
COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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What is *Your* Parenting Style?

Have you ever wondered what your parenting style is, and how your style affects the decisions you make with your children? You may think to yourself, *Do I even have a parenting style? Or, is my parenting style really important?* The answer to both questions is yes. Let me explain. Your parenting style simply refers to your method and approach to parenting your child. Every person has a plan and method which they use to parent, even if it is not defined. You may use the method your parents used in parenting you, or one that you have chosen for yourself. No matter the source of your parenting style, you must understand that it will dramatically affect your decision-making with your children and their lives in real ways.

However, the most important question to ask yourself, especially if you are a Christian; *is my style of parenting biblical?* Do you use biblical principles to determine your parenting decisions, or do you follow the latest fad or the newest pop psychology you heard on the afternoon talk shows? When considering this all important question of how you will parent your children, shouldn't you look to your heavenly Father for direction and guidance? Should you not allow God to direct your steps?

You may be thinking, *Does the Bible have anything to say about different parenting styles?* Yes, it does. The Bible gives several examples of very effective parenting methods, and some disastrous parenting methods. As you read this publication, see if you can identify your parenting style? Simply line up your method of parenting with the biblical models that I will refer to in this article.

Another important question to consider, especially if you are in a two parent home, *Is my parenting style the same as my spouse?* If you are arguing on a

regular basis with your mate about how to parent your children, I guarantee you that you have different parenting styles. Studying this publication together will be the first step in bringing harmony in your relationship with your spouse regarding your parenting style.

The last question you must answer is this, what is the best and most effective parenting style? Is there such a thing? Yes! God has clear and direct commands for parents to follow. These commands will naturally lead you to a godly parenting style. However, knowing these commands is not enough to make the changes necessary. You must obey these commands if you want to become the most effective parent.

What are the different parenting styles found in Scripture?

1. The permissive parent.

As you read 1 Samuel 2:12; 17; 29-30, you will observe one of the best biblical examples of a permissive parent in Eli the priest. His example proves the fact that just because you know the truths of Scripture does not mean that you will automatically be a good parent. Eli surely was not, and he paid a very high price for his failure to act in obedience to God!

How was Eli a permissive parent? As you read the biblical account you will find that He did nothing to stop his sons from sexually exploiting the women at the Tabernacle where the Israelites came to worship. Eli's sons also took by force the best sacrificial meat from the people who came to worship God. Eli told his sons that they should not do this, but took no action to actually stop them from continuing in their evil behavior toward the people of God (1 Sam. 2:23-24).

God judged Eli severely for his permissive parenting, and ultimately removed him from ministry because he did not stop his sons from doing evil in the house of the Lord. What was Eli's problem? God told Eli that he had

honored his sons more than he honored God (1 Sam. 2:29). Think carefully about this. You do not want to fall into this category. God wants you to honor Him in all that you do, especially in your parenting. You honor God by doing what he commands (Rev. 4:11).

What are the general characteristics of a permissive parent? This parenting style may give verbal commands to a child, but will take little action to correct the disobedient behavior. The permissive parent usually does not like the idea of discipline, because he or she equates disciple with meanness.

The permissive parent will usually give few boundaries to his or her children. Usually, if a child screams long enough and loud enough, the child will get his or her way. A permissive parent will usually give in to most of the whims of their child. Permissive parents who give in to most of their child's desires will usually have out of control children. These children argue and talk back to their parents in a disrespectful way. If your home is full of disrespectful exchanges, you are most likely a permissive parent. Your children should be permitted to disagree with you, but they must disagree in a respectful manner.

If you equate firmness and discipline with being mean, consider these passages. God is firm, but He is not mean. Scripture equates God's firm hand with His mercy (Ps. 136:11-12). In addition, God's Word always connects His love for His children with His discipline (Prov. 13:24).

A permissive parent also equates guidance and instruction as meddling in their child's life.

If a permissive parent has any rules at all, these rules are rarely or inconsistently enforced. If a permissive parent gives any warning to a child, it is not enforced and is followed by more warnings that are also not enforced. After being pushed to his or her limit by

"She is your companion and your wife by covenant" Mal. 2:14

non-compliance, the permissive parent usually erupts with anger and frustration.

Permissive parents will feel like slaves to their own children, because of the constant disrespect, manipulation, and confusion this parenting style brings into the home. In reality, permissive parents are simply inconsistent. He or she considers discipline and parenting simply too much work. Without discipline this parenting style usually produces a very self-oriented child, because he or she is left to become what they are by nature, selfish.

