

THE HOST PARENT LOVE DARE FOR ORPHAN HOST PARENTS

Never underestimate the power of unconditional love.

This Twenty Eight-Day journey CANNOT be taken lightly. It is a challenging process, but an incredibly fulfilling one. To take this DARE requires a resolute mind and a steadfast determination. It is not meant to be sampled, or briefly tested, and those who quit early will forfeit the greatest benefits. If you will commit to a day at a time for twenty-eight days – the first 4 weeks of host season, the results could change your life, your children's lives and host children's lives. **Consider it a DARE, from others who have done it before you.**

INSTRUCTIONS:

Read each LOVE DARE DEVOTIONAL beginning with Day 1 of hosting your child. Follow the LOVE DARE included with that day's devotional. At the end of the day, record your notes on how the love dare was implemented and/or received by your host child. We hope this helps you turn your host child's hearts more fully to you and keeps your relationships with them respectful and loving, long-term. No matter how your child responds, we encourage you to keep going and enjoy the journey!

Q&A:

- 1. What if I'm a single parent or my spouse does not want to participate?** You can adapt each DARE to your situation. This is a great time to strengthen your one-on-one relationship with your host children.
- 2. What if I fall behind and can't keep up?** Going slow and completing the journey is more important than finishing in 28 days. Just do your best and adjust as needed.
- 3. What if I the host children leave before I can complete THE DARE?** Get creative rather than give up. Focus on doing what you can do. Complete appropriate ones whenever opportunities arise during your limited moment of interaction. Some are possible to complete through the mail or over the Internet. Or you may turn THE DAREs into prayers for your host children.
- 4. What if my host children do not respond well to this experience?** The journey is different for everyone. Keep going it will get tough. Tougher for those that have pain or emotional damage. Be patient, think long term and **never underestimate the power of unconditional love.**
- 5. Should I do this for one host child at a time or for all my children at the same time?** Either way is fine, but each child is so different. While you will do the same DARE on each child choose to be creative in how you do them. They will all respond differently.

Day 1: Love Blooms

The love you express to your host children is infinitely more valuable than any possession you could give them. Host children come prepackaged with core questions hidden in their hearts: *Do I matter? Does anyone truly care about me? Do I have what it takes?*

Host dads and moms are commissioned to be God's first responders to answer these questions clearly and repeatedly. Love creates a safe zone to deal with life's lessons and harsh realities. Rebuke and discipline are more palatable when seasoned with genuine love. The DARE words are a powerful way to communicate love.

THE DARE:

The first DARE is simply to find a moment when you can verbally express love to your host children. Whether they are in your house or reachable by phone, if it is possible, make sure they hear you say the words I LOVE YOU today.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 2: Love is Patient

Display patience throughout the day as a demonstration of love to your host children

When you truly love someone, two key attributes will show up on a regular basis: patience and kindness.

Patience is how love diffuses something negative; Kindness is how love initiates something positive.

Patience is when love chooses to "suffer long" for the greater good of another.

It is like an experienced farmer who know that fruitful fields only come if he is willing to endure the heat of the sun.

Host children have an amazing ability to test the level of their host parents' patience by their tone, disobedience, irresponsibility, or any lack of respect. You can be assured they will also test host parents' patience. Sometimes host parents can feel so angry, they may say or do things in the heat of emotion that can damage young hearts and minds. The impact can leave a deep and lasting emotional scar for many years to come.

We must refuse to spring off the handle in front of our host children. When they see us controlling our anger, it teaches them to control theirs. Likely, they have seen their birth parents loose control in more ways than one. The Scripture says, "Be angry, and yet do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26).

Sometimes anger is appropriate, but we should never let it get out of bounds. Discipline and correction must be wisely rationed, but only after we've first demonstrated loving patience...

THE DARE

Write the words "Love is Patient" on a piece of paper and temporarily tape it to your mirror or refrigerator. Be sure to write it in your host child's language also. When you see it over the next few weeks, purpose to display patience throughout the day as a further demonstration of your love to your host child.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 3: Love is Kind

Patience helps us avoid problems, while kindness helps us be a blessing. Love will make you kind, and kindness will make you likable. When you are kind to your host children, they will enjoy being around you.

Kindness is love in action. It rejects passivity and reaches out. It takes time to listen, then takes steps to help. Specifically, kindness leads to service, seeing a need and moving to meet it - honoring others by putting their interests ahead of our own, even in little things.

Scripture describes the kindness of God by how he freely extends grace to His children, giving them exactly what they need (Ephesians 2:6-9). And He commands us to follow His lead by consistently being kind to others (Ephesians 4:32). This should begin with those in our own families.

