

Parental Love in Action

By: Sally Hohnberger

Do you want better-behaved children? Do you want your infants to be content, and your children to be willingly helpful and cheerful? Do you want your youth to be respectful and to love God? Of course we all want this end result. But how much? Are we willing to do what it takes to achieve this? Are we courageous enough to do what is necessary to train up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord so that we **can** have teens following in the way of God? If so, then we must choose against worldly parenting, choose against self, and choose to do the will of God in His wisdom and power, instead of our own.

I've met parents all over the world who desire contented infants, but who do not personally know the voice of God. They cannot recognize Him directing them in warfare against the enemy – selfishness. Many parents only know the voice of their flesh. Many wrongly feel that it is unloving to be firm, to decisively deny their child's little wrongs, or to give motivational consequences for outbursts of anger or passion. As a result, their infant's angry passions grow because of parents who lack proper firmness and knowledge of God's voice.

As children grow, their selfish behavior grows with their growth, and strengthens with their strength, so those little wrong habits grow into big, bad habits. They fail to learn how to submit themselves to their parents or to God. Yet, by worldly standards, they are considered "good" children.

As they mature into teenagers, any mention by their parents of standards in diet, dress, etc., results in heated home discussions, and passionate, boldly defiant reactions. They wrongly regard reading their Bible as a cruel punishment.

Expectations of kindness or helpfulness are thought to be unreasonable. These youth are viewed as "good kids" because they do not smoke, drink or use drugs— **yet**. But, all in due time, the true fruit of this permissive indulgence will show its bitter root.

Their parents throw up their hands, saying, "Haven't we done everything right? Haven't we taken them to church, home-schooled them or sent them to church school, and taught them their memory verses? I guess we'll just have to leave them in God's hands now!"

Your child may be one of these defiant youth. As such, you must face the fact that your child is, to a great extent, a by-product of your misdirected parenting, your misguided management, and your misapplied religion. You must face the magnitude of your own fault. You need to go to God for direction on how to get out of this mess and correct your wrong and indulgent practices. God has a way of escape for you or for me when we err. But He requires us to turn away from our former ways and look to Jesus for our next step!

At every age, our children need parents who will **direct and discipline** them in the path of righteousness, led by God. They need parents who will make them a priority over all else in life. Our children need to be introduced to Jesus, taught how to recognize His voice, and shown how to submit their will to divine power so they may win the fight against selfish inclinations. They need to experience a transformation in their thoughts, their tastes, their desires, their feelings, their words and their deeds through the intercession of a parent whose life is hid with Christ in God.

Parents, will you show your children the way? Are you ready to take up your work as

parents, personally led of God and no longer led of self and the flesh? Are your children worth fighting for? Yes! Yes! Are you ready to admit that your methods have been wrong and correct them today? It will take much prayer, much time with God, and much effort to **lay plans** for your new direction. It will require you to **study to know the will and way of God** – to find in Christ the wisdom and fortitude to recognize and firmly deny your youth's wrong ways. It will take effort to learn how to cultivate the right and to replace the wrong ways of your children!

Most importantly, you must **gain their hearts** by taking them to Jesus that He may cleanse their lives, direct them in new ways of reacting and responding in trials, and give them power to oppose their former inclinations. If you gain the heart and get it in Jesus' hands, the blessings and changes are wonderful. If you fall short of true surrender and strive for right behavior apart from Christ, you will be sorely disappointed and wounded.

Don't fear the battle of regaining their heart from Satan's clutches – from the habits and lying thoughts that he has cultivated and exercised them in all these years. Teach them to know God's voice. Take up the battle firmly and courageously for God has promised, "The Lord shall fight for you!" But first you need to come to Jesus, take His hand, and spend much time on your knees with pen and paper to **lay your plans** to redeem your child from Satan's service and learn how to place your child in God's service.

I'll share one family's story in the hope that it may inspire you to take this step of allowing God to lead you as you lead your child out of a life of sin and selfishness and onto the narrow path. See if you can relate and learn from their experience. Their letter was entitled "**The Fire.**"

My son had always been a relatively good kid. He didn't use drugs, was a good worker and often surprised adults by his willing communication with them. I'd like to say that when He was seventeen we suddenly had problems, but the truth is that there were signs and symptoms throughout the years. We were not consistent in our home. The discipline of regular study in home school was lacking and we were self-indulgent, setting the poorest possible example. When we did try to discipline, it consisted of doing the right thing and enforcing proper principles, while not being surrendered to God ourselves, and not being led of Him. We were the ones in charge, not God. We put forth only sporadic efforts to win his friendship, and gradually, as a teen, we felt him withdrawing from us. His music, his work, and his friends, both on the phone and over the computer modem, were consuming larger and still larger amounts of his

time. He developed friendships that had less than positive influences on him, and we noticed that he had started to sneak improper foods and caffeine.

