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Parenting Beyond Control

Leading Without Losing Connection

Isaiah 1:18 KJV

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Parenting changes as children grow. In the early years, parents rely heavily on control and structure. But as children mature—especially into the teenage and young adult years—control becomes less effective.

Healthy parenting transitions from control to connection, from command to influence.

Parents are no longer simply managing behavior; they are shaping relationships and guidance.

The Three Shifts Parents Must Make:

1. From Control to Influence

Young children need strong structure. Teenagers and adult children need relational influence.

Influence grows from:

- trust
- respect
- emotional safety
- consistent presence

When control is overused with older children, it often produces:

- rebellion
- secrecy
- emotional distance.

Influence, however, invites dialogue rather than resistance. A helpful question for parents becomes:

“Am I trying to control my child, or am I trying to influence their heart?”

2. From Reaction to Regulation

Many family conflicts escalate because emotions rise faster than wisdom.

Parents must learn emotional regulation—the ability to remain steady when children are upset, disrespectful, or reactive.

Regulated parents:

- slow conversations down
- refuse to mirror chaos
- respond thoughtfully instead of impulsively

When parents stay regulated, they become the emotional anchor of the family system.

Scripture speaks to this principle:

“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.” - Proverbs 16:32

3. From Correction to Curiosity

As children grow older, constant correction often closes their hearts while curiosity opens them.

Instead of beginning with accusation, parents can begin with questions:

- *“Help me understand what you were feeling.”*
- *“What was going through your mind?”*
- *“What do you think you needed in that moment?”*

Curiosity communicates:

- *“I care about understanding you, not just controlling you.”*

This does not eliminate accountability, but it preserves relationships while addressing behavior.

The Core Principle

A Leadership Insight for Parents

Parents must remember:

- Your child’s life is their journey, but your relationship with them is your stewardship.

Your goal is not simply raising a compliant child but nurturing a relationship strong enough that your child still values your voice when they are grown.

“When Conversations Become Confrontations”

Many parents enter conversations with their children intending to guide, correct, or help. Yet ***somewhere in the middle of the exchange, the tone shifts.*** Voices rise, defenses activate, and what began as a conversation becomes a confrontation.

This shift often happens not because the parent or the child intended conflict, but because emotions escalate faster than understanding develops.

Children and parents alike carry emotional histories, frustrations, and expectations into conversations. When a sensitive topic is introduced—school struggles, disrespect, friends, responsibility, or behavior—those emotional layers can surface quickly. Instead of listening to understand, both sides begin listening to defend themselves.

When this happens, the nervous system moves into a defensive posture. The brain shifts from thoughtful reasoning into a protective mode. In that state, people are no longer primarily focused on solving the issue; they are focused on protecting themselves from feeling blamed, misunderstood, or powerless.

Parents often interpret this response as defiance or disrespect. Children often experience the parent’s tone as accusation or control. Both sides begin reacting to each other’s emotions rather than addressing the original issue.

The result is escalation. The parent becomes more intense in order to regain authority. The child becomes more resistant in order to regain autonomy.

What could have been a moment of guidance turns into a power struggle. Healthy parenting requires learning how to interrupt this cycle.

One of the most important skills parents can develop is ***emotional regulation during conflict.*** When a parent stays calm and grounded, they become the stabilizing presence in the room. A regulated parent communicates safety even while addressing difficult issues.

When parents regulate themselves, conversations slow down. The child's defensive posture often softens because the interaction no longer feels like an attack.

Regulation does not mean ignoring inappropriate behavior or avoiding hard conversations. It means addressing those issues without allowing the emotional intensity to dominate the interaction.

Scripture affirms the power of measured responses:

"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." — Proverbs: 15:1

A calm tone does not weaken parental authority; it strengthens it. Children learn more from parents who demonstrate self-control than from parents who simply demand it.

Parents should also remember that behind many confrontations are unspoken emotions. A child who is disrespectful may actually be carrying embarrassment, fear, or frustration. A child who withdraws may be feeling overwhelmed or misunderstood.

When parents pause long enough to ask questions rather than deliver immediate judgment, they create space for those underlying emotions to surface.

Questions such as **"Help me understand what was going on for you,"** or **"What were you feeling when that happened?"** can transform a tense exchange into an opportunity for connection and insight.

This does not remove the need for accountability. Instead, it allows accountability to occur within the context of relationship rather than conflict. Parents who learn to guide conversations back from confrontation to connection preserve something very important: **their child's willingness to keep talking to them.**

The long-term goal of parenting is not merely raising children who comply with rules in the moment. It is **raising young people who still value their parents' voice when they face difficult decisions in life.**

When parents manage confrontations with wisdom, patience, and emotional steadiness, they create an environment where difficult conversations can lead to growth rather than distance.

Generational Groupings

Generational groupings are often used to describe large cultural cohorts of people shaped by similar historical events, technology, and social environments during their formative years.

While the exact years can vary slightly depending on the researcher, the following categories are the most widely recognized.

Traditionalists (Silent Generation)

Born: approximately 1928–1945

This generation grew up during the Great Depression and World War II, which shaped them to value stability, sacrifice, and discipline. They tend to respect institutions, authority, and traditions. Many in this generation value loyalty, hard work, and perseverance. In churches, they often carried strong commitments to faithfulness, service, and institutional stability.

Baby Boomers

Born: approximately 1946–1964

Baby Boomers were born during the large population increase after World War II. They came of age during major cultural shifts such as the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War era, and rapid social change. This generation is often characterized by strong work ethics, commitment to achievement, and a desire to make societal impact. Many church leaders and long-standing ministry builders come from this generation.

Generation X

Born: approximately 1965–1980

Gen X grew up during a time of increasing divorce rates, economic uncertainty, and rapid cultural change. Many became independent and self-reliant early in life. They tend to value authenticity, balance between work and personal life, and skepticism toward institutions. In church life, they often seek practical teaching, authenticity, and relational leadership.

Millennials (Generation Y)

Born: approximately 1981–1996

Millennials grew up alongside the rise of the internet and digital technology. They experienced major global events such as the terrorist attacks on September 11th during formative years. They tend to value collaboration, diversity, meaningful work, and social causes. In church settings, they often desire community, transparency, and purpose-driven engagement.

Generation Z

Born: approximately 1997–2012

Gen Z is the first generation to grow up fully immersed in smartphones, social media, and constant digital connection. They tend to be highly aware of mental health issues, identity formation, and global concerns. Many value authenticity, inclusion, and honesty. In ministry contexts, they often respond well to mentorship, interactive learning, and safe spaces for honest conversation.

Generation Alpha

Born: approximately 2013–present

Generation Alpha consists of children growing up entirely in the age of advanced digital technology, artificial intelligence, and global connectivity. Many are being raised by Millennials and will likely experience education and social interaction very differently than previous generations. They are still developing, but early indicators suggest they will be highly technologically fluent and globally aware.