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**Presentation Transcript**  
**Six Parenting Principles**  
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Well, we're going to be talking about children, parents and families all weekend. And that really jazzes me, so I'm excited. I want to talk to you about techniques of parenting – stuff that we want to apply, but often don't.

I want to give you some principles. I use these principles every day in my work at the Southwest Family Institute, helping parents learn how to be parents.

The first principle I want to talk with you about is *age appropriate boundaries*. What is the most well-known set of boundaries in Western culture? Ten Commandments. That's a set of boundaries, isn't it? "Thou shalt not..." Right? The things you're not allowed to do. It's a fence around our behavior to show us what's out of bounds, right? Lying is out of bounds. Why did God tell us not to lie to people? Well, when we lie to people, pretty soon, people don't trust us, right? And that's rough. So, that behavior is out of bounds for us, because it's harmful. Just like getting in a car with strangers is harmful to us.

Now most parents tend to think about rules as being too strict or too lenient. Where do you draw the line? But if you think about it from a perspective of boundaries, it helps us clarify certain things. Did you notice in our quiz, half of the questions had to do with being too strict, and the other half had to do with being too lenient. If we start thinking about boundaries.... When you're thinking of strict and lenient, you're thinking about what you do as the parent – am I too strict, or am I too lenient? But if you think about boundaries, you start thinking about what's good for the child, and what isn't good for him. That's why I like to talk about it that way. What will be good for my child now? And the boundaries always have to change as the child grows older. There needs to be more room to make choices as a child grows older.

If you have a newborn, you wrap them up in a blanket, and that's the boundary. Right? Because they need to be protected completely. But if you keep them that way until they're five, you've got a problem. The boundaries need to get bigger to allow for more activities so they can grow more.

So the purpose for boundaries is for safety *and* growth. We set those boundaries so that kids are safe, but also to give them room to grow. You see, when you're thinking about that, you're really dealing with strict and lenient, but you're thinking about what's good for the child instead of how you are as a parent. God is a boundary setter and we should be, too. So boundaries are all about the growth and development of our children as people.

Now, we could say a lot about this, but why should we reinvent the wheel? There's a book out on the market called *Boundaries with Kids*, by Henry Cloud and John Townsend. I've got a copy of it here. If you want to understand this concept and how it applies to children and families, this is the book to get. It's a good one. You can look at it, if you want, later. But that is a very excellent book on boundaries.

What are the boundaries in your home for your children? Do you hold them consistently? Or are they loose and mushy? And there's a difference between loose and mushy and inflexible. Right? How is it in your family? One of the things that we see in working with parents and kids in our clinic is that there are two ways to raise an angry child. One is where the boundaries are too tight. Kids are always growing and changing, and parents are always behind their development, because the kids grow internally and they develop capabilities that the adult doesn't realize until the kid *does* that. And we say, "Uh oh, they're ready to do this now." So the child is always tending to be a little bit restricted because the boundaries are always behind what they can accomplish. If it's too much that way, then children are going to become angry, because you're actually fighting their developmental growth.

The other way to raise an angry child is if the boundaries are too loose or inconsistently held, because the child does not know what's allowed and what isn't. They don't know what's safe and what isn't. They interpret that as the parent not caring about them.

I was talking to an eighteen-year-old runaway one time, who actually grew up in the church that I was in for a very long time. She had a little brother who had cerebral palsy. Back in those days they believed that cross-patterning was really important for those kids. So they did exercises with this little boy for eight hours a day, where they'd move his right leg and his left at the same time, and then the other. This was supposed to wire the brain. And she felt completely left out because the parents were spending as much time with him doing that as they were at work! So there wasn't much time left over for her. And she, pretty much, got to do whatever she wanted, because they were too busy with the little brother.

As adults, we can all understand the bind they were in, but, as a child, she *didn't* understand that. She made the statement to me, that when she was little she wasn't even worth spanking. There were no boundaries there for her. She just got to run wild. She took that to mean that she wasn't worth anything. And she was a *very* angry teenager because of that. We see that all the time in our work. You see a kid who's angry? It's always a boundary issue – too tight or too loose. You know, you see kids who have no wiggle room. They'll get angry and discouraged. And then you see those kids that have

too much leeway. They don't feel loved and safe. Okay, we'll let Cloud and Townsend take the rest of that one.

Look at this scripture with me.

