



The Pursuit of  
*Happy-Nest*



Helping Your Family Soar,  
Even While Winging It

Mary Joanne Bell

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ISBN 13: 978-1-4621-4187-6

Published by CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc.

2373 W. 700 S., Springville, UT 84663

Distributed by Cedar Fort, Inc., [www.cedarfort.com](http://www.cedarfort.com)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021950767

Cover design by Shawnda T. Craig

Cover design © 2022 Cedar Fort, Inc.

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed on acid-free paper

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# Chapter One

## Building Family

*Family is not an important thing.  
It's everything.*<sup>12</sup>  
—Michael J. Fox

\* \* \*

*A soft answer turneth away wrath.*<sup>13</sup>  
—Proverbs 15:1

### **Love for our families is the cement that holds our family relationships together.**

When I have asked young parents what they want most, the answers are often similar: to be more patient; to have a calmer home; to be able to handle chaos without losing it. The good news is that you are about to receive more serenity. You can use it to build your stronger home and family. Hold my virtual hand. Let's go!

Patience is the number-one parenting tool. Patience is the BMW, the Gucci bag, and the latest iPhone of parenting. We're all craving calm. We want the home to be a refuge of safety and peace. (Is there any other place left?) We know if we can "keep our heads when others are losing theirs and blaming it on us," family peace will increase.

Mothers set the tone. You know the saying: "When Momma's not happy ain't nobody happy." Whether rarely home or always home or somewhere in-between, the mother is the heart of her home. Sometimes she feels like the liver of the home, filtering societal toxins. Or she may feel like the pancreas of the home, trying to deal with all the sticky, sugary stuff trying to enter. But usually, she's the heart. And she's aware of the heart of everyone who lives there.

Similarly, a father can anchor the home like nothing else. He can help his family feel grounded, stable, and safe. I love it when my husband works at home, even if he is crazy busy and we can hardly talk.

An enormous piece of the peace puzzle is resisting the temptation to yell. I want to yell it from the rooftops: "Not yelling changes everything!" The resultant calmer feeling in your home will help cement your relationships with trust. Your home will be noticeably stronger. To your children, it will feel safer. It will be a place where all can truly relax.

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We all know the feeling. We are frustrated about something, and as our frustration increases, so does the temptation to dial up the volume of our voices. But we may also know this (framable) quote by Latter-day Saint prophet David O. McKay: “There should be no yelling in the home unless there is a fire.”<sup>14</sup> So then, we have to light something on fire. I’m kidding! But the situation can be challenging, especially when it comes to parenting.

If new parents could choose any attribute to instantly have, isn’t there a good chance they would choose patience? This would have been my choice. It seems that what we parents want most is serenity . . . now!

Truly, family life can feel joy-fueled and wonder-filled. It can be “Kodak moments” and Kleenex. It can be “running through fields of daisies holding the hands of those we love.” But then suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, it can feel that we have tripped and somersaulted into the Grand Canyon of Annoyance. We may be tempted to raise our voices.

We don’t want to raise our voices. We really, *really* don’t want to raise our voices. But it’s hard because children can be immature and demanding and—oh my goodness what is this sudden, massive mess, and where are the 800 socks I bought you, and please just Get. In. The. Car! And we are not yelling because we don’t want to break their beautiful spirits that just arrived from heaven. God entrusted them to us! We want to set good examples for them so that they won’t yell, so that they can reach their full potential more easily, so that they can be happier, so that they can grow up and teach their children not to yell so that they can be happier, so that there can be more peace on earth or whatever. And why is there so much pressure on parents, and why do we feel like yelling about this?

My husband and I didn’t want to yell at our children or at each other because we knew that yelling brought contention and we believed in this: “He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another” (3 Nephi 11:29).

Fortunately, patience is an invisible ‘muscle’ that can be developed, like any other muscle. It takes time, practice, and self-forgiveness.

Getting to calm(er) did not happen for me overnight. Or over a fortnight. Or in a fort. At night. First, I made a firm choice to try not to ever raise my voice. Then it was trial and effort. It was a trial to put in so much effort. So, I began to rely on what may be a surprising game changer: prayer. I just started praying for patience and a heart of love everywhere and anytime. Often, I was on my desperate knees.

One day a man knocked on our door and our three-year-old, Emily, answered it.

“Hello,” the man said. “Is your mommy home?”

“Oh . . . she’s home. But she can’t come to the door right now.”

“Why not?”

“Because she’s in there.” Emily pointed to another room.

