

DISCIPLINE THAT
CONNECTS
WITH YOUR
CHILD'S HEART

**Building Faith, Wisdom, and Character
in the Messes of Daily Life**

JIM AND LYNNE JACKSON



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We dedicate this book to all the parents we've been privileged to journey alongside. Though you may have come to us for guidance, you have been our guides as well, sharing the stories of your lives and learning. Your hunger to grow and your Spirit-led applications of things we teach keep us ever humble, curious, and eager to serve more parents like you.

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This book would not exist without the encouragement of many parents who sat under our teaching and kept asking us to put our thoughts in writing. The essence of the content grows out of our combined personal and professional experiences with people who have embodied grace with us—even in our worst moments.

Our parents, though by no means perfect, taught us about faithfulness in marriage and to love no matter what. Our kids—Daniel, Bethany, and Noah—accepted both our stumbling efforts to practice what we preach and our many apologies for blowing it.

We've had many mentors who showed us that discipline can be wise and gentle. Our past colleagues at Courage Center, Oxboro Church, Grace Church, TreeHouse, Rolling Acres, and Capable Kids showed us the importance of grace for all people, and to look beneath the surface of challenges to find the gift in each person. Our beloved pastors—Dave and Donna Heinrich, Joel Johnson, and Kevin Sharpe—persistently pointed us to Jesus and encouraged us to walk in our calling. And since 1990,

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a team of faithful donors have given sacrificially so that we could share the grace we've grown in with thousands of families.

Once we typed our ideas into a reasonable format and painstakingly agreed on them, Greg Johnson strongly believed this project had something unique to offer in a sea of parenting resources, and introduced us to the wonderful folks at Bethany House Publishers. Our editor, Christopher Soderstrom, persistently and graciously took our stumbling efforts to express ourselves and made the concepts flow.

Finally, to our amazing colleagues on the Connected Families and Safe-Generations teams: You put wind under the wings of our passion to inspire and equip parents to embody God's grace and truth!

Foreword

How do you fill your home with discipline and grace? Is it possible to build character in your child without crushing his or her spirit? Is there a strategy that will help kids to one day become responsible adults who love God? I believe the answers to these questions are found in this incredible book by Jim and Lynne Jackson. *Discipline That Connects With Your Child's Heart* is a strategy of parenting that is healthy, positive, and authentic. Jim and Lynne bring years of successful experience working with families, as well as having raised their own children. They know firsthand that parenting isn't always easy.

The principles in this book work whether you are trying to create a media-safe home, talk with your kids about healthy sexuality, build healthy morals and values, deal with homework, or help a child think through the consequences of unwise choices. I tell people all the time, if you're married, read at least one marriage book a year; likewise, if you're a parent, read at least one parenting book a year. This is *the* parenting book.

I absolutely love the way the Jacksons have laid out a simple (but not easy, because life isn't easy) plan for connecting with your child's heart. Their brilliant Correct, Coach, Connect, and

Foundation graphic gives us words, actions, and a strategy for helping our kids thrive, and helps us stay connected with our kids even as we discipline and give them boundaries. Let's face it: There is pain in life. I like to say, "It's the pain of discipline or the pain of regret." Paul taught his disciple Timothy to "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness," and in essence, that is a purposeful goal for every parent.

I'm so glad you have chosen to invest your time reading this book. Parenting will be the most meaningful job and most difficult job you will ever have. But you will gain some great wisdom and be more effective as you put these wonderful principles into practice.

Jim Burns, PhD
President, HomeWord

Dear Reader

In 1992 Lynne was shifting her occupational therapy career to serve kids with high sensitivities and behavior challenges, and Jim started leading support groups for parents of high-risk teens. The parents we served were overwhelmed, tired, and discouraged, and they found conventional teaching lacking. Determined to offer God’s grace along with practical tools, we developed a simple framework that offered fresh hope and new skills.

Meanwhile, we had three preschool kids and were dealing with ADHD, allergies, and asthma. When we were considering a fourth child, a good friend said, “You are the most stressed family I know. Your three kids are like nine. Why would you want twelve?”

We stopped at three. You’ll get to know each of them as you read through this book, as they were at the center of our learning journey.