Why is this important? Because if we are not careful as host parents, we too can become very unkind to the little ones we love. Host children are more sensitive than most children. When you resist or ignore them, they will struggle inside and likely not respond to you well. But when you create an environment of tender love and kindness, they become more open to sharing their heart with you and listening to the words you say and the lessons you share. As you show and encourage kindness in your host children, you are investing in the type of heart God calls us to nurture. It's the Golden Rule: treat others the way you want to be treated.

THE DARE

Surprise your host children today by doing some unexpected act of kindness. As they take note of your gesture, ask them to do something kind for someone else that is also unexpected.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 4: Love Protects

Let's face it, the world is getting worse not better. Your job is to parent. And that means being a protector. Count on culture to be continually pushing the age range at which they think your kids are ready to handle the private. Gruesome violence. Sexual knowledge. Foul language. Full online access. Remember, these host children have seen and experienced more than they should have at their age.

The Bible remind us that we have been commissioned by God to keep watch over our children's souls and that we will give an account to Him one day of how we handle the responsibility (Hebrews 13:17). For your host children, make an effort to model a Godly family. Let your actions speak. Also, take the time to voice situations that are not part of a normal family or behavior for children their age – such as foul language, watching R rated shows, porn, inappropriate talk of violence or sexual knowledge etc. They need to learn those things are not how life should be, even though they may have already experienced some of it. They need to know even though some things they may have done (ex. R rated movies), or experienced (ex. domestic violence), are things children shouldn't do or have been allowed to experience.

In order to get them prepared today to be successful tomorrow, consider these three key attributes you should pray for and develop in your host children:

1. A moral discernment of right and wrong (Hebrews 5:14).
2. An appetite for good and a hatred for evil (Romans 12:9).
3. A courageous willingness to stand-alone under pressure (Daniel 1:8-16).

THE DARE

Talk with your spouse about setting the appropriate boundaries for your host children regarding access to the Internet, television, movies, and phone use. Prayerfully draw up guidelines for what kind of activities is allowable with their friends. Before you present your decision to them, pray for discernment and for the Lord to work in both you and your children's hearts. Let your host child know you pray for them daily.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 5: Love Is Wonderful

Every child and host child is a one of a kind mini-masterpiece. Every birthmark is a trademark. Every special feature is a signature of divine design. God is always intentional as to why He makes each child the way He does. His strength is often revealed most vividly through human weakness, cultivating deeper character and compassion. Listen to your host child and learning how your host child thinks, dreams, and grows. Watch their habits, guard them against their weaknesses, and grow them in their strengths. Don't pressure or belittle. Instead, uncover and embrace the treasure you have been given. Accept and affirm their design. Water and cultivate the seeds God has already planted.

THE DARE

Thank God for how He designed your host children, and then discern if each one responds best to physical affection, verbal affirmation, spending quality time together, receiving gifts, or having a need of theirs met. Once you've discovered their preferred way to give and receive love, take a few moments to communicate love to them in that way before days end.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 6: Love Is Not Selfish

We are commissioned to love, teach, and train our host children for successful adulthood, even if it is only for four weeks. This process requires much careful attention. As host parents you must daily set aside something that will stand in your way: your own selfishness.

Selfishness is like a disease that suffocates our capacity to love. When we choose to be self-centered, we become less kind and content, more needy, sensitive and demanding. God will strategically use your host children to help you become less self-centered, less self-absorbed and more loving...like Him. But in guarding against being selfish around our host children, we must also try not to be selfish for our host children. You are a steward of the host children God has entrusted to you. As a steward, you resolve to take full responsibility for their nurture and care, to dedicate them to the Lord and to purpose in your heart to train them with God's help and grace. You must refuse to let your selfishness get in the way of what God has called you to do.

THE DARE

Take some time in prayer to identify and push aside any hurdles of selfishness in your own life that may be keeping you from loving your host child more effectively in this short amount of time you have with them. Then purpose to dedicate your host child to the Lord as a gift back to Him.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 7: Love Is Not Irritable

Your first response to problems when they arise will either leave your host child with refreshing and positive character lessons or with painful memories of how not to behave under pressure.

Love is hard to offend and quick to forgive. Correction and discipline from you, as a host parent, should never spring from uncontrolled anger. If your host child always senses your unearned irritation, you will cause them to feel less loved and even more insecure. Unintentionally, you may push their hearts away from yours.

Determine to no longer let minor problems produce major reactions. At this point in hosting you're likely beginning to experience some "boundary testing" from the children. Resolve to exercise emotional self-control. Choose to guard your words when frustration starts to well up inside of you, and let love direct the manner of your expressions, actions, and even your countenance.

