



# Teaching the Way of Love

Parenting With the Heart of Christ

For all parents  
with young adults.



*The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity. But if it is to achieve the full flowering of its life and mission, it needs the kindly communion of minds and the joint deliberation of spouses, as well as the painstaking cooperation of parents in the education of their children.*

~Gaudium et Spes. #52

**D**o you remember how you felt the moment you first held your child? Do you remember the sheer awe of that moment; feeling indescribable joy at the presence of this new life? How long has it been since your child has brought you that same sense of delight? Has your zeal to parent waned as your child has grown older?

Parenting is like a double-edged sword; it cuts both ways. Realistic parents understand that raising children swings between ease and pleasure to sorrow and pain. In the early years there is an abundance of joy and hope about the child's life; who will he become, how will he make his mark in the world? Every possibility seems open and achievable. With time, the magnitude of the role of a parent begins to take its toll as you realize that this child can't become who he is meant to be without your involvement. That means that you can't go out when you want, you have to spend money on what they need rather than on the things you want or desire, you have to say no when they want you to say yes... The original blessing becomes seasoned with a sense of burden and sacrifice.

Most parents want to know how they can maximize the good times and minimize the rough spells of parenting. The Catholic Church provides fascinating insight on how parents can increase the blessing side of family life. She begins by asking parents to see children as "the supreme gift of marriage" and "its crowning glory." The Church asks parents to recognize that children are gifts from God lovingly given to them. God intends children to be blessings not burdens. Stop and think about this for a moment. How would your parenting change if every time you looked at your child, you saw a marvelous gift? Imagine what might change in your parenting approach if you saw your child as the crowning glory of your love.

Secular studies related to this Church teaching confirm that how a parent views a child or what a parent expects makes a difference. Known as the "Pygmalion effect," the theory teaches that a person will act or behave as others expect them to. If parents think of their child as a gift with great worth, they communicate this sentiment passively day in and day out. The child "catches" this attitude of gift and acts in a manner consistent with the expectation. The underlying mindset cultivates the blessings and deters the burden of parenting.

Church teachings also tell us that children contribute greatly to the good of the parents themselves. This may seem odd, but children can actually make a parent a better person. Before children, adults are rarely interested in what a local school district is doing or what type of crime rate is in the area. They are not overly concerned that their actions have any impact on others. But as soon as a child enters the family these perceptions change. The birth of a child motivates parents to participate in the development of society and shape the world into something civil, hopeful and good. Children call parents to a higher standard and make them think twice before they act. In this way, children shape their parents' character and disposition.

Maintaining zeal to parent – especially during the teen years - rests on two factors; accepting that your child is a supreme gift from God and that this gift is meant to perfect you by making you more selfless and loving. It requires you to open your heart to the blessings that God has waiting for you as a parent. If you are open to God's grace and mercy, then you will wake up every day (alright, almost every day) with a renewed sense of sharing yourself with your kids. In sharing who you are with your offspring, you will move closer to your Heavenly Father who will maximize your joy. And isn't that what you want?

## From the DVD (WATCH THE CLIP THAT CORRESPONDS WITH THIS SEGMENT.)

If you want your children to “fly solo” they must know how to read their \_\_\_\_\_, file a \_\_\_\_\_ and stay in \_\_\_\_\_ with the control tower.

Five questions to ask your child that will set the flight plan include:

- \_\_\_\_\_ will you be with?
- What will you be \_\_\_\_\_?
- \_\_\_\_\_ will you be going?
- When will you be \_\_\_\_\_?
- \_\_\_\_\_ are you going?

Even \_\_\_\_\_ unacceptable answer can cancel a flight.

When your youth leaves, they need to know that you are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Portray yourself as a person who can be \_\_\_\_\_. Your child needs to believe you have \_\_\_\_\_ to relate.

Learn to “be there” when your \_\_\_\_\_ – not you – is ready to \_\_\_\_\_.

