



I'm Not The Perfect Parent

Part 3 – You May Not Like The Rules, But I'll Keep Setting Them

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today, we're going to continue our series and we're going to talk about discipline. *You may not like the rules, but I'll keep setting them.* As we dive into this topic of discipline in the home, I believe that I was selected for this particular topic because the Robbins family has outbred the rest of the teaching team. We have five ordinary, normal children and then we have one spectacular, extraordinary child and she counts as three. We just call her six, seven, eight. She pushes us to our limits. It's like I go to the effort of loading the van. I'm in there getting everybody strapped up. I finally get out and my back is ready to explode. Then I look in the van and I'm like, "Where is six, seven, eight." She's gone again.

Last night – this is pretty amazing – we were driving home from dinner and six, seven, eight is in the back seat, picking her nose. Just so you know, a general part of our parenting strategy is to teach our kids not to pick their nose. But she's back there picking her nose and all of the sudden, it starts to bleed. Ordinary, normal children will just bury their head in the hands and say, "I've got a nosebleed." Not six, seven, eight. She starts to thrash violently, and blood is spewing from her nose all over the back of the swagger wagon. It's very rare that Daddy Robbins will pull over the van because it would take forever to get anywhere. Normally, I'll just send Ashley back to go into van yoga mode and deal with whatever is going on back there so we can get to our destination.

I pull over the van and this child has blood – it's like a faucet of blood – flying out of her nose and she's spitting and throwing her hair around. It's just absolutely everywhere. It's funny... I don't know if there is here today, but Dennis and Sandra Rodgers, when they pull into work tomorrow morning, to Stitching at its Finest out on East 76 Highway, they're going to see blood splattered on their driveway. It was six, seven, eight.

Anyway... I'm here with you and I just feel extremely humble to be teaching on discipline because we are far from having this all together. But as I've been studying this, God has kind of put this sentence of this truth on my heart that has eased me, and I want to share it with you as we begin. The truth is this: **I am just one of God's kid who's been charged with raising some of God's kids.** It eases my heart knowing that God is the Father of all, and he's just given me a responsibility to be faithful with it. You know, if you've been a parent for any amount of time, that you can't control your child. We talk about going from control to influence, but ultimately, God is the one that is in control and we do the best that we can and fortunately, we do it with his help. The whole discipline process in the home is a part of growing ourselves up as a parent just as much as it is growing our kiddoes up.

I want to jump to this next slide, and this is really the heartbeat of the whole conversation. So, if I was to give an overarching theme, it's this: **The heart of discipline in the home is to show our kids who God is.** That's kind of a heavy statement because it's a massive responsibility. But ultimately and truly, kids are raising up God's kids. We want to show kids who God is. If we're going to do that, if that's the journey that we are going to set out on, we've got to answer a massive question first, and that question is, "Who is God and what is his character?"

To answer that question, we go to Exodus 34, which is a unique text where Moses would go up on the mountain and he would speak with God and God would give him instructions for his people. This particular time when Moses goes up on the mountain, God tells Moses who he is. This is a quote from God, God's words. ***6 Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth ; 7 who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished..."***

So, you get to see, just in a few sentences, a full picture of who God is. You get to see his love and his compassion and his eagerness and willingness to be a forgiver of sin, but at the same time, you see the character of his justice, that there is no sin that will go undealt with. In fact, that's a great way to put it. Sin will ultimately be reconciled, one way or another. For those who have a relationship with Jesus and who have accepted his sacrifice on the cross for our sin, all of our sin will be forgiven, dealt with. But for those who have rejected that sacrifice, all of that sin will be dealt with through punishment. So, no matter what sin it is, it will all be dealt with one way or another. And in that character, you get to see the beauty and the perfection of who God is.

As parents, that's how we get to move forward with our kids. We want to show them both the forgiveness, the grace, the mercy, and the kindness of God, but, at the same time, to instill in them a healthy fear or reverence of God. Proverbs 1: 7 says the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

As we go out and try to do that, it's easy err one way or another. **Some of us will err on the side of harsh truth.** This is kind of generality, but many times, Dads err on the side of harsh truth. That's definitely where I fall as a dad when I'm not walking by the Spirit.