“What is she doing?”

“Umm . . . she’s kneeling down. She’s praying that she won’t yell at us!”

I wanted a contention/yell-free environment because my husband and I also believed

in these words by Harold B. Lee: “When you raise your voice in anger, the Spirit departs from your home.” We didn’t want to chase that beautiful gift, the Spirit, away.

Prayer can even work when people aren’t sure they believe in God. An agnostic friend told me:

I wasn’t totally sure if there was a God. But I would “pray”—literally beg—when the kids were nuts. I would pray the same thing over and over: “Please help me not to yell. Please. I don’t want to yell. Please help me. Just, please.” I would just keep on with this prayer, or whatever it was, until at last I would feel the anger that had been rising in my chest start to subside. I had never really wanted to yell, but I just felt so helpless and didn’t know what else to do. To my surprise, the prayer thing changed things. That’s when I started thinking, this is science. Every time I do this, things get better.

I can second her emotions. I’ve been tempted to yell countless times, but as I have prayed, the frenzy in my heart would abate. Prayer can work miracles. It can help us to be gentle with everyone. It helps us use our personal power for good. Love can increase, crowding out resentment.

And when we stay calmer in our homes, there is a ripple effect that goes out into the world. As a nation, we could use some serious calm, couldn’t we? We want our homes to be places of refuge, safety, and peace.

We know the key maneuver for dodging contention: “A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger” (Proverbs 15:1). Softness for the win. We may not get peace on (all of the) earth right away, but we can get more peace in our homes right away, as we keep in mind the mighty power of our soft response.

One day a woman I barely knew approached me with a suspicious look in her eye. “Do you know Diane?” she asked. “She’s a Latter-day Saint.”

“Yes! I love Diane,” I said.

“Yes,” she continued, raising her eyebrows. “I was pretty sure you did. She’s not a yeller, you know.” She looked me over. “You’re not either. I can just tell. You’re one of those . . . you know, those . . . non-yelling people. But some of us aren’t like that, you know. We yell. That’s just how we do our parenting. It works for us!”

Huh?

Yelling can *seem* like it’s working. Especially in the short term. But what about the longer term? Children are like behavioral boomerangs. Behaviors come back to us. We don’t want our children to yell at us. This was a big reason I worked hard on “tranquilit-me.”

I decided to try not to raise my voice in early motherhood. But at first, it was trial and error. It was a trial, making all those errors.

One day when our three oldest children were very young, I wrote in my journal, “Spent the day yelling, ‘Stop yelling!’” I put the journal down and thought, *Yelling can seem like it’s working. Especially in the short term. But what about the longer term?*

The truth is that yelling lies. Yelling may get kids to behave in the short term, but it may have long-term consequences. It invites the spirit of contention into our homes. Yelling may teach children to yell at us and at each other. It may teach children to yell at themselves internally.

On the other hand, “staying gentle” (“Be gentle,” we remind toddlers) invites a spirit of peace and love into our homes. Once in a while, I still whisper, “Be gentle,” to teens

when they forget to frame frustration with good manners.

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Now let's go a little deeper. What could be at the roots of our inclinations to yell?

Could those roots be connected to a challenging child(ren)? What if a particular child seems to consistently drive us to the breaking point? What if a different child was equally difficult in the same way, but we weren't as ruffled by the behavior? If you've been there, I've also done that. I didn't understand what was happening at a subconscious level.

Let me explain. You've noticed that we can give birth to a child that reminds us of someone from our family of origin. Maybe your son looks a lot like your dad. Maybe your daughter can sing like your Aunt Jane. This is all great, right?

But what if this son or daughter reminds you a lot of someone from your family of origin with whom you have struggled in the past? At least subconsciously, you may have to struggle again, as you interact with this new person who reminds you of the "old" person from your past. So many humans, including myself, have been in this emotional wind-tossed boat.

We don't always make the connection between past emotional baggage and current parenting. We may feel confused. But we want to figure it out because if we don't, that confusion can cue the dance of dysfunction. Music, maestro, misery.

For example, you've read far enough to know about my dad's temper. When we had our first son, who was delightful and gregarious like my dad, I also secretly feared that he might have my dad's temper tendencies. My stomach was in knots over this. In an effort to make sure he didn't grow up with a temper, at first I gave him more than necessary time-outs concerning being respectful. When I understood the irrational connection I was making between my fear and my father, I was finally able to relax, reconsider, and relate more compassionately with our son.