THE DARE

Choose today to start reacting to your host children with love instead of irritation. Begin by making a list of areas where you need to lower stress in your life. Then list any wrong motivations that you need to release from your heart.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 8: Love Wins Hearts

Whoever has your host children's hearts has their ears and significantly influences the direction of their lives. For orphaned children, the odds are, that person may not have their best interest at heart. You can be the most spiritual, intelligent host parent on the planet, but if you cannot gain your host child's heart, your ultimate effectiveness as a host parent may be very little. Winning your host child's heart does not mean cowering, obeying their every wish, or giving them whatever they want. It means providing them the loving attention, affection, and affirmation they need while carefully guarding against any emotional distance, hurts, or unresolved issues from coming between you.

God puts a longing within all children when they are young to gain attention and approval of their parents. Host children are no different. They long for your approval. Host children can emotionally pull away for many reasons. You can count on part of it being from the pain in their past. If they believe your discipline is too harsh, your demands are too great, or that you are playing favorites, a warning light will go off in their hearts. Training, discipline, and boundaries are necessary for good parenting, but they must be packaged and cushioned within a context of love.

It's been a week now since your host child arrived. Ask yourself: Do they know they have my heart? Do they care what I think? Do they want to spend time with me? Are they grieved when I am displeased? If you are having a hard time gaining a host child's heart, then quickly press pause on your schedule and ask God to help you draw them to you.

THE DARE.

Reach out to your host children one by one and tell them you want to be closer to them than you are right now. Ask them, "Have I hurt you? Are you angry with me? How can I make it right?" Begin taking steps toward winning and keeping their hearts.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 9: Love Of A Father

Host father's can love their host children in deep aspiring ways. Anyone who thinks a host father's love is limited simply because he is a male is reading too much into stereotyping. Priceless and precious is a host mother's love. Host moms may have a more natural temperament, but host dads are called to cherish as well. Fathers should warm the hearts of their host children in their own way by lavishing them with huge, regular doses of comfort and care through heartwarming affection. Your tender caring and loving, appropriate touches carry warmth right into their hearts.

It could be as simple as wrapping your arms around your host son's shoulder or taking your host daughter's hand. Watching a movie together, giving a wink, gently squeeze her arm during church, at traffic light by reaching back and patting a knee in the back seat. Host fathers do have to be careful initiating a tickling or wrestling match. Host children could have an abusive past and would not welcome a lot of physical contact. Your host child may not be the touchy feely type. Regardless, your host child may truly be missing and longing for needed warmth your touch could provide just by sitting close, watching a movie. A gentle pat on the back or the comfort of your strong embrace could give them emotional strength that calms their worries and self doubt. And it most likely will interweave your hearts even tighter.

THE DARE

How could you warm the life and heart of your host child today? Take advantage of a current opportunity to give them an unexpected, tender touch. Choose an appropriate gesture that says, "I cherish you," and do it with sincerity.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 10: Love Is Not Rude

Toddlers are wonderfully notorious for their manners. Their ignorance supplies free entertainment to an understanding, sympathetic world. But when children become older, the fewer excuses they have for poor manners. You may find your host child has never been taught manners. Their rudeness can be a painful reminder of their past and the parental attention they have missed. Good manners can warm the heart and set the atmosphere at ease. Manners also subtly raise the respect level and enjoyment in the house.

By intentionally teaching and modeling good manners for your host children, you are not only treating them with great honor and respect, but you also help them become a living blessing to others. To be successful in this area begins with what you model privately at home. Let your love for your host children alter your own behavior around them. This can be as basic as holding the door for your host daughter or thanking your host son for doing a good job. Apologizing when you make a mistake. Your host children will watch your private etiquette and soon practice it in public. You are modeling love and giving them something they likely have never had, character.

THE DARE

Have a manners night with your family. Openly discuss a few ways you can avoid unpleasant behavior around one another and show greater respect. Lead your host children in a fun meal to practice good manners, giving everyone a chance to serve and be served. Locate a simple book on etiquette and begin learning new tips as a family.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 11: Love Teaches

Love sees parenting as a workshop, a boot camp for life's battles building up their minds and their relational IQs as well. Melding moral fiber into their core. When you're able to weave God-honoring concepts into everything from showing hospitality to guests, to sharing vegetables from your garden with neighbors, you communicate that life with God is not a separate category that only happens for a few hours at church.

Love simply has a teacher's heart. It knows that "wisdom is better than jewels." Don't save all the deep talks for after your host child is in bed. They just may take something away from the conversation that will help them with the problems tomorrow. Let your love draw out the road map for your host children. Something they have not been able to rely on in a broken home.

THE DARE

Make two separate lists of things you want to teach your host children: 1) Life Skills and 2) Life Lessons. Keep them in a notebook nearby. Look for an opportunity to involve one or more of your host children in a work project or some other teaching moment. Make it a habit.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 12: Love Encourages

Children love to hear their parents and other people compliment them. Host children are no different. You may not realize just how much your host children long to hear you compliment them. Words are powerful. What you speak into the ears of your host children can impart love and build bridges of hope that can change their lives or it can poison their perceptions and crush their confidence. The fruit of your lips not only helps them define their reality and comprehend their identity but also guides their destiny. Ten seconds of verbal venom could completely taint their lives forever.