I recently met an older gentleman who I now call a friend. As I sat down in multiple interactions to get to know him, he shared that he was raised in a home where his father ruled with an iron fist; he was abusive. As my friend grew up and then became a husband and a father, he ruled in the same manner. As a result, he ended up divorced from his wife and his only son left him. The son went to New York City, is living a homosexual lifestyle, and won't even talk to his dad. He will tell you today that there's no one left. Even his brother and sister won't have anything to do with him. Here's a man who dealt in harsh truths his entire life and he chased off everyone that he cared about. It's a sad story.

On the other side of things, some of us tend to **err on the side of passive kindness.** Some friends of ours who live in Texas have a nine-year-old daughter, which is the age of one of our kiddoes. She is wrestling with her sexuality and her gender like a lot of elementary kids do. It's perfectly normal. This husband and wife team has made the decision to take the position of loving her right where she's at and let her

figure out her path in life. I'm fearful for that little girl because she's lacking the guidance of a mommy and daddy as she figures out her femininity and who she is as a little girl. She runs around in boys' tee-shirt and shorts and has her hair cut short like a boy. She's missing out on guidance that mommy and daddy are responsible for.

Proverbs 3: 3 is a passage that has been on my heart for the last several months. It popped up in the middle of June and has been one of those sacred echoes that's been popping up in my life over and over again. As I spend time with the Lord, I just feel him sending me to Proverbs 3. I memorized Verse 3 the first day I laid eyes on it because it struck me so profoundly. It was appropriate for where I was in life and continue to be so. Proverbs 3: 3 says this: ***Do not let kindness and truth leave you. Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart.***

That passage is a beautiful cross reference from the Exodus 34 passage because they show that beautiful complexion, that beautiful blending of God's love and God's truth. As a daddy and as parents, this is a great passage to help calibrate us as we enter into these discipline conversations in our home. On multiple occasions, Paul charged both the Ephesians and the Colossians. He told daddies, "Do not be harsh. Do not exasperate your children to drive them to anger." So, a calibration for me, as I'm interacting with my Kiddoes, is that I want to be reminded... I want to move forward with both truth and kindness in order to raise them up in a godly way.

A couple of weeks ago, I was having knockdown, drag out with Knox. Knox cannot stand the texture of fruits and vegetables. You know, the healthiest things in life? And so, we have to pretty much blend everything and put it in smoothies to get anything good in his body. This particular night, Ashley had drawn a line in the sand and all he had to do was to eat one forkful of sweet potatoes and he had about an ounce and a half of his smoothies. It had carrots in it, and they weren't ground up fine enough for his pallet. So, we're just duking it out and he was digging his heels in. Then he started crying and throwing a fit. I said, "Get out on the back porch!" He was robbing our home of peace, so I sent him outside to think about it with his sweet potato and his smoothie.

Knox went outside and we continued cleaning up. Then I hear this screaming outside. He's like, "Dad, the bugs are biting me."

I go outside and I said, "Son, all you have to do is eat one forkful and drink this much smoothies. We can be inside in five seconds."

"But they're biting me!"

I said, "If you just eat it this will be over."

He said, "Dad, I'm going to puke."

I said, "It is better for you to be obedient and to puke, than to be disobedient and be eaten alive." Which brings me to my next point.

Discipline in the home is a partnership with the Holy Spirit to guide kids into reverential awe of the Lord. So, I was hot-tempered in the moment, but I had the piercing of the Holy Spirit saying, “Son, you need to soften up on your son.” So, I went back outside, and I knew I needed to meet him with kindness. I wasn’t going to back down; I was going to hold the line, but I needed to meet my son with gentleness. So, I went out and I got down on my knees.

I grabbed his face and said, “Son, do you know your daddy loves you?”

He said, “Yes.”

