

*God's Plan
for Us*

*Respect for
Others*



Teaching the Way of Love

because humanity passes by way of the family . . .

Please Pray That

- Parents will live according to the Ten Commandments, especially within the home.
- Families will always call to mind how they have been blessed by God.
- Families will foster an attitude of gratitude and contentment to combat the materialism of our culture.
- Parents will have the strength to selfless generosity in a culture of selfishness.
- Families will joyfully work to put God at the center of all they do.
- Our materialistic culture will learn through our example to value relationships and faith.
- Our children will find support inside the family and out to practice self-control and balance.

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The 10th Commandment: Self-Control and Contentment

As parents, we want to give our children the very best. But God calls Catholic parents to really examine what it means to give our children the best.

My children will tell you that their friends get the best from their parents. Their friends have smartphones, video game systems, flat panel televisions, and the freedom to use this electronic entertainment as much as they want to. My wife and I always give the same response: "We don't give you those things because we want to give you the best." Of course, our kids don't understand.

My wife and I are addressing many concerns as parents. Free use of media can all too easily lead children to evils like pornography and other immorality because it is usually presented as fun, exciting and "normal." We are also fighting materialism. We want our children to find happiness in relationships and especially in the faith, not in entertainment.

Another thing we're concerned about is teaching our children the **10th Commandment: Do Not Covet Your Neighbor's Goods.**

This Commandment is often overlooked, partly because it seems to be taken care of by the 5th Commandment about stealing, and partly because we have only a vague idea of what "covet" really means. To covet means to want what is not yours. While the 5th Commandment most directly speaks to our actions and our respect for other people's property, the 10th Commandment speaks more directly to the heart. To covet means to wish that you had what belongs to your neighbor. The extreme version of covetousness is envy. Envy is sorrow over the good that happens to another. Covetousness says "I wish I had what he has." Envy says "I wish he didn't have that." The step from the first to the second is very small.

As we've discussed in every article of this series, we can teach our children not to covet their neighbors' goods by encouraging them to grow in virtues that lead us to the good God's intended by the commandment. The first virtue we can encourage in our children is **contentment**. Contentment means being at peace with what you have rather than focusing on what you don't have. The virtue of contentment is the virtue of controlling our desire for more. That's why getting everything we think we want does not lead to contentment. The more we get, the stronger our desire grows for more. That's why my wife and I made a conscious choice not to give our children every game, gadget or toy they fancy. Instead we try to find a few things they will truly value, enjoy and take care of.



Contentment is closely related virtue of **gratitude**. Gratitude is an awareness that the good things in our lives come as a gift, ultimately from God. Even when we “earn” things through the use of our talents and labor, we can recognize that even our talents and labor are gifts from God. When our children don’t learn gratitude their attitude becomes one of entitlement. They think they deserve anything they want. But when they learn gratitude, they truly appreciate what they are given. More importantly, they are more able to see the things they are given as signs of love, and therefore to focus more on relationships than on things.

Contentment and gratitude are both virtues that “hinge” off of the cardinal virtue of temperance. Temperance is the virtue of self-control that leads us to the balanced enjoyment of created goods. We don’t want to teach our children that having material possessions is evil. In fact, possessions and money can empower us to do a lot of good in the world. On the other hand, we don’t want to teach our children that material wealth and possessions are what will make us happy. We want to teach our children a balance that is expressed in virtues such as contentment and gratitude.

The virtue of temperance is exercised through self-control. As parents, we help our children exercise self-control by giving our children boundaries at first. Then we can offer them greater freedom as they show a willingness to exercise self-control. For example, we have made a deal with our son that he can have more freedom playing video games if he can show us that he is willing to use his time wisely (i.e. get his homework and his chores done) and be honest with us. We made a similar deal with our daughter, offering her more freedom reading ebooks as she shows us that she can exercise balance in other areas of her life.

These virtues are important because they train the hearts of our children to be less selfish. Being content with what they have, acknowledging in gratitude that these good things came to them through relationships (especially their relationship with God), and exercising self-control through temperance all helps our children focus on what is truly best for them. That, after all, is what we want for our children, right?

So how do we teach our children the virtues of contentment, gratitude and temperance?

- Exercise “Thanksgiving” on a regular basis. Ask every member of the family to say what they’re thankful for. Sunday after Mass is a great time to do this, since “Eucharist” is Greek for “Thanksgiving.”
- Intervene when you hear your children start talking too much about what they wish they had. Encourage them to consider something they are glad they have now instead.
- Serve others as a family. This is a great opportunity to help your children to recognize that others have less than they have. More importantly, it can help your children focus on love.
- Give your children boundaries designed to teach them self-control. This may include limited media time, designated times for dessert and treats (such as reserving dessert for holy days and special days of celebration), and putting fun in its proper place by balancing it with duties such as chores and homework.
- As your children mature, offer them opportunities to exercise freedom and responsibility and to earn freedom by exercising responsibility.

This article tells about 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.

