



September 30, 2014.

Parenting: Balancing Between Discipline and Grace

Passage: Hebrews 12:5-13

Key verse: "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." v. 11

The little girl was about seven years old. Old enough to know better. I observed her for quite some time. She was smart and pretty. Her mom sat across from her and I watched the girl snap back at each comment her mother made.

My girls watched, fascinated. I kept waiting on the mother to get up and drag the little diva to the restroom. Instead, the daughter's offensive tone got worse. Louder. Uglier.

I just had to get up and leave.

Ever watched a scene like that?

I'm bewildered by children's attitudes these days. But my bafflement is not necessarily aimed at the children. It's directed at mom and dad.

I believe we're raising a generation pacified by iPods, iPads and the Disney channel. Invariably, their attitudes end up matching what we watch on some of those TV shows, where parents are portrayed as either apathetic or stupid and children rule.

Is it just me or are we missing something?

It seems as if somewhere between the days of my childhood and today, much of our society lost the balance between discipline and grace. I'm afraid grace has been replaced by utter leniency. Parents seem to be afraid of losing their children's love if they discipline them. Worse yet, many seem to think that they gain their children's respect by acting as their buddy.

But I dare say it's the other way around.

I believe many children's bad attitudes are a cry for discipline. Indeed, children want to know that their parents care enough to discipline them when they make the wrong choices, or when their attitude needs correction. Children need loving discipline when needed, as much as they need grace.

In Hebrews 12: 5-13, the author talks about God's discipline to His children and he compares it with the correction that a loving parent should provide. The word discipline in this text, often translated as "chastening", literally means "child-training" and it's not to be confused with punishment.

Punishment is the attitude of a judge. Chastening in this context, however, is the attitude of a godly parent.

Our heavenly Father chastens us when we stubbornly choose to rebel against Him. He allows us to bear the consequences of our bad choices, not as a Judge, but as a loving Father who longs to see His children "grow up" into the people He's designed us to be.

He certainly expects us to do the same with the precious children He's entrusted us with.

And then there is Grace. Wonderful, all forgiving, all restoring Grace.

There's nothing more harmful for a child than receiving discipline without grace. That happens every time a parent spans a child out of anger, or every time a child is disciplined unjustly. It's important that our children understand the reason for the discipline. It's even more important that they understand that you love them unconditionally. They need to know that they're being disciplined, not out of anger and hatred, but out of love.

After all, isn't the point of godly discipline training and teaching?

I love you too much to leave you as you are...

They need to know that you love them when they bring straight As in their report card, as much as you love them when they come home with a D.

Our message as a parent should never be: "I love you IF (...)". Instead, our actions and words should tell them "I love you, IN SPITE OF (...)."

I love you in spite of your attitude... but I love you too much to let you carry on with it.

I love you in spite of your bad grade... but I love you too much to allow you not to give your very best.

I love you too much to let you partake in things that will harm you... even if it angers you...

I love you too much to allow you to dress a certain way... even if makes me an "uncool" mom...

I love you so much that I need to say No... even though all your friends' mommas may say yes...

It's a delicate balance, my friend. It seems to be so much easier to just let it go...

It's hard work. And it's heart-breaking at times.

However, if we want to raise men and women who will impact their generation for good... if we want to raise them to obey God and therefore receive His very best in life, we must teach them to obey.

After all, if they don't learn to respect and obey us, how will they ever learn to honor their Heavenly Father? Our heavenly Father chastens us when we stubbornly choose to rebel against Him. He allows us to bear the consequences of our bad choices, not as a Judge, but as a loving Father who longs to see His children "grow up" into the people He's designed us to be.

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There's nothing more harmful for a child than receiving discipline without grace. That happens every time a parent spansks a child out of anger, or every time a child is disciplined without an explanation. "Because I say so" is, in my opinion, a bad, bad answer. Children need to know that you love them unconditionally. They need to know that they're being disciplined, not out of anger and hatred, but out of love.

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It's hard work. And it's heart-breaking at times.

However, as anything else in life, there is no reward without hard work. And raising children is no different. If we want to raise men and women who will impact their generation for good... if we want to raise them to obey God and therefore receive His very best in life, we must teach them to obey.

After all, if they don't learn to respect and obey us, how will they ever learn to honor their Heavenly Father?