

Chapter 2

ACCEPTANCE FIRST

“See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for he allows us to be called his children...” 1 John 3:1 (NLT)

We’ve introduced four types of parenting that are based on the presence or absence of *acceptance* and *accountability*. We learned that effective mothers and fathers utilize both. However of these two qualities, acceptance comes first. It is at the center of everything an effective parent does.

Consider the perfect father — God. Everything He does for us flows from His love, forgiveness and acceptance. For example, God loved the people of Nineveh, so he sent Jonah to preach to them. God said,

“Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons...?”
Jonah 4:11 (NASB)

God’s Acceptance

Jonah speaks of the great love, forgiveness and acceptance of our heavenly Father.

“I knew that you were a gracious and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. I knew how easily you could cancel your plans for destroying these people.” **Jonah 4:2** (NLT)

Q1. Do you believe God accepts you? Why or why not?

The Bible teaches,

“But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.”

Romans 5:8 (NLT)

Q2. What do the following verses say about God's acceptance of you?

“See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for he allows us to be called his children...” 1 John 3:1 (NLT)

“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”

Matthew 7:11 (NKJ)

“Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” Romans 15:7 (NASB)

These verses and many others teach us what God is like. However, we don't always believe what He says.

Q3. Is it difficult for you to believe God loves you? Explain.

Your Experience

Your experiences can taint and distort your view of God. In fact, the way you were parented could affect your view of God. We tend to put our earthly father's face on our heavenly Father. The Bible reminds us; however, that God is not a man.

*“... [They] exchanged the glory of the incorruptible **God** for an image in the form of corruptible **man**...”*

Romans 1:23 (NASB)

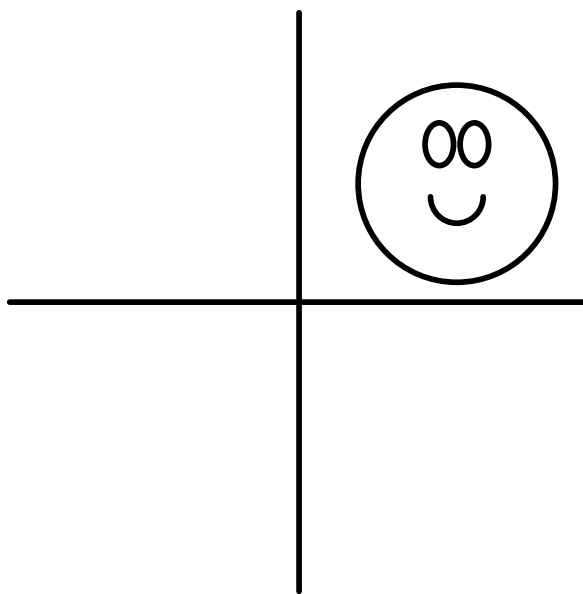
All parenting should reflect how God parents His children; unfortunately, most of the time it does not. Our relationship with parents or authorities in our life can hinder that reflection of love.

- Q4.** Describe your relationship with each of your parents.
- Q5.** What were their parenting styles (neglectful, permissive, controlling or effective)?
- Q6.** Did you have a better relationship with your mother or father?
What made it better?
- Q7.** If you had a better relationship with one of your parents, was it the one who showed you the most acceptance?

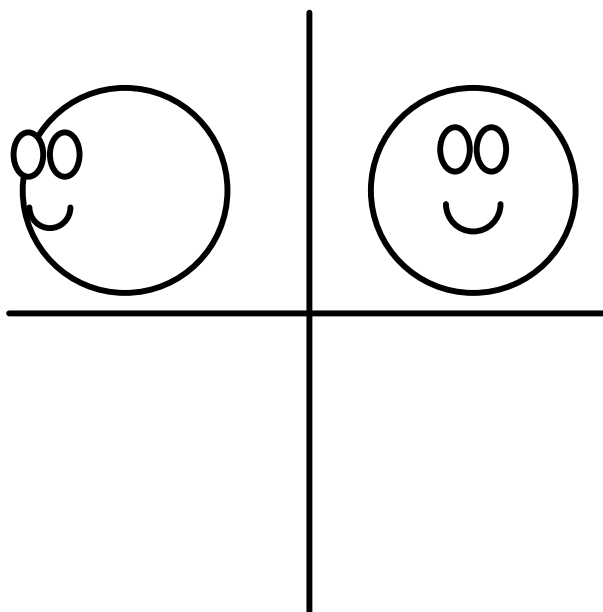
The Faces of Parenting

The following pictures depict the four styles that a parent might use.

