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**Presentation Transcript**  
**Practical Parenting – Using Crises to Create Closeness**  
**By Bill Jacobs**  
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The parents of a younger teen, who come to my office for counseling, took her phone away from her because she used it in an extremely dangerous and inappropriate manner. They were so frightened by what she'd done, when they restored the phone use, they gave her a flip phone and limited who she could call and text, and didn't allow her to have any Internet. And she couldn't use it after ten o'clock at night. Every night it went on a charger in their bedroom. After several years, they were still, I think, traumatized by what had happened, but, in her mind, it was all water under the bridge.

Children and adults experience the passage of time differently, don't they? To them, her dangerous activity was like yesterday, but to her it was ancient history.

After three years of the limitation, which she considered really unreasonable, when she had an opportunity, she got another phone from a friend so she could text, swap photos, etc. with friends while on Wi-Fi. And she hid this from her parents. Now, this deceptiveness, of course, was a wedge that she drove between herself and her mother and father. It diminished closeness. Well, you know what happened. One day her father saw her using it as he walked by her room. He went in and grabbed the phone. She screamed at him and ran out the door, disappearing into the night. They called the police and every person they could think of who might know where she was. Even her best friends were helping her parents because they were worried about her. Well, they found her after a few hours and took her home. Her parents were angry and afraid. She was angry and afraid. They called me the next day, set up a joint session, and we talked about it. Two weeks later, she had a full-featured phone and felt much better about her relationship with her mom and dad. And they had a lot more trust and respect for her. They were closer.

How did that happen? Well, they did several things that caused that to happen. And today, we're going to see what they did and what any parent can do to use a family crisis to promote closeness and move closer to the goal of a loving family.

So, our title today is *Using Crisis To Create Closeness*. It's the ninth in our series on *Practical Christian Parenting*.

The first thing we want to draw your attention to is that any crisis is an opportunity for closeness. While a family crisis is not fun, if it's managed well, it can produce closeness, improved relationships, and promote deeper understanding, and a lot more than that. When we have that, we're moving toward our goal of a loving family. So it's really important to understand how to use crises for benefit. But that's not going to happen by itself. Parents have to know what to do in order to make that occur.

When a crisis develops between a parent and a child, or a death in the family, or a serious accident, or an unexpected move, or a new family member, or any other kind of severe change – any kind of crisis – there's an opportunity for genuine communication. In the case with the girl with the phone, in the joint session, she got to hear her parents tell how much they loved her, how afraid they were when they saw the phone, how disappointed they were that she would deceive them, how sorry they were that they got angry, and how proud they were to learn, after looking at the phone, to see that she was using it appropriately. And they heard her say how ashamed she was that she deceived them, and how foolish she felt for panicking and running away, and how long it had been that she had been without a way to communicate with her friends the way all her friends could. And she also commented on how pleased she was that they saw that she had changed. So, with this family, none of that would have happened if I hadn't asked a few questions. In some families, that might not need to have happened, but in this one, it helped them. And I think they learned how to do that while they were involved with it. Once everybody laid their cards on the table, they took the next step and renegotiated the rules. They had an opportunity to hear her say that she wanted to spend time with her friends, be allowed to date, keep her phone, stay in school sports. She wanted them to stop nagging her about everything. She heard them say that they wanted *her* to become more part of the family, stop screaming and swearing at them, be willing to do her chores, do her chores correctly, use the phone appropriately, put the phone on the charger by ten still, and when away from home, let them know where she was, who she was with and what she was doing. They wanted her to approve all alone time with guys until she's older (her father 35 was a good age for that, but we negotiated that down a few years). And her parents agreed to stop nagging – to start using consequences instead – to let her continue to use the phone, continue to pay for her sports activities at school, to allow her to spend time with her friends, as long as each instance was negotiated ahead of time. And they all agreed to talk about their problems instead of getting angry.

Notice that the parents set boundaries for themselves, as well as for their daughter – very important.

