



"What does the Bible say about tough love?"

Answer: "Tough love" is an expression that is generally thought of as a disciplinary measure where someone is treated rather sternly with the intention of helping him or her in the long run.

Tough love may be the refusal to give assistance to a friend asking for help when to do so would simply allow him to continue along a dangerous path. However, with tough love in a biblical sense, the chastening hand is always controlled by a loving heart.

As the wise King Solomon said, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him" (Proverbs 13:24). The Bible has much to say about tough love, particularly in Proverbs and Hebrews. To fully understand the importance of why tough love is sometimes necessary, we first need to understand the magnitude of the spiritual fight that is a significant part of the Christian life.

Satan and his host of demons will make every attempt to knock us off the path of our spiritual journey, continually tempting Christians to give in to their sinful nature (1 Peter 5:8). As Christ told us, "Broad is the road that leads to destruction" and many will be on it (Matthew 7:13). A strong dose of tough love may be the most appropriate recourse to help one get off the road of destruction, especially if he's been on it for a while.

Unfortunately, however, many people, parents in particular, often equivocate when it comes to meting out tough love. Granted, firm disciplinary measures can be as unpleasant to the parent as they are to the child; that's why it takes wisdom and courage. However, when we continually shield loved ones from the consequences of their errors, we often deprive them of the opportunity for the growth and maturity that could possibly eradicate their problematic behaviour altogether.

Additionally, we eliminate any incentive someone might have for change when we hesitate to save them from themselves. As the writer of Hebrews aptly informs us, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11). In Hebrews we see whom God punishes: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son" (Hebrews 12:5-6

emphasis added). We are to endure hardship as discipline, for God is treating us as sons (verse 7). If we are not disciplined, then we are not His “true sons” (verse 8).

Additionally, the one receiving the discipline needs to see the sin that caused the correction the way God sees the sin. Our holy God is offended by sin and cannot tolerate it (Habakkuk 1:13). Tough love is often necessary because, as fallen humans, we have a tendency not to respond to gentle taps on the shoulder. Our heavenly Father will do whatever is necessary to conform His children into the likeness of Christ, as He predestined us for this very reason (Romans 8:29). Indeed, this is what His discipline is all about. And the better we understand His Word, the easier it will be for us to accept this. God will administer whatever amount of tough love is necessary so that our behaviour will line up with our identity in Christ. Likewise, this should be a parent’s motive when correcting the behaviour of a wayward child.