

Thrive through Loving Discipline

Hebrews 12:3-11; August 9, 2015; Page: 1008

Why address discipline in the second sermon of this parenting series? Let's do a quick review of last week:

- Tanner started last week by asking us all, "What are your dreams for your child? When you think about your child at 25, 45 or 65, what do you see?" Or fill in the blank: I will consider myself a successful parent if my child _____.
- He challenged some common notions of successful parenting and then concluded that the single most important issue in your parenting is pointing them to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul and might (Deut. 6:5). But if you've spent anytime around children lately, it doesn't take long to see that their hearts don't want to submit to the awesome reign of the Triune God; rather, they want to be their own god!
- This is no clearer anywhere else than in a trip to the grocery store. Speaking of survive or thrive, this is the ultimate "survival experience." You either know what I'm talking about or you've watched someone else's kids do this, right? It's as if these stores like the crazy behavior that comes out in our kids because they even give priority parking to parents with little kids. I don't even have to step foot into the store before these gods start barking out orders: "I want the race car cart...the blue one, not the red one. Let me get in first. I want to control the wheel." And if you've got more than two kids (like me), all the others are getting left out because there's only room for two kids in the race car cart. Once in the store, your shopping list and the food budget is bombarded left and right with non-stop requests (I want Lucky Charms, no I want Frosted Flakes; can we get Pop-Tarts, ice-cream, chocolate to make chocolate milk, etc.). And then after piling up an entire cart, you slowly make your way to the checkout, very aware of the land-mines that await you there: candies and mints perfectly placed at the eye level of little people too young to buy anything. EVIL! Before long, your ear is bombarded with nonstop requests: "Daddy, Mommy: can I have this?" You say no and point to the Lucky Charms that you already got them and they go bananas. At this point, the store clerk and everyone else behind you is giving you the look and you know what they're thinking on the inside: "If those were my kids, I'd..." At this point, not only have your kids lost it, you've lost it and you haven't even left the store and there's still the Redbox machine that you'll have to pass on the way out with more idolatrous opportunities.
- And this is just one example: the reality is that our kids love themselves have a wonderful plan for their lives and they don't want us to mess it up. Yet God has given us this great responsibility to raise them in the ways of the Lord to know and love him.

Transition:

- If we're going to thrive in our parenting and in particular how we discipline our kids, we need help and a heavenly, godly example.
- So this morning we're going to start by gaining some principles from the way our heavenly Father disciplines us and then apply those to the way we go about our own parenting.

1. Thrive by Imitating the Father's Heart.

The Context: the author is addressing Christians who are suffering and facing earthly trials and he teaches them that these trials actually testify to the fatherly discipline of God. He calls the believers to run with endurance the race of faith, knowing that God disciplines his children for their good and this good is their character training and formation into the likeness of Christ.

Read Hebrews 12:3-11

A. God lovingly disciplines his children (Heb. 12:5-8, 10).

- A form of the word “discipline” occurs at least once in every verse from 12:5-11. Discipline is the act of providing guidance for responsible living. It involves upbringing, training, correction and instruction specifically through correction. The focus of this passage is discipline with punishment (see BDAG; cf. 12:11).
- God disciplines *all* his children (Heb. 12:6, 8) and *only* his children (Heb. 12:6-8) and his discipline demonstrates that he loves you and you are his child. Andy Naselli notes, “It’s evidence that you are his child. Discipline is not bad. It’s good. It’s actually a very bad sign is discipline is absent because it means that love is absent. God disciplines his children because he loves them” (Naselli, 50).

B. God disciplines his children for their good (Heb. 12:10-11).

- Discipline is not an end in itself but rather a means to something greater. Discipline trains us to be righteous and holy. Because of this, we should endure it (Heb. 12:5, 7, 9).
- Even though God’s discipline is for our good, it is unpleasant and painful (Heb. 12:11). The author here is specifically referring to corrective discipline.
- “Experiencing it is not like opening birthday presents or eating ice cream; you don’t have to endure that” (Naselli, 51; cf. 12:11).
- God allows us to go through suffering because he uses it to produce character in us.

C. God’s discipline is to be imitated by parents (Heb. 12:5, 7-10).

- “This passage assumes that parents who love their children discipline their children. God himself disciplines his children, so discipling your children is godly. It is good and right” (Naselli, 51).
- Applying these truths to parenting:
 - I display love for my child by discipling them, even through non-abusive corrective punishment that doesn’t cause bodily harm.
 - The Proverbs confirm this (note that Heb. 12:5-6 are quoted from Prov. 3:11-12).
 - ◆ “He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently” (Prov. 13:24).
 - My discipline of my kids is not an end in itself but a means to a greater goal. What is that goal?
 - ◆ God disciplines us so that we might be holy. It’s because we still wrestle with sin

that God disciplines us (see Heb. 12:3-4).