If you would like to study another example of permissive parenting, read the account of Samson's life (Judges 13-16).

2. The uninvolved parent.

King David is one of the best examples of an uninvolved parenting style. David was a military man who was away from his children and served as the King of Israel for much of his life, but this was not what caused him to become an uninvolved parent. David had a minimum of six wives and at least nineteen sons. Most likely David also had many daughters as well, though only Tamar is mentioned in Scripture.

Primarily, David's lack of involvement and permissiveness is seen in his refusal to discipline his son Adonijah. Scripture declares that David "*had not rebuked him at any time*" (1 Kings 1:5-6). In other words, David was totally uninvolved in the discipline of his son.

In addition, David refused to deal with Absalom for killing his brother Amnon after the rape of his sister Tamar. David also failed to allow God's law and Israel's justice system to deal righteously with Amnon's action, or Absalom's murder of Amnon. Even after David allowed Absalom to return to Jerusalem, he neglected to meet with him to resolve the issues (2 Sam. 14:28). David was an uninvolved parent.

What are the general characteristics of an uninvolved parent? This parenting style is much like the permissive parent, but is even worse. The uninvolved parent has little or no actual involvement with their child. This parent is usually detached from their child's life, because he or she is self-involved with other interests that are more important to them.

This parent is self-oriented and neglectful of his or her responsibilities to parent. He

or she has few if any expectations, little to no meaningful communication with the child, and few if any rules.

An uninvolved parent usually produces very unhappy children who are the least ready to deal with the pressures of life. Why is this true? Again, this parenting style produces a very self-oriented child because there is little correction of this child's selfish nature. Thus, this child believes he or she can do anything they want and get away with it. David's children are the best example of this fact.

3. The over-protective parent.

What are the general characteristics of this parenting style? The overprotective parent bases most if not all of their decisions regarding parenting on fear and insecurity. This parent has made the decision to protect the child from anything harmful that could possibly happen in life. Fear is the motivator and basis for this parent's action. However, the Bible teaches that, "*The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe*" (Prov. 29:25). The over-protective parent is always overly concerned about safety, and therefore, will restrict a child from any activity, sport, or social interaction because of the fear of what *might* happen. This parent not only fears what people may do, but they also fear circumstances over which they have no control. Therefore, an over-protective parent is usually also very controlling. They want to control every possible circumstance that may happen.

A permissive parent will usually give in to most of the whims of their child.

Does this mean that a parent should not be concerned with the safety of their child? No, that is not what I am saying. Protecting your children from harm is a natural desire, but the overprotective parent is out of balance because of fear about what *might* happen. Fear and risk are the driving forces for this parent. This over-concern with what *might* happen will also be communicated to the child by the words, actions, and behaviors of the parent.

An overprotective parent usually fails to see that they are living out their own fears through their children. This parent has usually been abused, neglected, or

deeply hurt growing up. Or, they have simply been raised by another over-protective and fearful parent.

What the over-protective parent fails to realize is that from the moment of birth children are on a path to independence. This is how children grow and mature. They must learn the skill of independent decision-making and problem solving. With each year that passes, your child must become more and more independent in his or her thinking. But, that means they will encounter problems and must make mistakes if they are ever to learn how to think and problem solve on their own. Children must be allowed to become independent as they grow older, especially in their teenage years. Yes, this may result in some poor decisions. Jesus promised His disciples that in this world they would experience "*tribulation,*" but He also promised that He would be with them in the midst of these trials (John 16:33; Matt. 28:20). This is the fine balance a parent must also walk as they guide their children. You must constantly encourage your children to make good decisions, and when they find themselves in difficult situations, be there to help them work through issues without controlling them. You cannot live their life for them. They must grow in their maturity and wise decision-making, which results in a successful adult life.

4. The authoritarian parent.

The authoritarian parent is best seen in the life of King Saul. He was an angry, threatening, and vindictive man. King Saul was so harsh in his treatment of David that he ended up losing the respect of his own son Jonathan (1 Sam 20:30).