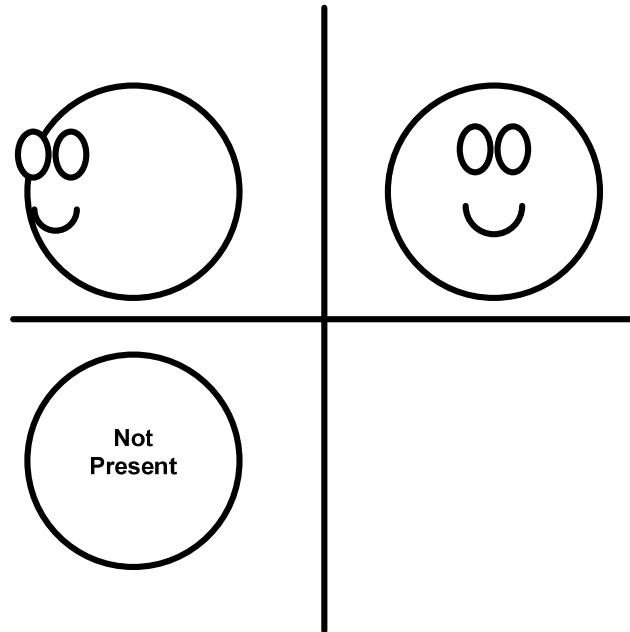
This parent accepts you for who you are – his or her child. This parent has rules but trains and encourages you along the way. This parent doesn't always like what you do, but you always feel loved.



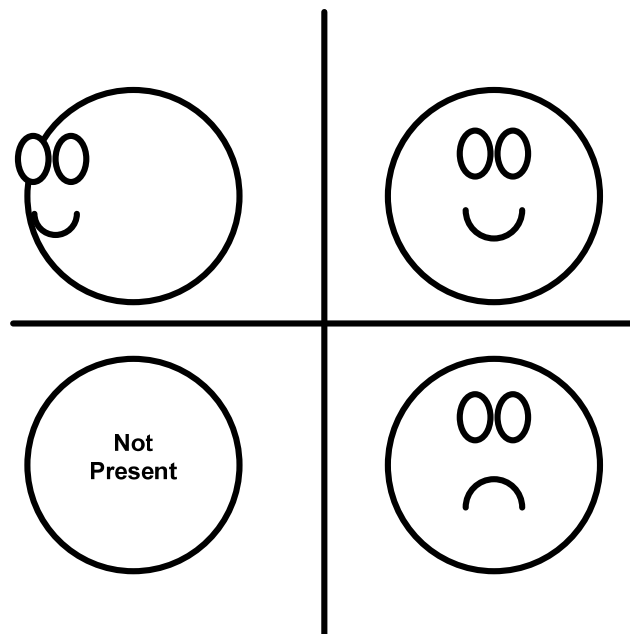
This parent accepts you but looks the other way when you exercise bad behavior. He or she accepts you but doesn't hold you accountable for your poor choices or correct you when you are wrong.



This parent has either abandoned you or was never around. They provide no support, love, training, or discipline.



This parent might be harsh and have expectations you can't live up to or be overly protective and never provide opportunities for you to make decisions. Either way, you don't feel accepted.



- Q8.** Mark the picture that best describes how you viewed your *father*?
- Q9.** What do you think characterizes an ideal parent/child relationship?
- Q10.** Did you experience all of the characteristics that you just identified, with your father? Which ones were missing?
- Q11.** How has this influenced your life?

Your View of God

The parent/child relationship can influence your relationship with God and the way you parent your children. The next statements represent right and wrong ways you might view God. Each statement is followed by what the Bible says concerning your heavenly Father.

Effective

You may see God as an *effective* father. “God loves me for who I am, not for what I do. I am His child.” You recognize that because you are His child, He is going to correct you when you make bad choices. He is training you to choose His ways so you will be blessed.

“For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes those he accepts as his children.” Hebrews 12:6 (NLT)

Permissive

You may see God as *permissive* and believe God loves you, but you don't think He cares about your disobedience. You hope poor choices you've made with finances, food or other things won't bring negative consequences.