- ◆ Thus, the primary goal of our parental discipline is to help our kids turn from their sin to know and love God.

Transition: Thriving through loving discipline is complicated by sinners on both ends. In a new Bible study called *The Gospel-Centered Parent* (by Miller, Harrell and Klumpenhower), they write:

- “The discipline of our children is meant to be done out of love, the way God parents *us* (see Heb. 12:6). . . . We want to be like that. We do want to correct our children because we love them and want the best for them, but often our selfish desires to be in control, to be respected, or to look good get mixed in with our love. And because our children are selfish too and also want to look good and be in control, our attempts to discipline often result in everyone—parents and children—becoming frustrated and angry” (39).
- So the last two truths are going to be aimed to solve this tension.

2. Thrive by Shepherding Your Child’s Heart.

If we were to poll parents with the question, “Why do children misbehave?” we’d probably get a number of answers:

- It’s because he’s tired.
- It’s the other girls at school - they lead her astray.
- His hormones are going crazy.
- Too many video games.
- It’s all the additives they put in children’s food.
- He’s just hungry.
- ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)
- They’re just being kids.
- It’s the parents fault.

There’s no denying that these may all be contributing factors but they don’t get to the heart of the matter. You can give your kids the right amount of sleep, the right food, limit their screen time, and shelter them from all of the negative influences in the world and still end up with kids that misbehave. Our kids misbehave because at their core they are born sinners.

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5).

David thinks of himself as a sinful person from the time of his birth. This is important to see: evil behavior cannot be completely explained through external circumstances; in fact, children (and adults) misbehave because they have sinful and selfish hearts. And this isn’t just something you outgrow. Kids don’t outgrow selfishness, rebellion and sinfulness.

This is important to get because there's such a temptation to focus our parenting simply on addressing external behavior and not address the heart.

- We can establish rules with our kids but though rules appear to change behavior, they have no power to produce lasting results (see Col. 2:20-23).
- I would say most of us probably fear our kids growing up to live evil and rebellious lives, but I have a greater concern that we end up raising hypocritical Pharisees that look great on the outside in their behavior but have hearts that are far from God.
- One of the main opponents of Jesus' ministry were the religious leaders of his day. Listen to how he describes them:

And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me'" (Mark 7:6; the outside of the cup is clean but you are full of greed and self-indulgence; you are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful but are full of dead people's bones - Matt. 23:25-28).

He then continues:

And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him." . . . Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person" (Mark 7:14-23).

Get this: your kids can look great on the outside and still be far from God.

A story told by the late Dr. Bill Bright (founder of CCC) highlights this reality. He says that a mother was driving to school one day, and her youngest child was standing in the seat beside her (this must have been in the days before carseats). Realizing the danger, she said to him, "Sit down, dear, I may have to stop suddenly and you'll be thrown against the windshield." But the boy refused and replied, "No!" The mother insisted saying, "Please sit down, dear, I don't want you to get hurt." The boy stubbornly replied, "No." Finally, she reached over and pulled him down. He sat there sullenly for a moment, then said, "I may be sitting down on the outside, but I'm standing up on the inside."

Key point: If our ultimate goal is to see our kids know and love God, then we must focus our discipline on what keeps them far from God, their sinful hearts.

- Paul Tripp calls this the principle of inescapable influence: "whatever rules the heart will exercise inescapable influence over a person's life and behavior."
- "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov. 4:23).

How do we discipline in a way that addresses the heart?