Another time, I gave birth to a daughter. This daughter, like her sisters and brothers, grew up to become one of my dearest friends. The day this daughter was born, I couldn't help but stare at her long, elegant fingers, her shock of lush eyelashes, and her thick mass of dark hair. *Oh my gosh*, I thought. I called one of my sisters from the hospital: "You'd better get down here. I think I just gave birth to your daughter. She looks so much like you!"

As she grew, she reminded me of this relative in terms of personality too. This was a huge compliment for both of them. Both are caring, strong, and sensitive, among other good things. I adore them! But their weak spots are also similar. Because of this, this sister and I have occasionally clashed, like instruments playing two different songs at the same time. We've had to work hard on our harmony. Consequently, we have eventually learned to make lots of beautiful music together. This took serious time.

*Ironically, by the time this fourth child arrived, I thought, I kind of know what I am doing. I am a fairly experienced mom. I have my mom's calm spirit fairly consistently dialed in, don't I? Childish temper tantrum? Been there. Seen that. When you're done, let's hug. Power struggle? I can side-step you most every time. Screaming? Meet your Zen master.*

But pride, as it is often wont to do, came before my fall.

I found myself falling into a few long-buried childhood struggle patterns with this

daughter. Feelings would well up in me that had nothing to do with this sweet girl. I would sometimes let myself get sucked into the silliest little minor arguments. I didn't know exactly how to stop.

With prayer, I gradually realized the first step in letting go of my end of the tug-of-war rope was getting clear about who I was struggling with—it wasn't my daughter. She was strong-willed, but it was my relationship with a different strong-willed woman that still needed a little untangling.

Are you a parent who has struggled inexplicably with a child? Could it be that subconsciously you, too, may actually be struggling with someone else, someone who reminds you of your child? Someone you struggled with in childhood? Physical appearances and mannerisms are powerful. Check in with yourself and ask, "Is there a different relationship I need to figure out first, before I can figure out the one with this child?" I would encourage you to dig deep on this so you can avoid accidental self-fulfilling prophecy.

Here's another example. I have a friend whose daughter reminds her a lot of her mother. Some of the connotations of this are negative. But it's a bit of a "chicken and the egg" dilemma, isn't it? Was the daughter *truly* like the mother from the get-go, or was a negative connection (possibly based on appearance, mannerisms, and so on) accidentally created, labeled, and then reinforced over years? Who can say? But what we can say is that if we can untangle the primary relationship (from the family of origin) first, and *forgive*, then we can also more easily forgive similar foibles in the successive parent-child relationship.

But I digress. Let's circle back to the story about my daughter. One evening this sweet but strong-willed little girl offered me tender redemption. She was so young but so wise beyond her handful of years. The light bulb in my mind switched on that night, and the memory is still bright in my mind. "Time out!" I said with frustration over a transgression. "Go upstairs and do not come down!" I had crossed a mental line and had let myself get a little bit mean. She went to bed, sniffing. I knew I had hurt her feelings. I tried to tell myself I was justified. I wasn't.

A little later she called out for me. I went to her room and stood just outside the door. "Mommy," she said in her tiny voice, filled with so much love that it broke my heart a little. "Remember what Jesus said about children? Remember how people wanted them to be sent away, but He wouldn't do it? Remember how he wanted the children to come to him, to sit on his lap? Mommy, isn't that the right thing to do when children mess up? Don't they need someone to hold them, and teach them, even lots of times, to be good? Doesn't it take lots of times to learn to be all the way good?"

*Yes. It takes lots of times to be all the way good*, I thought, -humbled. But a battle was going on in my soul. I was right, darn it! Wasn't I? But she was more right. Somehow, she understood a much higher law.

"A little child will lead them" (Isaiah 11:6). Was I willing to be led? Could I let go of my pride? Why was it so hard to let go? I stood outside of her door for a long time. Finally, I bowed my head and prayed. I listened to that still, small voice. "*Let go*," was the impression that came to me. "*Be at peace*."

I looked at my daughter with new, amazed eyes. She had been teaching me. I realized that she had come to Earth in part to bless me. In the years following, I still used time-outs but not as often. Instead, I tried to do what this daughter had taught me: to bring

children close and teach, in non-contentious ways, in peaceful settings, about what is right. In other words, I tried to teach like Jesus. Helping children learn goodness takes *a lot of gentle* repetition, of course. It pays off.

Today this daughter and I are the best of friends. She and her husband and two children are planning on moving close to us, joining three of her siblings (and their families) in the neighborhood or minutes away. (And more families are planning to join them!)