We should always guard the descriptions we attach to our host children. There is a big difference between telling your host son he did something foolish and actually calling him a fool. We must allow the patience and kindness of love to guide our tongues and build an atmosphere of powerful encouragement. Our mouths should be nourishing wells of love and truth, not polluted springs of cursing, complaining, and insults. Finding fault should never be our default. When they're confident you'll be there to support them, win or lose, they're freed up to take their best swing at even a difficult task.

Take your encouragement to the next level by making your kind words to them delightful, deliberate, and daily. Mention to your spouse what you really like about your host children, loud enough for them to hear in the other room. Your praise will leap inside their hearts and may echo back and forth in their ears for years to come. "I'm so glad that God put them in our family." These words will be gold to them. Whatever you choose to compliment will be what your host children will value more and seek to duplicate in the future. Pointing out how proud you are of their honesty, diligence, and kindness strengthens their moral foundations more in the long run than telling them you like their hairstyle or the socks they're wearing today. Aim your words at the heart, where it counts the most. Look for reasons to affirm good character and behavior in your host children, no matter how old they are. The more you celebrate in their lives now, the higher you lift their wings for the future. So open your mouth and let your love fly!

THE DARE

Commit to mentioning positive attributes about your host children every day throughout the coming week. Do it both privately to them as well as publicly to friends and family.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 13: Love Disciplines

When our host children misbehave, we do them no favors by ignoring or glossing it over. We must help our host children discover that their actions come with real consequences. Lasting joy come from practicing good behavior and godly character. As easy as it is to keep excusing misbehavior love steps in to courageously say and do what is needed. Parents especially fathers, are instructed to train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Host parents should do the same for their host children.

Nurture includes teaching clear instructions and chastening when rules are broken. Admonition goes deeper by appealing to their consciences with the knowledge that God ultimately the One they are to honor and obey. If our host children don't develop a fundamental respect for God, they will have no lasting foundation for true moral decision making in the future. If we don't train our kids to obey us "as unto the Lord," we are merely training them to further disobey God in the future. Many host children may never have been inside a church. Others may not know God at all.

When host children sin, host parents, through love, must step in. Discipline must be balanced out with patience, grace, and mercy. You should always guard your host children's hearts teaching them honor and responsibility.

THE DARE

Pray through the methods you use for discipline. Are they effective? Do they contain both the correction of behavior as well as an appeal to the conscience? What changes could you make to ensure that you are disciplining your host children with both nurture and admonition? Purpose to use direct but fair discipline in the future, and make efforts to balance your actions with the goal of honoring the Lord.

Today's Notes (my journal):

DAY 14: Love is Compassionate

Devastating failures may have already happened in your host children's lives. Unexpected bad news most certainly has. Confusion, anxiety, stress, failure at school, cruelty of another child's words or shame of their own sin or misconduct... all part of a host child's past. Host parents do not have to wait for the ideal opportunity to display compassion. As a host parent, your compassion will lovingly shout, "I care!" when your host children are convinced that nobody does. And they very likely feel this way.

Compassion is not always easy or automatic. It is rarely convenient for comfortable. But your love should refuse to leave any doubt in your host children that you take their burdens seriously. Jesus allowed Himself to be "moved with compassion" and personally feel the sorrows and burdens others were feeling. Then He went into action to lighten their load. Likewise, your willingness to comfort and console your host children will draw them close to you. Instead of having to struggle alone with spiritual doubts and questions, they'll know that your door and heart are always open for their confessions and concerns.

THE DARE

Look and listen for opportunities to demonstrate compassion to your host children and help lighten their load in areas where it may be too heavy. Ask if you could pray for them about any issues they share.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 15: Love Is From God

The love the parents have for their children is one of the strongest of all human emotions. God's love is what gives us as host parents the capability to love unselfishly and unconditionally. The truth is, the love God can give you, to shower up on your host children, is infinitely stronger than your parental love alone. His love can sustain them, no matter who rejects and disappoints them in life.

Everyday, with each new DARE, always bear in mind this one pervasive, reorienting truth. You're handling a divine opportunity to experience and present the love of God to your host child. He loves your host children more than you do. And you will love them more than you do now if you allow His love to flow into you and then into them through you.