## Continue the Discussion

**Read and reflect on the following questions and examples.**

1. How has your zeal to parent changed over the years? What has made it increase or decrease?
2. What do you do to make it through the drama and trials of parenting without losing your zeal to parent?
3. Do you think that the teen years should be a time of few responsibilities – a time to seek and experience the pleasures of life? Explain your answer.
4. Why should parents ask their youth to file a flight plan before leaving on an activity?
5. Parents who maintain their zeal are approachable and available. How can you be both for your child? Provide examples.

# Make a Plan

## For The Parent

Here are seven ways to maintain your zeal for parenting. Read each tip and then determine how frequently you exhibit this behavior. If you have any behaviors that you are not doing or do only on occasion, jot down in the space provided ways you can improve your ability to be a joy-filled parent. When you are done, compare your worksheet with that of your son or daughter.

**Keep a sense of humor.** Humor is the way that you can find joy even in the most stressful moments of your life. Humor keeps anger, resentment and depression at bay.

I do this!	I do this sometimes.	I'm not doing this.

**Pick your battles.** Parenting should never be looked at as a war. Good parenting is not measured by how many fights you won but by how many times you stepped down and readdressed the conflict calmly.

I do this!	I do this sometimes.	I'm not doing this.

**Correct behaviors in private.** When you correct your children, do so in private. Their mistakes are not for public viewing.

I do this!	I do this sometimes.	I'm not doing this.

**Be kind.** Your children will behave as well as they are treated. Your example of kindness will come back to you one hundredfold.

I do this!	I do this sometimes.	I'm not doing this.

**Network with other parents.** There is strength and support in numbers. Get to know the parents of your children's friends and socialize with them. Create a community that surrounds both you and your children.

I do this!	I do this sometimes.	I'm not doing this.

**Choose presence over perfection.** Presence is the ability to be in the moment and perfection is the compulsion to complete your plan. Presence allows for flexibility. Perfection rarely does.

I do this!	I do this sometimes.	I'm not doing this.

**Team Up.** The most important teammate that you have in parenting is God. Know Him. Serve Him. Love Him. For those parents who are married, share the load with your spouse. Not married? Find a mentor or ally that can be your earthly confidant.

I do this!	I do this sometimes.	I'm not doing this.

# Make a Plan

## For The Student

Here are seven ways to improve the connection you have with your parents. Read each tip and then determine how frequently you exhibit this behavior. If you have any behaviors that you are not doing or do only on occasion, jot down ways that you can improve your ability to connect. When you are done, see what your parent wrote down.

**Keep a sense of humor.** Humor is the way that you can find joy even in the most stressful moments of your life. Humor keeps anger, resentment and depression at bay.

I do this!	I do this sometimes.	I'm not doing this.

**Pick your battles.** Family life should never be looked at as a war. The goal is not to see how many fights you can win but to see how many times you can step down and readdress the conflict calmly.

I do this!	I do this sometimes.	I'm not doing this.

**Face conflicts in private.** When you have a conflict with your parent, deal with it in private. Family issues are not for public viewing.

I do this!	I do this sometimes.	I'm not doing this.

**Be kind.** Your parents will behave as well as they are treated. Your example of kindness will come back to you one hundredfold.

I do this!	I do this sometimes.	I'm not doing this.

**Network with other families.** There is strength and support in numbers. Get to know your friends' parents and socialize with them. Introduce them to your parents. Create a community that surrounds both you and your parents.

I do this!	I do this sometimes.	I'm not doing this.

**Choose presence over perfection.** Presence is the ability to be in the moment and perfection is the compulsion to complete your plan. Presence allows for flexibility. Perfection rarely does.

I do this!	I do this sometimes.	I'm not doing this.

**Team Up.** The most important teammate that you have in life is God. Know Him. Serve Him. Love Him. After God, your most important teammates are your parents. Keep them in the loop. Ask for their advice. Listen to their ideas.

I do this!	I do this sometimes.	I'm not doing this.

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