

See Dick and Jane Obey: Gospel-Centered Parenting vs. Raising Little Pharisees

“Let us then, with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Hebrews 4:16

Introduction: We all want to parent well. We long for children to love God as we do. But so do Mormons. Although not perfect, good parents strive to be consistent and loving their care and discipline. Moral atheists, too, want their children to succeed and be respectful and responsible. What makes Christian parenting Christian? If your children were transferred to a Mormon home, would they notice anything different in the message?

- Christian parenting must be gospel-centered in principle and practice. That means that the gospel of Jesus Christ must motivate everything we do. In our parenting we must determine to know “nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

How does this truth affect us as parents?

- We no longer look to play the role of perfect parent with perfect children. Our identity is in Christ, not in how I perform or how my children perform. Believing the truth about our position in Christ changes everything.
- We are justified.
- Christ came for sinners of whom I am the foremost. The belief will help us partner with our children instead of creating “us/them” mentality. Ephesians 6:10-20: Our battle is not against our children; we war against sin together.
- We no longer have to pretend that we don’t struggle or that we don’t make mistakes in disciplining our children. Humble, honest confession to our children will grow trust.
- We use every opportunity to preach the gospel to ourselves and our children. Not just during times of discipline, but rather all of life. (Movies, music, television... only one good story, it is Christ and Him crucified)
- We are not surprised when they sin. Romans 3:22-24
- We are excited when we see God’s grace in their lives. This means we must be looking for more than just what they do wrong.
- We no longer beat them over the head with the law. The law is only good as it drives us and our children to Christ.

Martin Luther “The law of God, the most salutary [beneficial] doctrine of life, cannot advance humans on their way to righteousness, but rather hinders them.”ⁱ

- o We cannot and do not obey the law. The law is God’s method of humbling us so that we will embrace Jesus Christ as our only hope. (Gal. 3:24; Hebrews 7:18-19)
- o The law will not transform our children. Instead, Paul calls it a “ministry of death.” (2 Cor. 3:7)
- o The law will only serve to stir up lawlessness within our children, as it does in us, as it did in Paul. (Romans 7:10-11)
- o We love methods and steps and list because they make our responsibilities manageable. Then, we love it when our children succeed and we can feel proud. On the other hand, we become angry, despairing and demanding when they fail.

“Everything that isn’t gospel is law. Let us say it again: *Everything that isn’t gospel is law.* Every way we try to make our kids good that isn’t rooted in the good news of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ is damnable, crushing, despair-breeding, Pharisee-producing law. We won’t get the results we want from the law. We’ll either get shallow self-righteousness or blazing rebellion or both (from the same kid on the same day!). We’ll get moralistic kids who are cold and hypocritical and who look down on others, or you’ll get teens who are rebellious and self-indulgent and who can’t wait to get out of the house. We have to remember that in the life of our unregenerate children, the law is given for one reason only: to crush their self-confidence and drive them to Christ. The law also shows believing children what gospel-engendered gratitude looks like. But one thing is for sure. We aren’t to give our children the law to make them good. It won’t because it can’t.”ⁱⁱ

- “Certainly children need to learn God’s law and to have house rules to follow, but gospel-oriented parents give the law to show children their need for a Savior, not to make them obedient”
- Four types of law that we teach our children “Active Goodness”
 - Initial goodness: learning to obey dad and mom’s voice
 - Social goodness: learning the social codes of their society
 - Civic goodness: learning to obey the laws of their society
 - Religious goodness: Learning the religious practices of their family and church”ⁱⁱⁱ

* None of these types of laws will save our children none of these types of goodness prove that our children are saved, or make them pleasing to God.

