

# Teaching the Way of Love

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## True Joy Comes from Self-Control and Striving

Where do your children find joy? I teach at a Catholic school whose motto is "Joyfully Catholic." Students will sometimes claim that we are not living up to our motto because we hold high standards for them. We give our students homework and expect them to complete it. We expect them to come to class prepared, to pay attention, and to participate. We demand that they care for the school environment, treat each other respectfully, and obey the rules. We designed these high standards to teach our students self-discipline.



People don't like self-discipline. We have a natural aversion to things that take extra effort. Learning about truth and doing what is right is difficult, so we assume they are unrealistic expectations. Wouldn't children be happier if we gave them more freedom and didn't expect so much of them?

Paragraph 1731 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that freedom is the power to shape our own life. It's a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness. And our freedom reaches its perfection when we direct it toward God and the happiness that God has planned for us.

That's the truth I want to teach as a parent and a teacher. We are capable of self-restraint and self-possession. Greater joy comes from striving to know the truth and to live in God's goodness. The thrill of acting on our impulses does not last.

I also want my students and children to grow in virtue. As a teacher, I focus on guiding students in the intellectual virtues. My message to students who have natural intelligence is that they won't be equipped to use their intelligence well without virtue. My message to students who struggle in school is that intellectual virtue can bolster their learning. I want all of my students and my own children to know that intellectual virtue helps them to embrace the truth and moral virtue helps them live in goodness. Growing in virtue is difficult, but it's worth the effort.

Finally, I want my students and children to learn that anything worthwhile is worth striving for. Children who get what they want too easily, whether it be grades or gadgets, don't learn to value things. Being willing to strive and work hard also helps them discern what is truly valuable. I would love my children to choose the Iliad over Tic-Toc because ultimately, I want them to choose Jesus over the world.

These choices are not easy. They require self-discipline. They are attained only by those willing to strive through difficulty to receive what is of greater value.

So how do we teach our children that they don't need to act on every impulse or desire? Here are some ideas.

1. Encourage your children to practice self-control in more manageable areas to build the moral muscle to handle challenging situations. Does your child like to play video games as much as mine does? My son claims that if he had the freedom, he'd do nothing but play video games "24-7." I tell him that's precisely why he can only play for 30 minutes. While he still has a hard time shutting it off when his time is up, he doesn't realize that this is just practice for the more difficult things in life he'll have to balance.

2. Encourage your children to make sacrifices for Advent and Lent. The Church gives us seasons of sacrifice for a reason! Help your children fully enter the meaning of the seasons of sacrifice by encouraging them to make their sacrifice for the good of someone else and pray for that person.

3. Make sure your children see you practicing self-control! If we tell our children to turn off the video game while our face remains glued to our smartphones, our actions will crowd out our words. Model self-control and self-possession by practicing balance and self-denial in your own life. It's also OK to show your children that you're doing so. But make it a statement of solidarity. "Boy, I'd love a second piece of desert too. But let's both be satisfied with just one piece."

These lessons in self-control will teach our children that they are not slaves to their physical desires. They can make choices about the kind of people they become. And ultimately, they have the power to choose God and the goodness that God has planned for them. It will also teach them that true joy comes from striving for higher goods.

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*This newsletter series is brought to you by Alice Heinzen and Jeff Arrowood, creators of **Teaching the Way of Love**. **Teaching the Way of Love** is designed to help you become a faithful, joyful and confident parent. Visit [www.twl4parents.com](http://www.twl4parents.com) for more strategies on how to become the best parent you can be. Consider becoming an annual member of the **Teaching the Way of Love** program. Members receive practical and timely parenting resources. Go to [twl4parents.com/membership](http://twl4parents.com/membership) for more information.*

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