

Raising Happy Children

Mom: Whoa, Timothy, I hardly recognize you. After that soccer game today you were covered with mud from head to toe.

Timothy: Yeah, it was a great game.

Mom: Did you wash behind your ears?

Timothy: Oh, Mom!

Mom: Well, did you?

Carol: Tammy, does that sound typical for you? I know it was a familiar sound in our home! You know, sometimes doing what is right for our children will not make them happy! You're listening to *Women of Hope* and today we have a great topic to discuss! 'Raising happy children'.

Tammy: Carol, you raised two children – were they always happy?

Carol: Oh Tammy, of course not. They were happy most of the time, but they were especially unhappy when they couldn't do what they wanted to do.

Tammy: And my children are the same, but we can't always let the children do what they want can we? We know what they need and what's good for them, so sometimes we have to be tough!

Carol: I found that if my children knew what they could and could not do they were actually happier in the long run! They knew that we loved them and we wanted the best for them.

Tammy: Yes I agree on that one. I've seen children who are allowed to do anything they want, and it's very interesting. They're not usually happy children are they?

Carol: No, Tammy, not at all. And usually it's quite the opposite. Children who are allowed too much freedom are unhappy and insecure. Raising happy children takes a lot of time and energy, but it's not an impossible task. It can be joyful and rewarding.

Tammy: Yes, it can, but it's not always easy is it? When my son was younger, I sometimes found myself losing my temper.

Carol: I'm sure we all do that at times. It's okay to be angry sometimes, but it's not right to take it out on the children.

Tammy: I agree. We as parents can be angry for good reason – but we must not act in anger with our children. We must not hit them or make them feel small by shouting at them. As parents our love for the children has to be constant and unconditional. Raising happy children is a very important part of parenting.

Carol: OK. This all sounds good, but how do we do it?

Tammy: That's the question. Stay with us if you want to hear more on how to raise happy children.

Carol: This is *Women of Hope* and we're glad that you're with us! Today we're talking about raising happy children.

Tammy: Carol, previously you have shared some parenting behaviors and skills. You have two adult children. And both of them are successful and doing well in life. Why don't you continue to share with us more on positive parenting.

Carol: I'm glad we can talk about families and raising happy children. I could talk about my family all day – couldn't you? We all like to talk about our children and what they're busy with and how they're doing in school don't we!

I remember a time when my children were small and I was having trouble with my son. Try as hard as I might, I could not get him to feel excited about school. He wanted to stay home with me and nothing else would do. He would get really upset and cry when I dropped him off to school each day. I tried giving him rewards; I tried reasoning and explaining - but nothing worked. After two months of unsuccessful talks with my son and many sad days at school I asked my son's teacher for help. She gave me a piece of advice that I will always remember. She said I needed to *reconnect* with my son. What did that mean? Well, I needed to show him that I really cared about him. He was not feeling secure; he was feeling 'disconnected' from me...and so he didn't want to leave me.

As I thought about this, I realized that I had put my relationship with my children in second place behind other things in my life. I was busy with so many things. None of them was really bad. But I had allowed too many things to come first – ahead of my children. And when I looked closely I could see my daughter was also feeling disconnected. She would try to get my attention – but I was so busy. My husband had a new job requiring late hours...and our home needed looking after. We had all become strangers. Does this family picture sound familiar to you? It was time to stop and take a look at our family – and our values. We needed to spend more time with these precious children that God had given us.

Raising happy children is a very important part of parenting. We all want happy children don't we? In order to raise cheerful, contented and well-mannered children we need to put in a lot of time and effort. But, you know, it is worth every moment we spend with our children isn't it? There are many rewards!

Here are some ideas to help in this important job.

We can work hard to raise healthy, happy and self-confident children, but the first thing we have to do is to be happy ourselves. We must have a positive attitude with our children. If we are always unhappy and grumpy with them, they will be unhappy and grumpy too. And if we are always shouting at them, they will shout at others...won't they? Our home should not be an angry place, but a place for caring, love and support.

