

## Parenting Perspectives on Behavior and Bonding

By Mary Lambrecht, M.S. LMFT

Dr. Sam Storms, in his book The Singing God, (1998) emphasizes that God “is ecstatically happy in His love for His little ones.” (p.14). He cites Zephaniah 3:17 as powerful indication that God actually has *feelings* for us: “The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.”

Therapeutic research (John Bowlby, Nathan Ackerman) shows how in any healthy relationship an amount of attachment and bonding needs to take place. Through the fall of Adam and Eve, mankind’s attachment bond with God was severed. However, God chose to use the bond of love through the sacrifice of His only son, to reconnect us with him (John 3:16). Dr. Storms suggests that “God is jubilant over bonding with us!”

An experience this past summer taught me this principle. I, two of my daughters and a professional wrangler, Mikayla, assisted on a horseback trail ride in northern Wisconsin with ethnic minority children from inner city Minneapolis. Mikayla lovingly bonded with these children. The teaching of horsemanship was important, but secondary. She allowed the children to choose their own horse, and thus the beginnings of bonding both with Mikayla and with their horses, began. Mikayla emphasized that “you will be in control of your own animal.” The scene that soon unfolded resembled anything but “control” to me. Kids’ feet slipped out of stirrups. They took their helmets off. A horse would shift its weight and a child would scream. Horses and riders were everywhere. “Pull back on the reins,” the wrangler stated, “not too hard or he’ll back up, now turn him around, that’s right, now keep the reins right there, you’ve got it! Find your stirrup with your foot again...once everyone’s helmet is back on, we’ll head for the woods.” Over and over, a variation of this instruction was firmly but gently given.

Horses finally fell into line, and we were all moving in the same direction. Then, unpredictably, one horse and little boy bolted for greener pastures. “Don’t let him eat, keep him in line, pull back hard on the reins, pull back!” The boy appeared to not hear Mikayla. The wrangler flanked him on one side, with myself on the other. “Don’t let him eat!” These instructions were given gently again. But again, no response from boy or horse. Finally the boy raised his head and locked eyes with us. Tearfully he choked out, “but he’s hungry!” It seemed apparent that the boy understood hunger from a very personal level. Mikayla allowed the horse to eat. Could God be healing part of this boy’s own emotional and physical pain through his bond with the horse and with Mikayla? Could He be “quieting him with His love?.” (Zephaniah 3:17).

One primary relationship that thrives on bonding and attachment is the parent/child relationship. Ask God to show you how ecstatically happy God is

with that child, *and how happy He is with you!* Your child's behavioral faults may be an indication of something bigger going on in his/her life. Ask God for discernment. He desires to free both you and your child from any darkness or oppression; "Lord God, say to this captive, "come, out!" and to this child in darkness, "Be free!" Good Shepherd, cause me to find pasture even on every barren hill." (Isaiah 49:9). Teaching and admonishing is important for your child but the apostle Paul tells us to put on love above any other virtue (Colossians 3:14 & 16). Your child may be temporarily grazing in a "forbidden pasture." Take heart, God desires for him to get back on the desired trail.

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