

Love is a Choice

(contributed by Alex and Sarah Chan)

We were reminded recently how important the relationship between husband and wife is, and the tremendous impact it has on a child.

It was a pleasant evening and we had just finished a lovely time having ice-cream at the neighbourhood McDonald's as a family.

At home, the girls had a fun time playing on the electronic piano keyboard. Knowing that my wife can play, I asked her to play us a tune but she declined. I pestered her a few times throughout the evening and she refused each time. Eventually, I pushed her to the point of annoyance. Meanwhile I was also getting frustrated - why can't she join in the fun and show us her skills, since neither our kids nor myself know how to play the piano?

Then something happened that tipped me over the edge (I frankly cannot remember what - it was that petty). My wife said something to me and I turned and responded in an audible whisper, accompanied by a scowl on my face, "I don't like you!" It was partly said in jest, as we sometimes do... "I don't like you right now, but I will still love you".

Mathena, our 5 year old, who was playing with me at the time, witnessed what I had said and how I had said it. She suddenly stopped dead in her tracks and her countenance changed completely. Then, from playing with me she turned to attacking me (yes, she's a feisty little girl). I have just threatened her precious mother and she was not going to let that happen without making a stand!

Actually, this is true of children - they can hone in on the slightest conflict between mum and dad, and while each child might respond differently, the responses are never positive. We can still recall the time when our first daughter, Letitia, corrected us by saying, "Don't talk hardly (loudly) to each other!" She was only 2-3 years old. No one had taught her that, and I'm convinced no one needs to teach any child how to pick up on conflicts between parents.

When the relationship between mum and dad is at risk, the entire world of the child is also at risk, especially in the eyes of the child. They seem to have an innate mechanism which

says, "If anything happens between these two people, my world is going to collapse. I must do what it takes to reconcile the two of them." Unfortunately, many children as they get older respond with anger and rebellion, or withdraw with a sense of hopelessness. A dear friend of ours said that her teenage daughter changed from a pleasant young girl to an angry one after she and her husband divorced.

A child's security and stability is anchored upon a strong husband and wife relationship, not whether the family is rich or poor (well provided for), nor whether they are well educated. If we want to have love in the family, it starts with the husband and wife. Love begets love.

Now back to our story, Mathena spent the rest of that evening drawing a poster - this is often how she expresses heart-felt messages like love, birthdays, and even apologies. The poster read: "I Love you both tow. Love each other." (she meant "I love you both two" or better translated as I love the both of you).

It nearly broke my heart. My actions have deeply affected my little girl, an innocent bystander. The fact is, the biggest and most innocent victims of a hurting marriage are the children. May we appeal to you, don't let that happen to them!

Love is more than a feeling; it is a choice and an action. Just think about the statement "I love you" - love is clearly a verb. A classic example is your children: a lot of times they are not likeable but you never stop loving them. And we can think of no greater example of love than the God who loves us even though we're not lovable. When Jesus said to love our enemies, he "walked the talk" by loving us even when we were his enemies.

One of the best pieces of advice that I had ever received was: *The best thing you can do for your children is to love their mother.*

Remember that love is a choice, and as with all choices there are consequences. Each day you can choose to love or you can choose not to love. Are we then ready to love when our loved ones are not lovable? Then be the first one to initiate the love, and that includes apologizing and seeking forgiveness even when we appear to be 'more right'!