



# Parent *pages*

RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN PARENTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY



JANUARY 2012 • VOL. 11 No. 5  
BY KIM MARXHAUSEN

## Goodness-of-fit parenting

As a parent, you have many books and programs available to influence your parenting style. Perhaps you've taken a parenting-style quiz or have followed the rules of a program to become a good parent. *Goodness-of-fit* parenting is the process of finding a parenting style that fits with the needs and temperament of your children.

**“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).**

This verse reminds us that effective parenting is essential to a child's well-being. Children brought up with discipline and instruction will grow physically, emotionally and spiritually. This is something we can easily accept. To make it happen, however, is another story.

Many child development books will describe four different styles of parenting:

### **Uninvolved**

Parents show little emotional support and have few expectations for behavior. Children are neglected and will have little self-control. They will be disobedient and demanding, with a low threshold for frustration and a lack of long-term goals. It is not unusual for parents in this category to be self-focused due to a mental illness or an immensely stressful family situation.

**He sends His Spirit to nurture our faith ... He knows when to apply law and when to rain down grace. This is the best example of goodness-of-fit.**

### **Permissive**

Children receive much attention and emotional warmth but few expectations. Decisions for behavior are left to



istockphoto.com

the child, and consequences are rarely applied. Permissive parents are over-indulgent and have low control. This is a parenting style that is all grace and no law. Children in this type of family tend to be selfish, demanding and dependent. They can be impulsive and have little motivation to learn.

### **Authoritarian**

Parents show less emotional warmth but have high expectations. The rules are typically inflexible and not explained to children. Some parents in this style insult their children, especially when expectations are not met. This parenting style is all law and no grace. The result tends to be children who are unhappy and anxious, with little confidence. They can also be dependent, defiant and have poor social skills.

### **Authoritative**

This parenting style strives for using the best of permissive and authoritarian styles. Authoritative parents have both high expectations and emotional warmth for their children. Rules are consistent, but children know forgiveness when

they fail. Decisions and restrictions adapt to the age and needs of children and when appropriate, involve children in the process. This type of parenting includes both law and grace. Children who grow up with this parenting style tend to be happy, confident and curious. They are independent, with good self-control and social skills. They also tend to be respectful of others and motivated to learn.

From these descriptions, it is easy to pick out the “best” parenting style. We would definitely want the happy, confident, polite children that are typical results of authoritative parenting. However, parenting is not accomplished with a formula. Parenting is dynamic, which means it changes and shifts with the needs of those involved. In every good parenting situation, parents will find times when they are permissive, authoritarian or authoritative. *Goodness-of-fit* means finding what works between the personality of the parent, the personality of the child, and the situation. Some children need a stricter parent; others need more space to make decisions. Some families live in less-than-safe areas or have a different cultural background that encourages a different type of parenting style.

The key to keeping a balanced parenting style is to remember what each aspect of parenting produces in child behavior. When children have low expectations (no rules or standards expected to be met), they tend to respond by being impulsive and lacking motivation. On the other hand, children who experience high expectations from parents will develop confidence and self-control because they continually hear the message that they are capable of doing better. Children need the guidance of the law.

Families that do not demonstrate emotional warmth will find children who are anxious and dependent. Emotional warmth is unconditional love. Children who experience and

learn to practice unconditional love will be more likely to be independent and to develop a strong sense of empathy. Children need the blanket of grace.

The key idea found in authoritative parenting is the inclusion of both high expectations and emotional warmth. This is the evidence of law and grace and this is our heavenly Father’s model for us. Remember that God gives us the Ten Commandments, and these commandments stay consistent. Because God knows that we cannot meet these high expectations, He also sent His Son to accomplish this for us. Furthermore, He sends His Spirit to nurture our faith and to help us grow and learn. God stays consistent, but He knows when to apply law and when to rain down grace. This is the best example of *goodness-of-fit*.



**“Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him” (Prov. 13:24).**

This is a familiar and often maligned discipline verse from Proverbs. I saw it in a new light when a farmer told me that a rod is used to guide and not to hit sheep. Here we see the law and grace that make for complete and effective parenting. We must have expectations and consequences for our children. This is the law that guides. However, we must also do this in love and attentiveness. This is the grace that forgives and encourages.

## For further study:

More on parenting styles: <http://tinyurl.com/3ckuoor>

*Scripture quotations identified as ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.*

---

## Parent pages VOL. 11 No. 5 • JANUARY 2012

Parent Pages is published by LCMS School Ministry (Office of National Mission), 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295  
314-965-9000 • [www.lcms.org](http://www.lcms.org)

Writer: Kim Marxhausen • Editor: Ed Grube • Designer: Frank Kohn

To Reprint: Permission is granted to reprint articles from this newsletter with the line “Reprinted with permission of “LCMS School Ministry.”

