

## Creating a Loving Family and Home



Christopher News Notes

**A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR LIFE IS BUILT IN EVERY HOME** where real charity—love—is the supreme law. It is the family that daily provides opportunities to give fresh meaning to the phrase: charity begins at home. It is within the family that we—parents, children, grandparents, and whoever makes up our family group—learn what it means to love and how to say, “I love you.” We say, “I love you,” of course, not only with words but through service lovingly performed.

## Forgiving Says, “I Love You”

When he was 10 years old, Jon West of Georgia learned about forgiveness from his father. Jon was playing with a tree branch near where his father was working on a ladder. The youngster accidentally caused his father to fall and break his arm. Jon’s father responded, “Let’s forget it. I’m going to be fine, and we’ll cut more limbs together, okay?”

This response made such a profound impression on Jon that it caused him to treat his mother with the same forgiving attitude when she spilled milk on him at dinner. Jon quickly told her, “That’s okay, Mama.” He later wrote an essay in which he called forgiveness “a sign of kindness and love.”

Daily irritations and problems give us lots of chances to offer—and seek—forgiveness. But families are also called to forgive bigger grievances. To forgive such hurts immediately can be difficult, if not impossible. Yet it is important to try—even to be the first to extend a hand in reconciliation—so the family can avoid wasting energy on hate and revenge.

During an interview on *Christopher Closeup*, Doris Donnelly, a theology professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, called forgiveness “the linchpin that holds a family together.” When we forgive someone, we are saying to them, in essence, “I’m capable of loving you and seeing you as more than that painful thing you did,” she said. But she warns that for forgiveness to take place, “You have to acknowledge the hurt and affirm the pain.”

You will know that forgiveness has taken hold when you can remember the event or the person that hurt you, and your stomach no longer churns. Instead, you feel at peace. As theologian Reinhold Niebuhr said of forgiveness, it is “the final form of love.”

## Listening Says, “I Love You”

When the Rev. James Conway’s three-year-old daughter, Barbara, told him that she hated his church because it always took him away, the California minister decided to change his schedule so he could spend more time with all his daugh-

ters. He and his wife listened and talked to the girls every night at bedtime and took annual camping trips with them. The result? As their daughters grew up and got married, they continued to maintain a close, loving, and supportive relationship with their parents and each other.

Listening is a priceless and loving gift. Psychologist Robert Wicks described it as “the core of family life.” Good listeners, he said, are patient. They give others the time they need to express their feelings without interruption. Don’t worry about coming up with a solution to the problems you hear, said Wicks: “Instead, be more interested in how you can help the person say more about how they feel.”

Even if you think you know just what the problem is, resist the temptation to “understand too quickly.” All of us appreciate being heard out. Sixteen-year-old Johanna Zetlmaier of California said, “When my parents hear me out, and they don’t immediately say, ‘Oh no, you can’t do this,’ then I can talk to them.”

Children, too, have a listening role to play. It’s part of the learning process. For Anne McCarroll, the “listening” room was her grandmother’s kitchen in Ohio. Writing in the *Christian Science Monitor*, she recalled how aunts, uncles, and children—herself included—all shared their thoughts, hopes, and concerns. She said that the lives of her own children “are infinitely richer for all that I learned there.” Says one counselor treating a troubled family, “Kids can say encouraging things, be appreciative and understanding.”

Many people tell of going through life without ever having the experience of being truly listened to. It shouldn’t be that way.

## Courtesy Says, “I Love You”

“Manners toward strangers are fine things, but in family life they are essential,” said Judith Martin, newspaper columnist and author of such books as *Miss Manners’ Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behavior*. Although she invariably approached her subject with humor, her message was a serious

## The Most Beautiful Thing

Hoping to paint “the most beautiful thing in the world,” an artist asked three people what they thought it might be. “Faith,” replied the clergyman, “you’ll find it at every altar.”

“Love,” said a young bride. “Love builds poverty into riches, it sweetens tears; makes much of little. Without it, there is no beauty.”

“Peace is the most beautiful thing in the world,” answered a weary soldier. “War is ugly. Wherever you find peace, you find beauty.”

“Faith. Love. Peace! How can I paint them?!” wondered the artist.

Entering his door, he saw faith in the eyes of his children and love in the eyes of his wife. And in his home, he saw the peace that love and faith had built. So he painted “the most beautiful thing in the world.” And he called it “Home.”

one for the family that wants to make home life more agreeable for all.

Courtesy. Consideration. Kindness. These help create feelings of warmth, caring, and acceptance in the home. All are facets of love. Courtesy and manners involve much more than knowing which fork to use. Sometimes to be courteous means to keep certain thoughts to oneself to avoid hurting another. Sometimes to be courteous means to show consideration for another’s feelings. Sometimes to be courteous means just to be polite.

But good manners are important, too. Letitia Baldridge, author of a book on corporate manners and former social secretary to two U.S. ambassadors, described good manners as good sense, “with a little extra dose of love and consideration.”

## Patience Says, “I Love You”

A *New York Times* story told of a young boy’s bewilderment when his mother lost patience with

him on a bus. The youngster was asking questions non-stop. Exasperated, the mother said sharply, "Shut up!" The boy was stunned. Hesitantly, he tugged at his mother's sleeve and said, "Mommy, it's me! Danny!"

Patience helps us deal kindly with others at home, work, school—even on a bus—especially on those inevitable days when personal problems make it easy to be irritable. One woman marveled at a friend's seemingly infinite patience with her three-year-old daughter, who kept interrupting her housework to call her outside to see a butterfly, a flower, or an ant. This woman asked the mother, "Don't you ever want to scream?"

The mother replied, "Well, I brought her into the world. The least I can do is let her show it to me."

## Saying "I Love You" to Children

It is especially important for youngsters to know they are loved. If they don't feel loved at home, they could grow up believing there is no love to be found anywhere. One way to help children feel loved and secure is by providing structure and discipline in their lives. While parents should be flexible, they should also set limits. Of course, there's more to discipline than saying, "No."

"The only real discipline comes from love, not fear," said Fred Rogers, a Presbyterian minister and longtime children's TV host of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. The loving parent will notice and respond to a child's effort to conform to

parental rules, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. The observant parent, the institute said, should look for ways to say such things as, "I appreciate your hanging up your clothes even though you were in a hurry to go out to play," or, "I'm glad you shared your snack with your sister."

## Parents Show the Way

Within the family, parents set the tone for the relationships that develop. They do much more than make sure their children have food, clothing, and shelter. Parents teach love best by example. The relationship between them is important not only for themselves, but also for their children. It's a powerful model of how to love.

Mr. and Mrs. James Perdue of Virginia, married 26 years, said almost in one voice that they "put one another first. We each know that our partner is looking out for our best, working for our happiness. Because of this we have developed a unity of spirit apparent not only to us, but to our children."

Stepparents, foster parents, adoptive parents, single parents—in all instances, the adults are the major influence on children who are learning about love. But the experts caution that "instant love" in a family is unlikely. It takes time and effort to build loving relationships, even under the most favorable conditions.

So, when we forgive, or listen, or act with courtesy or patience toward those with whom we share our homes and our lives, we're really saying, "I love you." A loving home life makes itself felt beyond its own boundaries. People who feel loved radiate love. To practice charity at home is one way you can change the world.

*"To love is to live according to His commandments: this is the commandment which you have heard since the beginning, to live a life of love." —2 John 1:6*

  
**"It's better to light one candle  
than to curse the darkness."**

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