

You Love, He Saves

I prayed that our children's hearts would be changed. Then came an uncomfortable (and liberating) realization.

By Krista Rogers Mortensen

My husband and I raised our children in the gospel. We had family scripture study every morning, family prayer, and weekly family home evening. We attended church, ate dinner together, and went on family vacations. Our children regularly attended the temple to perform baptisms for the dead, they graduated from seminary, and two of them served missions.

And then as adults, they started exploring paths and ideas that were different from the things we had taught them. One by one, our children stopped participating in the Church until only one of our five children still chose to attend. We shed many tears over our children and wondered if we had failed as parents or if there was something we could have done differently.

For a long time, I pleaded with the Lord to change their hearts, and finally the Lord answered my prayers. But not in the way I expected.

Instead of simply changing my children's hearts, He showed me that I needed to start by changing my own heart. While parents play an important role in teaching their children, He reminded me that my role isn't to judge or save them but to love them. Jesus Christ is their Savior and Judge.

In my determination to save my children, I had spent many hours praying, reading my scriptures, and going to the temple, thinking that if I did all of the right things, I would qualify for God's intervention—as if somehow my actions would lead God to override their agency and influence them to believe as I do.

My husband and I wanted so badly to save them, but our version of saving looked more like lecturing, nagging, or showing disapproval of their choices, which ultimately led to contention. We realized that in our desperation to bring our



children back, we were actually driving them away. The more they felt our judgment and disappointment, the more they avoided us.

My prayers changed to a plea for my own heart to be changed. I prayed for more love. I also prayed to overcome my feelings of shame and embarrassment that my family didn't look anything like the perfect families my friends displayed on social media with photos from their children's temple marriages or grandchildren's baptisms.

As I turned to the Savior for healing, my heart began to soften toward my children. I realized that to love them as He loves them meant I needed to make some changes. Trusting in the Savior's ability to do His work (see 2 Nephi 27:20) allowed me to focus on loving my children and turning the saving over to the Lord. It didn't mean giving up on trying to help them, but when loving them became the driving force behind my interactions with them, it changed *how* I interacted.

I started to see them in a different light. I began focusing on their strengths and their talents and began to see what loving, generous, intelligent, and good people they were.

I listened more and talked less. I asked questions about their lives and their interests. Instead of judgment, I showed curiosity. I replaced criticism and disappointment with expressions of love, and my children could feel that it was genuine.

Home became a safe place where they could feel love and acceptance. They stopped hiding things from me and started being honest and open about what was going on in their lives. We grew closer.

What Helped Me

prayer

a plea for my heart to change



perspective

seeing my children in a different light



love

don't just talk—listen



trust

my efforts are in partnership with God's

Our family is still a work in progress, but my children enjoy coming home and spending time with me now. They feel safe in my presence, and through my love I hope they can feel God's love for them. I don't know if in this lifetime they will return to the things they were taught as children, but I know that they are in the Savior's hands. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.