

## **Sermon Title: How to Raise Excruciatingly Perfect Children**

**Series Title: Family Matters Series**  
**Sermon by Pastor Tom Harrington**  
**Week of May 9, 2010**

### **Sermon Based Small Group Discussion Guide**

**Big Idea:** The key to a great family is godly love. This is true of all relationships within the family, but this final message in the Family Matters series will focus on how following God's example of loving others will guide parents as they seek to raise their children.

**Sermon Text:** John 14:23-29

**Study Introduction:** If you love something, set it free. If it comes back, it will always be yours. If it doesn't come back, it was never yours to begin with. But... If it just sits in your living room, watches your TV, messes up your stuff, eats your food, uses your telephone, takes your money, and doesn't appear to realize that you actually set it free in the first place, you either married it or gave birth to it!

In the beginning God created male and female and God said it was good. Then they got married got in trouble and had children. It can be quite a challenge to raise a family today. Many believe that the family structure has been weakened because the family is getting away from God and His principles. We can blame the schools or society, but really the downfall of the nation and of the family comes from the fact that the family has no idea what its purpose is. Today we will finish the Family Matters series by discussing the purpose of parents.

Most of us have heard Harry Chapin's famous 1970s song, "Cat's in the Hat." The words of this catchy melody poignantly illustrate just how well children learn from their parental example. As the final verse of this song shows, that is not always for the best. In the 1990s Alanis Morissette sang 'Perfect,' about parents who are never

satisfied. Parenting can be such a daunting task, but it is one for which God equips us.

In the focus passage for this week's sermon we find Jesus speaking to his disciples shortly before his betrayal and death. It is significant that, in some of his last teaching moments with them, he chose to focus on love, obedience, and the motivation for right behavior. These verses, which shed light on God's role as parent and ours as children, offer guidance and hope to parents, today.

#### **Icebreaker**

#### **Read John 14:23-29**

*Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me."*

1. What is the principle Jesus is teaching that can be applied to every area of your life? Choose one of the following suggested areas to which you can apply this principle and share with the group how this would look, if applied, in your life:

- a) family
- b) work or school
- c) church
- d) hobbies or sports

*Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 1 John 4:8*

*My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. John 15:12*

God not only is love, but his expression of love to us is the supreme example of how he would have us understand and demonstrate love. Jesus taught that love must come first in our relationship to him and to our heavenly Father. This has clear implications to parents about how to love children. Some of the greatest lessons on how to love, in general, and on parenting, in particular, come from God's relationship to people, as recorded in Scripture.

### **Exercise: How does God love?**

*Review the following verses and match them to what it reveals about how God expresses love (choices listed below Scripture passages):*

#### **Scripture Passages:**

- a) We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19)
- b) Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph 5:2)
- c) And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good? (Deut 10:12-13)
- d) The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)
- e) Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The LORD will do what is good in his sight. (2 Samuel 10:12)
- f) We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. (1 John 2:3-5)
- g) [Love] always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. (1 Corinthians 13:7-8)
- h) "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves; and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son...Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good that we may share in his holiness. No

discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:5-11)

#### **Descriptions of how He loves:**

- God is the initiator of love \_\_\_\_
- God's love is the reason we can love him and can love others \_\_\_\_
- God's love is consistent and unconditional \_\_\_\_
- God's love seeks our good by setting limits, requiring obedience, and carrying consequences \_\_\_\_
- God teaches us, helps us mature, because he loves us \_\_\_\_
- God's love is sacrificial \_\_\_\_
- God as just judge is not inconsistent with his loving nature \_\_\_\_
- God's love expects our right response/behavior \_\_\_\_
- God's steadfast love for us helps us obey his commands, even when we do not understand his larger plan \_\_\_\_

### **Study Questions**

1. How does God's concept of love, as seen in Scripture, differ from the world's messages about love, especially in how it applies to loving and raising children?
2. Brainstorm a list of what children need. God's love expressed in the incarnation was the perfect satisfaction of our needs, and when we love as God loves we seek the good of the beloved. What do children need?

Let's take a look at the significance of applying the principle of putting godly love first to child rearing. During the sermon, several different parenting styles were referenced. Although it is not within

the scope of this study to give a detailed examination of each of these styles, here is a brief review:

- a) the begging or pleading strategy
- b) the ultimatum or threatening strategy
- c) the guilt or manipulative strategy
- d) the persuading strategy
- e) the comparison strategy
- f) the pragmatic (bribing) strategy

3. Do you recognize any of these strategies as the primary style of parenting that your parents employed when raising you?

4. Do you use any of these styles of parenting on your own children? What is your primary style of parenting when you are fatigued or stressed?

5. Consistent application of God's example for demonstrating love could have a profound effect on our families. If you could focus on one aspect of perfect love to model more effectively within your home, what would it be? Which is the biggest challenge for you? Share this with your group and consider adding it to the prayer list.

### **Closing Challenge**

1. Review the status of each member of the household to see that everyone feels he or she is a VIP in the family. As a part of a group that accepts and trusts us, we, too, realize our value.
2. Check the basic structure. **Dad is to lead. Mother is to support the leadership. Children are to share responsibilities.**
3. Scrutinize family values. Make sure Jesus is the center. Anything else is too weak to hold the family together.
4. Develop family pride through accomplishment. Celebrate them.
5. Build up the fun side of the family with laughter.
6. Ease up on forced togetherness. Relationships need to breathe.
7. Keep the home ventilated with positive comments and relaxed attitudes.
8. Sweep out the old grudges.
9. Keep the door open to family friends.
10. Expect periodic spills of immaturity and imperfection.

### **Prayer Requests and Praises:**

#### **Announcements from:**

Care Coordinator  
Outreach Coordinator  
Social Coordinator