Do you remember Tammy and I talking about children being happy if they know what they can and cannot do? That is setting limits for our children. But we must do this without being angry or cruel. The limits we set should be in the best interests of the child and should be clearly explained from the beginning.

Then, all families need to spend time together – this is the only way to grow close to our children. Play with them – outside in the park, or at home playing games. You can teach them while you play, to take turns and share.

And it's always good to eat meals together when we can too. This is the best time for you to encourage open communication. Ask your child questions like this: "What is the best thing that happened to you today?" Listen to the answer and talk about each other's day. Family members should always be allowed to talk about what's bothering them too. You may even ask: "What's the worst thing that happened today?" This gives your child an opportunity to tell you about a problem he might be having. You can then gently advise him on how to handle the problem. Sometimes just listening is the best thing we can do.

So just to remind ourselves

- we need to be happy - so that our children are happy,
- we need to set limits for them
- we need to spend time together and encourage open communication with them.

Here are some more ideas...

Listen to your child. Even if you are busy...when your child comes to you with a question, or wants to tell you something, stop what you are doing. Make eye contact with your child...give him a reply and make sure that he has heard you.

Respect your children - children who are respected will learn to respect you in return. And they will learn to respect others. Encourage your children to be thoughtful as well. Demonstrate the importance of helping others. Children raised in this environment become respectful...thoughtful...and caring adults.

Praise your children whenever you have an opportunity. If you are always telling your child that what he is doing is not good enough, he will grow up not feeling very good about himself. He will find it hard to ever feel that he can achieve – even at school. Noticing your child doing something good and telling him what a good job he is doing, is one of the most loving things you can do.

Be a good example to your children in your work. Show them the importance of dedication. Whether you work hard at your job, or you give time to your church or your community, your dedication to something will be a very good example for your children. They will learn to do the same in their own lives by working hard at school. And they will learn the value of community service.

And make sure you enrich your life through others. Isn't it fun to get together with family members – aunts, uncles, cousins? Make family and friends feel welcome in your home. As you show interest in other people your children will do the same. And they will learn to value others too.

So let's remind ourselves again

- listen to our children and respect them,
- encourage them to be thoughtful to others,
- praise them whenever we can,
- be a good example to them in our work,
- and let's enrich our lives with other people.

And finally, we need to remind ourselves that it is actually God who is the creator of our children and that they are gifts to us from him. We are to take care of them as we would a precious gift.

Carol: Let's take some time now to hear more about God's gift of children. We have *another* Carol with us today. She is going to share something with us about **why** God gives us children. Welcome, Carol!

Carol Munger: Thank you – it's really good to be here again with you. I love to watch children at play don't you? There is something so fresh and innocent about them isn't there! These precious children are gifts from God. He has given them to us in trust that we will take the best care of them. What a wonderful gift. Let's stop now and thank God for these precious gifts. Would you like to pray with me?

Dear Father God, thank you for this day. Thank you for your precious gift to us of children. Father, please bless our time together. Open our ears and our hearts to what you have to say to each one of us today. Amen.

Becoming a parent is an awesome experience isn't it? If you are a parent, do you remember that first cry of your new baby? This new little person belongs to you and is part of you... They will grow up in your care, and be so much a part of your life.

But there's another way of looking at this new little life. God is the giver of life. He created this little one – and he has trusted this child into your care. This is a sobering thought because in fact our children are not really ours are they? They are little people given to us by God...they actually belong to God. Our task is to guide them and prepare them for all that is waiting for them in life. And at some point we will have to let them go...to make their own decisions. So we need to teach them wisely don't we!

Now I wonder if you have ever thought about why God gives us children. Well, of course if we had no children, human life on this earth would soon come to an end wouldn't it! And do you know...in the beginning of the Bible, God's word, God told Adam and Eve, the first two people he created, to 'be fruitful and increase in number' (Genesis 1:28).

