

EXTENDED  
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Love for  
Family with  
Problems

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## EXTENDED Love for EXTENDED Family with EXTENDED Problems

What happens when my extended family members are unsaved and acting out, extensively in unruly and sometimes carnal behaviors at our family gatherings?

As a biblical parenting and women's counselor I hear versions of this question all year long. Now we are entering into the holiday season when this becomes a priority concern for families who are trying to live a truly holy, set apart existence in this dying world; parents who are doing their best to protect their children from the firehose of immorality that is leaking in at every level of daily life. And now... are we to actually extend or accept an invitation to or from the ones in our family who gladly turn the firehose on, regardless of our wishes?

Have you heard the story, **THE HERO OF HAARLAM**? It's a legend of a little Dutch boy named Peter, who saved the day by putting his finger in a dike keeping the sea from destroying his village? The story is widely compelling due to the sacrificial commitment this boy makes, as he remains all night with no help, exhausted and freezing, recognizing that the lives of his family and town are at stake if he removes his finger from the leaking dike. As a Christian parent, we can feel like the boy with his finger in the dike! With the holidays comes the conflict that opening the doors to your home (or visiting extended families), often equates to pulling your finger from the dike, allowing relatives to tap an even larger hole in that dam! What will be the collateral damage to our children as we allow the interaction with (let's be honest) unholy relatives? We can find ourselves in a serious moral dilemma, a tug-of-war with the decision to either love and honor our extended family, or to isolate and protect the hearts and minds of our babies.



Let's examine our answers as we always do, in light of God's Word. But, before we begin, let me just say that if there is someone who is a physical danger to you or your child, you are wise to avoid contact with that person, regardless of their role in your life. Your requirements as listed below still apply, only *not* face to face. Think of ways you might be able to safely apply any of these precepts without contact with the dangerous person.

This is more specifically considering the difficult family member who might be contentious, undisciplined, unruly, lacking in wisdom, love and respect for the people around him/her, but are of no physical danger to you or your family.

So let's begin to discover what is reasonable and required by God.

## 1. Our Command to Love God and Love Our Neighbors ☺

*And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." Matthew 22:37-40*

With this we know that God's intention is that anyone in our path, anyone in our society, so of course, anyone in our own family is our neighbor. Much of the second greatest commandment flows forth from the first. If we are to love God, it will be exhibited through our love for our neighbor. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10), Jesus used the most unacceptable example as he shared with the Jews. The Samaritan people were considered unclean, and therefore a Jew would go miles out of their way to avoid contact with this person. Yet, Jesus gives us an example of true love using the most shocking hero, a Samaritan man who sacrificed his time, his reputation and his money to love his neighbor. Jesus was making the point that there is to be no judgement, and nobody outside the bounds of our love. So this clearly includes the worst of our relatives, doesn't it?

## 2. Our Great Commission ☺

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have*

*commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20*

When Jesus gives his disciples his final instruction, it is to make disciples of all nations. Again, those who were ordinarily offensive to the Jew were included in “all nations”. So with this, we recognize that the worst of the worst are considered an object of potential discipleship. We can’t forget that. We must allow this to motivate us, and keep this thought as a primary goal for everyone we know, even when we are obscured from talking to them about Christ. What we have left is our love. And by that all people will know that we are Christ’s disciple (John 13:35). By our love, many will be drawn to God. With the one who refuses to hear Christ’s name, we offer our love through acts. Of course this never negates the Gospel, which is to be given whenever someone is willing to hear.

### 3. Our Duty to Honor Our Family ☺

*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:2*

*Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the Lord your God. Leviticus 19:3*

*Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old. Proverbs 23:22*

God does not give us these commands with a loophole. We might want to say, yes... but... My parents are horrible, or my brother and sister are so rebellious! It would be a much more Christlike Christmas without them! Once again, we must recognize that our Christian family’s presence with the unsaved displays a radically different lifestyle that cannot be ignored. Even when you think it makes no difference, the non-believer cannot help but see the glaring light. Trust that God can use you and your children.

### 4. Our Duty to Train Up Our Children ☺

*You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your*

*eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:7-9*

This is our defense! Very simply, the better trained our children are in biblical truth and principle, the better they will be able to make sense of one who is acting sinfully and foolishly. When they understand how the Scripture relates to their own actions, they will not be influenced by the foolishness of other's actions. Remember, we must teach them how to be in the world, but not of the world. This comes through the instruction of Deuteronomy 6:7-9 which is very practical.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 clearly lays out WHAT we are to do:

- Teach God's Word
- Talk about God's Word,
- Keep His Word close, in hands reach, and in sight.
- Write God's Commands.

This Implies Constant/Continual engagement with the Bible.

And then the verse tells us WHEN we are to do this:

- When you're sitting in your house
- When you walk by the way
- When you lie down
- When you rise up.

This implies a moment by moment, all day commitment.

And notice that these are during the non-conflict times of the day. Not only when you are correcting due to their disobedience. On the contrary, God's Word is to be the topic of our conversation when we interact with our children moment by moment. You are actively growing them in stature and wisdom as you show them how the word is related to their daily activities.

