

Parents & Crosslink

Linking parents to one another and the cross

Casey A. Holtz

DISCIPLINE: Common Challenges for Christian Parents

Most Christian parents easily recognize that discipline has an important role in parenting. Most of them are able to quote Bible passages in which God tells us discipline is one of our duties as parents. Unfortunately, many parents struggle with the decision of how and when to discipline. Providing developmentally appropriate discipline for our children is one of the greatest challenges Christian parents face. Parents are often knowledgeable about basic parenting strategies and discipline techniques, but there are many challenges and barriers that prevent parents from delivering effective consequences.

Common Challenge #1: The Need for Immediate Results

All too often, parents are shortsighted and avoid discipline because giving in is easier in the here and now. Imagine this scenario: A parent says no to her young child who wants a cookie before dinner. The child quickly becomes upset and begins crying and screaming. As the tantrum escalates, the parent is forced to make a decision: "Do I stay firm in my decision? But how do I stop my child from screaming?" I suppose you can predict the most frequent outcome. Many parents will give the child the cookie in order to stop the screaming. This parenting impulse is logical because it works to decrease the negative behavior. This is shortsighted, however, because children quickly learn to engage in tantrum behavior whenever they want to avoid discipline or to get their way.

So, how can parents fight against this impulse? Remember, parenting is a long-term investment, and parenting decisions do not always bring immediate benefits. Saying no and ignoring a child's tantrum behavior is much more difficult in the short term, but it teaches children foundational skills that will allow them to find success later in life. Setting limits can teach children important values, including respect for authority, patience, ability to delay gratification, and humility. Remember that the energy put into providing structure, consistency, and discipline for a child will benefit parents when they see their child grow into a responsible and respectful adult.

Common Challenge #2: I Want My Child to Love Me

Christian parents love their children, and they dedicate their lives to guiding and supporting their children through the journey of life. But let us be honest. Christian parents are also sinful and typically hope to get something in return for their parenting efforts and sacrifices. The most common reward from parenting is to receive love or admiration. Obviously love is one of the great benefits of having children, but many parents believe they need to avoid discipline in order to earn the love of their child. Parents often mistakenly believe the best route to their child's heart is through befriending and leniency.

(Continued on page 2.)