You see, the parents knew. They saw the problems, but in spite of this knowledge they were powerless. My friends, it takes more than knowledge. It takes real heroism, resoluteness, and sometimes even a reckless daring born of conviction if we are to be used of God to wrest our children from the hands of the destroyer. Are we fearless enough to examine our own attitudes and choose against worldly parenting? Are we committed to saturating ourselves in the counsel God has abundantly given us? Are we willing to deny self and to seek to do the will of God instead? Courage, firmness, and positive requirements are necessary to raise children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We must fiercely resolve to no longer allow them to merely "come up" like weeds in our gardens.

Too many of us have attempted to raise godly children using ungodly methods, or using God's methods independent from Him. This always has and always will lead to failure, for "Without Me ye can do nothing!" But when we bring our children to a "full heart surrender", then the Lord can remove that evil root of selfishness and implant the goodly root of righteousness. It requires the combination of human effort and divine grace.

My wife was awakened one night at one a.m. While praying, she felt impressed that she should turn on the computer and read the e-mail my son had been sending. She did, and was shocked to realize the full extent of his rebellion. He spoke disparagingly of her, and it was clear that he was merely biding his time until he was of age. He told his friends how he really felt about life at home, and we were saddened to see his foul language and his stated desire to leave home as soon as possible. While we were hurt, we also realized it was our fault. We had created the problem, and now, if he were to have any chance at all, we were going to have to salvage it with God. That morning, he got into an argument with his mother and without permission took the car and drove off in a huff.

You can only "show" them the way, you know. Are you an overcomer of your selfish nature? Do you personally know Jesus' voice speaking to your conscience? Do you know how to cooperate with and surrender to Him? God longs to hear and answer your prayers so He can teach *you* how to teach *them*!

These parents had instructed their son, but he was not God's in heart and life. We must come to see the **distinction between teaching and training**. Teaching is to tell, to instruct, and to

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make them aware of what is right. Teaching deals only with the mind. Teaching alone is not enough! Training deals with the will and **sees to it they do** what they know is right. While teaching reasons, calls for a decision, and gives understanding, it is only the beginning. When teaching does not bring forth obedience, then you must go on to firmer measures. **They choose** a consequence when they choose to disobey. Training consults with God and gives whatever discipline or consequences (a lower motivation) necessary to bring their uncooperativeness to a true surrender. In that surrender, God can transform their thoughts, feelings and dispositions while they do right. You need God to direct you in this warfare. God must gain our children's hearts in order to change them.

God may call for a firmness beyond what you have heretofore given. Will you follow Him for your child's sake? It may take extreme firmness to correct your too-soft, indulgent practices. Or, God may call for a cultivation of softness to the dictatorial, cold parent. In either case, all firmness must be given **in the Spirit** – not in the flesh. Let's find balance. Watch the firmness this family was impressed to use.

Later that day, after my son had returned home, his mother confiscated his keys and driver's license. We had to deal with these problems soon. There was less than one year until his eighteenth birthday. We talked and earnestly prayed for wisdom, claiming the promise in James 1:5. But no answer was immediately forthcoming. As I took the trash to the burn barrel, I suddenly knew what I was to do. I turned from the barrel to retrieve my splitting block and maul.

With much continued prayer, I prepared for something that I didn't want to do, but felt that the Lord was calling me to. Then, while the rest of the children were taking a nap, I said to my son and my wife, "Put on your coats and boots. We have some work to do outside." I slung a day-pack over my shoulder and led them across the lawn while praying in my heart, "Lord, I don't want to do this. Please help me! Please give me the right words. Give me strength. Thy will be done." I stopped at the burning barrel and pulled a Bible out of the day-pack. I said, "Son, today we are going to have an object lesson that you are going to remember the rest of your life." I turned to Jude 21-23 and read these words from the Living Bible:

'Stay always within the boundaries where God's love can reach and bless you. Wait patiently for the eternal life that our Lord Jesus Christ in His mercy is going to give you. Try to help those who argue against you. Be merciful to those who doubt.

*Save some by snatching them as from the very flames of hell itself. And as for others, **help them to find the Lord** by being kind to them, but be careful that you yourselves aren't pulled along into their sins. Hate every trace of their sin while being merciful to them as sinners.' Then I said, "Son, we thought we were being merciful and kind to you, trying to save you from the world. But, we see we were wrong." Then, laying the Bible aside, I reached in my pocket, pulled out some matches, and lit some paper under the dry tinder in the burning barrel. Next, I reached into the backpack, retrieving a pile of papers containing mail communication between my son and his friends. I started looking through the messages and threw all but one in the fire. I began to read the message that he had composed that very morning just after his mom had confiscated his headphones while he was listening to a "Christian" rock music CD. It was a very angry letter written with much filthy language. I read it loudly (there was no one else within hearing distance) and with a vehement voice (even though I was not angry) as I imagined he would have wished to do. I read everything, including the vulgarities he used to talk about his Mother. Then I threw it in the fire. It flew right back out undamaged. I threw it in again with the same results. So I wadded it up tightly in my fist, held it toward my son, and said with a loud voice, "Satan loves this! He*

loves it so much that he doesn't want to see it burn like he's going to burn. I love you too much to let you join him there someday!" I threw it in the fire once more. This time it was consumed.