The recipe of one part firmness to two parts kindness and compassion is the best parenting recipe of which I am aware. As discussed in chapter 2, we are better able to extend firmness, kindness, and compassion to others when we are extending these very same things to ourselves on the regular.

Remember how hard it was to be a little child? You have feelings and needs, but you don't have articulation or decent self-regulation skills. You can only learn little by little, line upon line, precept upon precept. It takes time and so much practice. Children haven't been on earth long enough to figure out almost anything, including the "language" we most want them to learn. That language is called *Respect*.

Respect is a difficult language. It's nuanced—embracing politeness, patience, optimism and more. It takes overcoming parts of the "natural man" (see Mosiah 3:19). It can take years of practice to speak it fluently. Heavens, we know adults who are still grappling with this language. Many parents expect their young children to speak it immediately. But children are foreigners who have arrived on our planet without any words at all.

Imagine you are ten years old and have suddenly landed in France. You don't speak French. How would you prefer to be treated by French authority figures around you? Would you prefer to be scowled at, yelled at, or even asked to leave (think "time-out") for missteps vis a vis a language and culture with which you are not familiar?

Or would you prefer, whenever possible, to be extended grace? Would you like it if, when you violated a cultural code, someone took you aside (perhaps in quiet moments) and lovingly explained the correct phrasing or protocol? Of course, you would need repetition on these things so the teachings would stick.

What if your guides stuck it out with you? What if they were willing to gently teach the same principles over, and seemingly exponentially, over again? What if they would role play potential scenarios with you so you could be ready for the next challenges that might come along? And what if sometimes you really weren't "getting it" and you needed some "time out" to think things over? That could be a good thing too, right? You would still have your dignity intact. All of these things could be done under the umbrella of gentleness. (They forever can be).

There is a caveat here: children are naturally fascinated with power because they have so little. Don't "feed the beast." We gently teach toddlers, "You get what you get, and you don't get upset." We make sure and teach this in quiet, loving times too, so they can be ready to also hear us say it when they are actually upset. We can be firm and kind at the same time. Another thing I have been teaching my little granddaughters in quiet times is our motto, "More helping, less screaming."

Last Christmas we had a family brunch and Santa (one of our sons-in-law) came in full regalia. His little four-year-old didn't recognize him as her father. Santa asked, "Have you been good?" This little four-year-old, remembering our quiet goal-setting,

announced, “Well, I have been trying to do less screaming and more helping.” It was delightful—and true! She really had been trying hard.

We are all sent a little box of big powers from heaven. We all get to choose how we will use them. We have to be careful not to misuse them.

Once we had a little toddler who was occasionally teased by her younger sister, who had a more dominant personality than her older sister. Younger sister would tease to see if she could get “a rise” out of older sister. She was fascinated by her own personal power. The older sister, who came to earth with a very sensitive nature, would fall for the teasing continually.

One day I sat older, sensitive sister down with a little toy that squeaked when you squeezed it. I told her, “You won’t be teased anymore if you ‘stop squeaking!’” In other words, “If you don’t respond when she teases, she will no longer have the ‘payoff’ from teasing you. With no payoff, she will learn that her powers do not work on you. She will eventually stop.” This process took trial and much effort, but eventually, older sister did stop squeaking. The teasing got worse before it got better, in a last-ditch effort from teasing sister to get a “rise” out of the former squeaker. But as squeaky sister stayed strong at being calm, her teasing sister slowly lost interest in the teasing game.

*All human behavior is seeking “payoff” of some kind.* No payoff, no behavior (eventually). Pay off as many positive behaviors as you can. Try to ignore all the negative behaviors you can, or use time-out with as little emotion as possible. Children can also seek negative attention as they “play” with the “little box of powers” they receive as part of their mortal experience.

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Okay, we’ve gone deeper. We have connected some of our behaviors to, possibly unconscious, emotional baggage we may be carrying. We’ve learned about being careful with our own parental powers in big ways. Now we can refine ourselves even more. This refinement happens at a more subtle, more spiritual level. It’s Pilates—not for the physically deep core muscles, but for the deepest “core muscles” of our spirits.

Our oldest son helped me with this, asking one day if we could have a private conversation. I said, “Sure.” We are big on requesting private conversations when we need to discuss something that is sensitive to another member of the family. This helps us keep dignity intact for all involved. We went into another room. Our son said that he had noticed that I was being very nice to one of the kids that he knew had been especially difficult for me in the last few weeks. “Yes,” I said. I was being extra kind. Ironically, it was sort of “killing me softly” because, deep inside, I was actually resentful about a recurring negative behavior. I told him this.