**Eph. 6:4** – *You fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and the admonition of the Lord.*

So how do you avoid provoking your children to wrath? Well, we set age-appropriate, fair and reasonable boundaries for our children. As our children get older, we include them in the discussion about what those words “fair and reasonable” mean. So we negotiate boundaries with them that they can get into.

I had a couple come into my office – a mother and a daughter. This little girl is one of the prettiest little girls I've ever seen in my life. She was twelve years old. But she had one of the worst attitudes – one of the angriest kids I've ever seen. So I started working with them on just trying to get some sort of cooperation going. I helped them negotiate the volume on the radio in the car while they are going places. She always wanted it to be on five, and mom always wanted it to be on one. They were both up-down, up-down – you know, fighting each other over the volume of the radio. So we had a discussion about how that was going to go. They noodled that all around for awhile and they finally came up with a volume setting on the radio. Everybody was a little bit unhappy, but they were less unhappy than they were before. It was a little louder than mom wanted and a little softer than the little girl wanted, but they both felt they got something out of it. They negotiated that new boundary that they could both live with.

We don't want to provoke our children to wrath. We want to set fair and reasonable boundaries that keep them safe and yet give them enough room to do their developmental work.

Notice, too, that this verse says that we're going to “bring them up in the training and the admonition of the Lord.” Who's responsible to do that? We are, right? So the relationship is so important in doing that, isn't it? The relationship between the parent and the child is what allows that training and admonition – or nurturance, as it says in another translation – to take place. So, it gets down to the relationship.

Another principle that I use a lot in my work... This is especially effective with younger children. *Redirecting*. Not every situation in the home needs to be a power struggle. You don't have to win all the time. With little kids, we want to work on one, or maybe two, things at a time, and then finesse them the rest of the time. It's often easy to use that short attention span that they have to redirect their attention to other things. Get them to go in the right direction by focusing their attention on something else. Where I came from, that was like losing as a parent. We had to win all the time, because it was a matter of authority.

There's a guy out there, right now, in the Christian community who has a really popular parenting program going. He believes that children are, from the get-go, inherently evil. So when we nurture them as infants, and we feed them when they want to be fed, and we soothe them when they cry, that's just making them more self-centered than they already are – the way he thinks about it. He's the kind of guy that has to win all the confrontations. That's not the way children are. We're going to talk a lot about that this afternoon. We're going to see what amazing capabilities God has built into children for love and respect – a really important principle. You don't have to make everything a confrontation. It's not about winning or losing. You work on a few things at a time and the rest of the time, try to redirect to keep order in the home.

*Ignoring bad behavior and rewarding good behavior* is the third one. Let's assume that this kid is not really crying, but he does want attention. And he's trying to get it by being obnoxious. What's he trying to accomplish by this crying? He's trying to get attention, right? That's what he wants. Now, if you give it to him, what's he learning? You're reinforcing that behavior by giving it to him. What's going to happen if they continue to ignore his behavior? The reason he's doing this is because he's already learned that this works. This is the way he's gotten attention in the past, so that's why he's doing this. So, if they all of a sudden stop giving him attention, he's going to try harder for awhile. Then, when he realizes it doesn't work anymore, he'll quit. He'll do something else, because he still hasn't gotten what he wants. But he'll quit. So they call that *extinguishing bad behavior*.

What factors might determine how long it will take him to unlearn that behavior that we saw in the video? How deeply ingrained the behavior has become – that's one thing – how successful he's been at it in the past, in other words. Temperament – definitely. Anything else you can think of? How consistently the parents refuse to give in to that behavior. If you have a dog and you don't want your dog to beg at the table, you can do two things to ensure that he won't. One – you can *never* feed him at the table, and two – you can *always* feed him at the table. He doesn't have to beg if you feed him all the time. And he won't beg if you never do. But if you feed him at the table *sometimes* while he's begging, that only reinforces that that works in his mind. That's the same thing with this. They may have tried in the past to not give in to this behavior, but they probably have, because he's very determined to keep trying to get that.

Now let's think about something else. Why does he want attention? He obviously hasn't had enough of it. You have to provide the need in a positive way when that behavior is not going on. You give him attention for other things. And you reward him for good behavior. And that's what causes this behavior to go away. So you have to ignore the bad behavior, and you have to find another way to provide what the child needs.

