

What a Christian Counselor Would Say to the Parents in Baltimore

Love matters. Saying and doing love matters. Communicating “I value you” matters. Communicating “everyone has value” matters. If more people knew they were loved and valued and that other people deserved the same, the world would be a different place.

This and much more have been on my mind as I’ve watched some of the Baltimore situation unfold. There are many reasons adults and young people rioted. Many. I’m confident some of the youth are from wonderful families. On the other hand, perhaps some of the youth aren’t as fortunate and come from troubled homes. Today’s blog is simply a list of things I wish were true for every parent and child. Maybe it’s my “I have a dream” blog.

Don’t read this list too quickly. Choose the statements most relevant to you to prioritize in your season of life. I pray you’re not overwhelmed by this, but are inspired instead. Perhaps you could read through this with your children and let it stimulate a discussion.

Normally, I don’t recommend just telling people what to do. But this blog is different. It’s maybe a list of content I’d include if writing a complete parenting curriculum. If you want to know more, I’ve written many blogs that unpack these ideas more, as do my books, CDs, and DVDs.

Read on.

- Love well the children you love.
- Know your children and be appropriately vulnerable so they can get to know you. Choose to enjoy them – every

age and stage. Parent so they enjoy you and want to be with you. Know this won't weaken your position with them, but can strengthen it.

- Do everything possible to help them believe in themselves. Be positive and affirming. Optimistic and encouraging.
- Help them discover their gifts, talents, and passions and how to use them for good and not harm. Support them when they tell you how they hope they can improve the world.
- Value them today. Understand that today influences tomorrow. They don't just have future potential. They have present value. Parent so they believe this.
- Teach your children how to discern who is for them and who is against them, who is healthy and who is unhealthy, and how to make changes in their relationships when they recognize they should. Know your children's friends and love them, too. Invite them to your home often.
- Help your children know if things they don't like about themselves can be changed. If they can, help them. If they can't, help them. Help them value their uniqueness.
- Teach that different is different. Different isn't always wrong. When you believe something or someone is wrong, teach children how to react in respectful ways. Explain when speaking up is appropriate and when silence is wise.
- Parent so they know unconditional love is not unconditional acceptance.
- Teach them. Train them. Coach them. Reteach. Cheer for them.
- Teach what's right. Teach what's wrong. Don't tell. Don't yell. Teach. Reteach.
- Share your values and why you define right and wrong the way you do. Live and love so they choose the same values. If faith is important to you, demonstrate it. If the God of the Bible matters to you, let them know why

He does. Share your spiritual journey.

- If spiritual disciplines matter to you, let them know why. Teach them how to successfully use them. In other words, don't tell them to pray; teach them how. Do the same for worship, Bible reading, Scripture memorization, quiet time and a devotional life, the Sabbath, fellowship, and others you value.
- Model your beliefs and values in your attitudes and actions. If your children catch you not doing so, don't blow them off or flippantly excuse your behavior. Explain yourself, if appropriate. But then you must let them explain themselves at times, too. Apologize. Acknowledge their pain and disappointment. Work to earn back their trust.
- Pay attention to daily work, not just tests. Don't complain about their grades if you don't offer to help them study. Make sure they've been taught how to study and not just told to study. Help them discover, strengthen, and use the eight ways they're smart.
- Encourage them to try different extracurricular activities and then support them so they can be successful. Pay attention to practices, not just performances.
- Don't overschedule them. They're children, and play is important. More.
- Don't introduce too much technology too soon. Limit its use and don't let it replace other things we can all do in our spare time. Stay connected face-to-face more than to electricity.
- Forgive quickly. Offer grace and mercy. Learn to discern the differences between things like occasional errors in judgment, careless mistakes, and intent to harm. Treat them differently.
- Teach and model the difference between happiness and joy. Prioritize joy.
- Lead them. Guide them. Then follow them so you can guide them again if their choices prove they need you to.

- Teach what is good, better and best. Help them choose what's best so they can experience the joy and contentment that accompanies it.
- Prioritize excellence, not perfection.
- Say what you mean, and mean what you say.
- Listen to understand. Longer. Work at it. Be fully present.
- Create age-appropriate boundaries. Explain them and demonstrate them. Adjust them when children have proven they're ready for more freedom. If later their choices demonstrate they need boundaries again, reestablish them. Don't feel guilty for doing so. Your decisions are motivated by their choices. Explain that.
- Hold them responsible for their actions. Use natural and logical consequences when they're disobedient. Don't overprotect them. Let them learn from their choices and mistakes.
- Stay invested. Rest so you have the energy to parent well. If you're married, invest in your marriage. More.
- Affirm your children. Correct them. Be specific and helpful. Don't criticize them. Use both negative and positive consequences.
- Celebrate who they are and what they do. Talk at least as much about who they are as about what they do. Teach character and help them know what they believe. Understand that beliefs cause behaviors and identity controls behavior.
- Help them rest and learn to enjoy quiet.
- Model that always trying to avoid boredom doesn't work well. Learning to cope with it is wiser.
- Cultivate gratefulness.
- Meet your need for security, identity, belonging, purpose and competence in healthy ways and parent so your children do, too.
- Love well the children you love.

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