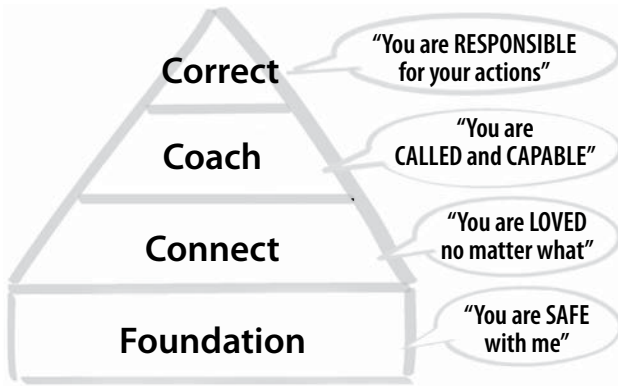
Like the parents we served, we were overwhelmed. But as we applied what we were learning, we found hope and purpose in our chaos. We paid close attention to ensure we were teaching not just theories but useful tools. We considered:

- Is this transferrable to every family? (Yes!)
- Is God’s grace firmly at the center? (Yes!)
- Do parents of all kinds find these ideas helpful? (Yes!)

Spurred on by those we served, we embarked on our calling to inspire and equip parents to embody God’s grace and truth in compelling ways.

The book you’re holding is the culmination of our twenty years of experience working with parents every day. In its pages you will find an approach to corrective discipline that focuses on a cross section of the larger framework that guides all our efforts (see more at disciplinethatconnects.org).

In brief, effective parents build a strong **Foundation** on God’s grace and truth that spills over to their kids. They communicate the message, “*You are safe with me.*”



4 Actions, 4 Messages

As they do this, they **Connect** with their kids by loving, enjoying, and celebrating them. This conveys, “*You are loved no matter what!*”

These parents **Coach** their kids to grow into their calling as unique creations of God, thus communicating, “*You are called and capable!*”

Despite parents’ best efforts, kids will misbehave. Thoughtful parents **Correct** their children with wisdom and love, aiming

Dear Reader

for more than right behavior, as they build sound identities anchored in the message, “*You are **responsible** for your actions.*”

Discipline That Connects With Your Child’s Heart is an exploration of how to give your best disciplinary effort by breathing life into these four messages.

This way of parenting brings God’s love, grace, and truth to life, even in squabbles and challenges with your kids. Like one mom said, “Discipline that Connects isn’t a quick fix, it’s a lasting fix!” If you’re looking for truly long-term impact, this book is for you.

Our kids need this—and our world needs them!

CHAPTER 1

The Lessons Our Kids Truly Need

Karla was fed up.

“My son, Nathan, has been nothing but trouble lately,” she told us. “Every day after school, he just drops his backpack in the entry and goes straight to his computer obsession. When I confront him for playing games before doing his homework, he sasses me and storms off. So I’ve grounded him from the computer and from going outside.

“Sometimes I work hard at setting consequences to make this stop. Other times I feel so tired that I just let him do what he wants. Yesterday he had another huge meltdown about it, but this can’t keep happening. He’s got to learn!”

Karla was exhausted, irate, overwhelmed, and searching for answers, all at the same time.

“What are you hoping he will learn?” I (Jim) asked.

“I’m hoping he’ll learn his lesson,” she said.

“I see. Which lesson?”

“That getting away with disrespect in this house just isn’t going to happen,” she said, growing more angry and determined.

“So far, how well do you think he’s learning the lesson?”

“That’s the problem—it seems the harder I try, the worse he gets. I’ve read books and been to seminars. Sometimes I’ve been pretty tough to let him know who’s the boss; that just made him madder. I tried diplomacy, but he just doesn’t listen. I’ve tried time-outs. I take away his iPod or computer. I ground him. Sometimes I ignore him and hope he’ll learn on his own. *Nothing* I do connects with him. None of it works.”



Karla’s experience illustrates two extremes that parents often embody—extremes that illustrate common difficulties regarding how to discipline. Many bounce between a tight, controlling grip and a discouraged, exhausted surrender when they’re too tired or preoccupied to keep trying. Whether it’s through aggressive dominance or through passive resignation, they’re hoping that somehow *something* works to make their kids behave.