## 5. Our Own Sinfulness ☺☺

*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and*

*seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:1-10*

Never forget the fact that we are sinners. In God's eyes, we are no better than our unsaved family member, except that we are seen by God in Christ, which is a gift that we did not earn, and we have no right to wield as a weapon. When we choke out, or even ignore our heathen relatives because they are still veiled in their understanding of God (Eph 4:17), they have not been forgiven for their debt as we have, God is not pleased with us at all (please read Matthew 18:23-35). Our response to his gift should be a reflections of Ephesians 2:3.

*...among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

Our humble acceptance of who we are before a holy God is very necessary to pleasing Christ through our relationships.

## 6. Our Trust in God's Plan for Our Family ☺

*The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.*  
Psalm 33:11

*I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Psalm 32:8*

When we are reminded of the Sovereignty of God, and that life is not by chance, we can rest in His plans, His instruction, and His guidance. In the NKJV, it says "I will guide you with my eye." This is such a reminder of how simple it is for God to direct us. Consider the fact that if He could speak the world into creation, He can so easily lead us with a look. We can trust Him, and rest peacefully in His direction. He loves our children, even more than we do and as we obey Him, He allows our life to go well and our training to be successful. Even our relatives cannot thwart the plan of God (Job 42:2)

## 7. Our Humble Approach ☺

Romans 12:9-21

- ☐ Let love be genuine.
- ☐ Abhor what is evil;
- ☐ hold fast to what is good.
- ☐ Love one another with brotherly affection.
- ☐ Outdo one another in showing honor.
- ☐ Do not be slothful in zeal,
- ☐ be fervent in spirit,
- ☐ serve the Lord.
- ☐ Rejoice in hope,
- ☐ be patient in tribulation,
- ☐ be constant in prayer.
- ☐ Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.
- ☐ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.
- ☐ Rejoice with those who rejoice,
- ☐ weep with those who weep.
- ☐ Live in harmony with one another.
- ☐ Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.
- ☐ Never be wise in your own sight.
- ☐ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.
- ☐ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
- ☐ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."
- ☐ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him;
- ☐ if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."
- ☐ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.



As you can see, I have taken this passage out of its scriptural format, and instead highlighting each instruction as a practical to-do list in hopes that you will undertake these as your marching orders. God in His wisdom has given us these very specific instructions in dealing with our difficult relationships. Believer, read this carefully and put these items into action. Commit to obeying each step as you patiently endure those rebellious individuals around you. Teach your children to do the same. Not with an attitude of superiority, but humility. Help your children to know that it is within their power, even as a child to overcome evil with good, because God said so, and he's given us His written Word with His Spirit to make it happen.

## 8. Our Opportunity ☺

Consider the immense joy of seeing your children take hold of truth based on their understanding of good and evil in this life. Of course we don't want to expose them to all forms of evil, but if some of that evil comes through our family members, they are able to learn to love that person, but hate that sin, especially as they watch you do the same. Once again, I remind you... if the evil produces danger in the life of your child, by all means remove your child from that situation. But if the evil is more typical of common sinful nature, talk the sin through honestly with your child. Name the sin. It may be idolatry, or greed, or selfishness, or rebellion towards God.

Accept the fact that though you hold your finger in the dike, there is still a bit of seeping water getting through. Don't panic, stand firm and kindly, honestly address the problem in biblical terms. You will have the opportunity to show the difference between the fruit of righteousness vs. rebellion towards God.

If there are family members who are verbally angry and undisciplined, occasional time-limited visits will not steal your child away from your consistent and diligent training. You will continue to be the primary influence in your child's life. In fact, it will give them a more defined picture of the contrast between foolishness and wisdom, and help them to understand why you are serious about training their own heart. As you have trained your child well, they will recognize the fruit of righteousness, vs. the fruit of rebellion, leaving them with a cleaner understanding of why they want to choose godly behavior.





You will have the opportunity to show God's grace and love to your in-laws. How exciting to be the example to your child of Christ's love through gracious acts and behavior towards the difficult people in your life. This will make a lasting imprint on the heart of your child. It will confirm the truths that he is learning from you on a daily basis that we are to love God and love our neighbor. And it will give your family specific, honest ways to pray for your relatives. No need to hide from the truth (as long as it does not demoralize your child), but show your kids how we can powerfully impact our relatives for Christ's sake through faithful prayer.

In the end, with your consistency in training your child's heart, and pouring in godly love and sacrifice into the lives of those who are in rebellion around you, you might very well be the "hero" that participates in the salvation of your extended family, and your village just like Peter from our illustration. Rather than ignoring the hole in the dike, and hiding away in your home only to see more devastation, you have allowed God to use you and your family (within boundaries) as the light leading to the solution. God has given us the way through his word. Now let's know it well, and live it out courageously that we might honor and glorify our God during the very season that points the way to our Redeemer!



*Have a Happy Thanksgiving  
and a Very Merry Christmas!*