

# Parents & Crosslink

Linking parents to one another and the cross

Casey A. Holtz

## DISCIPLINE: Common Challenges for Christian Parents

Most Christian parents easily recognize that discipline has an important role in parenting. Most of them are able to quote Bible passages in which God tells us discipline is one of our duties as parents. Unfortunately, many parents struggle with the decision of how and when to discipline. Providing developmentally appropriate discipline for our children is one of the greatest challenges Christian parents face. Parents are often knowledgeable about basic parenting strategies and discipline techniques, but there are many challenges and barriers that prevent parents from delivering effective consequences.

### Common Challenge #1: The Need for Immediate Results

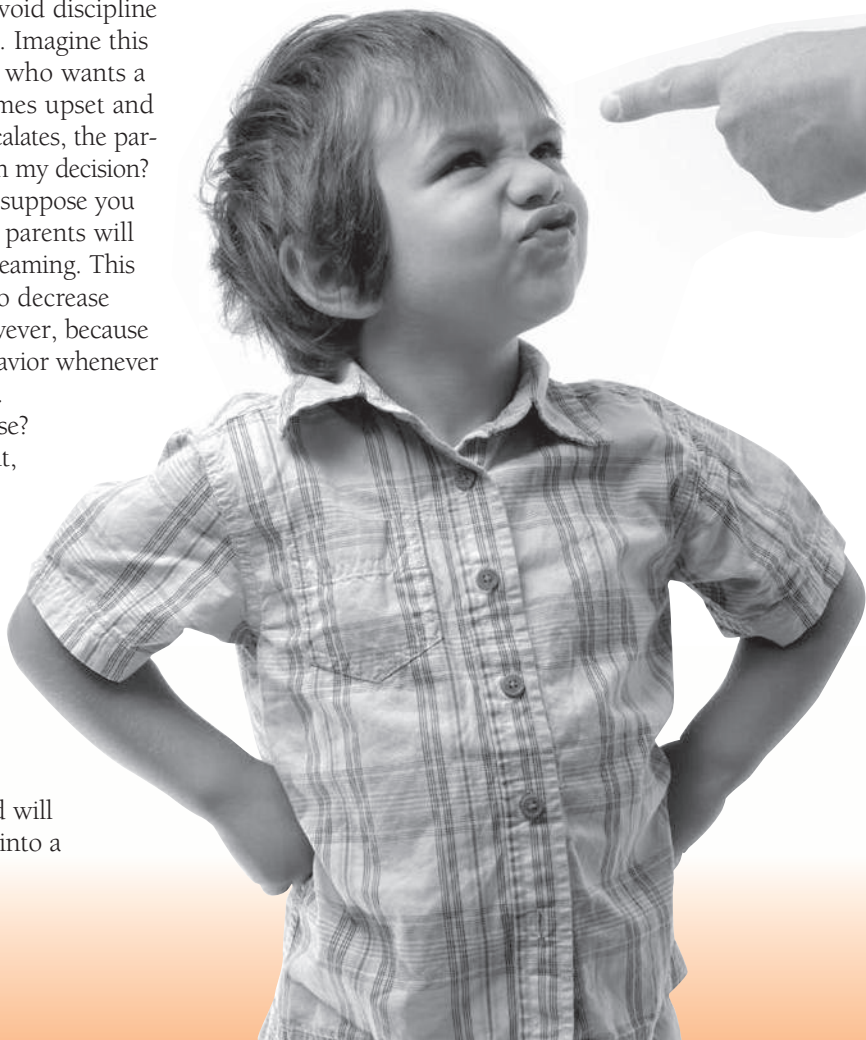
All too often, parents are shortsighted and avoid discipline because giving in is easier in the here and now. Imagine this scenario: A parent says no to her young child who wants a cookie before dinner. The child quickly becomes upset and begins crying and screaming. As the tantrum escalates, the parent is forced to make a decision: "Do I stay firm in my decision? But how do I stop my child from screaming?" I suppose you can predict the most frequent outcome. Many parents will give the child the cookie in order to stop the screaming. This parenting impulse is logical because it works to decrease the negative behavior. This is shortsighted, however, because children quickly learn to engage in tantrum behavior whenever they want to avoid discipline or to get their way.

