



## Leadership Letter

### *How's your parenting?*

This month's letter is written by Rite and is all about parenting. If you're not a Mum or Dad, don't rush away because actually the same principles for parenting apply to mentoring and discipling, so read on. Paul shares in 1 Timothy 3:4 that one of the qualities for leaders is, *"He must manage his own family well, having children who respect and obey him. For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?"* So this is an important topic to consider.

These past weeks have been filled with memories of my parents' influence in shaping my life. My mum died nearly two years ago and this February my dad joined her. It was a privilege to share at the memorial service about his characteristics and the rich deposit he had left in all of his five children. I realised that the most lasting honours of all, are those that your family bestow on you.

So what does a flourishing family look like? Many years ago, Gillian Warren, a board member for YWAM England, wrote a little article using the analogy of gardening to show parents or care givers the essential ingredients to encourage the flourishing of our children. She shared that mature healthy plants don't just happen, they need good soil, fertiliser, sunshine, water, pruning, time and training. Psalm 144:12 says, *"May your sons and daughters in their youth be like plants full-grown."*

As soon as we moved to Spain, I purchased an English book on how to garden in Spain. After living 26 years in Scotland, what did I know about hot weather, dry soil and exotic plants! This can be our challenge in parenting, as we find ourselves on unfamiliar ground and having very few tools to draw from. As Lord Rochester so poignantly stated, *"Before I had children, I had six theories about bringing up children. Now I have six children and no theories."* So without much training we develop our own style of parenting that is influenced by our backgrounds, cultures, personalities, priorities, time, lifestyles, observations, and our own parents' relationship with us. So you may see your approach in one of the four parenting styles following:

1. **Authoritarian parent:** they place emphasis on children obeying their parents to the letter (as they are always right!), having strict boundaries enforced in a legalistic manner, often attacking the child not the problem, in order to motivate behaviour.
2. **Permissive parent:** they are too lenient, often afraid to establish definite parameters and guidelines, and become overwhelmed by problems and so usually avoid difficult situations.
3. **Neglectful parent:** they see the child as a burden and so offer no training, no support system and give little of themselves to the relationship.
4. **Nurturing parent:** they are neither strict nor lenient but consistent. They discover the child's unique personality, potential and purpose in God and are physically, verbally and emotionally supportive.

Healthy adults nurture healthy children. Healthy doesn't mean being perfect parents or producing perfect children but having the attitude of a learner and continually

growing and developing. Jesus himself experienced the parenting process. Luke 2:52 describes his growth: *“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and grew in favour with God and men.”* This sounds like he experienced flourishing in all the developmental areas – intellectually, physically, spiritually and socially. Educators who have spent years researching fields of psychology and education affirm that a child forms his basic attitudes and habits between the ages of 0 and 5. His or her patterns for thinking and doing are almost set in these early years of development. The journey of childhood has always been a part of God’s plan and he wants us as parents to develop and nurture our children to flourish, like Jesus in all of the developmental areas.

Consider the following 4 needs of children (staff). Think about your own early years and place an ‘x’ on the line after each point to rate how your needs were met. Then place a ‘o’ on the line to evaluate how you are fulfilling the needs of your own children.

**1. Love & Security – good soil:** We all have a basic need to feel loved and accepted. Dr. Ross Campbell in "How to Really Love Your Child" talks about each child having an emotional tank. How full the tank is, determines how the child feels about himself and how he behaves. A child will be at his best when his emotional tank is continually being filled through love and encouragement. When you see poor behaviour don't only concentrate on what needs correcting, but ask yourself, "Does his emotional tank need filling and how can I fill it?"

What was Jesus’ attitude towards children? In one small encounter, he demonstrated the five love languages. Read the story in Mark 10:13-16. He changed the disciples’ agenda and encouraged the children to come (kind action), he made the children his priority (quality time), he lifted them in his arms (touch), he placed his hands on their heads and imparted something spiritually (thoughtful presents), and he blessed them (loving words). We all know how children spell love – T.I.M.E. The time we give them is really a measure of their priority in our lives. Time given says, “you matter; I’m interested in you; you come high on my priority list.” Love has to have some action. It’s not what we say but how we live.

Virginia Satir says: *“Feelings of worth can flourish only in an atmosphere where individual differences are appreciated, mistakes are tolerated, communication is open, and rules are flexible – the kind of atmosphere that is found in a nurturing family.”* The power of unconditional love, acceptance and nurture transforms us. It starts when we are children and continues throughout our life span.

As a dad, Stephe had a commitment to meet up one afternoon a week with our son John at 4 o’clock having processed with his office to leave early. This was an intentional connection point that meant a lot to John. One afternoon as John rushed in at 4pm, the phone rang and another leader wanted a meeting with Stephe. John confidently answered the phone saying, “Dad isn’t here right now, and when he does get home in a few minutes he has another commitment and I am sorry he won’t be available.” This is active love that produces strong roots to keep a child secure, knowing that they are a priority in your life as a parent. This is just one example of a whole host of regular family events and habits that we all looked forward to week by week. The Creator has given to us the awesome responsibility of representing him







The 5 love languages of children – Gary Chapman & Ross Campbell