Think about what happens when a crisis is handled this way. Open discussion of needs and hopes – that's what they had. Respect for everyone's needs and hopes. New boundaries for all parties are negotiated. Working together to make it better everybody – what a concept! Instead of fighting with each other, and trying to win the argument or the war, you work together to make it better for everybody. So, when you do that, a relational reset takes place. The way is paved for a new beginning. The way is paved for more trust and closeness. So, now is the time to intentionally move toward the other person. If parents won't do that, the child may think that things will just go on as before. If they think that, they'll go on as before. So, the parents need to take the first step in that relational move.

What would a relational move look like? Well, in the example of the family we're talking about today, the father invited his daughter to come to his karate lessons with him. And the mom made more of an effort to do girl things with her. They started including her more in family planning. And they made an effort to be more affectionate with her – more attentive. This attention and respectful inclusion helped the girl know that her parents were taking the lead in making changes.

There is, however – when a crisis occurs – a potential danger. If the parents attempt this kind of effort in the moment, it's not going to work – if everyone is still upset. What seems to work best is immediate *first aid* – you know, we're so glad you're home. Let's talk about it, but not now while we're all upset. And then, after everyone calms down, it's easier to talk in calm tones. When everybody is angry and upset, the blood drains from the cortex, where the thinking is done, down to the limbic system, where the emotions are created. Once this takes place, it can take as much as 36 hours to restore full brain function and any attempt to think logically can be short-lived and impaired. Emotions can flare again easily, so it's wise to use a cooling off period. In the case of this family, it was a week before they all got together in my office with the issue and discussed it.

What scripture could we point to in order to emphasize the importance of cooling down first? Let's look in Colossians 3:20.

**Colossians 3:20** – *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*

Children – if parents set a godly tone with them – generally want to obey their parents in everything. They know it goes better for them when that's working. But parents can discourage them in that effort by being angry and unreasonable with them. So, when faced with a situation where parents might get angry, better to let everyone cool off first.

Let's look at another thing that we can do. One of the three forms of insecure attachment is called avoidant attachment. Children who habitually do not get their emotional needs met give up and tend to avoid emotional connection with parents and others. When they grow up, they tend to dismiss others who disappoint them relationally. The thought is: "You see, I knew you would let me down." And they say that because that's what happened early on. They think this because, for them, it was always true when they were younger. So, they are called when they grow up – these children who are avoidantly attached – *dismissing adults*. That's their attachment schema. They give up on relationships.

So many of us grew up with deficits in the emotional care area, many of us are dismissing adults today. We give up too easily on relationships, including those with our kids. As our children grow toward adulthood, dismissing adults tend to dismiss *them* when they disappoint them.

How does God work with us? Remember, one of the points in this whole project we're working on is that we're trying to parent our kids the way God parents us. So, how does God work with us? Joshua 1:5:

**Joshua 1:5** – *No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.*

God *never* gives up on us. We've said, in this series, that our method is to parent the way God parents us. So, here's a proverb with special significance for parents. It's in Proverbs 3:3.

**Proverbs 3:3** – *Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you. Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart.*

Wow! To follow His example then, we should never give up on our children. The person who is secure in his attachment goes *toward* relationship, believing that any relational ruptures can be healed. And that's what we need to do also in our families, even in times of extreme crisis, even when we're disappointed, or wounded by what our children have done.

When the natural tendency is to pull away, what do we do to overcome it? Well, we use another principle – the principle of *intentionality* – to override our natural tendencies. We say, "My child has disappointed me, but I know I will go toward them rather than away. Our relationship can be healed and I'm going to apply what I know and *fight* for that relationship rather than pulling back. I can learn a new way." And then we follow through on all the points we've mentioned here and any others we can creatively produce.

Well, that's it for today – *How To Use Crises To Create Closeness*. Next time, we'll be talking about spiritual training of children. And guess what? Intentionality plays a part in that, too. Let's see how it works at that time.

Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.