What are the general characteristics of the authoritarian parent? He runs his house with an iron fist. He or she is usually very insecure about themselves and their position in the family. This parent is usually control oriented. Children in an authoritarian household have no voice or input whatsoever. They are "*to be seen and not heard.*" An authoritarian parent will usually be overly-strict and will use anger, yelling, threats, and harsh discipline to keep control. An authoritarian parent will be rules oriented – "*do it because I said so*" and will usually give little or no explanation or reasoning behind the rules. However, this behavior will exasperate and cause a child to lose heart (Col. 3:21). Why? The child simply does

not sense the love of the parent. The authoritarian parent has a *“my way or the highway attitude.”* He or she declares the law and obedience is the only path.

This parent needs to remember what Dr. James Dobson said about parenting. This is lesson worth repeating. He said, *“Rules without relationship will always equal rebellion.”* If you are an authoritarian parent, anger and yelling only cause your children to lose respect for you and rebel against you. You may think that you are in control, but in reality, you are losing control. In fact, you are losing the most important part of your family relationship, or for that matter any human relationship, which is respect (Heb. 12:9; Eph. 5:33; 1 Peter 3:7).

An authoritarian parent who is harsh and controlling can produce in their child behavior modification, but will not affect the real change desired, which is of the heart. Anger, yelling, and threats will produce temporary change in a child’s actions, but will not change the heart. Why? Changing the heart is a willing decision from within, and cannot be forced from without.

God has declared in both the Old and New Testaments that a heart change is what He is after. The Father declared that His desire was that the children of Israel, *“may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, And whose spirit was not faithful to God”* (Ps. 78:8). Jesus taught the very same thing when speaking about His desire for relationship with His people. Jesus said, *“These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me”* (Matt. 15:8).

Note that all of these parenting styles create frustration in a parent and will bring little peace to the home. These results should bring you to the conclusion that there must be a better way. There is!

5. The authoritative parent.

The authoritative parent is not to be confused with the authoritarian parent. The authoritative parent is the parenting style you should aspire to have in your home. Solomon is the best example of an authoritative parent. After growing up with an uninvolved father, Solomon reverses directions in his own life. In

Proverbs, Solomon wrote extensively concerning the love and discipline of children, and how to guide them in the way of the Lord. It is clear that Solomon wrote these proverbs for the guidance of his son. In Proverbs 1: 8 he warns, *“My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother.”* Twenty-six times Solomon addressed his instructions to *“My son.”* Solomon very likely came to these conclusions about parenting because of what he observed in his own family life, and specifically his father David’s parenting style.

An overprotective parent usually fails to see that they are living out their own fears through their children.

What are the general characteristics of an authoritative parent? This parenting style does not want to control, but guide a child’s heart. An authoritative parent is assertive, but not intrusive in a child’s life. Therefore, Solomon instructed, counseled, and lovingly guided his children. Note his own words: *“My son, if your heart is wise, my heart will rejoice – indeed, I myself; Yes, my inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak right things...Hear, my son, and be wise; and guide your heart in the way”* (Prov. 23:15-16; 19). As you read Solomon’s words you can see that he authoritatively instructed his son, but encouraged him to make a choice to guide his own heart in the way. Therefore, authoritative parents want their children to think and make wise and reasoned choices. This style of parenting desires children to become self-disciplined in their decision making. In all studies that I have read, both secular and Christian, this style of parenting has the greatest potential for producing the most well-adjusted and happy children.

Other authoritative parents that you can read about in Scripture would include Elkannah and Hannah the parents of Samuel the Prophet (1 Sam. 1-2), Zechariah and Elizabeth the parents of John the Baptist (Luke 1), Mordecai the adoptive parent of Esther (Esther 1-10), and Naomi as the single parental figure in the life of Ruth (Ruth 1-4). Each of these parents were authoritative, but not

authoritarian in their parenting. Each child became a very effective instrument in the hand of God.

What is God’s parenting style?

Now, you may think this is a ridiculous question, but it is not. We are constantly asked to become conformed into the image of our Maker, so let’s consider the example of God’s parenting style. The Lord promises, *“I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty”* (2 Cor. 6:18). God wants to be involved, authoritative, and instructive of you His child. So, think about your heavenly Father’s parenting style. How does He parent?

1. The Father loves you and wants involvement with you. God told Jeremiah, *“I have loved you with an everlasting love”* (Jer. 31:3). Jesus said, *“For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God”* (John 16:27)... and, *“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men”* (Matt. 4:19)...And, *“I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father”* (John 10:14-15). Jesus wanted to know and be known by those He called to follow Him, because He sincerely loved them. Therefore, as a parent, you too must be willing to love and become involved with your children.