Most kids that I see are starved for parental attention. They only get eye contact when they are in trouble. Parents don't hug them very much. They don't talk to them. They mostly focus on their faults.

I worked at public school for awhile, and we see these kids in every school, it seems, that just aren't making it. At the elementary level, they're just not being successful. They can't get along with other kids. They're not doing their work. What we would do is, we would call a meeting with the parent, the child, the school counselor, the social worker, the school psychologist, the Eas – the special ed teachers – everybody that we could get that had anything to do with that child – usually the principal or the assistant principal. And we would spend one-third of the time talking about the child's strengths, one-third of the time talking about the child's problem, and one-third of the time devising a plan to help the child. And you know what was the hardest part? The hardest part was getting the parents to say anything positive about the children! That was always the hardest thing for us, because they were just focused on the problems. And yet you could watch children while we spent twenty minutes talking about all the things that we liked about them and that they could do well. It opened them up completely to hear about the problem and opened them up to hear about a plan. Yet, it's so sad when you see parents that can't see all the good things that other people can see about their children.

Let's move on to the next one – *earning back privileges*. We use this a lot. As kids get older, and when infractions are more severe, if parents take away important privileges, that can be discouraging. You know, grounding forever – what motivation is there in grounded forever? Or a month, which is forever to a teenager? That's just punishment. There's no motive in that to do anything corrective – or to change. So, the way we set it up is, they get to earn back whatever it was that was taken away from them as soon as they start staying within the boundary. Then there's motivation to comply – and motivation *immediately*.

I had this client – she was thirteen. She was diagnosed bi-polar. (I told my boss that if she was bi-polar, I would eat my hat.) So we sent her to our psychiatrist, and he took one look at her, and said, "This is all behavioral," and took her off the medication. She just got a lot better, but she was so used to being out of control, and had so much control over her mother, she was still pretty unreasonable. I said, "What can you take away from her that she really likes?" Well, the computer was broken, the dog had been banished to the back yard. There was nothing that she had that she really liked. I said, "Get her a cell phone so you can take it away from her." She *loved* her phone. She loved to talk to her friends. Her mother even went beyond my wildest expectations and bought her text messaging. She really liked that. So now there was something that could be taken away that she could earn back as soon as she decided to do what her mother wanted her to do. That really had a huge impact on that girl. The mother wasn't unreasonable in her requests. She just wanted her daughter to stop using the F word on her. She wanted her to help clean up. Sometimes her daughter would cook and she'd leave a big mess in the kitchen. She wanted her to clean up. She didn't want her to stay out all night. So the phone got taken away for those major infractions. It wasn't too long before things got a lot better because she really liked the phone. And she could get it back as soon as she started complying. It wasn't punishment. It was just common sense. There was an immediate punishment and an immediate reward that was easy to enact.

Let's look at the fifth one – *immediate and consistent discipline*. This is a real tough one. Research has demonstrated that spanking works with children between the ages two and four if it is administered immediately – in other words, caught in the act. That's when it works the best.

I've always for years laughed at these experiments that they did on animals to learn about human behavior – you know, the rats and the monkeys and all that. But I'm going to break my own rule and talk about rats for a minute. You know those rats that were put in a cage and they had a blue button and a red button? And if they touched the blue button with their nose, they got a yummy rat treat. It rolled out of a little chute immediately. And if they touched the red one, they got a mild electric shock. What makes that work for training both positive and negative is the *immediacy* of it. The second they touched that red button they got a shock. And the instant they touched that blue one, they got something good. So, that's the same with spanking. It's more effective if you can catch them in the act. So, the point of that is that it's not about spanking or yummy rat treats either. It's about being immediate and consistent in our discipline.

Have you ever watched any of these nanny shows on TV? Nanny 911? Or any of those? Who would believe that you could, in just a few days, retrain a totally out of control three-year-old by putting them on a stool and making them sit there for thirty seconds? You don't have to spank them till their little bottoms are red. You just have to put them on a stool for thirty seconds *every* time they do what you don't want. The whole trick to it is *every* time. A mild punishment administered instantly and consistently is way more effective than severe punishment exacted later. That's what they do on that nanny show. That's why it works.

