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DEMONSTRATING STEADFAST LOVE IN PARENTING

BY DANNY HUERTA, MSW, LCSW, LSSW

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Demonstrating steadfast love to our children will help them learn and grow.

A solid foundation is one of the most important things a parent needs to create in a relationship with their child. Just like a tree, the roots must be set deeply in place before the trunk, branches and fruit can grow

What is Steadfast Love?

Steadfast love. It's a phrase we commonly hear in parenting circles and in the church. In the Bible, this phrase is written [195 times](#). But what does "steadfast love" actually mean? And, furthermore, how can we demonstrate it in our parenting?

God shows us what He means by "steadfast love" throughout the Bible. It is a love that is unwavering, never changing. It is an invitation to a relationship founded on trust and acceptance no matter what. There is nothing that we can do, as God's children, to make Him love us any more than He already does. Likewise, there is nothing that we can do to cause Him to love us less. God's love never fails and is always promised to us.

As parents, we mirror the steadfast love of God to our children. We love them no matter what. There is nothing that they can do to gain our love, or remove it. Our relationship with our children is like a garden — we must [nurture it with steadfast love](#) in order for a solid foundation and growth to happen.

The Foundation of Steadfast Love

In the spring, my family and I enjoy getting outside and planting herbs, flowers and maybe even a new tree or two in our yard. Working hard together in the warm sunlight and watching our garden flourish over the coming months is something we all enjoy.

Digging in the dirt as we plant new flowers reveals a dark brown or black layer of soil called *humus*. Humus is created by broken down organic material in the soil. Its dark color allows the soil around the plants to stay warm, and it acts like a sponge. Humus allows water and nutrients to penetrate deeply into the soil so that a plant or a tree can grow deep roots.

Much like humus, steadfast love allows us to create deep roots in our relationship with our children and with God. The words *humus* and *humility* both come from the Greek word *humilitas* – which means “grounded.” Steadfast love requires humility. If we practice [humility](#) in our parenting, it will create deeply rooted relationships with our children that not even the strongest storms can topple.

Parenting with Steadfast Love

Parenting is not a destination, but a journey. We are invited to participate in what God is doing in our children’s lives. We must remember that [parenting is not about being perfect](#), but about learning and growing. Not only can we grow individually, but we can grow as parents when we join our child on their journey. Ephesians 4:15 tells us, that “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.” Ephesians also talks about being a part of the household of God and the importance of unity.

A solid foundation is one of the most important things a parent needs to create in a relationship with their child. Just like a tree, the roots must be set deeply in place before the trunk, branches and fruit can grow. Imagine that your child’s needs are like a tree. Their physical needs, such as food, are the roots; these needs must be addressed first. Then, as a parent, you can begin to guide their emotional growth, which could be seen as the tree’s trunk. With the roots and trunk in place, you can begin to teach your children through the seasons of life and watch the fruit grow.

But what happens when your child makes poor decisions or choices that require tough love?



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Tough Love

We must remember that our job as parents is not to make our kids happy, or to gain their love or friendship. They'll mess up, make mistakes and disobey. As a family therapist, I have come alongside some families in difficult places. Our primary focus as parents is to love our children through every storm and season. And sometimes that requires tough love, boundaries and [discipline](#) that are part of a trusting and emotionally safe relationship.

When our kids make choices that are self-destructive and not acceptable, it is easy to react and either want to tightly control the situation or give up and disconnect. Neither one of these parenting techniques tends to generate good results and can even cause a serious rift in the relationship with your children. As parents, we must maintain emotional engagement with our kids, even when we may not feel like it.

When is Tough Love Necessary?

Tough love may be needed when our children are making poor decisions, getting into bad relationships, manipulating others or doing things that may threaten their safety or the safety of others. As parents, we often want to swoop in and save the day – rescuing them from the obstacles and stumbling blocks they may face. But sometimes the most effective way for our

children to learn and grow is to allow them to face those challenges. Falling gives our children the lesson of how to pick themselves back up.

Many teens are drawn to immediate rewards such as feeling better, being accepted by peers or gaining status. Their love of immediate rewards can lead them to poor decisions such as vaping, drug use, alcohol use and sex. As parents we are wanting them to avoid having to pay the “poor decision tax,” which can be costly, but we can’t ignore the great opportunity to explore what they are truly seeking. Tough love as part of steadfast love is about being attuned and available when your child is struggling and taking the time to listen, talk and repair.