THE DARE

Remind your host children today that "God is love" (1John 4:16) Tell them He deeply loves them. Pray with them that they will always know they can call on Him as their loving, Heavenly Father. And pray for yourself, that God will help you receive His love for you and make you a channel of His love to your host children.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 16: Love Respects God

The fear of the Lord is a deep respect for the One who is all-powerful and completely holy. God is not only patient, kind, and living, but also holy, powerful, and completely just. When a man and his children learn to fear the Lord, they begin to hate evil, pride, and perversion (Proverbs 8:13). Teach your host children to respectfully fear the Lord.

One of the ways we as host parents can bless our host children is by honoring the Lord with our own personal, humble worship. Not just church service attendance. The fear of God may be one of the most important things you could ever pray for and seek to develop in the hearts of your host children. The fear God is a starting point of the best and most abundant life of all.

THE DARE

Ask your host children to read Psalms 139 with you. Then ask what they learned about where God is and what He knows about each of us. Explain how God created them and loves them. Finish by praying together.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 17: Love Seeks God's Blessing

Did you know your personal faith and relationship with God can invite Him to greatly bless your host children? God said He blessed Abraham's descendants because of Abraham's great faith (Genesis 17:6-8). If you walk in faith and integrity – loving, fearing, and obeying GOD – He will bless you for it, and your host children.

Jesus described several loving, selfless attitudes we should develop that will cause us to be blessed. The poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who hunger for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, etc. God promises to comfort and bless in many ways. Start His blessings in your home.

THE DARE

Ask yourself if your lifestyle is inviting God's blessings on your family or repelling it. What needs to change? Second, choose two or more of the attributes mention today and discuss them with your host children at a meal. Then pray for God to instill a thirst within both them and yourself to develop these attitudes in your lives.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 18: Love Models The Way

God knows we will not always understand or like His solutions to our situations. So when you come to Him with a desire to love your host children more fully, don't be surprised if one of his most important request seems unexpected, to love and respect your spouse more fully as well.

The more you show genuine love and respect for your mate, the stronger and more love your host children will feel. Marriage is one of God's primary ways of teaching us how to love another selfish sinner unconditionally. This is the best environment in which host children should ideally grow. Bickering and bitterness can become as common as the nightly setting sun. And what do our kids feel and learn when this happens? Insecurity, anxiety, and anger. Regardless of your current marital standing, Jesus commands you to love your spouse, whether they're your close friend (John 15:13), distant neighbor (Luke 10:25-37), or arch enemy (Luke 6:27 to 29). Being faithful, warm, understanding, and cooperative with your wife or husband may not always be easy, but it will cash out in your host children's hearts as security, peace, strength, and greater self-acceptance.

Fathers, the greater responsibility for leading the way begins with you. How easy it can be to feel disrespected, then take out your frustrated ego on your wife and belittle her in front of your kids. Both parents should model what healthy relationships look like for their host children. Speaking negatively and turning a host child's heart against the other parent is not love. No matter what your spouse has done, your forgiveness can disarm much of the damage and keep it from raining down on your host children's heads and into their hearts.

THE DARE

Ask God to give you a greater love and respect for your spouse. Share something encouraging and positive today about them to your host children. If you have been running them down around your host children, ask your host kids to forgive you.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 19: Love Values

We need to listen to the consistent counsel of genuine love rather than the shifting opinions of a self-centered culture.

Love reminds us that our host children are a priceless, desirable, and unique treasure; each of them bearing untapped potential beyond measure. Love helps us view them the way God views them - as one of life's greatest blessing.

Behold, children are a gift of the Lord. Jesus rebuked His followers for treating children as an unwanted intrusion or irritation. Instead, He invited the children closer, saying that great blessing comes from welcoming them into our lives, "for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14).

Your host children will help you personally mature as parents. Pay attention and they teach you how to stop being selfish and to give sacrificially. Your money will never love you back, kiss you at night or run in and celebrate with you on Christmas morning. Regardless of how old your host children are, DARE to set your eyes and heart on them. To prize them. To follow the example of Jesus, welcoming them into your arms and lovingly blessing them and their future lives (Mark 10:16).

THE DARE

Communicate to your host children today that they are a treasure to you. Say in your own words, "You are a priceless gift to me, and I am grateful that you are in my life." Then thank God for them and for the chance He has given you to daily show them love and value them while they spend time with you in America.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 20: Love Takes Time

Imagine lying on your deathbed and looking back over your life. What would you wish you could have done more? Work in the office? Cleaned the house? Watched more TV? No. Those things won't matter then. If you're not careful, everything secondary and menial in your life will steal your time away from those you love. You look up seconds later and wonder where the hours went, then where the years, and your children went. Something always gets left out, but we must wisely choose what does... and what doesn't.

When we put our children off, from spending time with them, they likely hear is, "I am busy with things that are more important." We would never say that, of course. But it may be what they hear. We are the ones who need to step in and press pause.