2. The Father communicates clear boundaries for you to follow as His child. Jesus said, *“No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all thing that I heard from My Father I have made known to you”* (John 15:15). See also (Prov. 4:3-4). Therefore, as a parent you must communicate to your children all things that they need to know for a successful life.

3. The Father is not controlling, manipulative, or over-protective, because He gives you freedom over all non-moral issues in your life. From the beginning, God gave Adam and Eve the freedom to eat of any of the trees of the Garden (Gen. 2:16-17). He did not dictate over these issues. However, He did communicate a moral boundary so they would not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You must also have that balance in your own parenting. You must draw clear moral

boundaries and yet grant freedom to your children over non-moral issues.

4. The Father is very loving, forgiving, and merciful when you fail (Heb. 8:12). He is ready to forgive, and willing to receive all who come to Him for forgiveness. He is approachable. Are you forgiving and merciful when your children fail?

5. The Father also disciplines and corrects you when you disobey and rebel against Him (Prov. 3:12; Heb. 12:7). He will not look the other way when you sin. As a parent you must be willing to use all forms of discipline at your disposal to hold secure moral boundaries within the family.

6. The Father models the truth as an example. This is why Jesus came into this world to reveal the Father's heart and demonstrate His love (John 13:15). Being an example to your children is one of the most powerful and authoritative teaching tools you possess as a parent. Are you an example to your children of love, truth, mercy, grace, and giving?

7. The Father is encouraging and comforting in a balanced way. Paul told the Thessalonian church, "You know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:11-12). Children need your personal involvement which allows you to be authoritative in loving correction and comfort when they fail.

8. The Father is also very protective as He guards us from real harm (Heb. 11:23). Your children must know that you will protect them when a real threat comes their way. Doing so will only assure them that you truly care about them.

9. Last, the Father is a provider for His children (2 Cor. 12:14). Being a provider demonstrates His involvement and care for us as His children. His provision gives us assurance of His care and leads us into a deeper relationship with Him. Your sincere care for your children will do the same in constantly deepening your relationship with them.

May God enable each of you to become an authoritative, balanced, and caring parent that can lead your children to mature adulthood. May God give you the

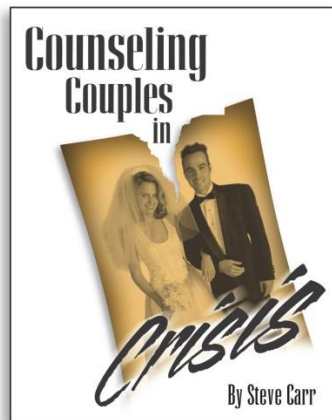
wisdom to see His path, and the power to walk in it!

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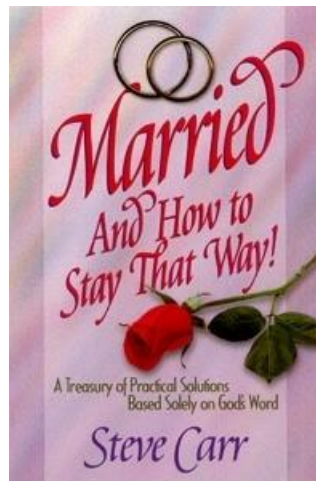
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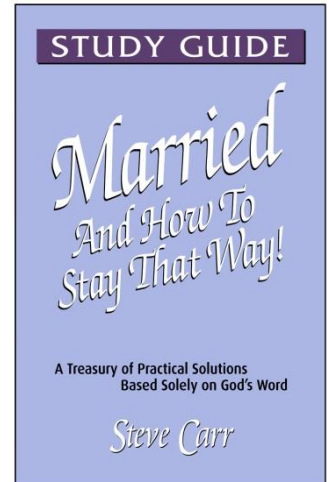
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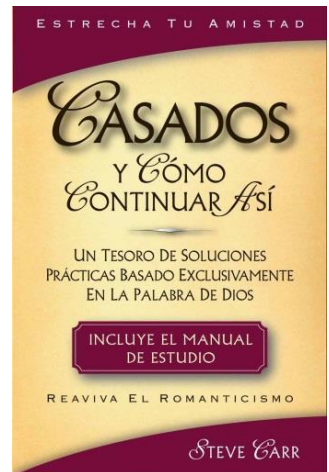
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