

## Gospel Coalition parenting article by William Smith 7/29/2017

You've been over and over this ground with them, but here you are again. You stand there, looking at them, barely holding on to your temper, wondering, *What do I do now? What do I say? What don't I say? What discipline do I impose? Will anything make a difference?* To date nothing seems to have worked. You're out of ideas, and you really would do anything, if only you knew what.

You're not alone. I regularly get asked, "What's the right thing to do with my child who . . . .?" There's something inside of us that wants certainty, some clear path forward with our children, maybe a flowchart with multiple branches detailing the many if-thens of what we should do based on what they're doing. But the Bible doesn't give you anything like that. It's not organized according to parenting issues you encounter with your child. It doesn't even have a parenting section you can skim through.

Instead, it offers you something better. From cover to cover, it introduces you to *the* Parent who engages his children, and you get to watch him parent. You learn how he relates to them and what's important to him in that relationship. Every historical account, every law, every poem, every vision, every biography, every instruction, every interaction is meant to reveal this ultimate Parent . . . what he's like:

- when you're faithful and when you're straying;
- when you're happy and when your heart breaks;
- when you're strong and when you're frail;
- when you're confident and when you're confused.

You don't learn first and foremost how to straighten out your kid's problem, so much as you learn how to be with someone who is struggling. You learn that God, the wise Father, approaches his kids in a variety of ways based on who they are and what's happening in their lives. He doesn't pretend that for every problem there's a singular solution that'll be the key that turns the lock . . . Like looking for the one right way to approach your kids. Watch God with his children and you'll quickly learn you can have the same issue as another of his kids, and yet he'll approach you both differently. Or think back over your life and you'll realize he varies his approach with you over time depending on how you've grown.

In other words, God's method of parenting doesn't lend itself to tightly scripted formulas—"If you do x and y, then z will result." It is more like playing jazz (I'm told!) than working off a score. You have to study the chords and chord progressions, and you have to practice and hone your technique. There's music to learn, but in the moment you're always ready to improvise based on what the rest of the band is doing and how the audience shapes and influences the piece. It feels dangerously uncertain, like it could spin out of control at any time. You start a riff and look for it to move toward a resolution, but you're not 100 percent sure where or how it will end. Is parenting then a hopeless matter of taking random shots in the dark? No, but your hope is found in your Parent—*the* Parent—not in the principles and techniques you've learned. Hope comes from realizing:

- he loves your child more than you possibly could, which means he cares that they're parented well even more than you do;
- he gave you principles and examples of parenting long before you ever knew you needed them;
- he's more concerned than you are that you have the resources you need to parent well;
- he gave up his own Son to rescue you from the foolishness that would distort the wisdom he gave you, proving he cares more than you do that you'll use his resources well;
- he committed himself to redeem every misstep in your life to bring about the future he desires, including all the missteps you've taken with your child;
- he promises to wipe away every tear that comes from times when you've failed;
- he put himself inside you to lead you—to parent you—so you could be the parent he longs for you to be, the parent your child needs you to be. His Spirit teaches you to trust his parenting of you far more than you trust all the graphs, flowcharts, and principles you could ever master.

Does that kind of hope offer you a certain future of guaranteed outcomes with your child—a future when you confidently know what to do in each situation? No. It's better. It offers you the certainty of God committing himself to work in you and in your child to accomplish his purposes in them and in you. That confidence will keep you stepping into your children's lives even when you don't know what to do next, because you trust he'll be with you every step of the way.

## The One Another Commands in the Bible

Jesus said, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34).

"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves" (Romans 12:10).

"Live in harmony with one another" (Romans 12:16).

"Stop passing judgment on one another" (Romans 14:13).

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you" (Romans 15:7).

"Instruct one another" (Romans 15:14).

"Agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

"Serve one another in love" (Galatians 5:13).

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Eph 4:2).

"Be kind and compassionate to one another" (Ephesians 4:32).

"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Ephesians 5:19).

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21).

"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13).

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16).

"Encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

"Spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24).

"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another" (Hebrews 10:25).

"Do not slander one another" (James 4:11).

"Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16).

"Love one another deeply, from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22).

"Offer hospitality to one another" (1 Peter 4:9).

"Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another" (1 Peter 5:5).

"Greet one another" (1 Peter 5:14)