“If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children after all.” Hebrews 12:8 (NLT)

Neglectful

You may see God as *neglectful* and think things like, “Where was God when I needed Him? He’s too busy running the universe to take time to deal with my problems or needs. Is He even real?”

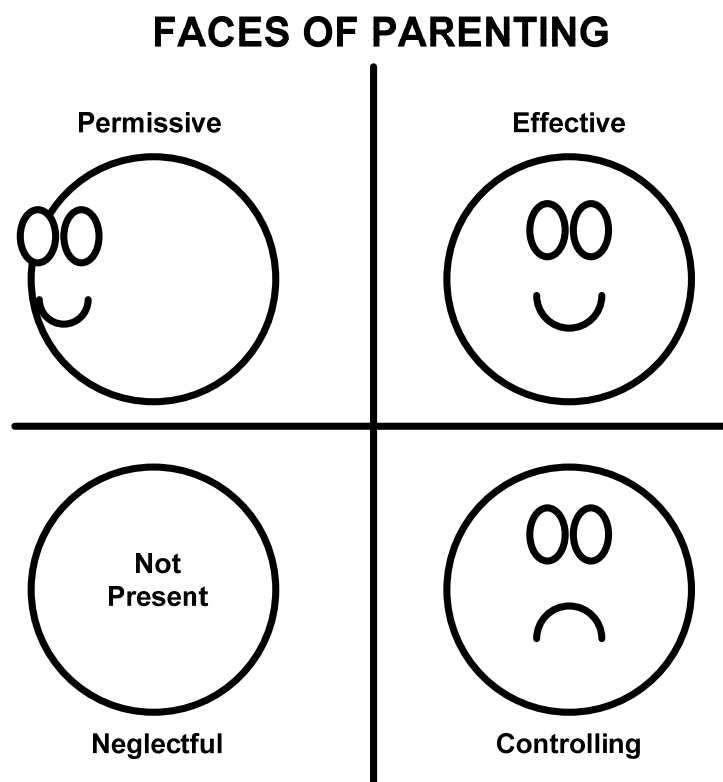
“Not even a sparrow, worth only half a penny, can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to him than a whole flock of sparrows.” **Matthew 10:29–31** (NLT)

Controlling

You may see God as *controlling* and believe God is judging you. You think He is angry at you. You have thought things like, “I’ll never measure up. God is ready to hit me the minute I fail. He’s going to ask me to go where I don’t want to go and do what I don’t want to do.”

“So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God’s very own children, adopted into his family – calling him ‘Father, dear Father.’ For his Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we are God’s children.”
Romans 8:15–16 (NLT)

Q12. Which of the following four pictures best describes how you see God?



- Q13.** Is there a connection between how you were parented and how you view God? What connection is God revealing to you?

Your Child's View

So far, this lesson has talked about the effect your parents had on your view of God, but your parenting also has affects on your children.

- Q14.** Which of these four pictures best describes how you think your child sees *you*?

If you are not satisfied with your answer, consider what might be missing — acceptance.

- Q15.** Why do you think acceptance is so important?

A child feels loved when he or she is accepted and feels rejected and unloved when acceptance is missing. Children need to be accepted, regardless of their behavior, so they will feel loved. Do children need accountability and discipline as well as acceptance? Of course they do.

“Discipline your children while there is hope. If you don’t, you will ruin their lives.” Proverbs 19:18 (NLT)

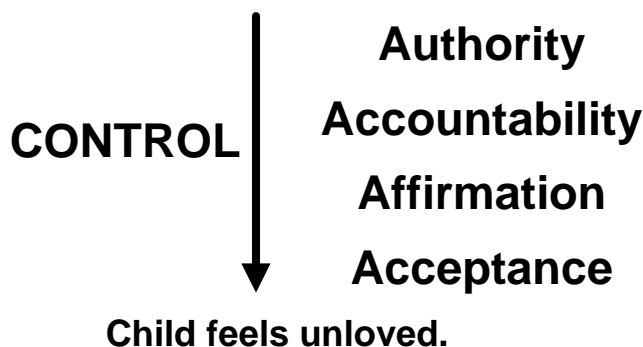
God has placed parents in the position of authority over their children.

“Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do.” Ephesians 6:1 (NLT)

When Acceptance Comes Last – Control

How do we discipline in love? Most parents find it difficult to accept their child when he or she needs discipline. God has given you, as the parent, authority to hold your child accountable for his or her behavior and attitude. However, you are not following God’s parenting model if you *only* give affirmation when your child behaves well and does what he or she is told to do. God doesn’t make you behave well on a consistent basis before He gives you acceptance.

