

5 Principles to Disciplining Your Kids

I often think of myself like a mama bear walking around the forest with her two cubs. I'm so happy (relieved?) to be at the stage we're at now. For the most part, we're past the point of worrying moment to moment about my boys' safety. They don't stick things in outlets. They know what is poisonous.

They can walk up and down stairs without falling. They know not to run out in the road. Looking back, it's amazing how much just keeping them alive dominated my parenting during those early years. But now we're into the stage of honest discipleship.

I've been thinking back this week on various things I've learned about parenting my boys the last few years. Most of the principles listed below I've learned the hard way. Here's a summary of the big ideas that have been life giving to me, totally changing both my boys and myself, how we relate to each other and how I prepare them for the future.

1. First and foremost, punishment is not the same as discipleship. If Christ truly fulfilled our punishment on the cross and there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1), then that has to change how we react to our children when they do wrong. I used to think that I was disciplining/discipling my boys by punishing them when they disobeyed. But how do you convey the gospel (that Christ has already paid for their sins on the cross) that they need in that moment when you are simultaneously punishing them anew for it? Learning the subtle yet profound difference in punishment and discipline has been life-changing for me personally and subsequently for me with my children.

2. Spanking is not required in Scripture. It is certainly allowed in Scripture, but it is not required. The commands to "discipline" in Scripture are not synonymous with spanking, not even close. The word *rod* in Scripture is not synonymous

with spanking either. Again, not even close. These first two principles were the biggest problem I had with the chapter on spanking in *Give Them Grace*. Otherwise I appreciated that book very much.

3. Modeling for my boys what I want them to be and do is the most effective form of discipleship. Often when they disobeyed, I modeled the exact opposite of what I wanted them to do. I want them to work out disagreements with calm words, even when the other party is angry. I want them to walk away until the parties calm down in heated situations. Yet I realized that I wasn't doing that when I was disciplining them after they did not do it. Reactive parenting is ineffective parenting. When I train my boys with a view of what I want them to become, not what they just demonstrated they were, I'm obeying the Golden Rule, which Jesus claims is fundamental to all other instructions in Scripture: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31).

4. Know the difference between pervasive and total depravity. My boys are not always acting out of the worst of their sin nature. Sometimes they just make mistakes. Very few men or women in the history of the world have demonstrated total evil at all times in all places of life. But we are pervasively depraved.

Our sin problem pervades all of our life and is so extensive to be something we cannot eradicate on our own. Understanding this difference protects me from assuming the worst of my boys at every turn, which is a big problem since Paul instructs in 1 Corinthians 13 that biblical love is ever ready to believe the best of someone. A wrong understanding of depravity tempted me to disobey the greatest command to love as the Bible describes that term.

5. Fruit takes a long time. I can't sow my seed in the morning, water it 10 minutes later, fertilize it the next hour and expect fruit by the evening. I have learned the value of sowing in the morning, watering in the evening and fertilizing the following week.

I may need to repeat the process for a few weeks or months, maybe years, but eventually fruit will bloom. Real fruit—not the type of change my kids do to appease me in the moment and shut me up from harassing them. Such real heart change because my children internalized a principle we have been working on over time is beautiful to see.

I have to keep revisiting these principles, reminding myself why, from Scripture, these things are the scaffold around which I want to parent. I hope something there is encouraging to you today too as you disciple your children.

*Adapted from **Wendy Alsup's** blog, . Wendy has authored three books, including By His Wounds You are Healed: How the Message of Ephesians Transforms a Woman's Identity. She is also a wife, mom and college math teacher who loves ministering to women.*