

How many of you would take on a task if you knew that it would never end, that you would never get it done, that you would never arrive at the finish line where you could say, "I finally have that task done?" For most, the motivation of completion, of arriving at the end, of accomplishing the challenge is what keeps us going. In the realm of parenting, we function as parents because God has asked us to be His representatives, to carry out the never-ending art of parenting.

I. Today, for our family-focus, we focus on several aspects of our never-ending art.

1. As parents, we need to be patient. Paul writes, "Love is patient." Typically, we connect these words to marriage, but they are equally true for parents. Because we love our children, we practice patience. But we face a problem. Call it a lack of dedication, a lack of sticktoitiveness, or whatever else you like, but we are often more dedicated to getting our kids to baseball or volleyball practice than we are consciously practicing patience. In our hurried world, our God says, "Take time to practice what matters most. As you practice patience, you will see Me working in amazing ways!"

2. As parents, we also need to offer kindness. Before we go any further, perhaps I need to point out that this never-ending art doesn't exclude aunts and uncles, cousins, or grandparents, or those who never married or never had children. Regardless of our status, we're all in this together. Therefore, offering kindness is something we need to practice every day. Here's a question to ponder, "Who is more likely to practice kindness with no strings attached? Is it the parent or another relative?" Because parents are in the trenches every day, kindness is sometimes attached to actions. Our God calls us to offer kindness because it's what we are called to do.

3. As parents, we also need to be other-focused. Paul tells us that love is not self-focused, is not out for self-gain. But sometimes, we falter. Sometimes, we want our kids to excel at some particular activity for our benefit as if our kids are supposed to accomplish what we never accomplished as kids. Yet, our God says, "Focus on your children. Notice their talents, their strengths, their abilities. Then, let me know that you are proud of them for who they are, not what they accomplish." As we focus on our kids, we pour our energy into helping them live up to their God-given potential which is precisely what we need them to realize.

4. The art of parenting also includes controlling our anger. But we already know that, don't we? No one needs to tell us that uncontrolled anger isn't a great thing. So if we already know that fact, we need to focus on control. When you are riding a bike or driving a car or even a semi, how much control do you have? As individuals, we have the power to control. Our challenge is to utilize that power at the right moment, to put on the brakes when things are getting out of control. Like driving a car, we have tremendous power, but that power only works when we use it at the right moment, before we lose control.

5. Our never-ending art also includes forgiving. Paul writes, "Love keeps no record of wrongs." Why do we keep records? Why do we have church records or births records? So that we can go back and gather important information, right? But what happens when we keep a record of wrongs? We retrieve information that

has no value in the present. Our heavenly Father forgives and forgets. He doesn't write it in His mental book because those events have no value to Him and if they have no value to our God, they need to have no value to us. As we practice the art of forgiveness, we practice the art of shredding the records of past mistakes.

6. As parents, we remain ready to protect. As you watch animals, how quickly do adults step in to protect their young instead of looking the other way? Would you describe their protection as casual or intense? In the animal world, parents put their lives on the line to protect their young. Fortunately, we don't typically find ourselves in situations that intense, yet our children, our grandchildren, our nieces and nephews need to know that, if the need arises, we will protect. We will step in. As our Father protects us day-by-day, we, as His representatives, protect when protection is needed, even when our kids may think we are being overly protective.

7. As God's representatives, we always trust God for help. Paul tells us in our text that love always trusts. This could be interpreted in different ways depending on your focus. For our purposes, we look at our need to trust in God for help. How many things have you done for so long that you can do them without even thinking? The danger we face as parents is that we put too many things into the "I can do it myself," category. Today, more than ever, we, as parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles need all the help we can get. To obtain that help, we lean on our God. When we trust God for help, we expect God to arrive on the scene because we cannot go it alone.

8. Our text reminds us that love always hopes. As parents, we say, "Love always hopes that our children remember what they learned at home." Isn't that one of the toughest things for parents as their kids leave home? For years, we've been training up a child in the way that he or she should go. But as they go out on their own, everything changes because the world isn't interested in Christian parenting. Suddenly, our kids face things we can't control or protect, things we can only pray they handle in the proper way. As parents, we hope and we pray and when our kids veer off the path, we stand ready to assist when God provides that opportunity.

9. Our never-ending art would not be complete without including perseverance. As parents, how many times have you wanted to throw up your hands and say, "I quit. I'm done being a parent?" What would have happened in the past fifty years if every parent quit when they felt like quitting? In the beginning, God created the family and God created perseverance. We are God's representatives, His stand-ins. If we quit, God quits and if God quits, family will cease to exist. As we face our tough moments as parents, God says, "I have given you this task. I will not allow you to fail. Keep being the parents I created you to be and I will bless your efforts!"

10. In our minds, it would be great if parenting had a start and end date that were only about five years apart. But in God's perfect plan, parenting is what God created it to be. It is and always will be a never-ending art. Amen.