So, how can parents fight against this impulse? Remember, parenting is a long-term investment, and parenting decisions do not always bring immediate benefits. Saying no and ignoring a child's tantrum behavior is much more difficult in the short term, but it teaches children foundational skills that will allow them to find success later in life. Setting limits can teach children important values, including respect for authority, patience, ability to delay gratification, and humility. Remember that the energy put into providing structure, consistency, and discipline for a child will benefit parents when they see their child grow into a responsible and respectful adult.

### Common Challenge #2: I Want My Child to Love Me

Christian parents love their children, and they dedicate their lives to guiding and supporting their children through the journey of life. But let us be honest. Christian parents are also sinful and typically hope to get something in return for their parenting efforts and sacrifices. The most common reward from parenting is to receive love or admiration. Obviously love is one of the great benefits of having children, but many parents believe they need to avoid discipline in order to earn the love of their child. Parents often mistakenly believe the best route to their child's heart is through befriending and leniency.

*(Continued on page 2.)*





## PROVIDING DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE DISCIPLINE FOR OUR CHILDREN IS ONE OF THE GREATEST CHALLENGES CHRISTIAN PARENTS FACE.

(Discipline . . . cont.)

Parents *cognitively* understand that their child will not hate them if they have to set limits and discipline, but many parents are *emotionally* unable to tolerate their child's frustration, or at times anger, about being disciplined.

Parents might well consider the difference between the role of a friend and that of a parent. Friends can condone most any behavior; they provide unconditional positive regard; they are not responsible for the well-being of their friend. Parents, however, are put in a position of responsibility for their children. God formally instructs us to discipline our children and warns us, "Do not withhold discipline from a child" (Proverbs 23:13).

Parents establish rules and limits in order to keep their children safe. Parents often need to establish limits and rules regarding their child's clothing choices, curfews, early friendships, food options, and daily activities. Instead of viewing discipline as a negative aspect of parenting that causes our children to dislike us, consider the fact that setting limits is an act of love. Our loving Lord is the perfect model of a loving Father, as he rebukes us out of love to bring us closer to him. In Proverbs 3:11,12, God challenges us to realize discipline is an act of love: "My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in." Psychologically speaking, your children need you as a parent, not just as a friend. Children may fuss, cry, or even say "I hate you" in response to discipline, but if discipline is delivered appropriately, children will recognize that their parents are setting limits for their children's own good. Children develop love and respect for parents over time through consistent parenting that appropriately balances love, understanding, patience, and discipline.

### Common Challenge #3: I Want My Child to Be Happy

Have you ever heard parents say, "I don't want to parent my children in the way I was parented"? This is usually an expression of regret about their own childhoods. Parents often hope to provide something different for their own children. It is wise to learn from our parents' mistakes, and it is important to work toward our own values, principles, and techniques as parents. It is not wise to think that happiness is the measure of good parenting. If parents work to always please their children, they

will likely find there is no possible way for their children to be happy all the time. For example, parents give a child the much desired video game, but there will always be another game or a newer gaming system their child "needs" to feel happy.

Take heart! When parents show true love and consistency and give their children time and energy, they will see frequent happiness. Parents must also remember that we live in a sinful world. Disappointment, regret, frustration, greed, and discontentment run rampant in the lives of children as well as adults. Instead of spending energy on trying to help their child avoid these negative aspects of our sinful world, parents better serve by setting limits and working toward teaching their child how to react and adjust to sadness, frustration, and disappointment.

### Common Challenge #4: The Lack of Parenting Tools

Most parents rely on their previous knowledge and experience to guide their discipline techniques. Or they default to parenting techniques they learned from their own childhoods. These approaches can be appropriate, but there are many parenting situations that present unique challenges, leaving parents scratching their heads and asking, "What do I do now?"

