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## Let's Tell God So He Can Be Glad

If our families were as loving and harmonious as God intends them to be, we would be a powerful witness in our communities.

If we are not effective priests at home, we cannot be good priests anywhere. So I want to share some of the things I have learned in my own family. These are not just concepts, they are life. I experience what I am talking about.

As a pastor, I gave good instruction about the family. But there is a big difference between teaching a concept and imparting life. A man may have a family altar, so that his family starts the day with perfect teaching. He tells others to try to do what he teaches. But when you try to do it, you wonder if he does what he says!

To have even perfect teaching, but not to actually do it, is legalism—a concept. And that condemns people. Although you may not live it, you can look in the Bible and pick out verses to give a wonderful picture of marriage. But if you are not experiencing what you are teaching, people who hear you will find they can't do it, and become condemned.

One of the greatest blessings for the leaders of my church was to come and stay in our home when I was a pastor. I invited them to be with us for two or three days, to see how we lived.

They said, "You know, Brother Ortiz, the greatest help to

us is to see that-you are normal people. We thought you and your wife spoke with Bible verses, and that you got up in the morning singing hymns."

Remember, the Pharisee looked like a saint, but he was a holy hypocrite. The publican, on the other hand, was an honest sinner. And I prefer an honest sinner to a holy hypocrite.

So I believe that we have to start by being very honest. We have to take off our masks, and let people see us as we really are. We cannot be one way in our church fellowships and a different way at home. We should be the same all the time.

What is worse, we not only live a different life on Sunday morning from the rest of the week, many of us live two lives in our own homes. We have family devotions at which we behave in a saintly way, different from the rest of the day.

If I said that we don't have family devotions, I would not be telling the truth. But if I say we do have them, you will think that we have them in the traditional way—a family altar. And that is not altogether correct.

I believe that one of the greatest inheritances we can give our children is that we are not activity-oriented Christians. By that I mean that Christ is not something for Tuesdays, Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays at 10:00 a.m., or from 6:00 to 6:30 in the mornings. No, Christ is 24 hours a day. We are in a continual dialogue with that inner Christ. It is continual fellowship because we have become one.

So when my children and I are playing soccer, or while we are doing anything together, we stop in the break and we say, "How nice is this day. We're having fun, aren't we?"

They tell me that they are having great fun. So I say, "Let's tell God, so He can be glad."

Then I say, "Lord, we are having fun, thanks to You."

We don't close our eyes and make it a religious act. In fact, there isn't one instance of anyone closing his eyes to pray anywhere in the Bible (although of course it's all right to do so if we want to). We just talk with God naturally, and we

recognize Him in everything. So my children have learned to have a relationship and not a religion.

When we get up in the morning we say, "Good morning! Wake up! Look what a beautiful day it is. Isn't God good!"

Then at the breakfast table—sometimes we pray before eating, and sometimes we don't. Sometimes I say just a word, without making it like a prayer, such as, "Thank you, Lord."

Other times I tell my children how good God is to give us all this food. It's not a prayer, yet it is a prayer. I try not to make them religious, but to live this life in Christ in a perfectly natural way.

We try to treat our children in the way that God treats us. This means that we deal with them through relationship rather than through law. I believe this is the key: relationship and friendship. Not their perfection, but dialogue.

When I get home after a trip, all of our children come to our bedroom at night.

We are six—my wife and I, and four of them. We all lie in the bed talking, sometimes for three or four hours. Every night that happens when I am home. When they have to go to school, we have to push them out. But when they don't have school, I tell my wife, "Let them stay. Even if we fall asleep, let them talk among themselves and with us about everything."

My wife tells me that even when I am away they come to our room. The older ones work in a restaurant. So sometimes they have to close the restaurant at 12:00 or 1:00. Even when they come home at 1:00 in the morning, they come to our room. They wake us up, and we talk with them.

My children are all teenagers now, and we have to understand that teenagers are teenagers. When they grow up, they will be grown-ups; but right now they are teenagers, so we face many of the situations that other parents face.

The first thing that my wife and I see is that we are not to worry. Teenage is a normal stage of growth—we all have been teenagers, too. We believe our example is sufficient to

see them through these years, so we don't try to hurry it or worry about it.

We don't get shocked or scandalized when they do something which is "wrong" according to our evangelical rules. Like kissing a girl, or smoking a cigarette.

We have developed such an atmosphere in our home that they tell us when they do something like kiss a girl. We are very, very good friends. So we know what they do. We know where they go. They tell us things I never would have told my parents when I was their age!

I believe that the most important thing is not to require perfection from them, but to accept them as teenagers and require from them honesty. As they grow, they will learn what is expedient for them, and what is not expedient.

Honesty is the key thing. We talk with them in such a way that they don't live under condemnation. We don't say, "God will punish you," or "You are going to lose your soul."

If your children can tell you everything they do, don't worry if sometimes they tell you something that might be bad. Because they will do it anyway, but not tell you. So you are better to know, then you have an opportunity to teach them gradually. The other way, you are going to lose them.

I find that this is the way God is with us. He wants us to trust and love Him. So even if we do something wrong, we do it in His presence because He lives in us. We are friends, and a friend understands. When we explain, He hears us and forgives us, and we keep our friendship.

Most Christians are related to a set of rules rather than to a person. The set of rules has no emotions, no feelings—you cannot talk to them. It's just, "Thou shalt not."

But we are related to a personal God who has feelings and emotions. He listens, understands, and dialogues with us—and we can tell Him as did Peter.

