

Hugging as Spiritual Warfare

Baptist and Reflector, Nov. 11, 2009

I am a hugger and come from a line of established huggers. My dad was open with his affection to me and the rest of my family. He was practically an official ‘hugger’ at our church, and I can remember him kidding about that often. I also remember well working with another man in the church on our “Fix-It Squad,” doing household chores for our widows and shut-ins. He was clearly a ‘man’s man’ and was open with his affection and forthright on the value of hugging.

So, with that background it is no surprise that hugging my own children is so common to me that I almost do not notice it. I really never paused to reflect on why I hugged them. When I think of it I realize that primarily I hug them so often because I enjoy it so. I love my children and rejoice to demonstrate that. To give and receive these tangible expressions is for me a natural habit and a great joy.

Over the last year or so, however, I have reflected more on the value of this expression of affection to my children. This was prompted by pastoral work with people who are emotionally damaged. While talking with a dear brother who was struggling deeply with homosexuality, I was struck by his comment that he had never heard his father tell him that he loved him. Another man in the same situation related how he never remembered receiving affection from his father and had practically no positive memories of times with his father. People in other situations, wrestling with different problems, when baring their souls have often referred to the lack of affection in their families.

These negative experiences do not, of course, excuse sinful behavior. But these testimonies have reminded me of the value and importance of the hugs I give my children. One evening, in the midst of a time when I was walking with a church member through some dark days of struggle with homosexuality, I was holding my infant son, hugging him and preparing to lay him down to sleep. In that moment as I prayed for him, I realized afresh, that by hugging him I was investing in his soul. I was preparing him to face the onslaught of the enemy in days ahead. Spiritual warfare is often used to refer to glamorous or even odd things. But, in the truest sense, I was at that moment waging war for my boy’s soul by investing in one more

incident which is building up a general sense of belonging and strong, pure affection from his father. He will not remember that hug, but all these hugs will shape the general context of his early memories. I was, in however a small way, helping him to have a paradigm for a Father who loves him and also corrects him. In that moment I was making my corrective discipline more effective by reinforcing that it comes from a context of love.

This thought has encouraged and challenged me. It has sent me forth in greater diligence in loving my family. So, fathers, let us take up our 'arms', wrap them around our children and wage war for their souls by embracing them.

Ray Van Neste