Consider the results in children when a father or mother start with **authority**, and move to **accountability**, **affirmation** and lastly **acceptance**. The child feels rejected or unloved. This flow illustrates the use of authority to exercise control. It is a method for getting your way or wanting to look good to others by having well-behaved children. Many times the child of a controlling parent can’t do anything well enough to receive affirmation. The child feels unloved.



Although this control appears to get results, it trains your child to believe your love is conditional. The condition is, “I will love you only after you do what I say.”

- Q16.** Is this true — do you *only* love your child after he or she does what you say? Give an example.
- Q17.** Or is it true that you love your child even before they do anything? Give an example.
- Q18.** What would your child say? Does your child feel loved by you regardless of what he or she does?

If not, this sends a wrong message.

When Acceptance Comes First – Love

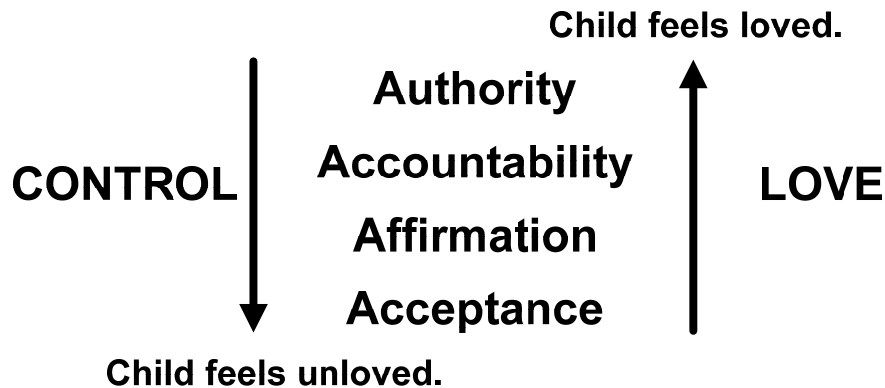
To communicate love to your child, consider again how God fathers His children. He does not use His authority to control you, even though He has every right to do so. God demonstrates His love for you by accepting you. Since He loves and accepts you, you can love your child. Loving your child begins with accepting him or her.

“When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, no one is likely to die for a good person, though someone might be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.” **Romans 5:6–8** (NLT)

- Q19.** When did God accept you?

God starts by loving you. He loved you before you did anything, good or bad. He **accepts** and **affirms** you. He desires for you to become more than you already are and therefore holds you **accountable**.

Control vs. Love



Notice in the following verse that God accepts you *before* He holds you accountable and disciplines you.

"For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes those he accepts as his children." **Hebrews 12:6** (NLT)

Finally, because of His love, you yield to His **authority** and love Him in return.

"We love Him because He first loved us."
1 John 4:19 (NKJ)

Acceptance First AND Then Accountability

Permissive parents may start out with acceptance and affirmation but stop before they hold their child accountable. Neglectful parents don't start with authority and go down the diagram or start with acceptance and go up the diagram. They do neither. God wants us to love our children like He loves us. All children need acceptance first and then accountability.

"If you refuse to discipline your children, it proves you don't love them; if you love your children, you will be prompt to discipline them." **Proverbs 13:24** (NLT)

Q20. How do you begin to show love to your children?

First, accept them:

- Recognize God accepts them.
- Acknowledge they are the children God gave you.
- Remember you do love them.
- Thank God for your children.

Next, affirm your children. This involves outward displays of affection:

- Speak kind words to them.
- Hug and kiss them.
- Hold them.
- Spend time with them.
- Speak about them positively.
- Listen to them.

*“But God **demonstrates** His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*

Romans 5:8 (NASB)

Finally after you have accepted and affirmed your child, you can begin to hold them accountable without undermining his or her assurance of your love. Showing love takes time and energy but is well worth the investment. If your children find sufficient acceptance at home, then they won't be seeking it in the wrong places.

Personal Application

Q21. What did the Lord show you through this lesson?

If you have had a wrong view of God, **ask Him** to help you see Him the way He really is.

Q22. What did He show you?

Ask God to help you love your children the way He loves them with acceptance first.

Share the diagram from this chapter with someone this week.

You will learn how to exercise effective accountability in the next chapter.

Faces of Parenting

Diagram

Notes