

Helping Your Child Overcome the Joy-Killing Performance Trap

A children's ministry leader motioned for me to come to the back from my seat during the church service one Sunday. She asked if I knew the parents of a certain child and wanted me to help her locate them. Their daughter had been scratched in the face by another 3-year-old in class and she needed to inform the parents. She didn't know the details or which child was the scratcher. When we arrived at the classroom, I discovered that it had been my daughter who had done the scratching. After profusely apologizing to the couple, I packed up my kids and scooted home as quickly as possible. If I was getting a mom grade that day, it felt like an "F."

Another time I sat in a school assembly where they awarded the citizen of the year to only one third-grader in the entire school. When my son was chosen, I beamed. Arriving home after being congratulated many times over, I felt like I an "A" parent. (At least until one of the twins threw a tantrum.)

It's easy to fall into the trap of seeing our kids as our grade cards. God calls us to train them, not to exasperate them, and to lovingly discipline them. So when they obey that must mean we are succeeding and when they disobey we've missed the mark. Right?

Wrong. God modeled perfect parenting. He walked in the garden in close relationship with Adam and Eve. He clearly laid out instructions about which tree was off limits. His kids still disobeyed even when God loved them perfectly. He continues to discipline, instruct and walk with His children. However, He doesn't grade Himself with our successes and failures.

When we begin to use the behavior of our children as our

measure as a parent we will find:

- We pass judgment on others when their children struggle rather than encouraging and praying for them.
- We yo-yo between pride when our children are compliant and shame in times of rebellion.
- We envy the social media posts of academic, athletic and other kinds of achievements of our friend's kids.

So what does God expect from us in regards to the training of our children? We want them to develop character qualities like obedience, self-control, courage, and kindness. God calls us to train them. Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

God calls us as parents to do all that we can to teach our children about Him so that He can work in their lives. Their character must flow out of a heart dependent on Jesus. Rather than focus on our grade in the moment, we need to seek to be faithful to lead our kids to know and love God over the long haul. Some of the best times to do this come during our children's bad behavior. We can teach them about God's discipline, His grace, and His Gospel through the ups and downs of their choices.

Some of the best ways to training we can give them is:

- Modeling what we want them to become—If we want them to read the Bible and pray, they should see us doing it.
- Clearly communicating expectations and consequences—getting down on eye level and using few words so they don't get confused.
- Consistently enforcing consequences—even when it feels like it isn't working in the moment, I've seen it work over a decade with patient consistency.)
- Admitting our own failures and asking their forgiveness—even though we are their God-given

authority, we are also sinners who don't always get it right.)

- Making God our parenting audience of One so we care more about what He thinks about our kids' behavior than the watching world

So when I'm concerned about a disrespectful tone or a bad test score, I'm not going to embrace a parenting "F" for the day. Instead, I'll pray for perspective and persistence to keep loving and parenting with complete dependence on the Holy Spirit to guide me through. If I'm not modeling, communicating or being consistent or humble, then I need to repent and ask God for help in making a change. Once I rest that I am obeying God to love and discipline my child, I'll leave the results up to Him. Thankfully He calls me to be faithful to Him, not to produce perfect children. While we are instructed to train them and lead them to Jesus, our kids are not our report card.
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*Adapted from the introduction of Total Family Makeover: 8 Practical Steps to Making Disciples at Home by Melissa Spoelstra, © 2016 Abingdon Press. **Melissa Spoelstra** is a popular women's conference speaker, Bible teacher, and writer who is madly in love with Jesus and passionate about helping women of all ages to seek Christ and know Him more intimately through serious Bible study. She is the author of several Bible studies and Total Family Makeover: 8 Steps to Making Disciples at Home. Melissa describes herself as a small-town girl from East Texas, but now resides Dublin, Ohio, with her church-planter/pastor husband of 20 years and their four children.*