

I Corinthians 13:4-7
 May 8, 2011 Dedication Service for Elijah Berge

Hampton Baptist
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🚀 Rocket Full of Rocks+

Questions that begin with the word *why* are often heard in families with children. Parents wonder *why* kids do things; children ask *why* as a means of understanding.

A mother was showing her son how to zip up his coat. "The secret," she said, "is to get the left part of the zipper to fit in the other side before you try to zip it up."

The boy looked at her quizzically... "Why does it have to be a secret?"

A little boy was in a relative's wedding. As he was coming down the aisle, he would take two steps, stop, and turn to the crowd. While facing the crowd, he would put his hands up like claws and roar. So it went, step, step, ROAR, step, step, ROAR, all the way down the aisle. As you can imagine, the crowd was near tears from laughing so hard by the time he reached the pulpit. The little boy, however, was getting more and more distressed from all the laughing, and was also near tears by the time he reached the pulpit. When asked why he was doing that, the child sniffed and said, "I was being the Ring Bear."

When a mother returned from the grocery store, her small son pulled out the box of animal crackers he had begged for, then he spread the animal-shaped crackers all over the kitchen counter. "Why are you doing that?" his Mom asked.

"The box says you can't eat them if the seal is broken," the boy explained. "I'm looking for the seal."

A grandmother was surprised by her seven-year-old grandson one morning. He had made her coffee. She drank what was the worst cup of coffee in her life. When she got to the bottom, there were three of those little green army men in the cup. She said, "Honey, why are these army men in my coffee cup?"

Her grandson said, "Grandma, it says on TV 'The best part of waking up is soldiers in your cup!'"

Parents may also find themselves constantly asking the question *why*? *Why* is your room still cluttered after we have requested that you clean it up? *If* you knew such-and-such would happen, then why did you do it? Many parents consider *why* questions non-verbally rather than verbally. Parents may wonder why a child has behaved in a certain manner, trying to understand their thought processes and decisions. Parents may wonder what makes their children tick, what drives them, what makes them do this or that. The *why* questions come more regularly when the children are so small. Is it instinctive for kids to pick up rocks? Do they automatically just pick them up? Is it automatic for children to step in puddles until they are taught to go around them?

Why do children put rocks in their pockets? Kids place rocks in their pockets for many reasons. Some rocks are shiny. Some are sharp. Some are smooth and are good for skipping along the top of water. Perhaps children also like to place rocks in their pockets to see how they feel, much like people who jingle coins in their pockets. That is something which happens mostly among older men: change jingling. I am not sure why: perhaps younger men don't have change; all their change has gone for the gum machines.

As parents, we should be asking the question *why*? Why do kids put rocks in their pockets? To be like an adult? For a collection? Because the rock seemed significant to them? To use for later, like when they go near the water?

A child may have varied reasons for having a pocket full of rocks; chances are great that the rocks differ from one another. Christian parents have varied reasons for doing what they do. The reasons differ from one another. As parents, we have learned by example, experiencing how our parents raised us. We have observed how other families operate and gleaned positive skills from those observations. Some parents read books, attend seminars and classes to become parents. The encompassing theme underlying all parenting techniques and skills should be love.

Our New Testament Lesson is familiar to most all of us. I've probably read these verses in almost all of the weddings I've performed. If there is scripture in a wedding, these are the verses usually presented. Most may find the passage a bit odd in light of parenting, yet it is a natural fit.

Paul was writing to the Church at Corinth. The theme of the letter was how a Christian should live in a pagan society. The town of Corinth was a seaport that was known for its vice, immorality, and depravity. In the previous chapter, Paul examined the many gifts God offers to people, concluding with these words, "And now, I will show you a more excellent way." And then, Paul began his discourse about love. Love is the only thing which could bind the church in perfect unity. I contend that love is what should pervade everything a family does. Let's look at this kind of love which Paul described to the Corinthians.

In our text, Paul listed fifteen characteristics of Christian love. Like a child having a pocket full of rocks, parents have a variety of Christian teachings at their disposal. But behind every technique, decision, and discipline should be love.

Today, I'd like for us to look at the many facets of love as related to parenting. Imagine each of the characteristics are rocks in a pocket labeled L-O-V-E. Reflecting on parenting, these words should be our foundation: "This love of which I speak is slow to lose patience--it looks for a way of being constructive." This describes patience with *people* and not patience with *circumstances*. Such patience is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength. Parents, even those with young children, who show patience are indicating strength. As parents, we are to exercise the same kind of patience with our children as God practices with us.

Being constructive or being kind is generally easy to do with children...except when they are *trying* our patience. Maybe the reason they are testing us is that *we* have exhibited impatient behavior. Asking ourselves why the children are acting in a certain manner may indicate unconstructive or unkind behavior on our part. Maybe that is why Paul linked these two descriptors together. Being patient and being constructive are acts of love.

