

**September
In the Year
of Mercy**

**Expect
Goodness**



VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1

Teaching the Way of Love

SEPTEMBER, 2015

PLEASE PRAY THAT

- That families may see this new school year as an opportunity for growth in faith and character.
- That all of God's children may see the beauty and goodness He created inside of them, and may work with His grace to make it fully realized.
- That we may learn to balance high expectations and forgiveness when those expectations are not met.
- Young people may have the courage to forge life-long, faithful commitments.
- That 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 are able to provide for the health and well-being of their family.

Setting Expectations of Goodness

Summer went by in the blink of an eye and school is back in session. Some parents greet the end of summer with a tinge of sadness. Some greet the new school year with a bit of relief. On one hand, summer freedom gives rise to summer fun and increased family time. On the other hand,



unstructured time easily leads to boredom, restlessness, and trouble. The school year means more demands, more rushing around, and less free time. But it also means structure and routine. The truth is, we really are blessed to have both the freedom of summer and the structure of the school year. The new school year is a perfect time to set standards and to work toward personal and family goals.

There are many standards that we commonly expect of our children. We expect them to get up on time, to eat breakfast, maybe to clear their breakfast dishes, to brush their teeth, and to get out the door on time. We expect them to come home and do their homework (before video games, right?), to help with chores, and to spend time with the family. We expect them to practice personal hygiene and to get to bed at a reasonable time. And all of these expectations are good! Not only do they help the family run more smoothly, they can teach our children self-discipline and self-respect – and they can play an important role in establishing good and healthy habits for the future.

All of these expectations flow naturally out of the structure of the daily routine. They are fairly easy for us to set. But, they are not enough. We should also put some thought into expectations for our children that don't come quite so naturally from our daily routine; expectations that influence the development of our children's character.

What is Character?

Our character is the part of our personality that is most in our control! While our temperament is our inherited, biologically grounded emotional makeup, our character is made up of our moral choices and the virtues and vices that they form. Temperamentally, we may be high or low energy, quick or slow tempered. But our character determines if our high energy means that we're friendly, helpful and productive or if we're restless, self-indulgent, or mean. Character can determine if our low energy means peacefulness and mindfulness, or if it means laziness and sullenness. And our character is shaped by what we continually choose to do.

Because humanity passes by way of the family...

How Parents Shape the Character of Their Children

Ultimately the character formed in your children will be determined by their own choices. But, parents can have a powerful influence on what children choose and how their children's character will develop.

First of all, character is developed primarily through habits. Habits established in childhood lay the groundwork for habits as adults. Think about your own life – do you have any good habits that you started when you were a child? You may even be able to think of a habit or two that you have today because your parents encouraged it in you at a young age. On the other hand, you may also have good habits that you struggle to develop because you never got the hang of it as a child. Parents who encourage good habits – and especially moral virtue – in their children make these habits easier to grow when their children choose them in adulthood.

Second, parents can show their child how attractive a good character is. On one hand, children have a natural attraction to good character. Most superheroes are more than just a superpower. They also have outstanding character – a strong sense of justice, a strong sense of mercy, concern for protecting the innocent. An outstanding character is extremely appealing. That is why parents must strive to show children what a good character looks like in real life – and explain why it's so attractive.

Finally, parents have the privilege and the duty to identify and call out the strengths of their children. We mentioned how our temperaments can be shaped in good ways or in bad. Parents have the opportunity to help their children shape their temperament toward the good.

Whether or not you're looking forward to the end of summer and the beginning of school, this is like any other new beginning – filled with potential and promise. It's a perfect time to look for the potential and promise in our children and to nudge them toward the goodness that we know God wants for them.

Here is your September Challenge

Think about your children's character right now. Think about these three things:

1. What emotional patterns do your children have that could be shaped by their character? Here are some examples of emotional patterns: high or low energy, introversion or extroversion, quick or slow temper.
2. What character strengths do your children already display? This could be "low-hanging fruit" that your children could easily strengthen and see the beauty and benefit of becoming a good person.
3. What character weaknesses do your children have? What habits, routines, rewards, or other structures could you put in place to help them work on these weaknesses?

Based on these three questions, choose one or two good habits that you and your child can work together on developing in her. Be sure to make it a positive project rather than an accusation that they somehow don't measure up. Let your children also see you working on the project of your own character. What habits do you need to strengthen or develop?

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.