Because love takes time. Precious, priceless time never waits and never returns. Every act of love requires it. To waste time is the waist portion of life and another opportunity to love. Host parents must teach their host children to love God through daily interactions with them in the morning, all sitting together at home, while we're out traveling, and around bedtime at night.

1. God is first
2. Our marriage is second, and then
3. Our kids are 3rd.

Children, too, must wait sometimes. Leave the dishes and the bushes a few more minutes. They'll still be there to tackle after you've spent a little extra time with your host children.

THE DARE

Turn off the television Internet tonight and spend some focus quality time with your host children. Talk, listen, and play with them. Take this hosting period and embrace it, treasure it, make the most of the time you have with your host children.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 21: Love Is Fair

Favoritism almost always leads to envy, anger, and jealousy. Our selfish, human nature is what causes us to give preference to the rich over the poor, the beautiful over the plain, and the strong over the weak. This is why God made a point of telling us he does not show partiality himself (Romans 2:11) and that we, too, should do nothing in a spirit of partiality (1 Timothy 5:21).

The Scriptures warn, wrath is fierce and anger is a flood, but who can stand before jealousy? (Proverbs 27:4). And if we are to love our host children well, we must guard against its subtle and dangerous ability to infiltrate our families in at least two major ways:

- 1. Jealousy among siblings. Yes, certain seasons, schedules, or circumstances will require you to focus more on a particular host child's needs, even their miss behaviors. Love drives us to work hard to shepherd each of their insecure hearts, value their strength, and guide our words with wisdom to help us eliminate any weed of envy that wants to take root inside them. To do this, you must make sure every little heart hears, sees, and feels your personal love.*
- 2. Jealousy among parents. Both mom and dad possess different gifts, personalities, and rolls. And God intends to use each of us differently to more fully meet our host children's needs. One seems to have easier responsibilities. And this can lead to one or both of you feeling jealous and angry at the other. But remember, love is patient, kind, and unselfish. It celebrates success instead of being threatened by it. You must both intercept any potential envy by frequently, deliberately thanking God for the qualities of your spouse that make them such a good parent. Then tell your spouse so.*

Lastly, the most fertile ground where jealousy and impartiality can take route is in blended families, split custody situations and yes, in hosted children and their love of their birth parents... regardless of what abuse they endured. You must apply patience liberally. Always be complementary, not critical, of people who aren't in the room. Respond quickly and overwhelming love to any host child who appears threatened. Genuine love, often and freely expressed, can help put out the fires the envy wants to set.

THE DARE

Set up a special box or folder for each of your host children. Begin collecting keepsakes, photos, and memories. Let them know you'll continuing to gather new things special to them. Go through the box weekly with them as a way to express how proud you are of their achievements.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 22: Love Honors Authority

Few things are more pleasant in a child than seeing them honor authority. Perhaps most of all, seeing them look into the eyes of the parents with loving respect and obedience. There's one primary command in the Bible address specifically to kids: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1).

Something special happens when host children recognize the core importance of God's ordained authority structure. It contributes to their overall sense of well-being. It also sets the tone for receiving greater trust, freedom, and blessing from their host parents. Host children already have a mistrust of adults, especially parental figures, after all, something traumatic has happened in their past concerning their birth parents that have caused them to become "orphans." Invite God's blessing in their lives. What happens with your host children in your home will follow them everywhere.

In the few weeks you have with your host children, train them to speak respectfully to you, obey without complaint, and work as hard when they're alone as when they're being overseen. You are equipping them to honor and win the favor of all future authorities in their lives. Most important, this prepares them to more quickly obey God as He speaks and reveals His wonderful plans to them. No, they won't do everything perfectly. Neither do we.

God values authority highly. He made it a frequent part of His teachings throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, children in Israel who hurt or cursed their parents were given the same punishment as those who committed murder or blasphemed God (Exodus 21:15-17) The Christian's willingness to perform their duties beyond what is asked of them, shines a spotlight on what Christ's power and love brought about in their hearts. If we want our host children to live in the blessings of respecting parental authority, love calls us to set the example and lead the way.

THE DARE

Reflect on your own attitudes about authority in your life. If the Lord exposes any wrongdoing in your heart, confess it and ask forgiveness. Talk with your host children about the importance of honoring God by honoring their authorities.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 23: LOVE INTERCEDES

Typically, the more children grow, the more unpredictable their lives become. More opportunities for slip-ups and let downs. More chances for the wrong people to whisper backward thinking in their ears. And because you are hosting orphaned children – likely these wrong things have already been a part of their lives, early on.

You cannot always protect them or control the flow around their lives. And certainly you have no control over your host children's past. But love has a stellar battle strategy and backup plan. It's called – prayer. God can see your host children when you do not. He can go with them, watch over them, and guide them were you cannot. There is nothing more powerful you can do to greatly impact your host children for good, than to get on your knees and sincerely pray for them.