I said, “Do you know why we help you eat vegetables and fruits?”

He said, “Yes, because it’s good for me.”

I said, “Yes, son. And we are going to hold this line because I don’t want you to grow up and become ungrateful and unhealthy and disobedient. Do you want to be those things?”

He said, “No.”

I said, “Then what do we need to do?”

He said, “Finish my dinner.”

So, Knox choked down his smoothie, ate his sweet potato, puked on the deck, and we walked inside. True story. It felt like a win to me.

I want to give a Cathy Jensen quote that kind of sums this up really well. She said, “Parent the heart, not the behavior.” It’s important that we don’t get caught up in behavior modification. Most of the time, when kids are acting out, they are acting out because there is something going on in their little heart. As parents, we have to get beyond the fight and we need to get to the heart. That’s what makes the difference and moves the needle forward in kids’ lives.

I also think it’s important for us to be honest. **The discipline is hard to deliver.** Six, seven, eight is a perfect example. A lot of times, it is easier or sometimes more convenient just to let things slide. This is totally Robbins 101 where you’re spinning a number of different plates and there’s this one that talks back, gets smart, or whatever that needs to get corrected. It would just be easier to just sent them to the shower. It’s in those moments where I feel we all need to run to scripture to be reminded of the good fruit that follows the discipline when we lean in to go after our kiddoes’ hearts.

Here are a handful of scriptures I dug up. Proverbs is chock full of them. Proverbs 13: 24 says, ***He who withholds his rod, hates his son, but he who loves him, disciplines him diligently.*** Proverbs 22: 6 says, ***Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old, he will not depart from it.*** Proverbs 29: 15 says, ***The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his***

mother. Proverbs 29: 17 says, *Correct you son and he will give you comfort; he will also delight your soul.*

So, in each case, the charge to discipline is coupled with a promise. It's a promise that we all want for our children that helps push us over the edge to move into that intentional space and follow through on discipline in the home.

On the other hand, it's also **difficult to receive discipline.** We all know this, and this speaks to each one of us. Exodus 20: 12 says, *Honor your father and mother than your days my be prolonged in the land which your Lord your God gives you.* That's the fifth commandment from the Ten Commandments, the first commandment with a promise. Hebrews 12: 11 says, *All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it afterwards yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*

This week, I was blessed to be able to go on a spiritual/leadership retreat in Winter Park, Colorado. I went with a van full of my best buddies and colleagues. About half of them are older than I am and are dads that I absolutely revere. We got to do a bunch of fun stuff. We went mountain biking and rode four wheelers and climbed mountains. Every day, we would come back feeling a little sorer and more bent out of shape. So, we spent a lot of time in therapy in the hot tube. In preparation for this message, I was picking the guys' brains during one hot tub session. I asked, "What pearls of wisdom do you have in regard to discipline in your home?" It was so awesome. It was like wisdom poured out of these men. So, I have a few pearls of wisdom from the hot tube for the church family today. In fact, I think we should do a whole series on this, but we'll start with these seven in regard to discipline.

1. Have a marriage centered home. In our home, we want to have the foundation of God's word underneath our feet, with Jesus being the cornerstone. For those of us who are married, the husband and wife team is the center of the home. We are the decision makers; so goes us so goes the home. This is something you'll hear at our church over and over again and it's Hebrews 13: 4 – *Marriage should be honored by all and the marriage bed kept pure.* We're passionate about eradicating a child-centered home and putting Mommy and Daddy together as a unified front to lead the family.

As I mentioned earlier, again this is a generality, so don't hold me to it, but generally speaking, guys tend to err toward the harsh truth in discipline and women can tend to err toward tender, passive kindness. But when those two are combined, what happens? A beautiful, godly blend. It's a picture of a husband and wife being more godly together than they were apart. That's what a unified front looks like when we parent in the home.

