and giving relationship.

Third priority – is our children, this is essential.

Other priorities may be important but these three must head the list in this order.

Too many put money, power, prestige and work before these three and the end result is tragic.

What is worse, the end result of such misguided priorities are **not** often realised until it is too late to make any changes.

Fleeting moments –

We cannot choose when we give “*focussed attention*” for life is so short, unpredictable and uncertain, we cannot know or plan how many opportunities we will be allowed by our Creator God, to nurture our children and express our love for other human beings.

These moments we are given to express love do **not** happen every day, we have to grasp every moment to leave a lasting expression of love in the minds of our children.

There was a young boy named Rick, he was the youngest of a large family and on his father’s 50th birthday he had planned to express the love he had for his father by giving him 50 kisses on that day.

The morning arrived and Rick ran into the kitchen at breakfast time and started his planned expression of love.

His father became irritated by this expression of love and rejected this spontaneous gesture.

Rick was mentally crushed by this rejection, and with tears streaming down his face rushed, half blinded, out of the house right under the wheels of a passing car.

Even if Rick had lived he would never have forgotten the pain, anguish and humiliation of that moment of rejection.

If only Rick’s father had spent a few moments of his time to accept and thrill to those 50 kisses, before he rushed off to work, Rick would have treasured that memory all of his life, especially when he was tempted to go against the values his loving parents were seeking to teach him.

A child at first may **not** know how to express or show how they treasure the fleeting moments of “*focussed attention*” we give them.

This appreciation will only be expressed in the way the child lives in the months and years ahead.

Personally I cannot remember telling my dad how I adored the times when we walked together in the countryside with the dog and when he pointed out all the signs and sounds of God’s creation to me.

Or the times when we “*dug for victory*” during the last World War on our allotment.

Yet these moments are foremost in my mind when I think about my father.

He was, maybe without realising it, giving me the “*focussed attention*” I was craving for.

Let’s face it, finding the time to give each of our children the “*focussed attention*” they need in this hyperactive society is very hard.

Especially when children seem to prefer to receive “*focussed attention*” from TV or computer rather than their parents.

This is all the more reason for us to give our children “*focussed attention*” rather than being influenced by adverse outside forces that pervade society today.

It will be difficult but the rewards will be great.

Watch out for unexpected opportunities.

As the children grow older, the period of “*focussed attention*” needs to be longer, as they need a “*warm up*” period to allow their defences to drop and for them to gather their thoughts, especially if there is something that is troubling them.

Special times for giving are –

When a child is sick, which is a time of greater need, also a time when they are in a more receptive mood.

When they have accomplished something new.

When they have been hurt emotionally by being let down by one of their friends.

“*Focussed attention*” takes time, lots of time, but it is the most effective way of ensuring that our child’s “*emotional tank*” is full to overflowing.

There are some in society who say “*too much love will spoil a child,*” and others “*you cannot love a child too much.*” Let us examine this controversy.

First we must understand that there are two very different types of love.

Appropriate love –

This is the type of unconditional love that we have been examining.

A child can never receive too much of this type of love.

As we have seen, it is emotionally healthy and aids the child to mature into a balanced adult.

Inappropriate love –

This type of love actually hinders a child’s emotional growth and hampers self-reliance.

This type of love tends to be possessive on the part of the parent.

The parents may be seeking to fulfil their own dreams through the child.

A father uses the son to fulfil his own athletic longings.

A mother steers her daughter into relationships she would like to be involved in, even when her daughter is **not** mature enough to handle them.

Role reversal – This is a reversal of dependency, where the parent deals with the child as if they are much older than they are.

When the child cannot fulfil the emotional needs of the parent, then the parent may become abusive.

Most child abuse cases fall into this type of inappropriate love.

The basis of this problem may be that the adult is not receiving the emotional need, that we all have, from their own mate, so look to the children to fulfil that need.

Too high expectations of the child –

Demanding what is **not** attainable by the natural abilities of the child.

All this is with a total disregard of the emotional needs of the child.

How do we avoid these situations?

Never find ourselves in a position where we are unable to nurture our children through –

Fatigue or illness, poor emotional health, or poor spiritual health through lack of prayer, study of God's Word, the Christian Bible or meditation on what we read in God's Word.

1 Corinthians 10:26 [New King James] *“for ‘the earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness.’”*

The fullness includes our children, for we are only stewards of what belongs to the Creator God, [**Acts 20:28**].