"Son, after forty years in the wilderness, the Israelites still had to fight the giants, but listen to what God said." I picked up my Bible and read the words from Deuteronomy 1:8: "I am giving all of it to you! Go in and possess it, for it is the land the Lord promised." Then I said, "Son, there are giants in your life, but we are going up to possess your land, because God has given us the victory!" With my splitting maul stuck in a chopping block directly in front of me, I read these words from Matthew 3:10: "The axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." I said, "Son, there are some trees in your life that are not bringing forth good fruit." Reaching into the day-pack, I brought out a small, handheld color TV that his mother found in his closet that morning, and set it on the chopping block. I said, "Son, this represents all the garbage in your life that Satan is using to destroy your soul." I raised my splitting maul and with one blow destroyed it. Pointing at the remains, I said in a loud, firm voice, "Throw it in the fire!" He obeyed.

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Pulling out a plastic box containing sixteen so-called "Christian" rock CDs, I chopped them up and commanded once again, "Throw them in the fire!" As he consigned them to their fiery fate, he got a little too close to the fire and almost got burned. I said, "Son, if you continue to hold onto your sins, you're going to burn in hell someday, just like those CDs."

We went through the same routine with his expensive headphones and his ear buds while I said, "These could have been used for good, but you chose to use them for evil." The last item to be sacrificed was a small brick of aged cheddar cheese found in his jacket pocket. I said, "This represents all the garbage that you have been putting into your body." After I smashed it with the maul, he threw it into the fire.

Do you see how Jesus the great Shepherd will personally direct your steps to correct your present situation? Come to Him that you may have light and life. He needs you to spend much time with Him – not just time in His word, but intimate time with Him where He can talk personally with you. He desires to get down to your heart, your trials, and your struggles with sin. He wants to empower you to overcome even those besetting sins, those chronic troubles, and show your children the right way! This is truly the "great controversy." The choice truly is yours. Who are you choosing to serve today?

Laying the maul aside and picking up my Bible, I began to share God's plan of salvation with my son. With tears in my eyes, I said, "No one ever showed me how to walk with Jesus. No one ever helped me. I want to help you. Your mother and I have made a lot of mistakes, but we love you and want to do everything possible to help you to have a saving relationship with Jesus. God is ready to give you the victory right now. The Apostle Paul said, 'Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.' I Corinthians 15:57. Jesus has already conquered Satan, and Jesus gives us the victory as we claim it. Romans 6:11-12 says, 'Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.' If we are dead to a sin, we are not going to be doing that sin. 'But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.' Romans 13:14"

"Son, you have been mostly compliant with us, but you seldom submit yourself to God or your parents, and now I am calling for true submission." Praise God, he chose submission, prayed with us, admitted his sins and sought forgiveness.

Right away we had opportunity to test his submission, as I outlined the new program for our home. Besides schedule changes for all of us, there would be new restrictions on him. I would keep his driver's license for a while. The cordless phones

would be replaced with corded ones so there would be no chance to talk privately with his friends. All mail, incoming and outgoing by any medium, would now pass through me. I asked for him to end one friendship, and I restricted another to association only while I was present.

I made changes, as well, spending time with my son and making friends with him – something new for both of us. We went snow boarding the other day. While I felt like I had broken a couple of ribs getting off the lift, and I was sore for days with muscles I hadn't used for a long time, I wouldn't trade this new relationship for anything! This is not the end of the story – just the beginning of a better one. My son is making progress, and is learning to submit to God and to his parents.

Firmness in Christ is the essential ingredient that brings our children away from wrong habits. Dear reader, depend upon Christ personally for your directions with your youth. This is the key to success! **Do not copy the methods others have used as your key to success.** Attempting to do what others have done without God's presence guiding you all too often ends in failure. **There is no virtue in a method, apart from the guidance of an all-knowing God.** Don't go with a method alone. Go with God and the method of following His leading for your family. Take courage! It is never too late to work for your erring children in Jesus!

Power for Living



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Empowered Living Ministries
3945 North Fork Rd, Columbia Falls, MT 59912
Office: (406) 387-4333 Fax: (406) 387-4336
Toll free (877) 755-8300 (orders only)

Email: office@EmpoweredLivingMinistries.org
Web: www.EmpoweredLivingMinistries.org