But prayer is not merely a response to our host children's current crisis or past crisis'. It is the opportunity to talk to God on a regular basis about every area of their lives. God lovingly allows prayer to influence Him and change things. By uniting our hearts with Him and keeping our thoughts and desires aligned with His in prayer, we place ourselves in a position to bring about more good for our host children and their futures than anything else we can do on earth (John 15:7). Our intercession allows us to stand in the gap against evil in temptation, and ask God to save and strengthen them. The impact you can make in your host child's lives through prayer alone, is staggering and life changing. Start interceding for your host children today.

In prayer, we can join Him and waging war (Ephesians 6:10-19) against the spiritual forces that would steal and kill and destroy their dreams and futures (John 10:10). More effective than our prodding, regular prayer in our home draws them closer to God while drawing their attention away from the problems and onto the One who holds every answer. Prayer is a language of love. We should speak it as naturally as breathing. We should teach our host children that they can deal with any issues that arise in their lives by praying about it. So train your host children to be wise and careful, but also trust them to the One who ultimately holds their success and safety in his omnipotent hands (Psalms 127:1-2).

THE DARE

Pray for your host children. After talking with God on their behalf, share with your host children what you are now praying for in their lives. Begin praying daily for your host kids.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 24: LOVE FORGIVES

As long as there are muddy feet, sibling rivalry, and a variety of uses for living room furniture, parents will always have plenty of opportunities to practice the fine art of forgiveness. The priceless quest of host parenting is to show our host children that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). That's how love endures.

Lasting love and unforgiveness cannot co-exist for very long the same heart or home. One will always force the other out. When anyone refuses to forgive, bitterness will bloom, hearts will harden, and the affectionate feelings of tenderness will fade into the background. We must keep forgiving our host children as we have been forgiven (Ephesians 4:32 ; Matthew 18:22). We must also teach our host children to forgive... they need to know they should forgive the bad things that have happened to them in the past. Forgive the wrong-doers in their lives... whether that be birth parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, or strangers. You do not need to speak in detail about their past, but letting them know it's important to forgive the wrong they were done is invaluable to their healing.

Teach them how to extend loving grace that God extends to us, and then overcome their greatest obstacles with forgiveness and peacemaking. Make sure they see the power of love in action. Yes, forgiveness is best when triggered by another's repentance (Luke 17:3). Jesus said our forgiveness must stay unconditional (Mark 11:25-26) and never ending (Matthew 18: 21-22), knowing that our spiritual lives will always be impacted by it (Matthew 6:14-15). When you forgive your host children for their mistakes, both the petty and the paramount ones, you are handing down an incredible example for them to want to extend to a hundred other relationships.

THE DARE

Search your heart for any unresolved anger or unforgiveness against your host children (or anyone else, for that matter). Write down their names and a list of their offenses. Pray for them and ask God to give you the love and grace to forgive them. Then cross out what they have done with permanent ink and say loud and from your heart, I choose to forgive you. Throw the paper away is a testament to your forgiveness and new found freedom. Help your host children do the same.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 25: Love Takes Responsibility

One of the most powerful experiences that strengthens the bond of a parent and a host child is when a host mom or host dad steps up and says to their host children, "No, I'm the one at fault here and need to apologize to you. Will you please forgive me?"

Love soberly invites us to look at our host children in the eye and tell them the truth about our brokenness (without going into detail). Why is that important? Because love brings healing to hurts. It won't hide behind hypocritical masks. Hurtful words. Broken promises. Angry outburst. Times when you have not practiced what you preached. Help your host son or host daughter deal with each issue in their lives through your humble confession or your honest clarification. As they share with you, some things may seem petty or easily explainable, but take each item seriously.

Confession is courageous. It deals with issues head on. If host parents don't want to make "truth" their best friend in these situations, then it will become their worst enemy. We're not just confessing, we're changing. By Learning to show us mercy, our kids will develop a habit of being more merciful.

THE DARE

Ask God to help you model responsible love to your host children. Go to each host child and ask if you have hurt or wrong them in any way. Be ready to listen and humbly apologize for anything you may have done wrong or to clarify issues were they may have misunderstood your actions. Ask them to forgive you, and thank them for their honesty and compassion.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 26: LOVE IS JESUS CHRIST

Of all the things love leads us to do as host parents, nothing is more important than leading our host children's hearts into a real and living relationship with God. N.O.T.H.I.N.G.

We cannot say we've given them everything we can give them until we introduce them to the greatest love of all and showing them how Jesus Christ can give them true peace with God. God created us and our host children with an eternal purpose in mind, to become His children, to know His love, to honor Him with our lives, and to spend an eternity with Him (John 3:16).

