

Parenting Fearful Children | the realities of bad fear

I. It's foolish to believe there is danger where there is none.

- Proverbs 3:21-26
- Fearing that which is not fearful is foolish. And that's what this category is: it's foolishness versus wisdom.
 - There are two sides to this foolishness: we can imagine there is danger where there is none, or we can imagine there is no safety where there actually is.
 - How do you parent a child in this situation?
- Wisdom is the application of knowledge and understanding. Therefore, in order to parent toward wisdom, we must start with teaching. And this teaching must not merely be impartation of Truth, it must also guide toward understanding and then help the child apply that Truth wisely.
- When our children take what they know about the situation and what they know about God, understand it, and believe it, they will not fear.

II. It's always sinful to lose our Spirit-control.

- Ephesians 5:15-21
- As we parent our children to be wise, we will parent them in self-control.
- Bad fear is sinful because any time a person loses control, they are not functioning in a Christ-honoring way. It doesn't matter if the child is overreacting when there is no real danger or if they're overreacting when there is a real danger. Both responses are wrong, but the second one is actually worse.
- General guidelines for approaching such situations.
 - You need to make sure the child is safe. Obviously, if the child is overreacting to a real danger, you need to protect them from the danger and from the additional danger they're likely creating by freaking out.
 - It's good to help the child feel safe. This is especially helpful in situations where there is nothing legitimate to fear. A warm embrace and gentle words may do the trick. We want them in a frame of mind where they can learn and understand what they need to know to conquer their fear. If they're slavishly giving in to deceptive emotions, Truth may not resonate.
 - You need to teach them what is true about the situation.
 - You need to teach for understanding. Throwing bricks haphazardly onto a pile will not create a valuable wall. In the same way, tossing random facts at our kids without the mortar of understanding to cement the truth together will not result in the protection from fear our kids need.
 - You also need to remind them of God's expectations for their Spirit-filled behavior. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit; it's a mandatory thing for Christians. II Timothy 1:7 says, "*For God gave us a spirit **not of fear** but of power and love and **self-control**.*"
 - And then you need to provide opportunities for your child to take their knowledge and understanding and put it to work in their lives. This is the proverbial get-back-on-the-horse step. Maybe in the moment and maybe sometime later your child will need to pet that snake, get back on that bicycle, squash that bug, tell that dog "No," or check under their own bed.
- As they flex this spiritual muscle and — assuming they're born again — rely on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, they will find that fear is not the temptation it once was and the occurrences of a complete loss of control will disappear.

III. It's a sin to trust the danger more than you trust God.

- Matthew 14:22-33; 10:26-33; Psalm 34:4; Isaiah 41:10; I Peter 5:6-7
- When we're afraid, our emotions have convinced us that all is lost, but our emotions are lying to us. The only thing that can truly overpower deceitful emotions is a Christ-acknowledging mind.
- Too often we try to assuage our children's negative emotions with positive emotions. But emotions are capricious and fleeting regardless of whether they are happy or sad. We need to give our children substance. The Truth of God is a shield and strength. It can overcome anything. It can definitely overcome ours and our children's fear.
- So, when it comes to irrationality versus discernment, it's a problem of *interpretation*: your child is viewing the circumstances and believing that the danger of the issue is greater than the security of God. They're obviously coming to the wrong conclusion.
- It's completely biblical to say that it's irrational to be afraid when God has promised to protect you.
- Security comes from following Christ. That involves knowing Him and understanding Him and using wisdom and discernment to live like Him in this life. If Jesus — Who had the divine promise that the angels would not let Him dash His foot against a rock — would not jump off the temple when tempted by Satan, He definitely wouldn't step in front of a bus to test the promises of the Father.
- Fearlessness does not equate to recklessness. It's equates to wisdom and Christ-likeness and holiness.
- Irrational fear is a sin. It denies Truth by ignoring the promises of God.

IV. It's a sin to say that something is dangerous when God says it's not.

- Mark 4:39-40; I Peter 5:7; Philippians 4:6-7; Matthew 6:25-34 Isaiah 26:3
- It's foolish to define danger differently than God does. This is a question of worship. It's idolatry versus the worship of God.
- God says that we should not be afraid. Even if the situation or individual involves genuine danger, it will never be more dangerous than disobeying God.
- And since it's sinful to contradict God, believing that it's okay to be worried or anxious or afraid when God says it's not is — in itself — the most dangerous thing you or your child could do. That's what you need to avoid. That's what should scare you.
- It's sinful to trust yourself more than you trust God. Your perception of the situation should never trump God's. That's not discerning. That's irrational. That's not Spirit-controlled, that's ridiculous. That's not wise. It's foolish.
- This is why the biblical answer for fear is always faith in God.
- Is it possible that something like an outbreak of candida may cause us to feel an adrenaline rush akin to anxiety? Yes. Should you seek medical attention if you have unexplainable bouts of glutamate that forces too much cortisol and adrenalin into your system. Yes. But there should be no reason to *fear*. There need not be any foolishness, lack of self-control, irrationality, or lack of faith in God just because your body is producing a chemical reaction that resembles fear.
- The Truth about God hasn't changed.
- God says "fear not" for two reasons.
 - We live in a world wherein it is easy to be tempted to fear.
 - Regardless of that temptation, "*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it*" (I Corinthians 10:13).

IV. We can train our children to overcome bad fear.

- Keep your kids healthy.
- Before fear strikes, teach them the biblical understanding and place of emotions. Teach them about adrenaline and respect. Help them have a biblical definition of fear.
- Teach them about God's character and person. He's a Savior and a refuge because He's powerful and loving and kind and sovereign.
- Then help them understand what the fear of the Lord is and how it grows from Who and What He is.
- When physical danger strikes, make sure they are physically safe. Help them do the most Christ-honoring thing in the situation.
- When spiritual danger strikes, make sure they are spiritually safe. Help them respond in the most Christ-honoring way.
- This will involve reminding them of reality. Who God is. Why they are. What fear is. What part emotions should play in our choices.
- Admonish them to respond wisely, not foolishly, rationally, not irrationally, Spirit-controlled, not uncontrolled, and God-worshipping, not self-worshipping.
- And pray. Learning to allow Truth to overcome emotions takes a lot of maturity. Be patient and bathe your kids in prayer that they may know God and submit to Him.

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