**RAISING CHILDREN WHO LOVE WELL**

King Solomon said, “Guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” When a heart loves one person or group too much, a spring for loving self and others dries up inside. Young adults with this pattern have usually learned it from their parents. It doesn’t have to be this way.

The key to a healthy wellspring of love is *balance*. • Love your neighbor as yourself, and love yourself as you love others. • Love the neighbor who is balanced that way, more than the one who isn’t. • Watch out for the ones who love themselves or someone else too much or too little, including you, as they will drain your wellspring. • Keep your wellspring connected to your Creator, and to the community that loved your heart first, as they know the well-balanced life the heart needs to stay healthy.

How can parents raise children with well-balanced hearts? Make sure that you *show love in a balanced way to everyone in the home,* including yourself. Don’t show more love to the ones who show the least love to themselves and others. Instead, do *show some love to people most in need outside the home,* such as the elderly, sick, less privileged, and those new to the community. And at each stage in your children’s development, be ready to teach them to love in balanced ways they will need at that age.

*Preschool Years*

Always indulging or picking up crying children will exhaust you both. Teach babies they may have to wait awhile for their desires to be met. Learning to tolerate a little discomfort is a way for them to gain strength. Their irrational fears will subside, if they’re given enough time to adjust, thus showing love themselves and for you. This works with fears like darkness, storms, quiet, the sight of new people, the taste of new foods, and being away from their parents. They can learn to distract and soothe themselves, thus developing a taste or tolerance for things they will be experiencing in life.

*Elementary School*

Friendships in grade school pull children’s hearts from their families. When they’ve been rejected, while you comfort them, give them more education than sympathy. The two keys are teaching them to give *attention* and *affection* wisely. “Why give your attention to them, and hope they’re nice to you? Pay them no mind, and let those snooty people have each other. Look for people who need a friend, for people that are nice to everybody. Be nice to them and see how that goes.” Tell them how these things worked well for you and others when you were young.

*Middle and High School*

Passions run higher now. Being rejected in love, left out of a clique, or worst of all, getting locked into a lopsided romance or clique are big hurts that most teens suffer. But not to worry *–* it’s better for them to learn from these experiences than to avoid them. They’ll learn when you ask (and keep asking) these questions: • “You are giving and forgiving a lot, not getting much back. Why?” • “Why do you deserve this?” • “Why not talk your feelings out with a healthy person, instead of acting them out with one who’s not?” • “Do you enjoy your life more or less than you did before you got into this?” • “How does this end?”

It doesn’t help to lecture or criticize teens, or those they love. The best principles to teach are those in the first two paragraphs of this article, and the first article in this series (the July issue). Stories will help, especially from your own life. The best you can do is to guard your own heart. Show them how much you enjoy life, thanks be to your healthy, well-balanced wellspring heart.