We meet people at work all the time...most of them have come from a bad background where they were abused. So they don't want to abuse their children. They have no boundaries. The kid gets totally out of control – irritates them to the max. They blow. They abuse their child. They feel remorse. It takes them back to how they were treated and the whole cycle just starts over again. They let their kid get away with murder until they're so frustrated that they blow, and it just keeps cycling around like that. The way to break that cycle is to just devote a few days – when that child is little – to every time that child does something wrong, you administer a very mild punishment immediately. That's how they train the rats to touch the blue button, right? It's just that mild, mild thing. If you watch those shows, you'll see that in just a little while those kids start to comply. You watch what's happening and you think, "Why would they even care to sit on a stool for thirty seconds?" It's what happens *every* time. Thirty seconds is a long time to a toddler. And they know that it's shaming. So they want to get away from that.

At our grandkids' house it didn't quite work that way at first. My daughter saw the nanny show and she got a trouble stool and put it in the living room. She put one of them on it and the other one cried because they wanted to be there, too. She said, "I think I'm in big trouble." I said, "Stay the course. Just hang in there. They'll figure it out pretty soon – what you're doing." That's how immediate and consistent discipline works – very important.

What else is important? This is probably the biggest thing that I talk to people about – *natural and logical consequences*. How does God get us to do what He wants us to do? How does He teach us things? So two things.

Natural consequences. What is a natural consequence? I gave this book to a lady that I was working with. It's called *Parenting With Love and Logic*, by Foster Cline and Jim Fay, and it's about natural and logical consequences. For my money, it's the best parenting book that I have read as far as technique and methods. I told her to read this book, and she came in, and she said, "Yesterday I was watering my house plants and I looked into the plant that I was pouring water on, and I saw that my son had left this little electronic computer game in there. It was soaking wet and ruined." She said, "Yesterday, before I read the book, I would have yelled at him and bought him a new one. Today, I handed it back to him and said, 'I'm so sorry you left your toy where it got wrecked.'" See, that's a natural consequence. He left the toy where it shouldn't be, so it got wrecked. "So it's your problem." See how he has to learn about life?

If you don't make your car payments, what happens? Mama buys you a new one? No! No, it gets repossessed, right? That's just a natural consequence of not making your payments. So, we all have to learn that to live in the real world. So we start with our kids when they're very young, letting them live with the consequences of their own misbehavior.

What do most of us do? "Don't forget to take your lunch." "Don't forget to take your coat to school." "Don't forget to take your homework with you." You know, some of you become the lunch police, the coat police, the homework police. Now, does God do that to us? No. He lets us suffer our own consequences, doesn't He?

When I was a kid in California, it was always cold in the mornings and warm in the afternoon. So I would take my coat, put it on, go to school, leave it in my locker, go home with the coat still in the locker, and then the next morning I'd have to go to school cold. It took me about six years to figure that out, but I finally did learn it – until last night when I came here without a coat because it was 85 where we live in Albuquerque and it was 50 degrees last night at the airport.

Josh read Proverbs to us today – a book filled with natural consequences, isn't it? I mean, that's what that book is all about. The boundaries are in place for us, as people, and we get to decide whether we will obey them or not. If we do, certain things will happen, and if we don't, certain things will happen. So we get to learn, by the natural consequences of our behavior, how to be. So that's why I like this approach with children. It just goes right along with what God does.

Let's look at a couple of them.

*For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, and He ponders all his paths. His own iniquities entrap the wicked man. Oh! He is caught in the cords of his sin. He shall die for lack of instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.*

Because God only tells us to do things that are good for us and He warns us off of things that will hurt us.

Can you think of any other natural consequences in life or in parenting? I'm going to go to the next part of this then – logical consequences. What is a logical consequence? This is a consequence that is applied by parents that ties back to, in some way, the boundary violation that took place. We do that when there is no immediate natural consequence. Jim Fay tells a story in this book about this lady who took her two elementary-aged kids to the grocery store. What do kids do when they are in the back seat and they know their mother or father can't do anything about it because they're driving? Well, they fight, right? So these two kids were fighting in the back seat of the car. Mother told them to stop fighting and they still didn't. So she did nothing. She went to the store. She went shopping. She came home. Next week it was time to go shopping again, and she said, "You know girls, you guys fought in the car last week while I was driving, and it was distracting. I was afraid it was going to be dangerous. So I can't take you to the store this week. And you're going to have to figure out how to pay for the baby sitter." See, the good part about that is, you get to think about what's going to happen. You get to think about what consequence to apply that ties back to the misbehavior. And it doesn't have to be immediate because it's logical.