“I think she can tell,” he said. He told me that when he was a counselor at [Anasazi<sup>15</sup>](#) he was taught that if actions are right but the heart is wrong, kids will pick up on the subtle clues. Children are masters of observation. He was inspired to share this with me, I thought. I need to get my heart right with this child.

At first, I wasn’t sure I could. I prayed hard for charity and forgiveness. The friendly feelings at last returned. But they were fragile. I wanted that love to be consistent. Focusing on avoiding contention, remembering the worth of children in the sight of

God, and repenting on the regular helped me with that consistency.

Eventually, my feelings of pure love for this child became steadier and steadier. We became the best of friends once again.

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*For every thousand hacking at the leaves of evil,  
there is one striking at the root.*<sup>16</sup>

—Thoreau

We've covered a lot, haven't we? Now, let's go to the deepest level of all. Let's get to the root of evil and to the author of contention. Latter-day Saints, and those of many other faiths, believe that the author of contention is Satan, our adversary. It is he and his minions who tempt us to be contentious. Contention includes all kinds of awful things. Yelling is one manifestation.

Fortunately, good is ultimately more powerful than evil. Contention is a choice.

What exactly is contention? Because so much of what goes south in families comes from contention, let's get a good understanding of it. Many people only have a foggy understanding of contention. I get that. To be honest, even after a degree in biopsychology, I didn't clearly understand contention until I caught some "deep baseball" on the topic through the scriptures, counsel from Latter-day Saint apostles, and more.

Let's look at some super powerful, "cut-to-the-chase" clarifying scriptures on contention: "And ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked; neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another, and serve the devil, who is the master of sin, or who is the evil spirit which hath been spoken of by our fathers, he being an enemy to all righteousness" (Mosiah 4:14).

In quiet moments we taught our children the scripture above and others like it. We especially taught them this one: "For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but *is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another*" (3 Nephi 11:29; emphasis added).

Isn't this a fantastic scripture to memorize as a family? It tells the truth, and it's a truth children can handle. When we share truth with our children, truth bears witness of itself. Children can feel the truth of it. Then they can carry that witness and make choices, of their own accord, to follow it.

A man once asked the Prophet Joseph Smith how he was "enabled to govern so many people and to preserve such perfect order, remarking at the same time it was impossible for them to do it anywhere else.' Mr. Smith remarked that it was very easy to do that. 'How?' responded the gentleman; 'to us it is very difficult.' Mr. Smith replied, 'I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves.'"<sup>17</sup>

Children, especially as they get older, really can govern themselves (when it comes to contention and beyond), if they are served up the truth, with a generous side serving of love. Marjorie Hinckley (wife of former Latter-day Saint prophet Gordon B. Hinckley)

said “yes” to children whenever possible. Of course, there are times of concern when this isn’t possible, but everyone loves a “win.” If we can say “yes” to creative ideas and moments of spontaneity, as well as, “Yes, you are right, thanks for teaching me,” we can win the hearts of our children and teens as we show them deep respect.

There is a scripture that reads: “And he commanded them that there should be no contention . . . having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another” (Mosiah 18:21).

Don’t you just love that imagery of “hearts knit together in love”? This is the goal for families, and someday, for the world. How do we get there? The answer is that we can decrease contention by adding more charity, which is truly defined not just as a repository for funding for the poor, but as the pure love of Christ (see Moroni 7:47). Charity is the polar opposite of contention. How do we obtain such pure and undefiled love? This scripture gives us the answer: “Pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love [charity], which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ” (Mormon 7:48). There is more on charity at [ChurchofJesusChrist.org](http://ChurchofJesusChrist.org).<sup>18</sup> Developing charity is hard work. I can testify that it’s worth every second.

All happy families share a common desire to avoid contention. They sidestep temptations from the adversary to fight. Sure, there are tough topics that have to be discussed sometimes. But this can be done with respect, grace, and, whenever possible, with contention’s kryptonite: the hug. I recall a tough day a handful of years ago with two of our then tweenagers. We had already raised six tweens by then, so you would think I wouldn’t be fazed. But every tween offers a little unique testing of their own. On this day I was frustrated. One of our older daughters, Emily, noticed this. She saw my pursed, frustrated expression out of the corner of her eye. I wanted to tell her, “It’s nothing, really.”

And it wasn’t a huge deal. I just wanted to drop a couple of at-the-moment super annoying tween-agers out of a window (a first-floor window, into the softest possible bushes).