For those of you who now have grandkids, one of the awesome things that you get to do as background singers is you get to come behind your kids and support them raising your grandkids. This is going to require some communication because odds are your kids have made a few tweaks to your parenting style. It's super important that grandpas and grandmas are given a voice to give wisdom, and then grandpas and grandmas need to come behind whatever the standard is in the home and support it. It's really cool how you can have a family that becomes multi-generational and they join together to raise

awesome kiddoes. The Robins family is fortunate to have both a grandpa and grandma on both sides of the family that have gotten behind us, and our kids are the benefactors as a result of it.

2. The goal of discipline is repentance, not compliance, however, many times, compliance will suffice.

The Holy Spirit does the convicting. It's always our goal for our kids to experience the power of the gospel in a discipline conversation. We want to help them recognize that they are in the wrong, that they are in sin, that they need to take ownership of that, and then go to God and seek forgiveness and go to relationships and seek forgiveness and reconciliation. Every single discipline conversation is a gospel conversation. Isn't that amazing? Do you ever wonder how to share the gospel with your kids? Punish them. I sounded like Ted there, didn't I? He's rubbing off on me. At the same time, we cannot force kids to have a repentant heart. We could probably force them to apologize, but the genuine heart change that we truly desire from them comes from God. We need to be okay with compliance at times and in seasons.

3. Tuck-ins are a discipline free zone. I am so wildly passionate about this. A peaceful, loving tuck-in is the most important thing that you can do when you and your kids are at odds with each other. When your kids are in the greatest state of rebellion, the value of that tuck-in skyrockets. So, no matter how much strife there is, no matter how much disrespect, no matter how angry you are, it is so important for mommies and daddies to die to themselves and to remember holding that little rug rat in your arms as a baby. Walk in there, get down on their level, and love them right where they're at to communicate how much you love and adore them.

There is something sacred about tuck-ins. It doesn't matter how old they get. From 0 to 18, it's important because when a child's head hits the pillow at night, the defenses come down because their little hearts are weary, and all of the emotions of the day will begin to swirl as they head to sleep. That intimate space is a place of ministry for a mommy and daddy to just shower them with the love and grace of God. Again, you don't back off whatever discipline is in place. You wake up the following morning and you hold the line. But that time of intimacy is just so potent and powerful.

4. Championship teams call timeouts. I love this in families, in businesses, and on teams. If you were to watch really great teams, if you were to watch the Clemson Tigers, you would see Dabo Swinney. When the team starts to lose momentum or perhaps the momentum switches, he'll call a timeout and bring his guys in and make adjustments and then send them back out on the field. That would be an example of calling a proactive timeout.

There are other times when the wheels come off and you have to call a timeout in desperation. Both kinds, both proactive and in desperation, matter; you have to use them both. But as much as we can, we need to be proactive to bring our family in and call a family timeout. Then, when you're in that setting, cast the vision for a better future together. In other words, you ask, "Son, what kind of man do you want to grow up to be?" "Daughter, what kind of woman do you want to grow up to be?" "What do you want our home to be like? What do you want it to feel like? What do you want our relationships between Mommy and Daddy and kiddo to be like?" We build that vision together, then we cast that vision for the future, and then we decide together what we need to do as a family to move towards that goal.

Together, you can take those things... It's amazing how capable and smart kids are. They'll know what needs to happen in order to get from here to there. So, we find our path to reconciliation and strength as a family and fun and enjoyment, etc. by calling these little timeouts, bringing everybody together, and getting on the same page. Then when you break the huddle, you go out on the field and move towards your goal. Call regular proactive timeouts as a family.

5. Stay consistent; it's just a season. One of the dads shared a story about his junior high son. When he was in sixth grade, all of the sudden he started putting deodorant on and wearing nicer clothes to school and putting gel in his hair. They realized they had a girl problem sparking up. This Dad and Mom started to get worried about what to do, thinking he was too young to be worrying about this stuff. The dad said that three months later, his hair was disheveled, his shoes were untied, and he ran out the door and went to school, and that's the way it's been ever since.

