

Treat All the Same – But Differently

The hallmark of Christian discipline is to show the same individual care. However, fairness and consistency are not always the same. Teachers and parents walk a fine line between the application of redemptive discipline and the way it will be perceived by others. It is the tension between individual nurture and care versus the responsibility to the corporate body of Christ.

Three girls sat in my office looking expectantly at me. Two of them were regular visitors to my office due to their somewhat unrestrained ability to disrupt their friends in class. I simply asked them, “Why have you been sent to see me today?”

The three girls looked at each other. Anne cleared her throat nervously and then responded, “Well, Carol and I were chatting instead of listening to the teacher. And then Jenny joined in. I guess we got a bit too loud. The teacher saw us talking. It was only a little thing really.”

My eyebrows raised in a question mark. “And yesterday when you came to see me for talking in class that was seen as a little thing too. And last week, Anne and Carol, you told me it would not happen again.”

We chatted through the fact that Carol had quite a history of disrupting the class. That Anne was not far behind, but that this was Jenny’s first time to be sent to see me.

I then asked the question, “Do you think you should all be treated exactly the same for being sent to see me today?”

Silence reigned supreme for at least twenty seconds. Then Carol looked up and very astutely said, “You know, I don’t think you can. Anne and I have been to see you a lot more than Jenny ever has. This is Jenny’s first time.”

We then began to chat through what an appropriate response might look like for the three girls. Carol and Anne received a significantly harder “judgement” than Jenny. All had been sent for the same reason. Yet all three girls affirmed without hesitation it was fair.

Jesus had an interesting interaction with two rich men. The rich young ruler was given the invitation to become part of God’s kingdom but chose not to. He was a great citizen, a fantastic role model in his society – but his choice to say “No” was respected by Jesus. Zacchaeus was also very rich but he was despised and seen as a traitor by his countrymen because he worked for the hated Romans. He in fact accepted Jesus’ invitation and became a changed person. Both were given the invitation. Both had expectations laid upon them – but only one of them responded positively.

“**We need to make sure that we do not confuse consistency with uniformity. It is important that we take the time to react to the individual needs of each person.**”

As parents and teachers, we will find that we have children or students who react very differently to the same circumstances. We need to be mindful of their distinct personalities and needs. We need to make sure that we do not confuse consistency with uniformity. It is important that we take the time to react to the individual needs of each person. Some will only require a gentle reminder. Some may need a much stronger measure.

Take the time to get to know your children or students and shape your response to their individual needs.



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