My daughter approached me slowly, looking at me straight on. Raising her eyebrows, she said quietly, “Snuggles, not struggles, Mom. Remember?” There was a hint of teasing laughter in her sparkling eyes.

Yes, we are a huggy, snuggly sort of family. What is life without hugs? One of my best friends, Theresa, and I share this hugging thing. Years ago, a woman observed us hugging people right and left. “You two are hugger muggers,” she said. We guessed she was on to something. But if ‘hugging mugging’ was wrong, we didn’t want to be right.

This daughter was nudging me back into hug-e-ostasis (homeostasis with hugs). Then she said something that we could all write on mental Post-it notes when we have upset feelings: “Forgive them, Mom. We’re all bumblng through life. We all make perceived mistakes. Don’t let pride get in the way. Don’t let the temptation to be contentious steal joy. You know it’s the adversary tempting you. You can sidestep this as you most often do. Hug them.” She was right, of course. It’s difficult to hold on to frustrated feelings when you are giving someone a hug.

Science embraces hugging for many reasons: Hugs increase the bonding hormone oxytocin in the body. Hugs lower levels of anxiety and loneliness. Hugs can change blood pressure and heart rates. In an experiment at the University of North Carolina, Chapel

Hill researchers found that “participants who didn’t have any contact with their partners developed a quickened heart rate of 10 beats per minute compared to the five beats per minute among those who got to hug their partners during the experiment.”<sup>19</sup> Wow.

We come to Earth as children of God to be tried and tested. When we arrive, so innocent and new, we are hoping for hugs. Lots of hugs. Endless years of hugs.

My husband and I had a basket full of children, and when they were small, they would often land on the same couch, falling all over each other like puppies. Those puppy childhood years may have sped past, but innocent laughter has never left. We have tried hard to maintain a home that is as innocent as possible.

In our case, this meant, in part, that the kids were raised mostly with little media. Consequently, they had to chat with each other frequently. Maybe this contributed to their solid friendships, built on years of silliness, serious debates, inside jokes, and hugs. Still, annoyance reared and rears its occasional head.

It’s been said that when you are dealing with a difficult person, the first five minutes of your next encounter with them is the most important. This initial time sets the tone for the rest of the interaction. A big smile, a compliment, a little silliness, and of course some hugs can go a long way.

When the tweens came back, I hugged them. They were surprised. I was a little surprised. But I could tell by my older daughter’s quiet confidence that she was not surprised. She trusted me to remember what works, and it did work. Peace was back, like a friend we had been missing.

In my early mothering years, I would sometimes go outside, throw up my hands to the heavens, and say, leaning in the direction of home, “Do you see that I am not yelling, or trying to spark any other kind of contention in that house? Do you see the hugging?”

Heaven saw me. I could feel it. I testify that those heavenly beings have seen you too. They see all of us, in all of those private, difficult moments of testing. They see us being firm but kind. They love us beyond measure. They are cheering on our efforts to be charitable.

Truly this kind of love, this charity, is the indispensable “construction adhesive” we need to build the strongest possible homes.

## NUTS & BOLTS

- Assess your yelling tendencies. Could they decrease? Could constant prayer help? If you think that maybe it could, try it. This can work no matter your faith, or even with no faith at all.
- Remember that patience is a mental muscle. It gets stronger with practice.
- Gently teach your family about what contention is, where it comes from, and how to avoid it.
- Is there someone in your family who reminds you (in a negative way) of someone from your family of origin? If so, you can untangle the emotional knots with that person. This will help you then untangle knots with the person you love in your current family.
- Teach toddlers: “You get what you get, and you don’t get upset.” Memorize this together in quiet, peaceful moments.

- Avoid a “heart of war.” Strive for a “heart of peace.”
- Recipe for resolving a temper tantrum: one part firmness, one part compassion, one part kindness.
- All human behaviors are seeking payoff. Are we accidentally paying off incorrect behaviors with negative attention?
- Try to ignore negative behaviors when possible. Children are “playing” with their little “box of powers” from heaven and may choose negative attention if it’s available.
- Reward all possible positive behaviors with praise and hugs and gratitude.

## NOTES

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14. David O. McKay, *Stepping Stones to an Abundant Life*, comp. Llewelyn R. McKay [1971], 294.
15. Anasazi is a highly rated non-profit organization that hosts wilderness retreats for at-risk youth. You can learn more about their work at [anasazi.org](http://anasazi.org).
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