*"Lord, You ask me if I love You, and I say yes," Peter said.  
"But You ask me again and again. Listen, I know You saw*

*my denying You. I denied You three times. But though I denied You, I love You. You may say, 'How do you love Me if you deny Me?' Anyway, Lord, I don't understand; but I know that I love You. If You know everything, You know I love You, in spite of all I did."*

My children, though they are just like other children, have a relationship with Jesus. He loves them, and they love Him. They are not saints. Though they are not perfect by all outer appearances, they have a relationship with Him.

The power of sin is the law. Therefore, children will be more tempted to things which are prohibited to them than to things which are not prohibited.

This means they are free to decide not to do certain things, because they see that they are not expedient for them. As Paul says, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable."

They are free to tell us about anything they do.

If they do something wrong, they know that we will react with full acceptance. We would never reject them. Also we will always be there to help them out in any situation, rather than to reprove, threaten or condemn. They have to see the love of the Father in us. Some issues are not easy, but I believe the way to deal with them is to do so openly, rather than avoiding them.

We were concerned that our children might marry too early. But David said, "No, no, Daddy. I am going to marry when I'm 26, like you."

I believe they have a very high idea of marriage and the home, because since they were tiny children they have seen us living the life of Christ with them openly.

Because we are in Christ, we have no problems, just new situations. So I am never anxious for anything. I rest. I face each situation at the time and follow the inner guidance of the Spirit. There are no formulas, just the daily leading of the inner Christ.

Acceptance is always the underlying basis for all we do in our relationship with our children. Acceptance is through the blood of Jesus, not by their behavior. Up to now, what our children have seen in us is what they believe will be good for them also.

Of course, it is not so easy if parents have come to a knowledge of the Lord when their children already are 15 or 16, and they already are rebellious.

In such a situation I would tell my children, "I want you to know that whatever you do, I love you. But I want to explain what I believe<sup>1</sup> about the situation you are in. You are wrong. Whether you obey me or not will not change my love for you. But because I love you, I have to tell you when you are wrong."

I would tell them everything they need to hear, because love isn't keeping quiet. But I would stress that it doesn't matter what they do, I will love them anyway.

"Do the wrong," I would tell them, "and I'm still your friend. But I have to advise you that you are wrong."

We will have more success this way, I believe, than if we put their obedience to us as a requirement for our friendship. If we continue to be their friends, they will face us every day and there may be a chance to help them.

But if we tell them, "If you don't do what I say, goodbye," they are on their own and we no longer can influence them. While they are in our home, we are a convicting factor. And as we continue to love them, one day they will listen.

First of all, then, our children need to know that they are fully accepted by us just as they are.

They must know that they don't have to perform in order to earn love and acceptance. This is very important, because our children learn of God through us. The picture they have of us, their parents, is the picture they probably will have of God. So we have to be careful to treat them as God treats us—and the way that God accepts us and dwells in us is just as we are.

Once one of our children did something quite bad. He was six or seven, so we sent him to bed. When I passed by the bedroom he called me and using a Spanish expression, said, "I'm so tranquil." I asked him why he was tranquil. "Because I know that though you spank me, you love me."

Even in that little mind, that was the concept he had of God. My children never thought they would be rejected by God because I taught them that they are always accepted.

Second, I also believe that discipline is necessary.

Discipline is not legalism, however. Legalism is when they have to perform to be accepted. Discipline is with acceptance. They know that whatever they do, they will be accepted. But they have to learn what is expedient for them.

Discipline is just part of the infrastructure of the house. "Brush your teeth," "Say please" and "Sit properly" are part of the running of the house.

Third, I also have learned that spanking and shouting at my children don't do too much toward the end we are pursuing. When they do not understand other language, perhaps a spanking could be good, especially when they are quite small. But they have to understand very well why the spanking is given, and that we love them.

My concern is that when many parents spank their children, it's not to the degree of the child's obedience but rather as a result of the parents' impatience. When we are in a good mood, we often are too lenient. This confuses children.

Fourth, look for guidance from the Lord. I don't have a rigid concept of how to discipline. Instead, I believe I am led spontaneously by the Lord.

Every child is different. Sometimes a child will understand much more by a spanking than by words; at other times, a spanking would be a very wrong thing to give him. Those of us who live in the Spirit learn how to be led by the Lord in the way we approach our children when they do wrong.

Do you understand what I mean when I say that the life of

the Spirit is not for services on Sundays, but for the whole of life? I need the guidance of the Holy Spirit in my home with the children more than in meetings!

Sometimes people think that the Holy Spirit is only for devotional times, and they deal with their family affairs by books or rules. No, it is in all things that we are to follow the guidance of Jesus in us.

If we would follow the Spirit, our homes would be a witness in the community. But too often our homes are a mess. Our homes must come ahead of any ministry that we are involved in.

One time we faced a difficult situation in our family, and I was ready to quit the ministry.

I called a family meeting and told my children, "Perhaps I am the guilty one, because I travel so much that I cannot be here at home. Mom is a woman, and you take advantage of her. So I will have to stop traveling. I will take a job, and I will make disciples around where I live, because you are of more importance than my ministry."

My two sons said, "Listen, Daddy. We are sure that your ministry is from God. We have seen the blessings that have come to people around the world because of it. People tell us continually, 'Your daddy helped me in this or that.' We will do our part, so you can stay in the ministry. We are going to behave better. We are going to obey Mom. We are not going to take advantage of her."

So we made a unanimous decision that I would keep traveling.

What does the neighbor know about the Christian in many situations? Only that in this house a Christian lives. He's a very strange person. He leaves early in the morning and comes back late at night. That's all the neighbor knows. He has no fellowship, no contact with this mysterious man.

It should not be this way. So the first thing we have to do is become a family that is a light in the community, that spreads love to all who live around us. And this begins when our family is in submission to Christ, the head of the home.