Jim also told this story about his daughter's first date. She was supposed to be home at midnight. She didn't come in until one. She didn't call. So her mother and father were sitting on the couch waiting for her to come in. She came in. They jumped up. They ran over to her. They hugged her. They kissed her. They said, "Oh, we're so relieved that you're safe! We're so glad to see you! We love you so much! Let's go to bed." So they went to bed. Nothing happened. Two weeks later she wanted to go out again. They said, "Oh, we couldn't stand that. Stay home." She caused it, right? She couldn't go out because she didn't come in the time before. The consequence was tied directly back to her misbehavior. If you do that, kids will much more likely get the point – if the consequence is tied directly to it.

He told another story – just to give you another example of how this works – of a boy who was caught shoplifting. He was sixteen. And his father took him down to – I guess it was – a hearing. And it was determined at the hearing that he would have to go to court. So they came home, and his son said, "So, what's going to happen next?" So he said, "Well, I guess you're going to have to hire an attorney. You have to have an attorney to go to court." He said, "Well, how do I do that?" He said, "I don't know. I never hired one." Then he said, "I've heard that some people look them up in the phone book." So his son goes and he gets the phone book. A few days went by and he came to his dad, and he said, "Dad, you know they want to charge me six hundred dollars!" He said, "Yeah, attorneys are really expensive." He said, "How am I going to do that?" He said, "I don't know. What are you going to do?" He said, "You know, I did talk to the judge at the hearing and I learned that a parent can represent his child in a case like this in our state." "Would you do that for me, Dad?" He said, "Well, I don't know. I charge three hundred dollars an hour." "Would you really do that for me, Dad?" "Yeah. Do you have three hundred dollars?" "No." "Do you have anything *worth* three hundred dollars?" "Well, my

motorcycle.” “Okay, I’ll hold your motorcycle until you can earn three hundred dollars to pay me.” He said, “I won!” He said, “I had him mowing lawns for all the elderly people in the neighborhood for months! He got to meet all the neighbors. I got the bike away from him for six months. And he got to hear me tell the judge what a great kid my son is!”

So you see, he didn’t solve his problem for him. He put it back to him. He was the one that stole the stuff from the store. He did support him, but he allowed the son to feel the full weight of what he’d done – just like God does with us.

But we can think about the fact that a lot of us get locked into one or two things that we do, and usually they’re not very creative. What I like about this logical consequences thing is, you don’t have to do anything right away. You can think about what you’re going to do. Because the consequence – if it’s tied to the misbehavior – doesn’t have to happen until the next time. So you can consult people. You can get people to help you figure out what would work. My adult clients love to sit around with me in my office and brainstorm about what to do the next time something happens that isn’t good for the child. So we sit and think about how to create a logical consequence that’s going to help the child learn to behave.

These are the things that I use in my work every day with parents who have children that are, generally, really angry and really out of control. These are the things that I use to *teach* parents how to gain control in their home so they can start building positive relationships with their children. Mostly I ask them to read books about these things because they’re so easy to learn. They don’t need to have me walk through every single step. They can go read the book. Then they can come in and we can talk about it and we can brainstorm a few things. And pretty soon things are going better.

You’ll notice that spanking is not on this list. There are a lot of things, I suppose, that disciplinarians would want me to teach parents about how to bring their children under control, but the church that I was a part of for many years took a control approach to children, and that approach was an unmitigated disaster. It fostered the discouragement and the spiritual malaise of several generations of people. I just don’t think that it worked very well. These things that we’ve covered today – so far – are the very latest strategies – and also the oldest ones – for effective parenting. They are light years ahead of the things I used to do with my own kids and that I used to teach from the pulpit. But as a parent, or as a congregation, if these things right here – these six things – are all we know, then we’re really missing the thing that makes all these things work. What we need to do is go on to all the reasons why these things are so difficult for us to apply. That’s what we’re going to do this afternoon when we talk about effective Christian parenting.

So I believe this can be a time of personal growth for everybody here, whether they have children or not. I did this seminar two weeks ago and we had people in their late seventies all the way down to seventeen years of age actively involved in the material we’re going to cover – because everybody can think about and talk about their families. So, hope to see you this afternoon and tomorrow, and we’ll get after it at that time.