Paul then told the Corinthians that love is neither envious nor possessive. Christian parents recognize ultimately to whom their children belong. Today, we have gathered so that Eric and Andrea would dedicate their son to God, that they would dedicate their parenting skills to God, and that we as a church would covenant to do our part in nurturing Elijah. Paul says, "True love is not possessive." Elijah has wonderful parents, a caring family and a nurturing church, but ultimately, he belongs to God.

Love is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance. Parents who seek to brag about their personal accomplishments to the detriment of their children do them a disservice. Telling a non-athletic child of your former sports honors could do more harm for the child than good. Bragging about your child to others in hopes of patting your own self on the back could even minimize the child's self-worth. For a parent to declare him or herself "important," the need seems to address the parent's insecurities rather than the child's.

Paul wrote that love has good manners and does not pursue selfish advantage. William Barclay wrote, "It is a significant fact that in Greek, the words for 'grace' and for 'charm' are the same. There is a graciousness in Christian love which never forgets that courtesy and tact and politeness are lovely things." (William Barclay. The Letters to the Corinthians. Philadelphia: Westminster Press. 1975. p. 121) Christian parenting not only teaches children to have good manners, but Christian parents should model good manners toward their children. Christian parents, in seeking to love their children, will place their children's needs above their own. Good manners and selfless living should be rocks in our pockets.

Christian love is not touchy. This is one of the toughest on the list. Christian parents aren't to get exasperated at their children. Exasperation is a sign of defeat. Easier said than done, but when we lose our tempers, *we* lose. In a poem simply entitled, "If..." Rudyard Kipling offered that the test of a person was, "If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you; If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you, but make allowance for their doubting too; If you can wait and not be tired by waiting, or, being lied about, don't deal in lies, Or being hated don't give way to hating, and yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise."

([http://oldpoetry.com/opoem/2940-Rudyard-Kipling-If---](http://oldpoetry.com/opoem/2940-Rudyard-Kipling-If-)) If one can do these things, one passes the test.

Remaining non-anxious around children is sometimes difficult, especially when the phone is ringing, the pot is boiling over, and the baby has awakened you too many times during the night. One of your rocks is to keep your cool.

Love does not compile statistics of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people. Tallying how many times a child has done wrong doesn't profit anything. Paul was using an image of an accountant in referencing the compilation of statistics of evil. We are not to remind our kids over and over of how bad they are. The reminders don't serve as a deterrent. One of the great arts in life is to learn what to forget. Love finds no pleasure in anything that is wrong. It is not so much delight in doing the wrong thing that Paul meant, as the malicious pleasure which comes to most of us when we hear something derogatory about someone else. Kids pick up our attitudes. In parenting, we are not to compile statistics of the wrongs our kids have done, nor are we to delight in anyone's bad fortune.

On the contrary, love is glad with all people when truth prevails. There are times when the truth will hurt, when parents need to be up front with their children rather than live a lie. If our parenting is undergirded by love, then honesty will be the best policy. Christian love has no wish to veil the truth; it has nothing to conceal, and so is glad when the truth prevails.

Finally, in poetic fashion, Paul wrote, "Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything." Love can bear any insult, any injury, any disappointment. Unlimited endurance in parenting comes only with a perfect kind of love. Unending trust is a gift that is born out of unconditional love. This kind of love always believes the best about others. It is often true that we *make* people what we *believe* them to be. That is certainly true of parenting.

Elijah is a symbol of a hope that doesn't fade. Andrea and Eric, you have the opportunity and the pleasure of helping mold Elijah into the person you want him to be. His potential is as expansive as the night-time sky, and his possibilities are just as plentiful. Hope is founded on love.

Paul concludes this section of his letter by stating that "Love is the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen." Hope may fade. Trust may end. Your endurance may find a limit. But if love is the foundation and motivation for your actions, then love will still stand, no matter what.

We may come up with many reasons why children fill their pockets with rocks. We can also examine each rock regarding its significance. Eric and Andrea, you have been blessed with a wonderful extended family, and while the number of children are many, Elijah is distinctive and is to be loved as an individual.

The characteristics of love related to parenting that I have mentioned today are the manifestations of a *perfect* love. There are no *perfect* parents, no *perfect* children, nor *perfect* families. The only person who personified these qualities without fail was Jesus Christ. As Christians, living as little Christs, we are to attempt to live this way in daily interactions with everyone, including our children. Andrea and Eric, you will make mistakes with Elijah. I have made mistakes with my children. All parents make mistakes. We seek to attain the lofty heights of raising our kids the best way, the Christian way as detailed in our text, but we will fail on occasion. Thankfully, God extends grace to us when we fail, just as we are to extend to our children when they fail...and we hope our kids extend to us when we fail.

So on this day when Elijah is being dedicated to God, I offer these three admonitions: Ask the question of why. Fill the pocket labeled L-O-V-E with these characteristics found in I Corinthians. And remember that we are to parent our children as God parents us. Love never ends.