

CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY FOR CAREGIVERS

BY MARY MOERBE



Words are very powerful. Hurtful words and threats can continue to ring in our ears for a long time. Thankfully, we can help replace those words with healthy and loving ones — even with the very Word of God!

- Everyone can be selfish, but Jesus never is. Jesus gave Himself up for us on the cross, and then He rose from the dead so He can still take care of us.
- It is OK to love someone even if you have to stay away or be very, very careful. It's also OK to pray to God *for* anyone or *against* anything bad.
- What people do is important — it can help or hurt others — but Jesus has already done everything we need to be loved by God! He wants us to keep hearing God's Word so we keep receiving faith.

Children can be especially receptive to comforts adults might overlook. For example, it can be a huge relief to learn the world is not the way it is supposed to be, and that grown-ups make mistakes and need to learn and practice doing right too. After all, right and wrong are much more than “do this” and “don't do that.” When a child has been wronged, or seen loved ones wronged, a child needs the assurance that some things are not acceptable.

Consider your child. Here are some brief biblical teachings you can introduce, little by little and as opportunity permits, that might comfort your child:

- God helps us in lots of ways. He even helps us through people in our lives: family, doctors, teachers, pastor, police, etc.
- God cares about big things and little things. He cares about everything that affects us because He loves us.
- We receive God's gifts through our bodies: our ears hear, our mouths speak, etc. We often receive love through our bodies, as people listen, speak and interact with us.
- God does *not* give us bodies to hurt each other! God made us, and He doesn't want anyone to sin against us!
- The Bible teaches us about history and right and wrong; but most importantly, it gives us faith in Jesus, our Savior!

Sometimes grown-ups use words before children understand them. Your child may not understand the differences between “sin,” “sinner” or “sinned against.” Still, we can remind ourselves and our children, “No one is perfect, but at *those times* someone *else* was wrong.”

Forgiveness is also a term that sometimes needs to be taught, as well as shown. And it can be tricky! Forgiveness is a difficult concept for some, but forgiveness never overlooks or belittles sin. Just the opposite, if “it was nothing,” then there is no reason for forgiveness.

When we forgive others, we say, “There is something bigger than you and what you did.” Although our wounds and other consequences may remain, forgiveness lets us look up from the bad to see Jesus with both His unconditional love and His unflinching rejection of sin and sinning against others.

Sometimes a child (or individual) blames him- or herself. The child longs for forgiveness even though the child wasn't wrong. It can be very helpful to consider that, really, we confess in order to get what follows. Sinners confess to receive forgiveness, and the sinned against may confess to receive the hope and assurance that comes from both our loved ones and Him who loves the world in this way: that He sent His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Children are expected to obey a lot of rules without understanding why. When a caregiver has given rules and also hurt them in some way, right and wrong can be especially confusing. We can ask:

- 1) *Who can help us know what is right and what is wrong?*
- 2) *How does God teach us right and wrong?*
- 3) *What else does God teach us in His Word?*

Children are still forming an understanding of safety. You may talk about safety plans in cases of storms and fires. Consider making safety plans for other scenarios too.

- 1) *Where are safe places?*
- 2) *Who can you ask to help you get somewhere safe?*
- 3) *How can we find each other if we get split up?*
- 4) *What password can we use if another grown-up needs to get you?*

Things can change quickly for children. You can periodically ask:

- 1) *What helps you feel safe?*
- 2) *What helps comfort you?*
- 3) *What helps you feel like you belong?*

To help children talk about emotions, you can ask, “What are some feeling words?” Even speaking random emotional terms can encourage children to use them when they need them. You can also introduce new words too, silly or serious as needed.

Children need to learn that love continues even through anger and disappointment, and that sometimes we feel conflicting ways at the same time — and that’s OK! You can periodically share, “I sure am feeling a lot right now! I feel both x and y! But I sure am glad to have you in my life. I love you very much.”

As children grow, they can have uncertainties and resentment toward bodies. They may be scared by their natural lack of self-control. They may fear that bodies only get hurt or hurt others. They may even come to think that bodies are only meant to be used.



1) Encourage that Jesus has a body and soul, and He cares for us in body and soul. There is a big world we can explore with our bodies, minds and feelings, and Jesus is preparing a place for us where sin will never reach us again.

2) Affirm good things bodies allow, like exploration through our senses; the company of others; and even basic abilities to receive, laugh, play, enjoy a meal or pet, etc.

3) Allow and encourage boundaries. For example, if it is safe, let a child walk away angry. Let a child say “No” if the child needs to.

4) Emphasize that bodies can give us hints to what we need. Dehydration and low-blood sugar, for example, can make moodiness and anger worse. Lack of sleep affects focus and memory.

5) Suggest ways we can work with our own bodies to calm down and practice patience: go for a walk or a run, get some sunshine, close your eyes in a quiet spot when feeling overwhelmed, etc.

In Genesis 50, there is a passage about a young man who was abused horribly by his brothers. Toward the end of the story, there is a startling — but comforting — verse:

“*As for you [my brothers], you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.’ Thus [Joseph] comforted them and spoke kindly to them.*”

(GEN. 50:20-21)

Wrongs should not take place, but God continues to provide despite them. Jesus goes before us, His ears once filled with threats and His flesh once torn by hate. May He comfort you and your loved ones with His Good News and promises, even as we walk through this fallen world.