Working to shape and mold your host kids into a righteous child from the outside, can be a blessed, transformation energized by God's love and power on the inside. Only one truth leads to that certainty, the truth that more than 2,000 years ago, a man named Jesus of Nazareth, willingly shed His blood for us. He came to take the punishment we deserve. Because of Christ, we, and our host children, are invited by God to turn from our sins, call upon the name of Jesus, and place our faith in him (Romans 10:13). By opening your heart to Him, His promise to you is as simple as it is profound and secure, you will be saved. You don't need to understand everything about God to reach out to Him and trust Him. You don't have to know it all to share His love with your host kids.

Host parents should focus on modeling God's love for their host children, praying for their salvation and patiently planting seeds of truth about Jesus into their hearts. Jesus is what their hearts need more than anything else to help them heal. Helping them to know Him, and follow Him daily, should be an ongoing focus of your prayers and your love and encouragement.

THE DARE

Ask yourself if you have truly trusted Christ as Savior and Lord. If so, spend time thanking him for his priceless gift and find a way to share your testimony with your host child today. If not, you can settle this question today by turning from your sin and asking for His forgiveness and salvation. Then share His truth and your story with your host children.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 27: Love Is Satisfied In God

God didn't give us children or host children so we could lose ourselves in them. God Himself wants to be our chief source of satisfaction. True love, joy and peace are found only in close fellowship with Him (Galatians 5:22). As counterintuitive as this statement may sound, your host kids really shouldn't come first in life's pecking order. Neither should your spouse or even yourself.

One of the great DAREs of host parent love is to plug all your passions into the channel of fellowship with God. Loving God first will enable you to love your host children even better. Circumstances become irrelevant because He and His promises never change. God's word, wisdom, and patience will simply start coming out of you because of what you're allowing Him to place inside you every day. We should take our hearts to God when we feel unsatisfied. And because His vast, unending abundance is able to "satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Psalm 145:16), we don't need to worry one second that His supply won't be enough. You can enjoy God for He is an everyday, unending source of everything you need.

THE DARE

Read Jesus' words from Matthew 11:28-30. Spend time with God and ask Him how you can daily find rest in Him. Open up your heart and ask Him to fill you with His love and to help you find your intimate walk with Him and how you can let that light shine for your host children. Thank Him for His goodness and provision in your life. Enjoy your time with your host children as you stay centered on Him. Your host children will see the difference this makes in you daily.

Today's Notes (my journal):

Day 28: Love Is God's Word

Children who hear the truths of the Bible, who read it, and who hide it in their hearts (memorize it) and minds are much more readily equipped for life. They will better understand the foundational cornerstones for building greater marriages, families, businesses, governments, and societies. This is something sorely missing from your host children's lives. In a normal world, it must start with mom or dad who simply love their children, love their God, love His Word, and are willing to help their kids develop a rich appetite for God. In host children's lives, this never happened. Now it's you, as a host parent, who can add this missing piece of love and need for God into their lives.

If you know Christ, you have the Holy Spirit within your heart as an illuminator of truth. And because of His internal lamp, the Scriptures are now yours to read, comprehend, live by, and share. It's not a matter of training and knowledge, but of willingness and love. Simply begin reading a chapter at a time out loud to your host children sometime in the morning, at a meal, or before you go to bed at night. As you read and discuss and pray over what you have read, your host children will grow spiritually...and exponentially.

God's presence and power show up consistently in homes and hearts that choose to honor His Word. This job is not too big for you. In fact, you are perfectly positioned and qualified, like no one else in the world, to lead your host children through this treasure chest of spiritual gold. If you could sit down and tell your host children everything you know, you could only take them so far. By daily placing the Word before them, it ensures that you are helping them become "complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). When each member of your family, including your host child, is founded on the rock of God's unchanging Word, they become equipped, solid, and ensured for the storms and adventures of life. Your host child needs this equipment more than ever.

THE DARE

If you have not been having a consistent time of family devotions, take the time to do it today. It can be as simple as reading a short passage, story or chapter from Scripture. Make it an interactive adventure in your home. Pray specifically today for God to use these moments to speak His truth even more clearly and powerfully to you and your host kids.

Today's Notes (my journal):

THIS CONCLUDES OUR HOST PARENT LOVE DARE

You have reached the end of a life-changing journey – hosting an orphan.

Please let us know what you've learned, any new habits that you have formed, changes in your home, or memorable experiences you had and whether this Host Parent Love Dare influenced your hosting in a positive way.

We'd love to hear from you!

Michelle@p143.org

1 JOHN 4:8

But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

Love is patient,

love is kind.

It does not envy,

it does not boast,

it is not proud.

It does not dishonor others,

it is not self-seeking,

it is not easily angered,

it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects,

always trusts,

always hopes,

always perseveres.

Summary Notes (my journal):