



Consequences

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On Friday, I chaperoned my son's class on a field trip to an amusement park. The driver and I were the only two adults on the bus. As we were parking, the teacher, on a different bus, sent me a text of instructions to give the students. I stood up, braced against the seat, asked for everyone's attention, and told them what to bring, what to leave on the bus, and how to line up for their tickets. As the students walked up the aisle, I checked them over to be sure they had each followed the instructions. The driver noticed from the side mirror that students had opened the emergency door and were hopping off from the back side door. I was furious. How dare they! I hopped off and walked around the bus to tell them (in a loud, angry voice) they had no business opening that door, that their behavior was unacceptable, that they need not be in such a rush. At that point, a day with middle schoolers in 90-degree weather, quickly lost its appeal.

Earlier this week, I spoke with a teacher stressed about her students' behavior. She said they slap each other, call one another names, refuse to do work, won't walk in line. She said she had spoken with the students multiple times, but the occurrences had increased rather than decreased. She said that her school's discipline system promotes the idea of natural consequences rather than the traditional consequences of isolation, detention, or missed recess. Natural consequences? I went to Google.

[Natural consequences](#) are outcomes that happen as a result of behavior that are not planned or controlled (Pryor & Tollerud, 1999). For example, if a student cuts in front of another student in line, the natural consequence may be that the other child won't play with the "cutter" at recess. A teacher did not plan or control this consequence, but he or she may discuss and help students predict natural consequences to encourage them to see the connection between their choices and what happens to them.

After I calmed down about the students using the emergency door to de-board the bus, I wondered what the natural consequences would have been. If they didn't properly close the door, it could

have swung open when we were on the interstate that afternoon, someone could have fallen out of the bus and been seriously injured. Should I have yelled at them or waited for the natural consequences to occur - what if the natural consequences didn't occur, or what if they did occur, but the students failed to associate the consequence with their earlier actions? Was I wrong to have raised my voice at them? The Bible says, spare the rod, spoil the child (Proverbs 13:24). I didn't have a rod, but if I had had one...

I am not convinced that a classroom discipline system can be effective when based solely on natural consequences. To understand natural consequences, a clear relationship between cause and effect must be realized, even when are separated by a lengthy period of time. It requires a level of maturity that children and adolescents do not have. Their brains are not developed to the degree needed to make these associations. I think natural consequences need to be explained to students, so that as they grow, they will begin to think before they act. Once they can predict outcomes, they will make better choices.

~Hebrews 12:11

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

~Proverbs 29:15

The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

~Ephesians 6:4

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

~2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Of course there are more Scriptures about consequences and discipline, but these are a few that I particularly like. Discipline or consequences should not be pleasant. If they are, then they will not alter behavior. Discipline leads to self-control, which leads to peace and righteousness. Children who are not disciplined grow into adults who cannot make their parents proud. As we seek to discipline our children, we must work to ensure that our discipline is both logical and fair. Our consequences should be related to the offense. If a student cuts in line, the consequence might be that he must write an apology to those he cut. Another logical consequence might be that he must move to the back of the line. To impose a consequence that is too harsh, humiliating, or otherwise excessive will cause the child to become angry. If this happens, he is no longer thinking of or learning from what he did. He is, instead, thinking of what has happened to him. As we discipline our children, or teachers their students, we must offer some degree of grace. We must never forget that we, too, are imperfect beings. Just as the Lord is patient with us, we must be patient with our children.