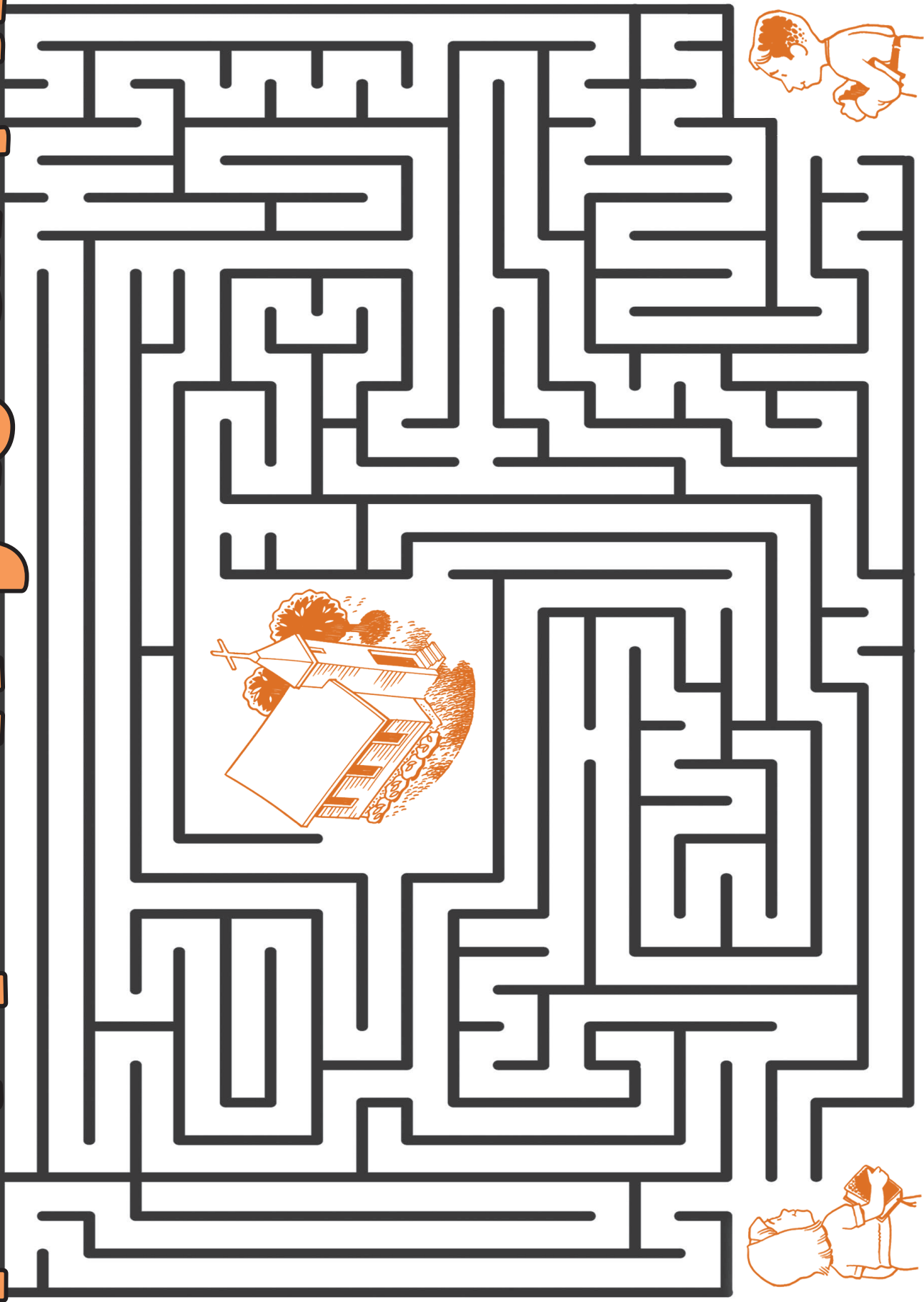
There are a few important things to remember in response to this parenting challenge. First, there is no miracle discipline technique that will wipe out all negative behavior. In fact, showing love and providing rewards for positive behavior is the most effective means to change behavior. Second, you are not alone! There are numerous parenting books, parent support groups, and therapeutic services designed to help parents through difficult times. Be patient with yourself, and embrace the reality that no parent is perfect. Take your time, learn as much as you can about parenting, and consider reaching for parenting help if things get too difficult.