Your choice to handle a situation with tough love should never be in response to the heat of the moment. Tough love is about looking at the big picture and long-term journey that your child is taking. When you must give your child tough love, be sure to think about how your actions will impact and guide your child for years to come.

Situations that require tough love also open up a natural opportunity for you to connect with your child and share your story with them. These teachable moments are a great chance to share where you might have encountered a similar situation, and how you handled it.

“Hey, Can I Tell You a Story?”

Being authentic and open with your kids is an excellent way to show steadfast love in helping them through challenges of their own. This requires a lot of discernment, because not all stories are helpful. One way to be authentic in your parenting is to honestly share your own past experiences that pertain to their current situation, but prayerfully consider the importance, helpfulness and relevance of the story.

When your child is going through a difficult situation and chooses to share something about it with you, that’s a great moment to ask, “Hey, can I tell you a story?” This is an opportunity to share your own experiences and how you learned and grew through the situation you faced. It’s important to focus more on the growth and learning that you achieved, rather than the actual mistake or situation itself. Next, be sure to frame the situation as a place where you got stuck or lost some freedom. Children can tend to think, “You got to have some fun, why can’t I?” when it comes to our stories if it is not clearly explained that it was damaging. Finally, when you’ve finished with your story, emphasize that you hope your child can learn from it, and not have to make the same mistakes you did.

Remember to keep the story you share with your children relevant to the situation that they are facing. The story should keep the long-term focus of teaching your child and encouraging their growth.

A Few Practical Ways to Demonstrate Steadfast Love

- **One-on-One Time** — Dedicate time that you spend one-on-one with your child. If there are other kids in the house, make sure you spend time individually with each of them if possible. We are all busy, so be creative and prioritize. There are several good things, but what are the great things you can be spending your time on? Share a hobby or experience, or just get out and get some exercise. This can be an excellent time to talk and deepen the [attachment](#) between you. Driving your children to school or going to the store together and making it one-on-one talk time during those moments could also work.
- **Write Notes** — A simple card, letter, or note dropped into a lunchbox can mean so much to your children. [Writing](#) can reaffirm that they are precious and show that you love them for who they are, no matter what. You can use quotes or verses that are inspirational or relate to something they shared with you.
- **Journaling** — For the thinkers and writers out there. Keep a journal. Write down how your child is growing, what you love about them, and why you are grateful for them. This can be especially effective and encouraging in times where tough love is necessary. You can share some of your observations and admirations with your child from your journal. You can share your observations of what God is uniquely building in your child.
- **Check In** — Periodically check in with your spouse and your kids. Don't be afraid to ask how you're doing as a parent or how things are going as a family. Remember, parenting is about

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*Ways to Demonstrate Steadfast
Love*

your growth as well! These are great opportunities to make small or big adjustments.

- **Call Time Out** — When things get tense and your emotions are triggered, call “time out.” It is okay to tell your child that you need a moment to process what they’ve told you or what is happening. Go on a walk or go someplace you can have the space to calm down. Rather than pulling the pin on a verbal grenade, it’s important to take that step back and respond to your child in love. This demonstrates self-control and that you respect and care for your relationship with your child.
- **Show Affection** — It may feel uncomfortable to some of you, but God created us to be responsive to loving touch. Research consistently shows that warmth from parents leads to several positive outcomes in children.
- **Model Healthy Conflict** — Conflict is a part of human existence. Work hard at demonstrating humility through listening in discussions. You get to set the culture and tone of [how conflict is managed](#) and resolved in your home. If you have a strong personality, ask the question, “What is it like to enter a disagreement with me?” God calls us to serve one another. Do you model serving your spouse and family? This is tough, but this is where there is a lot of root growth and development of nutrients in the soil.
- **Look in the Mirror** — Psalm 139:23 says, “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!” Sometimes it is critical that [we take a look at ourselves](#) and our own hearts as parents. Questions to ask yourself might include:
 - In what ways am I over critical of my child?
 - What ownership do I have in this situation? Am I helping or hurting through my reactions?
 - How do I need to grow personally to parent my child through this situation?

Showing our children steadfast love, as God first demonstrated to us, will help create a solid relationship with them, and will be vital in helping them grow as humans and in Christ. Things will not always be easy, but raising children is a wonderful journey where both the parent and child can grow individually, grow together and grow toward Christ.

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