



Broken Record

- Elizabeth -

My son, keep your father's commands
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.
Bind them upon your heart forever;
fasten them around your neck.
When you walk, they will guide you;
when you sleep, they will watch over you;
when you awake, they will speak to you.

Proverbs 6:20-22

"Get off the table! Thank you, good job. Hey—no!—don't jump off the couch! Thank you, that's better, good boy, that's wonderf—Wait! No, please don't rub your face on my good pillows—your boogers—aw, gross! Hey—don't snatch that toy from your sister! No, I said don't snatch! Don't even think about snatching! Oh, no you don't—don't you dare hit. If you hit, you're going to be in big trouble, mister! Did you just stomp your foot at me? We never stomp our feet at Mommy. Oh, now you've done it—when I get off the toilet, you're gonna get it! Hey! Put that down! Not my coffee cup! No! Where are you going? Stop! Freeze! Don't move a muscle! Pleease give me back my coffee cup? Come back! No, not on my white carpet! AAAAAH!"

Sound familiar? Welcome to thirty seconds of the soundtrack at my house. Repeat about fifty times, and some days, you'll have it just about right.

As preschool parents, we can feel doomed to parrot the same instructions over and over and over and over and over again. We issue the same commands, prohibitions and lectures all day long; we punish for the same offenses day after day; we address the same character and behavior concerns for weeks on end. We get creative—we read Bible verses; give rewards; tell stories; sing songs; buy books that teach moral lessons; perform stuffed-animal reenactments—but still the behavior persists. We feel like a broken record.

But we can't give up! Sometimes, repetition is exactly what our kids need. They must know that we are serious, and that they can't change our minds or wear down our resolve over time. Why else do you think Deuteronomy 6 commands us to employ so many different ways of teaching our children about God's laws—by tying them as symbols on our hands and foreheads *and* by talking about them at home *and* when we walk along the road *and* when we lie down *and* when we get up *and* by writing them on our doorframes and gates? Because we need the repetition!

When we feel like broken records with our kids, when we feel ignored and begin to wonder whether our children suffer from hearing loss, we are getting just a small taste of how our heavenly Father must sometimes feel with all of his children. How many times does he repeat himself in the Bible? And how many times do we fail to listen? We can hear God's frustration in verses such as Isaiah 42:20:

You have seen many things,
but have paid no attention.
Your ears are open,
but you hear nothing.

Jesus echoed God's sentiments when he said: "O unbe-

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lieving and perverse generation, how long shall I stay with you and put up with you?" (Luke 9:41). Let us keep in mind our own failings, our own stubbornness, when we are tempted to throw up our hands in irritation with our little ones. (And yes, I imagine that many of you, like me, are getting genetic repayment for the defiance that we once dished out to our own poor parents!)

In the heat of battle, remember 1 Corinthians 13:5: "Love...keeps no record of wrongs." Even when we are embroiled in a prolonged battle of wills with a headstrong child, we must keep on loving the little terror. I take comfort and guidance from one of my childhood heroines, the sweet troublemaker Anne of Green Gables, who said: "Each day is fresh, with no mistakes in it!" Just as our kids need consistent discipline, they also need the reassurance of a clean slate every morning—and sometimes every hour.

The apostle Paul viewed repetition and reminders as a way of protecting his flock. He said,

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.... Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (Philippians 3:1, 4:4)

Reinforcing lessons is a way of protecting our children, of imprinting convictions in their minds so that one day, when they are not with us, our voice will echo in their memories and remind them what to do.

Sure, we should expect our children to listen and obey—even to obey the first time. If we find ourselves constantly addressing the same issue, with no success, then it can't hurt to reconsider our strategy: Are we following through with the consequences we threaten? Would a different approach be

more effective? However, even with the most consistent and creative of parenting, some lessons take time to sink in.

Even when kids finally seem to “get it,” they are bound to regress at times. Proverbs 22:15 says,

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child,
but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.

Children will naturally return to their default setting—whether it be one of whining, defiance, selfishness or anger—and they often need to be “reset” and reminded of the house rules. They may seem to master a lesson for a while, and just when we think we can relax and breathe, they up and whallop their younger sibling again, just to see if the rules have changed! (Yes, “up and whallop” is a proper grammatical expression with roots in Neo-Southern American Drawl, in case you were wondering.)

But take heart: Your kids are listening more than they let on. I have been encouraged recently by reports that Cassidy quotes me in my absence. In spite of how much she fights me at home, she actually does hear me, and she even values my opinion and convictions. The other day I even heard Blake garble the words “obey” and “spank-spank”—and I knew that he was making some important connections about consequences.

Let's keep at it, and one day, we'll realize that we've gone a whole morning without saying, “Don't hit” or “Don't whine” or “Share”—and we can rejoice in the small (yet oh so monumental) accomplishment. Before long, we may string a few days or weeks together, and enjoy a time of peace...just enough time to gear up for the next parenting quandary!



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No matter what child-rearing challenges we face, or how long they take to overcome, let us draw comfort from Paul's encouragement to the church in Galatia: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9).

BUILDING BLOCKS

- You can't fight every battle at once. What are the top three house rules you are trying to establish or enforce right now? Which one is *most* important?
- Psalm 32:8-9
I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you and watch over you.
Do not be like the horse or the mule,
which have no understanding
but must be controlled by bit and bridle
or they will not come to you.