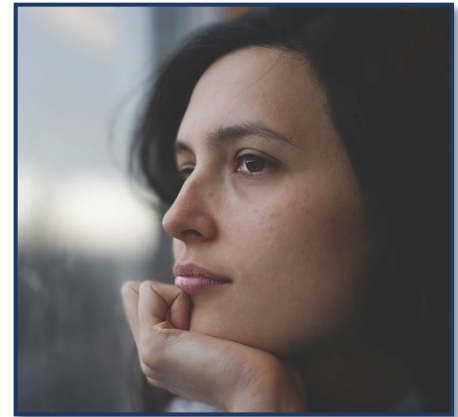




What to Do When You Think You Aren't a *Good Enough* Parent

Parenting is hard work. It is not easy to embrace parenthood and stick it out. That is why a group of parents asked me to join them in a discussion about parenting. They wanted me to listen to their situations and offer some ideas for hope. A mom talked about her head-strong son who questioned every decision and request she made. A father described his daughter who had become an accomplished liar. Another mother shared concern about her timid daughter who struggled to stand up for herself. Another parent disclosed how her son's independence was leading him to detach from the family and its guidance.



As the conversation developed, I was struck by several common threads that ran through each of the parent's concerns. All of them wanted their children to succeed in life. Each of them wanted their son or daughter to do their best. Yet, all of them felt insecure about their ability to support and guide their children. None of them felt they were prepared to face the challenges of parenting a child into adulthood. As one parent succinctly put it; "I just don't feel like I am a *good enough* parent."

This feeling of being inadequate took me back to the time when my children were becoming adults. I also worried about raising children to be happy, healthy, and holy adults. I doubted my ability to be the first and best example for my kids. It was so easy to question my actions and motivations back then; so tempting to feel that I couldn't be the parent I needed to be. It was tempting to feel like I should abdicate my parental authority to another adult or institution or let my kids go it alone.

Thankfully, I never gave in to the negative emotions tugging at my heart back then. I resisted the voices trying to convince me to give up; to settle on being *just good enough*. Gratefully, I chose to acquire the virtue of **fortitude** and tackle parenting head-on.

When the parents in this small group asked me to comment, it was a privilege to acknowledge their emotions and struggles and offer fortitude as a solution to their parenting struggles. I shared that fortitude is a foundational moral virtue which ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in doing what is right and good. It is mental and emotional strength to face doubt or temptation courageously. Fortitude helps you overcome emotions like fear and despair; feelings that make you think you are lacking and not worthy to be a wonderful parent who can guide and lead.

Making fortitude the center of the discussion shifted the group's focus from worry to hope. We discussed how moral courage is needed to face struggles and move forward. We talked about fortitude as a way to push outside of your comfort zone and act intentionally. We explored how fortitude confronts personal

weaknesses and the feeling to give up. Most importantly, we discussed that fortitude makes it possible to do what is best – especially when it will cause you suffering.

Through the discussion, the parents came to a collective understanding that parents – ALL parents – struggle. Each mom and dad is challenged. Each parent worries. As one father put it, “pick your hard. It is hard to parent. It is hard not to parent. So, pick your hard.” His comment made the group see that building fortitude was the reasonable way to shoulder the hard burden and increase parental hope.

Developing any virtue takes time, effort, and a lot of grace from God. Maturing in fortitude is nearly impossible without divine assistance. With God’s help, parents can stop feeling sorry for themselves, learn to control their anger and anxiety, and resist the impulse to make everyone happy. They can set and implement boundaries and standards for behavior. Under God’s care, parents can learn from their mistakes and plan for a better future. Filled with the grace and mercy of God, parents can renounce misgivings and embrace sacrifice for the sake of the child. Here is a prayer to help you build fortitude.

*Dear God, help me to develop fortitude,
for it is something that I lack.*

*I need courage to raise my child/ren
to know, love, and serve you above everything and everyone else.*

*I need courage to fight against my doubts,
against worries and troubles, temptations,
attractions, darkness and false lights,
against tears, depression, and above all fear.*

*I need fortitude, dear God.
Strengthen me with Your love and Your grace.*

*Console me with Your blessed Presence
and grant me the courage to persevere
and know that I am the best parent for my children.*



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