- There are three levels of parental discipline and instruction (from Paul Wegner).
 - Teach the Guidelines (Level 1)
 - ◆ Teach appropriate behavior, inform of improper behavior, and explain the negative consequences of disobedience.
 - Warn: Reiterate the Guidelines (Level 2)
 - ◆ Give Appropriate Warnings
 - ◆ You must always follow through with warnings.
 - Enforce the Guidelines (Level 3)
 - ◆ If obedience has not been without challenge, excuse or delay, you must follow through with some kind of discipline.
 - You must be consistent between parents.
 - You must concentrate on the heart. What did you want? What were you hoping to achieve? Why did you do it?
 - Lead your child to Christ. Use discipline as an opportunity to show them their sin and need for Jesus to change their hearts.
 - ◆ A Reprimand with Non-Corporal Punishment
 - A stern conversation.
 - Isolation (sending them to their room, ground them).
 - Remove privileges
 - Let them face the natural consequences of their actions (let them be late for school, don't replace toys they've carelessly broken).
 - ◆ A Reprimand with Non-Abusive Corporal Punishment that Doesn't Cause Harm
 - This is not the right to unbridled temper, not the right to hit your children whenever you wish, not venting frustration, anger or retribution.
 - Take your child to a private place (never do it in front of another child).
 - Tell them specifically what they have done or failed to do (never spank for general purposes or just because you've had it).
 - Secure an acknowledgement from the child of what he has done.
 - Remind him that the function of spanking is not venting frustration or anger but to restore him to the place where God has promised blessing.
 - Tell the child how many swats he will receive.
 - After you have spanked, take the child up on your lap and hug him and tell him how much you love him.
 - Pray with him/her.
 - Age specific suggestions:
 - ◆ Our goal should be to spend most of our time in level 1 (teach), less time in level 2 (warn) and as little as possible in level 3 (enforce). But, the younger the kids, the more time you'll probably spend in level 3 and you'll probably move much quicker from level 1 to level 3. But the older they get, the more you should be spending in level 1.

How do we discipline in a way that guards against legalism?

- We don't want our children to learn that good behavior earns acceptance while bad behavior earns rejection. This will feed legalism and hypocrisy and not foster true heart transformation. Rather, we need to discipline in a way that is motivated by the gospel and full of grace. I love how Chester and Moll explain this: "Grace doesn't mean no discipline. Instead, it changes the way we discipline. We combine discipline with love and acceptance. We discipline our children and point to the forgiveness won on the cross. We accept our children as they are, but with an agenda for change" (47).
- Chester and Moll give a few practical ways to do this:
 - Don't harbor a grudge after you discipline them. Don't make them feel as if they have to earn your love back.
 - Always show acceptance to your child when you've disciplined them. Never humiliate your child.
 - Don't use bribery to control your children. Bribery teaches them to get the reward rather than do the right thing.
 - Make sure they know you discipline them because you love them.
 - Don't compare your child to other children.
 - Say sorry to your children when you don't get it right. Don't pretend to be perfect. Let them know you're a sinner and in need of God's grace.
 - Above all, bring your children to the cross.

The goal of parenting is not just behavior just; you are after heart change. When your child's heart is changed by God, behavior change will follow.

3. Thrive by Inspecting Your Own Heart.

- **Discipline in a way that teaches your children the gospel.**
 - As a Christian, I'm not obeying God's commands in order to be accepted by him. Rather, I'm already accepted in Christ, therefore I respond in obedience.
 - Our children can become angry and frustrated if they feel like they're never able to please their parents. Make sure your child knows that they are accepted and loved, even in your disciplining of them.
- **Discipline in a way that expresses faith in the gospel.**
 - Does anyone feel defeated and guilty in their parenting? Does anyone feel like a failure? Do you ever lose it in your parenting? Do you ever sin?
 - Your standing before God is not contingent on the way you parent. You are not parenting in order to earn God's favor. Your approval before God is solely the righteousness of Christ.
 - In view of this, first, draw near to him today with repentance and find forgiveness.
 - Second, take an honest look at your parenting and ask God to help you apply these principles:
 - ◆ What were some good, loving reasons behind why you discipline your child and how you went about it?

- ◆ What were some selfish, sinful reasons mixed with your discipline?
- ◆ What were some helpful actions that were a part of your discipline?
- ◆ What were some harmful actions that were a part of your discipline?
- ◆ In view of how you responded and acted, how do you desire to grow in gospel-centered parenting?
- **Discipline in a way that expresses constant dependence on God.**
 - Even if you perfectly disciplined your children with love and always encouraged them in the gospel, you would not have the power to transform their hearts. That is the work of the Holy Spirit, not yours. You can't save your children.
 - I am constantly reminded of how desperate I need God in my parenting. I need wisdom from God on how to shepherd my child's heart each and everyday and through all kinds of circumstances in life.
 - In view of this, resist the urge to respond with discouragement, defensiveness, denial or even a determination to do better. These just reveal that you're depending on yourself. Rather, discipline by faith and not frustration and draw near to God in prayer.
 - "We have a loving Father who cares for us and our children. Pray together to him. Ask him to do what only he can: make your children willing to be corrected. Ask him to help you too, to become more gospel-centered in your discipline" (*The Gospel-Centered Parent*, 45).

The Point: Imitate your heavenly Father with loving discipline that shepherds both yours and your child's heart to love him.