Parenting is a difficult job with numerous challenges. The first step for parents is to identify and confront barriers that impede effective parenting and decision making. Then parents should work to understand their individual child and select parenting techniques that best suit the situation and their child. Finally, parents must trust their parenting decisions, stay consistent, and believe the Lord will support them in their endeavors. Parenting is certainly a challenge, but it is well worth the effort.

Casey Holtz, PhD, is a psychologist counseling children and adolescents.



# Find Your Way to Church





# Promote Humility

Pamela Holz

Teachers dread the confrontational parent. Imagine Mama Bear defending her cubs . . . and you've got an idea of how I can appear to a targeted teacher. My intent is not to be confrontational, but there is a topic that may have teachers apprehensive of my approach. With four children attending public school, I have talked with

their teachers about wanting to do something that goes against their norm.

Are you curious? It is not that I want them to feed my children only whole grains and purified water, local honey and grass-fed cattle, though those ideas are not without merit. Nor do I ask that they allow my children time to pick bouquets of wildflowers

and climb to the tops of willow trees, though that would be delightful. My unusual request? I would like them to praise my children less.

At the schools my children attend, there are all kinds of awards given out on a regular basis. There are awards for making the honor roll, for being kind, for being conscientious, for

improving one's behavior, for reading books, for doing well on tests . . . and none of these are bad. But aren't students supposed to be doing all these things in school? Why is an award being given for simply doing that which is expected?

Please understand that I realize this is drawing a fine line. In public school settings, teachers don't have the opportunity to motivate using the gospel. And it is important to reinforce good behaviors and attitudes. But can they do this without all the praise and awards? This request befuddles the majority.

As a Christian parent, I struggle to refocus my children's attentions away from themselves and instead to fix their eyes on Jesus. I want to foster in them an attitude of Christlike humility, of giving glory to God for the abilities with which they have been blessed. Teachers serving in public schools are not allowed to express much of an opinion on the topic of giving glory to God, but the idea of encouraging humility is met with quizzical expressions sometimes. I get the feeling they don't receive requests like this very often. I am thankful for the blessing of wonderful teachers, but ultimately this humility challenge is a responsibility that is up to me, the parent.

So back to that fine line. . . . I want to avoid being a stoic, simply looking at my child's report card, remarking, "You did as you ought to have done," and leaving it at that. On the other hand, there are children who are paid big bucks for every A they receive. Is this wrong? Not necessarily, but it may send a confusing message to the children about their abilities and to whom the praise truly belongs.

In order to give glory where glory is due, I need to take a step back and consider my original situation. When I peer into the mirror of God's law, stripped of my flimsy facade, and examine my naked, sinful condition, I can do nothing but react as did the penitent tax collector. He could not even look up, but cringed before God, begging for mercy (Luke 18:9-14). I know that I have been sinful from conception. I know that I can do absolutely nothing to earn God's favor or blessing. I am dead on my own, decaying and putrid in God's nostrils. Looking at

myself in this dire situation, there is no room for pride or boasting, only shame and despair.

But that is not what God wants for me. He so loved me and all in this world that he gave what was most precious to him to be a sacrifice in our place. He sent his Son to live and die in this corrupt world, to take the place of sinful people who reek of hell's decay, showing a love that's incomprehensible to mortal minds. And yet, by the power of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts, faith's vision is now clear. We bask in the glow of the love of a Father who sees us through the blood

of one Christian writer puts it: "Humility is forged in the fires of an unmistakably clear vision of God, a biblically rich and abiding perspective of the cross, and a robust sense of man's desperate sin-condition! When confronted with these realities, our deficiencies are properly magnified and successes are never allowed to take on a life of their own" (Jerry Wragg, *Exemplary Spiritual Leadership: Facing the Challenges, Escaping the Dangers*, p. 33).

What is needed to both encourage a child and give praise to God is a different perspective. God has blessed each one of us with different amounts of

## AS A CHRISTIAN PARENT, I STRUGGLE TO REFOCUS MY CHILDREN'S ATTENTIONS AWAY FROM THEMSELVES AND INSTEAD TO FIX THEIR EYES ON JESUS.

of Jesus. He pours out that love upon us, his beloved children, and blesses us beyond our comprehension. Our response is simply, "Thank you, God. Help me live for you."