- **How does this affect our children?**

- It teaches them that obedience does not mean they are accepted by God. Only Christ righteousness makes them acceptable before God.
 - Let’s be honest: it is easy to tell them to obey because it pleases God. The truth is even if they obey their best efforts are as dirty rags. It is oppressive to put that pressure on our children and it is not the gospel. The gospel says you can’t obey, you can’t please God, but that is only half the story. Christ obeyed in our place He is our righteousness. The truth will free our children.
- If Christians, it teaches them they can rest in their identity in Christ. They don’t need to obey to gain our approval. We must not make our approval or disapproval their motivation. Our hearts cry should be that they obey because they love God. Not to please man, but to please God. We don’t want Pharisees. We must not equate our approval with God’s approval. God’s approval only comes through Christ righteousness applied to their life.
- It teaches them not to “be good” but to rely on God’s goodness towards them and Christ’s goodness in their behalf. It makes their obedience about God’s work, not their own.
- It teaches them an atmosphere of humility and dependence on God’s grace for everything.
- It teaches the ground is level at the foot of the cross. We are fellow sinners in need of grace.

How does this truth affect our parenting/discipline?

“Moms Need To Pray Constantly

- **Management:** Is this a time to simply manage your children? Sometimes children just need to be told what to do. “Go get in the car now.” “Don’t run in the street!” “Finish your homework and get ready for bed.” “Sit quietly in church.” “Don’t throw your bat.” Management includes training in the social, civic and religious categories we talked about in
- **Nurturing:** Many times children simply need hope that there is a God who loves them and has provided everything they need. Feed their soul with gospel truths of how Jesus has cared for them.
- **Training:** Children also need to learn how the gospel applies to the circumstance they’re facing and what an appropriate response should be. For instance, you could say something like,
- **Correction:** Grace does not forbid us from correcting our children. But gospel correction reminds us to bring correction to them in the context of what Jesus has already done for them and his great love for them
- **Promises:** Children need to be reminded of God’s promises. They need to know the promises that he has made if they fail to believe that he is as merciful and good as he says he is. Failure and shame is all that awaits them. On the other hand, if they say that they believe, then they need to be reminded of the promises he has made to love and care for them, no matter how they fail.”^{iv}

<u>Category</u>	<u>Scripture Passages</u>	<u>Example</u>
Management or Oversight	Luke 3:11, Ephesians 4:28	Basic Instructions for Daily Living
		“You must stop fighting with your brother. Let go of his neck and remove your teeth from his back.”
Gospel Nurturing “Bring them up”	1 Timothy 6:18, 1 Thessalonians 2:6-8 Psalm 78:4; 17-19	Feeding Their Souls with Grace
		“I understand that you are very angry with your brother right now. You are so angry that you are hurting him. You do not love your brother the way you have been loved. Jesus Christ loved you and fought to win you. Because of His love for you, you can love your brother.”
Gospel Training “Of the Lord”	Isaiah 53:3-5	This is what Jesus has done for you. This is how you should respond.
		“The entire time Jesus was here on earth he was mistreated, hurt, rejected so that He could show His amazing love to you. The way you are mistreating, hurting, being unkind to your sister right now is the very sin that He had to die for.”
Gospel Correction	Ephesians 6:4 Deuteronomy 4:9-14 I Chronicles 16:23-27 Titus 2:11-14 Psalm 16:11	Correcting Him When He Doubts or Forgets
		“When you fight with your friend, you are saying to God that whatever you are fighting over is more important than Him, and His love. If you are fighting to be heard, or to have someone tell you that you are right, or over a toy, or over being the best, whatever it is, it is truly nothing compared to the satisfaction that you can find in Christ. You are forgetting what the real prize in this life, the real prize is knowing that you are loved by Him.”
Rehearsing Gospel	Genesis 3:15	If She Isn’t A Christian:

Promises	<p>Nahum 1:2 John 3:16-18 John 8:24 John 19:30 Acts 16:31 Romans 2:5 Romans 3:23-24 Romans 4:22-25, Romans 10:9-13 I Corinthians 15:51-57</p>	<p>Right now you are pouring your anger out on your friend by fighting with him. You are a little boy, and your anger and strength make you feel powerful, but your strength is small compared to the God who made and sustains the entire universe. Please know that He has promised to pour His anger out on those hate Him, and those who don't turn to Him to rescue them from this anger, But you can turn to him today...".</p>
		<p>If She Is A Christian:</p>
		<p>Do you know that the biggest fight in all of history has already been won? That was the fight that Jesus fought for you. He fought against Satan, he won. He conquered, completely whooped up on Satan. He fought the fight to win your soul, and we should praise Him for that. He gave His life during that fight; He had to die in order to win that fight. Remarkably, He did win, He died, and He won. It wasn't just a fight that was during His death on the cross, He fought His entire life. He fought against every temptation, every sin, every time someone was mean to him, He fought to love. That is truly the hardest thing to fight to do. But you can fight to love others too; you can fight to love because He has loved you.</p>

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Management or Oversight	1 Timothy 3:4-6; 12-13; Galatians 4:2-3	<p>Basic Instructions for Daily Living</p> <p>"Throwing your bat when you strike out is inappropriate behavior. You could hurt someone."</p>
		<p>Feeding Their Souls with Grace</p> <p>"I know you're sad because your team lost. I'm sad, too. Let's go outside now and look at how high the heavens are above the earth. This is how much God loves you. He's using this suffering in your life to make us both look up and see his love" (Psalm 103:11-12).</p>
Gospel Nurturing "Bring them up"	1 Timothy 5:10, 1 Thessalonians 2:6-8 Psalm 78:4; 17--19	<p>This is what Jesus has done for you.</p> <p>This is how you should respond.</p> <p>"Because Jesus laid down his life for you, you can lay your life down for others by congratulating your teammates for their good game. I know that this is hard. But it was hard for Jesus to lay down his desires for you, too. He understands all you're going through right now. He'll give us both grace if we ask."</p>
		<p>Correcting Him When He Doubts or Forgets</p>
Gospel Correction	Ephesians 6:4	

	Deuteronomy 4:9-14 Titus 2:11-14	“Right now you’re acting like what Jesus has done for you doesn’t matter. You’re acting like winning is all there is. You know that even if you had won, you still wouldn’t be truly satisfied...at least not for very long. God has given you and me an opportunity to be happy about what is really wonderful: His love. Your anger shows you how thankful you should be that you have a Savior.”
Rehearsing Gospel Promises	John 3:16-18 John 8:24 Acts 16:31 Romans 3:23-24 Romans 4:22-25, Romans 10:9-13	If She Isn’t A Christian:
		I understand why you’re so mad about not winning. It’s because winning is all you have. Because you don’t believe in Jesus’ love for you, your whole life will be spent trying to win and never being satisfied. And then, you’ll have stand before God and all you’ll have is your record of failure. Striking out isn’t the worst thing that will happen to you. But you can turn to him today...”.
		If She Says She Is A Christian:
		Jesus Christ has paid the price for your sin. Jesus Christ has given you his perfect record. You are a new person with a new identity. Your new identity is that of a beloved child, not a failed baseball player. He’ll never leave you nor forsake you. You can be confident that he will always hear you and give you grace and help. He will sustain you throughout your whole life and bring you home to be with him forever. Winning is nice, but having Jesus is better. I’m so glad that we can both look forward to a time when we won’t make any more mistakes. Won’t that be wonderful?

When we Discipline we must show them how it all points to Christ. Three reasons for disciplining;

- The Bible commands us to discipline, we must obey.
- It reminds them that Christ suffered for their sin. He was punished.
- It reminds them that pain always follows disobedience

ⁱ Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), p. 23.

ⁱⁱ Elyse Fitzpatrick, Jessica Thompson, *Give Them Grace: Connecting your Kids to the Benefits of the Gospel* by (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) to be published, manuscript

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

^{iv} *Ibid.*