But when parents approach discipline this way, their children rarely learn the desired lessons. While parents aim to communicate the importance of respect, responsibility, and, in the big picture, faith, instead they often convey an altogether different set of messages. They end up arguing through a snowballing cycle of frustration, defiance, and disillusionment. This ultimately gives kids the sense that they control their parents’ emotions. Worse yet, the attitudes and actions they’re seeing in their parents imply to them that parents aren’t worthy of their respect.

But parents can get out of this negative spiral as they connect with their child’s heart during discipline. You *can* connect with your child’s heart through discipline! We’ve witnessed the Discipline that Connects approach powerfully transform the experience of families whose parents embrace it. It’s centered

on four biblical principles (see chapter 2). They are simple yet profound concepts that guide parents to think, act, and love in alignment with God’s heart for discipline.

Parents who learn and apply these principles often see dramatic improvements in their family relationships. Even if changes in their children’s behavior come more slowly than they hope, parents themselves learn to be peaceful and confident in their efforts, driven more by what’s best for each child than by the urgency of the moment.

Further, as parents grow, their children will see the difference. As parents become calmer, grounded in peace and purpose, they become far better positioned to influence their children toward wiser responses and decisions.

Connection Makes All the Difference

Let’s revisit Karla’s situation to see how these principles might guide her.

Karla notices Nathan’s unopened backpack in the entry and hears the unmistakable sounds of a computer game coming from his room. Instantly she begins to feel angry about his repeated disregard for her instructions. Recognizing her growing agitation, she realizes that a big power-grabbing reaction won’t get her where she wants to go. She also acknowledges that some of her anger has been the result of a stressful day at work.

Taking all this into account, Karla slows her pace, takes a deep breath, and prays, “Lord, you love Nathan, and so do I. I need your wisdom to deal with this situation. Help me to be a *safe* parent.”

When Karla walks into Nathan’s bedroom, she gently places her hand on his shoulder and sits beside him. In a nonthreatening but firm tone, she asks, “Honey, do you remember what I’ve asked you to do before playing computer games?”

He shrugs, saying nothing.

“I know you love this game, but I want to make sure you’re listening when I explain the consequences for playing it before doing homework.” She pauses, hoping he’ll stop the game on his own.

When he doesn’t, she continues calmly, yet slightly firmer, “You’re so persistent. I love that about you. But at the moment, it’s not helping you. If you pause the game right now, you can play again after homework. If you don’t, then I’ll decide how long before you can play again.”

Nathan hits the pause button, looks grudgingly at his mother, and mutters, “What’s the big deal?”

Karla softens. “I appreciate your attention. The ‘deal’ is that you’re still disobeying by playing before finishing your assignments.”

He takes a quick breath, which tells her a complaint is coming. So she adds, “I’ve seen that you’re really good at this game—maybe that’s part of what tempts you to ignore responsibilities?”

She pauses again, this time wanting her statement to sink in while she determines how exactly to empathize with her son. Once she’s sure of herself, she goes on: “Sometimes I struggle with things this way too. We could talk about that, or we could talk about how you can manage homework and still get to enjoy the game. What do you prefer?”

(Note that so far, in their brief exchange, Karla has skillfully offered Nathan choices and put the decision in his hands. She’s managed this not only without compromising her parental role, but also, as she had intended, with a touch of empathy.)

“Whatever,” Nathan says. He’s off balance. Usually by now he is fighting back; this time his mom’s kindness has dropped his usual defensiveness. While he hasn’t really listened to the choices she offered, he also isn’t feeling trapped.

Ordinarily Karla’s anger and combativeness frustrate Nathan and center his focus on her. Now that she’s in control of herself, he is feeling the weight of his own choices.

His response surprises her. “I just hate my math teacher. And the homework is stupid. It’s so confusing, and I’m never going to use this stuff in real life!”

“Ah, I get it,” she says, gently. She feels a surge of both satisfaction and hope at realizing she’s learned the root of his homework avoidance—without having had to lecture or badger him. She empathetically rephrases his words.

“Things a little tough at school right now?” she asks.

“Yeah. No kidding.” Nathan looks at the floor.

