



Abundant Living Ministries

Encouraging Christian Living since 1978

February 2020

My heart hurt as my friend told me about the struggles one of his adult sons was going through. Alcohol, marijuana, heroin, unwed pregnancy, addictions, DUI arrests. I said my heart hurt but I realize that I can't even imagine the pain and sorrow a dad and mom feel when they see one of their children like this.

This is a Christian home. These parents love God and sought to teach their children in the ways of the Lord. They desired so strongly to see their children commit their lives to Jesus and then teach their children to do the same.

My friend asked me quite simply, "John, does anything come to mind... do you have any suggestions for me? How can I help my son? He's an adult and doesn't very often welcome advice from me. What can I do for him?"

I so wanted to give my friend a simple three-step plan guaranteed to result in spiritual healing and mental health for his son and son's family. But life isn't always that easy. We did brainstorm some practical things he could do to strengthen his relationship with his son, perhaps resulting in the son giving ear to Dad's counsel. But that's not the point of this letter.

Here's the point. I suggested to my friend that, most importantly, he offer his son *unconditional* love. This is a love that prays and cares constantly for his son. It's a love NOT dependent on his son's response. It's actually GOD'S love flowing through this dad... even when he gets angry rejection in return.

I think of Jesus who, as recorded in Matthew 23, looked down over Jerusalem. In grief and pain, He exclaimed, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing." Jesus loved perfectly, but was still rejected. I'm sure Jesus' heart ached. I'm sure He felt the deep pain that resulted when rebuffed by the very ones He loved.

But the significant thing is that JESUS DIDN'T QUIT LOVING. The rejection... the pain... the sorrow did not block His *unconditional* love. In fact, that love took Him to death. Even on the cross, He expressed his love, "Father forgive them."

This is the love my friend purposes to show to his wayward, struggling son. I believe this kind of love is only possible as we invite GOD'S love to flow THROUGH us. We become HIS reflectors... or HIS channels!

Some of you, who are reading this letter, have experienced a situation pretty similar to the one my friend is dealing with. Others, like me, have not faced a situation so severe. But we have all had occasions when our best effort at loving seems to have been shunned. We try so hard to help, to encourage, to give, to LOVE... and our love-motivated outreach is rejected, and perhaps with a scolding.

That hurts. Actually, pain at such times is normal and appropriate. Jesus helps us with that wound too.

The really important question is, "Will the pain and sorrow hinder my continued expressions of love? Will I keep on loving, EVEN IN the face of rejection?" Will my love be UNconditional?

Yes, May HIS LOVE flow through us!

John Charles (for Sharon and the rest at ALM)





Every Valentine's Day people all over this country spend much money on cards, candy, flowers and other gifts to say, "I love you," to the special people in their lives. While it is always nice to convey that message with words and gifts, there are plenty of other practical ways to show others that we care deeply for them. And often our actions will speak much more loudly than our words.

Let's take some pointers from two verses out of "the Love Chapter," and consider how we might implement them in our homes, not just in February but every day, starting today.

1 Corinthians 13: 4 – 5

Love is patient ... I purpose to show love today by waiting *calmly* for my family members. I will resist the urge to roll my eyes, shake my head, tap my foot, or give any signal of exasperation or frustration. I will continue to pray about family problems and trust God to work, even when I don't see any outward evidence of change.

Love is kind ... I purpose to bless my family members with an unexpected act of kindness today. I will assist them with a project they are working on, do a task they normally perform, surprise them with a special treat, or offer to spend some time with them doing something they enjoy. I will do these acts of kindness with a warm smile.

Love does not envy ... I purpose to mentally review my many blessings today, refusing to park my thoughts on things I don't have, but wish I had. I will express enthusiastic gratitude to my family members for the many good gifts God has showered on us.

Love does not boast and is not proud ... I purpose to rejoice today over family members' successes and/or blessings. I will ask them to talk about their day and their accomplishments and will show genuine interest by asking questions and listening, rather than talking about myself.

Love is not easily angered ... I purpose to quickly forgive family members when they "step on my toes" by ignoring me, taking me for granted, mistreating me, etc. I will ask God to bless them in a special way today. If I need to speak to them about their behavior, I will do so calmly and positively, focusing on how I can be of help to them, rather than on how they upset me.

Just imagine how pleasant family relationships would become if this type of love were shown each day! The wonderful thing is that each one of us can improve at demonstrating love. With God, the Source of love, as our Helper, this love can show up, not just occasionally, but every day of the year!



Sharon
Charles

Open Arms Childbirth Class

Five Consecutive Thursdays
April 9 - May 7, 2020

Taught by an experienced childbirth educator, this class covers the same information offered in a hospital course, but includes a distinctively-Christian perspective. You will meet and connect with other expectant couples and gain many practical helps as you prepare for a great labor and delivery. There is no cost for this course. Please register by contacting the ALM office (see contact information below).



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