

**October
In the Year
of Mercy
Charitable
Correction**



**Teaching
the Way of Love**

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**PLEASE PRAY
THAT**

- Parents everywhere may follow Jesus' example of balancing mercy and accountability.
- Children may learn how to seek forgiveness, make amends, and choose goodness when they fail.
- Our country and civil authorities may lead all citizens to what is truly good, and always balance mercy and justice.
- Young people may have the courage to forge life-long, faithful commitments.
- Children will see in their parents a loving but firm guide to the goodness God has planned for them.
- Children will trust their parents and approach them with their questions and concerns about love and life.
- Parents can provide for the health and well-being of their family.

When They Falter and Fail

You are doing all that you can to shape your kids' character and to attract them to what is right and good. You monitor their activity. You sit down and chat regularly. You even take the time to enjoy their company. And yet, they still choose to do what is wrong and harmful. Why is that?



Wag your finger at their God-given gift of a free will. From the moment of their creation, your children were destined by God to be rational beings with the capacity to think and choose. They were always meant to have the power to act or not to act, to do this or that and to perform deliberate actions on their own. God made them thinking beings so that could seek Him and freely attain his full and blessed perfection by clinging to Him.

If you are like most parents, you may look at free will as more of a design flaw than a blessing because life would be much easier if the decision-making capacity was an exclusive right of parents. Yet, God doesn't make mistakes which means that we have to persevere in our efforts to form our children's character so that they habitually choose God's goodness rather than evil.

Reality Check – They Will Fail

Every person on earth will succumb to the temptations of the world. No one will escape the snares of the devil and lead a perfect life. That said, every person has the ability to resist the allure of sin and return to God's grace. This is as true for you as it is for your children. Think back to the story of Adam and Eve. Even though they were living in perfect harmony with God in the Garden of Eden, the serpent was still able to deceive them. Eve thought that by eating the Fruit of Knowledge of Good and Evil, she would know more goodness. She totally missed the devil's promise that by eating of the tree, she would be exposed to the sinful side of life; the side that God did not want them to know. Up until that fated bite, Adam and Eve only knew of God's goodness. He had spared them knowledge of human agony.

Just like God, you want your child to know only goodness. You desire to keep them from the pain and suffering of the world. But, just as God respected the free will of Adam and Eve and allowed them to choose the knowledge and experience death, so must you.

This is not to say that all is lost. God knows that we are fallen, but He still loves us and continues to walk with us and offer his mercy and love. As a parent, you are to do the same. God wants you to continue to love your child and at the same time detest the sin. He wants you to hang in there when times get tough and continue to guide them towards heaven. He wants you to do your best to expose cultural deceptions that twist His truth. This will take effort, but with God's grace and mercy, you can do it.

Because humanity passes by way of the family...

What You Can Do when They Falter and Fail

The first suggestion is to accept two truths about your children: they can be tempted to do what is wrong and they have a free will to choose what is not good for them. It is important to recognize this because ignorance of this fact gives rise to serious judgment errors. When a parent thinks that their children can never do wrong, the parent is likely to give them undeserved trust. This can be a serious parenting mistake because kids deserve unconditional love, but not unconditional trust. Parents should clearly communicate to their offspring that trust is not freely given, but earned through behaviors that demonstrate reliability, honor, consistency and truth telling.

A second strategy is to deal with poor decisions immediately. Never let a poor behavior become a pattern. Rather, quickly call the child to accountability so that it is a “one and done” event. The parental action needed here is to stay involved and to know what is going on in your children’s life. Sit down frequently with your kids and check in. Ask them how they are doing. Then listen – really listen to what they say and how they say it. If you sense their spirit is troubled, become more present to them.

The final strategy is to minimize the occasions of sin for your kids. The best way to do this is to set up standards for behavior, especially standards on monitoring the use of the media. Kids should know your expectations on chores, curfew, activities with friends, spending money, friendships and dating, and practice of the faith. Children wrapped in the security of parental expectations based on the Ten Commandments avoid most of life’s temptations.

Don’t live in dread of your children’s failures. Instead, it is important to realize that everyone falters. We are all prone to sin. As parents we can help our children get up again by being by their side and calling them to accountability for their choices. We can’t keep them from making mistakes, but we can help them keep bad choices from becoming bad patterns. With grace and prayer and a bit of wisdom, we can show our children the path to becoming good people despite inevitable sin.

Here is your October Challenge

Think about your children’s behavior right now. Think about these three things:

1. How trustworthy are each of my children? Are they reliable (do what they say they do)? Are they consistent or unpredictable in their behaviors? Do they honor your family? Do they tell the truth?
2. When your children make poor decisions, do they own up to their mistakes or do they blame others for their actions? How do they react when you sit down with them to talk?
3. What standards of behavior have you set in place for your children. Do they know what chores you expect of them? Do they know your curfew limits? Have you spoken to them about their conduct with friends? Do they know how you believe about the practice of the faith? Do they understand the value of money and saving?

During the month of October, reflect on these three questions. Consider up to three actions you will take as a parent to continue to strengthen their character and guide their free will.

This challenge is just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit www.twl4parents.com for more strategies that will help you become the best parent you can be. And for the best systematic approach to parenting, consider purchasing the Teaching the Way of Love program, which can be found at the same website.

This article series is brought to you by Alice Heinzen and Jeff Arrowood, authors of the Teaching the Way of Love home study series for parents. Find out more at www.twl4parents.com/teaching-the-way-of-love.