



PROVIDING DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE DISCIPLINE FOR OUR CHILDREN IS ONE OF THE GREATEST CHALLENGES CHRISTIAN PARENTS FACE.

(Discipline . . . cont.)

Parents *cognitively* understand that their child will not hate them if they have to set limits and discipline, but many parents are *emotionally* unable to tolerate their child's frustration, or at times anger, about being disciplined.

Parents might well consider the difference between the role of a friend and that of a parent. Friends can condone most any behavior; they provide unconditional positive regard; they are not responsible for the well-being of their friend. Parents, however, are put in a position of responsibility for their children. God formally instructs us to discipline our children and warns us, "Do not withhold discipline from a child" (Proverbs 23:13).

Parents establish rules and limits in order to keep their children safe. Parents often need to establish limits and rules regarding their child's clothing choices, curfews, early friendships, food options, and daily activities. Instead of viewing discipline as a negative aspect of parenting that causes our children to dislike us, consider the fact that setting limits is an act of love. Our loving Lord is the perfect model of a loving Father, as he rebukes us out of love to bring us closer to him. In Proverbs 3:11,12, God challenges us to realize discipline is an act of love: "My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in." Psychologically speaking, your children need you as a parent, not just as a friend. Children may fuss, cry, or even say "I hate you" in response to discipline, but if discipline is delivered appropriately, children will recognize that their parents are setting limits for their children's own good. Children develop love and respect for parents over time through consistent parenting that appropriately balances love, understanding, patience, and discipline.

Common Challenge #3: I Want My Child to Be Happy

Have you ever heard parents say, "I don't want to parent my children in the way I was parented"? This is usually an expression of regret about their own childhoods. Parents often hope to provide something different for their own children. It is wise to learn from our parents' mistakes, and it is important to work toward our own values, principles, and techniques as parents. It is not wise to think that happiness is the measure of good parenting. If parents work to always please their children, they

will likely find there is no possible way for their children to be happy all the time. For example, parents give a child the much desired video game, but there will always be another game or a newer gaming system their child "needs" to feel happy.

Take heart! When parents show true love and consistency and give their children time and energy, they will see frequent happiness. Parents must also remember that we live in a sinful world. Disappointment, regret, frustration, greed, and discontentment run rampant in the lives of children as well as adults. Instead of spending energy on trying to help their child avoid these negative aspects of our sinful world, parents better serve by setting limits and working toward teaching their child how to react and adjust to sadness, frustration, and disappointment.

Common Challenge #4: The Lack of Parenting Tools

Most parents rely on their previous knowledge and experience to guide their discipline techniques. Or they default to parenting techniques they learned from their own childhoods. These approaches can be appropriate, but there are many parenting situations that present unique challenges, leaving parents scratching their heads and asking, "What do I do now?"

There are a few important things to remember in response to this parenting challenge. First, there is no miracle discipline technique that will wipe out all negative behavior. In fact, showing love and providing rewards for positive behavior is the most effective means to change behavior. Second, you are not alone! There are numerous parenting books, parent support groups, and therapeutic services designed to help parents through difficult times. Be patient with yourself, and embrace the reality that no parent is perfect. Take your time, learn as much as you can about parenting, and consider reaching for parenting help if things get too difficult.

Parenting is a difficult job with numerous challenges. The first step for parents is to identify and confront barriers that impede effective parenting and decision making. Then parents should work to understand their individual child and select parenting techniques that best suit the situation and their child. Finally, parents must trust their parenting decisions, stay consistent, and believe the Lord will support them in their endeavors. Parenting is certainly a challenge, but it is well worth the effort.

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