The Bible says a lot more things about children. Would you like to hear some of them?

(Psalm 127:3, 4 NLT) *'Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him. Children born to a young man are like arrows in a warrior's hands. How joyful is the man whose quiver is full of them!'*

Wow – I wonder if you have a "quiver" full of children. The warrior carries his arrows in his quiver – and of course he needs plenty of arrows when he goes hunting. Maybe you live in a village and your husband takes his sons hunting...so you would know all about the value of those children to help provide food. And maybe your daughters help you work in the garden to provide food for your family. Or maybe you live in a city and your children go to work to help provide for you...and take care of you. They really are a gift from God aren't they?

Our children can bring us joy and delight – here's a lovely promise to those who 'walk in God's ways': (Psalm 128:3) *'Your wife will be like a fruitful grapevine; flourishing within your home; Your children will be like vigorous young olive trees; as they sit around your table.'*

Children can bring much joy to our marriage and to our home.

The Bible tells us that children are given to the parents not only to bring them joy but for a specific purpose. Every child (including you) comes into the world with a future planned by God. (Psalm 40:5) It says: *'Your plans for us are too many to list.'*

God not only has plans for our own lives – but also for our children.

And of course, God knows that as we get older, we need someone to take care of us. He says to children: (Proverbs 23:22 NLT) *'Listen to your father, who gave you life, and don't despise your mother when she is old.'* And as we get older there are our children's children – our grandchildren. What a delight they are to us in our older age! The Bible says: (Proverbs 17:6 NLT) *'Grandchildren are the crowning glory of the aged; parents are the pride of their children.'*

When Jesus, God's son, was here on this earth he said something wonderful about children. His disciples were trying to shoo them away. They thought the children were a nuisance. But Jesus said this: (Matthew 19:14 NLT) "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children."

We love our children very much don't we! And God loved his only son Jesus very much too. But he also loves us. In fact his word tells us (John 3:16 NLT) that he loved us *'so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.'*

All of us have done, said or thought things that are wrong. This is called 'sin' and our sin has separated us from God. The good news is that about 2000 years ago God sent his only son to die on the cross for our sins. Jesus lived a sinless life and died to take the punishment for us. Jesus rose from the dead and now lives in heaven with God his father. He offers us the gift of living with him forever if we accept what he has done for us. He wants us, his children, to be in heaven with him. And of course he wants our children to be there with him too.

So may I ask you a parenting question? Have you made a true commitment to God? Do you know, parents, that God loves you too? God reaches out in love to you and wants you to be his child. You can choose to ask Jesus Christ to forgive your sins...and to come into your life as your Lord and Savior.

Would you like to pray with me about this?

"Father God, we thank you for the gift of our children. Thank you for sending Jesus, your own son, to die for us to make us your children. By faith we believe that we can be made right before you, because Jesus has taken our sins away through his death. We ask that our children will come to know you as their father too. And now, we look forward to having a loving relationship with you, in this life. And after we die we will join you in heaven. Thank you, Amen."

Tammy: Isn't it wonderful that God loves us and even more wonderful that we can choose to have a relationship with him, as a child has with his father!

Carol: If you prayed with us today, believing in what Jesus has done for you, then, my friend, you are now a member of God's family; you are one of God's children. And we hope that you will have many years to enjoy growing in your understanding and knowledge of God, and just being his special child.

It is good to be reminded that children are precious gifts from God and as we spend time with them, talking and sharing we grow closer in our relationship with our children, don't we?

Tammy: And in the same way, as you talk with God, your Father, and share your life with Him, your relationship with Him will be closer, too. He's always listening to you.

Carol: We hope that you will always listen to us too!

Tammy: Yes we do! We would love to hear from you. You can write to us at TWR Women of Hope. The email address is TWRWomenofHope@twr.org. If you missed a program or want to hear one again, visit our website TWRWomenofHope.org. Or visit our Facebook page.

We do hope you will be with us again. Have a good week!