“Sounds like you’re pretty frustrated and discouraged. How about this: Why don’t I help you get started on your math? Over dinner, let’s figure out what could help you feel better about math and follow the rules about homework.”

Nathan isn’t enthused, but at least he is opening up to her.

Karla’s discipline is *connecting*.

She set the stage for a constructive process of coming alongside her son as a guide. She didn’t allow herself to be drawn into Nathan’s drama. She created a safe place for him to share his real feelings. Building on this foundation, she now was *with* him, no longer seen as an opponent or a controlling authority figure.

Karla lovingly kept her position of authority, put responsibility into Nathan’s hands, and gained respect. This scenario illustrates one way Discipline that Connects principles have helped hundreds of parents strengthen their influence and bond with their children through the kinds of situations that often drive families apart.

Typical Discipline vs. Connective Discipline

Parents generally respond to their children’s misbehavior in one of two ways. The first is *domineering*—charging into the situation and controlling outcomes through demands for immediate obedience and either threats or use of strong consequences. The

main aim of this approach is, “That behavior must stop—now!” The parent’s own strong feelings of anxiety, anger, embarrassment, and confusion are oftentimes hidden beneath this primary goal. These intense emotions can cause parents to get as loud and demanding as needed in an effort to “win.”

In a real sense, then, that approach is about kids being defeated. If “winning” equates to gaining instant control, then these tactics might be effective for a time. However, no one really wins when this is a parent’s standard approach to discipline, because kids either comply to stay out of trouble or eventually rebel against the control. Either way, they never learn how to be self-guided, and once they’re free from the controlling parent, they tend to lose control of themselves—and their lives.

The other typical parental response is *passivity*—giving in or giving up. Sometimes parents allow the kids to get away with various choices and actions because they believe certain situations and confrontations are just too difficult, especially as the kids move from being toddlers to teenagers. Even if there is little or no peace, parents in this mode are trying to “keep the peace” anyway. They turn their backs on battles, clean up the messes, and hope they aren’t offending and alienating their kids.

They tend to feel weak and wounded. They regularly say (for example) that they feel like doormats, or that their kids don’t appreciate them. Their kids are likely to grow up feeling entitled and accustomed to getting what they want.

Virtually every parent is capable of getting stuck in one or both of these extremes. But none of us wants to live there! Parents who commit to Discipline that Connects with their children’s hearts can little by little find their way into a new normal. If you want to learn a way of disciplining that will profoundly influence your children’s behavior, their development, their future, and their faith, keep reading.

Our hope and prayer is that as you grow in your understanding of the following principles, you will set goals for

discipline that go far beyond merely controlling or avoiding your child's misbehavior. We pray that your goals will encompass modeling God's grace, truth, and love in all situations, no matter how difficult. To any extent that up to now you may have "missed the mark," be sure of this: Living this new way will have a lasting impact on your children as they see faith come alive in your home.

Discipline puts to the test what we most deeply believe. Is Christ's love longer, wider, higher, and deeper than our children's (and our) misbehavior? Is God's mercy present in our ugly conflicts, ultimately drawing our hearts back together—and to Him? Does God's Word truly bring valuable protective wisdom that gets us back on track after we sin? Is the Holy Spirit's power more than sufficient to keep us growing in faith and character even when we struggle?

Simply stated, *corrective discipline is a wonderful opportunity either to reinforce or to tear down our efforts to train kids to know, love, and follow Jesus*. If we ourselves are Jesus-followers and want to pass on our faith, but we err foundationally in how we discipline them, they will likely conclude that the elemental spiritual principles of our faith don't meaningfully reach into real life.

Discipline that's effective in *discipleship* will flow from a parent's heart of humility, forgiveness, wisdom, love, and vision for a child's life. It must make sense to the child to win his or her respect. We can know that discipline has connected with our child's heart when he or she is developing a desire to know and love Jesus and to walk in the grace of obedience.

MY RESPONSE

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- What stands out to me about the heart-connection approach to discipline?

- In what way(s) have I exhibited one or more of the elements of Karla's thoughtful, connective approach when I've disciplined a child?
- What aspect(s) of my current disciplinary methods would I say could use the most adjustment or change? What are the adjustments or changes?