In this world of "I am so proud of myself!" promoting humility is definitely swimming against the current. And yet our loving Father gives us this directive in 1 Peter: "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble'" (5:5). Is it wrong to feel proud of one's self? Looking at that phrase in the light of God's Word, there is just no room for me to be proud of myself. A better phrase to use would be "I am thankful that God has given me the ability to do this."

Martin Luther pointed out that true humility does not know that it is humble. If it did, it would be proud from the contemplation of so fine a virtue. Psalm 139:14 reminds me of where praise belongs: "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." Acknowledgment of where the gifts originate results in giving the proper recipient praise for the gifts. As

various gifts and abilities. I can't claim that I am responsible for the talents I have. I can work to improve the natural talent with which I have been blessed. I can strive to achieve a momentous task. However, none of this would be possible if God hadn't given me the abilities in the first place. It is like the story of the scientists who challenged God that they too could create something. They got ready to begin by gathering up some dirt, and God had to remind them that he created the dirt!

It is not wrong to acknowledge our gifts; they are blessings from God. Parents can assist their children in recognizing these blessings and encouraging their children to put these gifts to use, not to receive praise and awards but for the glory of the One to whom the gifts belong. "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

*Pam Holz resides in Clarksville, Tennessee, where her husband, Kent, serves as pastor at Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church.*

# Parenting Challenges

Cheryl Loomis



Family life can sometimes feel like a juggling act, and most parents strive for balance.

Tensions exist between work and play, needs and wants, and Christian values and the effects of culture in modern society. Raising young children to become responsible Christians poses many challenges along the way.

We live in an age of information. We are able to access it on a myriad of parenting topics. A generation ago Dr. Spock gave parents the advice to rely on common sense, to trust your own instincts, and to follow your doctor's directions. Some would contend that parenting in that age was easier. Today so much information presents a challenge.

Parenting magazines, blogs, and journals abound, all with differing opinions on the same topic. Previous generations could often rely on immediate family for advice on parenting matters. Now that family origins can be far-flung, parents are left to read and research on their own. Wading through too much information creates stress in trying to decide what is the best way to parent. We might well question what is available. What philosophy forms the basis of the information parents are reading? Parenting books are abundant in many bookstores. Online journals and blogs offer a multitude of perspectives on the same topic. Finding the balance and knowing whom to trust pose challenges.

Balance within a family is another challenge. It manifests itself in a variety of ways but boils down to the fact that

## **FAMILY LIFE CAN SOMETIMES FEEL LIKE A JUGGLING ACT, AND MOST PARENTS STRIVE FOR BALANCE.**

we all have the same allotment of 24 hours in a day. How do parents find the time needed to recharge for the day-to-day demands of parenting? How do they balance parenting responsibilities with the need for personal time? Solo parents struggle to find some personal time along with juggling the needs of children, while married partners struggle to find some time to build their relationship as a couple. Many families are over scheduled with too many activities after school, causing some of them to feel that they are living a hurried, disconnected lifestyle.

Finances also create varying challenges. Families today struggle to make ends meet, and children feel this stress. Entitlement abounds, and raising children to think past the idea that they deserve everything they want is difficult. Teaching children to distinguish between needs and wants is difficult

when they live in a consumer society.

Guiding children to a wise use of money has been redesigned from a round, pink piggy bank to one that is compartmentalized—save, spend, donate, invest—to help children understand money management.

Teaching values, another challenge, in a culture that is saturated with media influence poses problems. Young children are imitators of superheroes, while older children may be exposed to inappropriate reality TV situations. Ellen Goodman, a *Boston Globe* columnist, once wrote that the main job of parents is to “counter the culture.” So much more so for Christian parents, whether it be for sports heroes, clothing, advertising, or social media. Being able to screen the content of things a child sees is a challenge as newer technologies are introduced. Often children are more technologically savvy than their parents.

Raising children with Christian values when the world they see goes contrary to Scripture is the biggest challenge. Modern thinking insists there are no absolutes; people make their own truth. Christian parents know where to look for help in raising the next generation. God's Word gives us the absolute truth. Parents can turn to Scripture for help in meeting the challenges. Open up the Scriptures with your children so that they find the same help for their own challenges.