When he told that story, I got a kick out of it and I just remembered how kids change so fast. Stay consistent, hold the line. Many, many times, in our family and in our life, we've been banging our heads against the wall with a particular kid, with a particular issue, and then all of the sudden, we look back and it's been two weeks since he/she was doing that. Kids change fast, so we want to cater to the uniqueness of each child, but also understand that seasons will come and go as they are growing up and that's okay.

6. Yes you can. I think this statement especially important for parents of teenagers. A lot of times, in a teenage home, things become undesirable, like the home, the atmosphere, relationships might be at a point where you're just like, "This is not where I wanted to be, but I feel like we're just too far gone." I want to encourage you today. Yes you can. You can do something about it.

Screen time is a really good example of this. You might have a kid who from the ages of 14 to 16 has had unrestricted access to their cell phone. They look at it night and day; there are not rules around it. You know that if you take it away, limit it, change the standard, they are going to lose their mind. It might not seem worth it, or you might feel like it's not going to work. My statement to you is yes you can. It is going to be hard, but if you are convicted by the Holy Spirit that this is the right thing to do for your family, it doesn't matter how long you've been doing it wrong, today you can start to do it right. One of the blessings I've seen in watching other families do this is that when they take that step of courage and they go through the hard season, when they get on the other end of it, the fruit is just tremendous.

7. Partner with the Holy Spirit. I started with this, I hit it in the middle of the message, and I'm going to end with it. The Holy Spirit has some specific roles that are here to help you. In fact, Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Helper. Anybody need help raising their kids? It's so funny it's true or so true it's funny. We need the Holy Spirit. Specifically, the Holy Spirit was said to be the Convicter of the world. You can't convict your kid, but the Holy Spirit can. He was sent to remind you of the things that Jesus said. There will be times in discipline conversations where you feel like you don't know what to do or say and that's when you need the Holy Spirit to speak into that space.

I'm going to end with this point, and I want to speak specifically to the parents who feel like it's too late. Some of you, your kids may have been out of the home for decades. I have a story from a relationship

that developed this summer that I think will be an encouragement to you. I met a young man named Ryan who was wrestling with some sin and bad habits, specifically, he was really caught up in his perception to women, the way he was perceived. He would gain his value from how many women he was having sex with, if he did or didn't have a girlfriend, what he looked like in the mirror.

As we dove into that to find where this was coming from... Again, we parent the heart and not the behavior. So, as we went to his heart, it came out that as a kid, on maybe just a half dozen occasions, his mom... He was a chubby little guy and his mom told him that he was fat. She said, "You've got to get ripped in order for any girls to like you."

As a young man, those words sliced open his heart and they have wreaked havoc in his life ever since. In the midst of the fertile grounds of that wound, he began to believe those lies that he was only as valuable as what the girl he liked thought of him. He was only as valuable as the number of notches he had on his bedpost. And even behind that, he had made some promises to himself that he was going to do everything he could to look good in front of women. He was going to do everything he could to hookup with as many as he could.

As I listened to his story, I gave him a challenge. I said, "Ryan, I want you to go home and I want you to tell your mom what happened and the way it made you feel."

He did that about a week later, and he came back glowing from that conversation. He shared his heart and his mom did three things. The first thing she did was listen. The second thing she did was validate his pain and accepted responsibility for what she had done. The third thing she did was ask her son for forgiveness. That moment healed his heart and changed his life. Now, Ryan is far from perfect, but what God did in a snap is he reconciled the wound that had been festering for 15 years.

To the mom and dad who feel like it's too late, I want to encourage you to press into those. You might find out that after decades of strife, in a moment, your relationship can be renewed.

To those moms and dads that feel like they need some help and perhaps need to process through the next step or even need to ask for forgiveness, our prayer team will be down at the front and would love to process life with you. They are here as a resource to you.

Father, we come to you with thankful hearts that you are loving, kind, and just. Thank you for being patient with us and thank you for the opportunity to invest and disciple up the next generation through our families. We pray blessings on these families that you give them wisdom and endurance, Lord, and that you would help us to be godly men and women and godly mommies and daddies.

It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.