

Capturing the Heart of Your Child Part 1

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The year was 1921, when Lewis Lawes was warden of the Sing Sing prison in New York, a place where the hardest criminals were sent. Of course, everyone advised His wife, Catherine, to avoid any contact with the inmates. However, at her first opportunity she contradicted all advice, and brought her three children to the prison to attend a basketball game. Thus she began to get acquainted with the inmates and in the years that followed her kindness overflowed to them. She taught a blind murderer Braille. She went to signing school to learn to talk to a deaf inmate. But in 1937 a terrible thing happened. Catherine was killed in a car accident. The next day, her husband, Lewis, was absent from prison. The inmates sensing what had happened gathered at the prison gate mourning. Then the acting warden, seeing their intense grief, did an absolutely unbelievable thing. He opened the prison gate and let the criminals walk, unguarded, the kilometer to her home, to pay last respects. “Be back by evening.” The warden ordered. And what do you suppose happened with those hardened criminals? They all came back. Every single one.

Catherine Lawes, even though dead, had captured the hearts of the most unlikely characters. The worst echelon of society could not resist her. Now, of course, our children are not calloused criminals, although at times we may feel that’s the case. Our children have ways of driving us to our wits end. We wonder why so many of our efforts in parenting fail. And may I propose, that it is likely that we have neglected what Catherine displayed so powerfully, the irresistible capacity to capture another’s heart. And this is exactly the strategy of God. It is still what magnetizes us, and brings us home, far though we may wander.

Great tragedy awaits us if we ignore the dire condition of our times. We live in an era in which a parent cannot afford not to capture the heart of their child, because there are many forces that, without a doubt, will. Juvenile crime is at record highs, the highest since police began keeping records 30 years ago. Half of robberies and one third of violent crimes are now committed by juveniles. Boys arrested for sex crimes have doubled since two years ago. Buying drugs in Tokyo is now considered as easy as in New York or

Paris. An estimated 50,000 teenage girls are participating in *enjokosai*. That means one girl for every high school class in the country. And the condition of public schools is alarming. One report rates that 44% of elementary and jr. high schoolteachers have witnessed *gakyuhokai*.

There are many spiritual forces out to destroy us, and the enemy has fixed a very strategic target-- our children. There are a myriad of ways he aims to do this, but principally I believe he aims to single a child out from his parent, to break down the healthy bonds of relationship, and eventually enslave their heart. When I was doing campus evangelism among the *rokudaigaku* I spent time ministering at *Waseda Rikogakubu*. The year was 1987 and I remember seeing fascinating posters around the campus with a hairy guru levitating in *zazen*. Here, among some of Japan's upcoming great scientists, was an appeal which promised "great supernatural powers." I never gave the movement much thought back then, but it turned out their campaign was very successful at Waseda, and the recruits became a great strength to the causes of *Aum Shinrikyo*. *Asahara Shoko*, the man on the posters, had captured their hearts.

Upon surveying over 400 parents in the Tohoku (100 Christian, the remainder otherwise) I found an overwhelming interest in the topic "capturing the heart of your child." Parents seem to intuit that this is what is needed, but often aren't sure of how to go about it. So how did Catherine Lowe capture hearts? The same way Jesus did. She loved people, pure and simple, in spite of how they acted. If there is one thing in life we need to become particularly skilled at it is love. It is the most important thing in life (1Corinthians 13). But what does love mean practically, especially with regard to our children. I will present two outstanding aspects, two things that a parent must do for a child. The first is to understand them, the second is to delight in them. Here we will discuss the first, in the upcoming article we will deal with the second.

One of the greatest adventures of parenting is that we begin to discover (as well as partake in) what God has made our child to be, and each is a unique masterpiece. No parenting experience is the same because each child is quite different. In my book *将来の魂 - 新しい時代のための子育て* I outline 60 possible different abilities which God may have planted in our children. Are they gifted with their hands? With their ability to analyze? With their imagination? Are they gifted communicators? Humorous? Sensitive? What are

their spiritual gifts? Discovering and then helping your child discover these abilities is one of the joys of parenting. This is where home schooling has a special advantage. A parent can observe much more of their child as they work on tasks together. Besides this, public schools tend to magnify the value of certain abilities and neglect others, perhaps the very ones your child has. This is a set up for emotional struggle and failure.

Our children also differ in the way they sense love. There are many ways to communicate love, but are we communicating in the way that is best suited to our child's personality? Some people feel loved via kind words, they need to hear someone say "I love you." Other people need lots of skinship to feel loved. Holding hands, back scratching, and hugging are a high priority. Then other people feel loved when receiving gifts. If their birthday goes by without much in the way of gifts it is devastating. The funny thing is we tend to show love to others in the way we prefer, but maybe not in a way the other will appreciate. How tragic if a parent tries to communicate love through the giving of some toy, when maybe what a child needs is to be held close. In the West baby girls get on average five times more kisses and hugs than boys in their first year. Strangely there are about 5-6 times more boys treated in Psychiatric clinics than girls. A child who is not feeling loved is being set up for a life of needless frustration and destruction. But we as Christian parents should reflect our Father. Isn't it amazing how our Heavenly Father communicates His love in a myriad of ways to meet each one of our needs. We might even ask our child; "How do you know I love you?"

Of course all of this is obvious. We are attracted to people who understand us. If we sense that we are misunderstood how do we feel? Walls begin to form; we begin to cut that person off. We are skeptical and negative about such people in our lives, and that is just how our enemy wants your children to feel about you. Let's make sure we are not participating in furthering his plan; plans for isolation and destruction. Our enemy, just like a lion, works the herd over to dislodge a colt, and then move in for the kill. On the other hand, there is nothing more wonderful than being captured by someone who truly loves you. Our kids deserve to realize that.