*Cheryl Loomis is a professor of early childhood education at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota.*



## WITH MY BASEBALL CAREER SEEMINGLY HANGING IN THE BALANCE, THE DECISION TOOK MY DAD ZERO SECONDS. CHURCH FIRST. THEN THE GAME.

I once read an article written by Harvard Business School professor Clayton M. Christensen. Entitled “The Bottom Line on Happiness,” it is based on a lecture he gives his students on their last day in his class. Christensen’s point is that the business principles students learn must also be applied to their personal lives. One of the subheads is “Avoid ‘Just This Once’”.

As parents, we’ve heard this phrase uttered by our children. “Can’t I stay over at my friend’s house, *just this once*?” Or “I promise I won’t ruin it. Let me use it . . . *just this once*!” Do you remember using the same phrase? I do.

I wasn’t very girly for being a girl. I didn’t like to wear dresses, cringed at the sight of pink, played baseball in an all-boy league, and prided myself in the fact that I could hold my own in that league. There was one problem. We played games on Wednesday nights. That might not seem like such a big deal, but for a pastor’s kid during Lent . . . it was huge. Lenten services began at the same time my games did. To a middle schooler full of drama, the answer was “My team needs me!” Week after week, I begged, pleaded, rolled my eyes, slammed doors, and cast wrath on any sibling in my path. *Just this once* couldn’t I play and skip church?

With my baseball career seemingly hanging in the balance, the decision took my dad zero seconds. Church first. Then the game. So each week I went to church, wearing my little league uniform under a brown and white dress that snapped down the front. I didn’t care that everyone could see my green uniform with BARNETT BANK clearly visible through the dress. I wanted everyone to know the sacrifice I was making. Apparently I had forgotten the purpose of Lent: to focus on the ultimate sacrifice Christ made. As soon as church ended, I would rip off my dress, Superman-style, as I ran to the car, and my mom would drive me to the ball field, where I would assume my position at first base . . . in the middle of the fourth inning.

Christensen says, “The lesson I learned is that it’s easier to hold to your principles 100 percent of the time than it is to hold to them 98 percent of the time. If you give in to ‘just this once,’ . . . you’ll regret where you end up.” Just ask Adam and Eve.

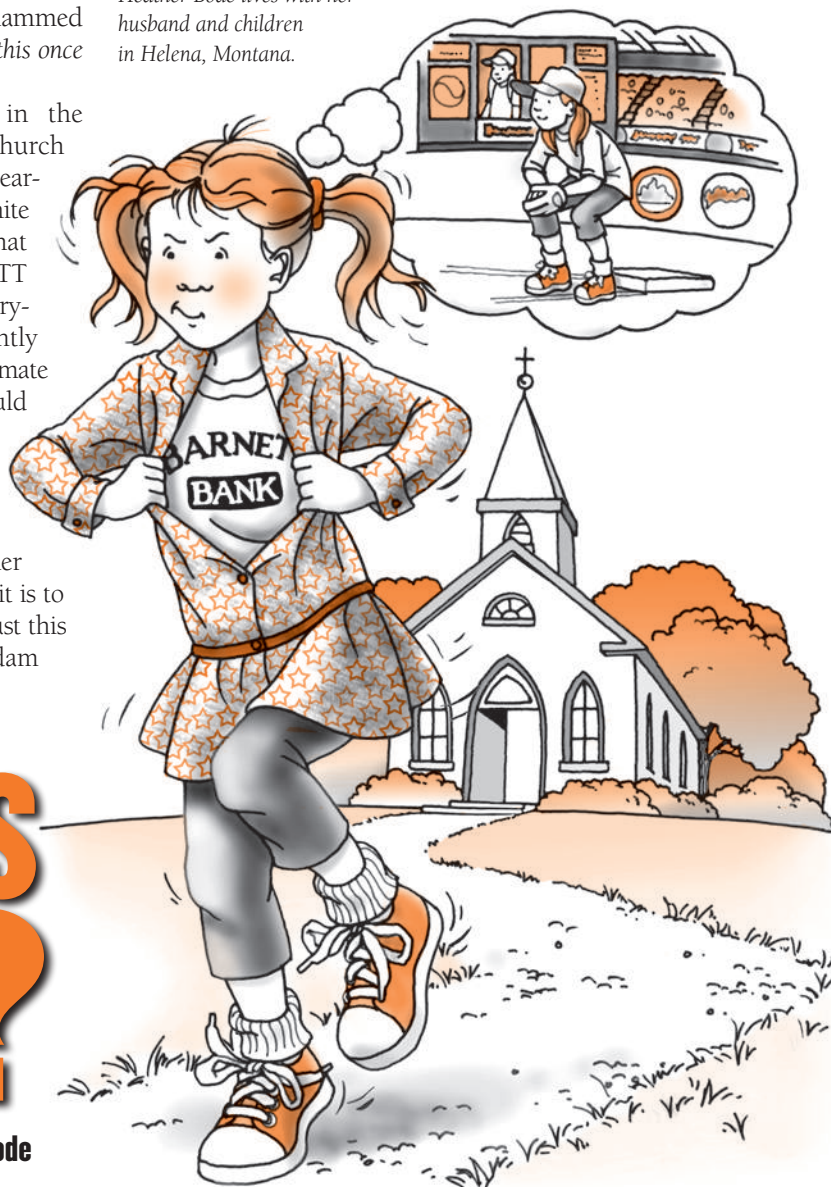
What significance do the words *just this once* have in our lives? Maybe we need to ask the teenage mom or the alcoholic or the drug addict. What would their lives be like if not for the words *just this once*? Thinking in Bible terms: What if Noah had said, “Just this once I won’t build the ark,” when God issued his command? What if, *just once*, Jesus had given in to Satan’s temptations? What if, *just once*, Jesus had decided that suffering and dying for the sins of all people was crazy? What if . . . ?

