

## Just Love Them

By Christine Vander Wielen, MSW, LCSW

Several times a month, Pranitha Timothy leaves her husband, her daughter and the comfort of her home to help negotiate the release of slaves in different parts of Asia. At times, she has been held at gunpoint as she has stood between slaves and their captures.

Motivated by God's love for others and a desire for all people to experience freedom, dignity and safety, Pranitha has been on more than 50 rescue missions and has been a part of restoring more than 4,000 people from slavery. However, Pranitha's life has not always been marked by love, selflessness and the desire to serve others.

At a recent conference, Pranitha spoke to a crowd of thousands and humbly shared her story. As the daughter of missionaries, Pranitha was sent to boarding schools. She was angry and bitter that she could not be with her parents more. As she grew so did her rage. When she was in college she treated others so poorly that she was called "C.C." by fellow students which stood for cold and calculating. Due to her mistreatment of others, she was eventually expelled from college.

Through all Pranitha's mistreatment of others, God still loved her and still had a plan and a purpose for her life. He never gave up on her. He is a God of second chances. As I listened to Pranitha's story, I was struck how powerfully God can transform any life. I also thought about her parents and how they may have been broken hearted and disappointed with her decisions and behavior at times.

Sometimes as parents we can be disappointed with our children's behavior, attitude and decisions. The best parenting advice I ever heard was from a youth leader who was speaking to a group of parents of junior high kids. We all know how trying those years can be. Her children were out of the house already and she was speaking from personal experience. She told the audience, "Your children will disappoint you. Expect it and just love them."

Our children are not perfect, and neither are we. Sometimes their behavior may leave us scratching our heads or pulling our hair out, and sometimes our behavior may leave others scratching their heads or pulling their hair out.

When our children disappoint us (and they will), they still need and deserve our love. Yes, *deserve* our love because their misdeeds do not change the fact that they were fearfully and wonderfully made and that God loves them. When their behavior calls for it, they need and deserve correction in love.

In my practice, I have found that some parents struggle with this balance. Parents tend to vacillate between loving but enabling, and correcting but tearing down. When your children disappoint you, love them.

When we mess up (and we all do), we need forgiveness. When our children mess up they, too, need forgiveness and a clean slate. It has been my experience that some parents withhold forgiveness out of fear that their child will receive the message that their misbehavior was acceptable. Sometimes parents can bring up the misdeeds so often the child turns a deaf ear. When correction is done in love, children are more apt to accept the correction. By grace, God is a God of second chances, and by His grace we can give others second chances.

At the end of her speech, Pranitha's parents joined her on stage and beamed with pride. I imagine they were thankful that God never gave up on Pranitha and thankful she has become a wonderful woman of God. God never gives up on us, or on our children, and neither should we. Just love them.

Sources:

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