I am thankful today for my mom and dad who stood their ground, who listened to my screams of “*Just this once!*” and then proceeded to teach me a life lesson about the importance of God’s Word in our lives. Their grandchildren are now learning the same one. I am also thankful to our Savior, who suffered and died for that selfish middle-school sinner: me. How amazing that Jesus can take some little words that cause us such grief, *just this once*, and turn them into something incredible: *Just this once* I died for you! There is our bottom line on happiness.

Heather Bode lives with her husband and children in Helena, Montana.

# Just this ONCE?

Heather Bode



# Parenting Proverbs

Proverbs are sometimes easy to say but often difficult to accomplish. It's no different for parents who discipline their children. But the words of Solomon in the book of Proverbs give us two encouragements: (1) disciplining children has always been a challenge for parents, and (2) discipline is a principle as old as parents and children.

These proverbs are more law than gospel. For Christians then, they are guides to follow. Christian parents who know the forgiveness of Jesus will find in his forgiveness the comfort they need when they have failed to be what he expects. They will also find in that forgiveness the glow of Christ's love to warm their resolve, as well as the courage and strength to continue to discipline their children with firm love. (NIV paraphrased.)



Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates correction is stupid. (Proverbs 12:1)



Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it. (Proverbs 22:6)



The one who loves their children is careful to discipline them. (Proverbs 13:24)



Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish them . . . they will not die. (Proverbs 23:13)



Those who disregard discipline despise themselves, but the one who heeds correction gains understanding. (Proverbs 15:32)



A child left undisciplined disgraces its mother. (Proverbs 29:15)



Discipline your children, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to their death. (Proverbs 19:18)



Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire. (Proverbs 29:17)



Cartoon: Ed Kochler

"You're mean—I'm leaving! But first can you help me cross the street?"

## Parents Crosslink

**Parents Crosslink** is published by Northwestern Publishing House four times annually in partnership with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's Commissions on Discipleship and Lutheran Schools. All comments should be directed in writing to **Curt Jahn**, Editor, N16W23379 Stone Ridge Drive, Waukesha, WI 53188 or [jahncc@nph.wels.net](mailto:jahncc@nph.wels.net).

For subscription rates or other questions regarding subscriptions, call NPH Subscription Services at 1-800-662-6093. This issue includes articles printed in previous issues of **Parents Crosslink**.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. All materials contained in **Parents Crosslink** are protected under U.S. copyright law.

Key for maze on p. 3

Find Your Way to Church

