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The Importance of Discipline

Guest: Sam Crabtree
From the series: Parenting With Loving Correction (Day 1 of 2)
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Bob: Sam Crabtree is a grandfather who recently was watching his grandchildren while their parents were gone, and before they went to school, Sam let them know about a boundary he was putting in place. After school, they could have a snack until four, but not after that.

Sam: Pick them up after school, reminder, “You can have snacks until four o’ clock. After four o’ clock, no snacks.” Well, four o’ clock comes, no snacks, and I’m starting to hear, “I’m hungry.” Then the tone starts to intensify, “I’m hungry! I’m so hungry, Grandpa!”

“Supper will be in a little bit.”

I held the line, “No snacks till supper.” The next night, only one said, “I’m hungry, Grandpa.” Third night, no comments.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson, and I'm Bob Lepine.

Are there boundaries in place for your kids at your house, and do you enforce those boundaries? Do they get tested? Of course they do! We’re going to offer some help on how you can hold the line with your kids today; stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us.

I get excited about programs we’re going to do where I feel like, “Okay, we’re going to help some moms and dads with some real, honest stuff you’re dealing with,” but then I think to myself—I come across a book like the one we’re talking about today and I go, “What I really want is to send this to my kids” [Laughter], and say, “Start doing this with the grandkids!” Do you feel the same way?

Dave: Yes, I was just going to say, you know what I get excited about?

Ann: What?

Dave: Finding out little-known facts about Bob Lepine. I just found out—

Bob: What'd you just find out?

Dave: —in the last minute. Our guest today is from Minnesota, and I didn't know you were born Edina, Minnesota.

Bob: I was born in Edina, Minnesota, which I understand is kind of like "old money" Minnesota, is that right?

Ann: Oh!

Dave: Yes.

Bob: I don't think it was the '50s when I was there, because we didn't have old money; we didn't have much money. But I understand—when I say Edina now, people go, "Oh, you're from that part of town."

Dave: Yes, well you're trying to get away from what I'm going to say, because I just found out Edina stands for...

Bob: It's an acronym.

Dave: It's an acronym for Every Day I Need Attention. I thought, "There it is! Bob Lepine!" [Laughter]

Bob: That explains why I'm on radio every day. [Laughter]

Sam: I hope they let me fly home.

Bob: Our guest is not from Edina, but he is from the Twin Cities. Sam Crabtree is joining us on *FamilyLife Today*; welcome back.

Sam: Glad to be here. Really glad to be here.

Bob: Sam is an author, he's the executive pastor at a church in Minnesota called Bethlehem Baptist Church, which, if people have heard of Bethlehem Baptist it's probably because you had a pastor for a number of years, who you worked with, who became pretty well-known.

Sam: Yes. John Piper brought me there. He was there 30-some years, and now he's full-time with Desiring God Ministries, and I'm on the board. Just incidentally, we're also next-door neighbors.

Bob: Is that right?

Dave: Oh really?

Sam: So we roll our garbage to the curb together. [Laughter]

Bob: Well, and you continue to serve at Bethlehem Baptist, although Dr. Piper matriculated about five years ago and is, as you said, full-time with Desiring God.

Sam's an author; he's been here on *FamilyLife Today* before, and when I saw your new book, I'm thinking, "A grandparent had to write this book." Your heart here is really to help young couples understand that they can serve their children really well if they will correct them really well.

Sam: That's right. It's been my heart's cry to God and my prayer that this would be helpful to parents, not just a book to put on the coffee table or add to the product line or something like that.

Bob: As you look at young couples today raising the next generation of children, would you say that in this area of loving correction young couples are getting it, or that they need some help in this area?

Sam: Well, there's a continuum, as you know. There's a spectrum, and some young parents are well-trained, maybe, by their parents or grandparents, or well-read, or they've followed *FamilyLife* and they're just sharp as a tack on this. Then there are other families that I've observed that seem clueless, and I don't mean to be pejorative or condemning of them. It's my ache for them that prompted me to want to write this book, to try to help them mean what they say when they speak to their children, so they get it.

Bob: Those that are clueless, are they just checking out of correction altogether with their kids? Is that what you're seeing?

Sam: Well again, I would hate to generalize and put everybody in the same bucket as to why they would do it. I think there can be different reasons why people don't correct their children well—and I don't mean become dictatorial, tyrannical—that's not what I'm talking about here. That is not what I'm talking about here.

But they don't hold a line with their children, maybe because they don't know how to, maybe because they're afraid of their children. It may be that they've been influenced to think, "If I'm too consistent, that equates to harshness and rigidity and my child will grow up warped and will hate me and despise his childhood." Some parents are just weary. They're just gush. They're tired. It takes energy to correct your children.

Bob: Right.

Sam: So there can be multiple reasons why parents don't do it or won't do it.

Dave: We just spent four days watching our grandkids, a four-year-old girl, two-year-old boy, and a one-year-old boy. You know, we're grandparents, right, so when we got on the plane to fly home after four days, my wife looks at me and says, "So? How are you doing? We haven't talked in four days!" [Laughter]

Ann: I'm telling you, Sam, I remember, "Oh, I forgot how all-consuming this was, that stage is, and how did I have any time to spend with God? How did I have a marriage?" Because it really is so demanding when our kids are so little.

I think in this culture the loving piece—we all want to love our kids, but what about the correction piece? What does that mean, and why is that so important?

Sam: Yes. Well, just to identify with the energy part there. I mean, we love when our grandkids come...and we love when they go. [Laughter] And we love them dearly!

Ann: Yes.

Sam: I mean, I would guess I don't pray for anybody more—

Ann: Us too.

Sam: —than my grandchildren. They're a high priority.

Ann: Yes.

Dave: How many do you have?

Sam: Six. Six, from age soon-to-be-14 on down. They take energy. They do.

My daughter-in-law, because of her work, was on a work trip and her husband was able to go with her, so they asked us if we would be the grandparents, and Vicki was not able to be along, because she has a music studio and she had stuff scheduled in there. So I went to be solo grandpa for four days and nights.

Bob: Wow!

Sam: Yes.

Ann: How old were the kids at that time?

Sam: Well, I'd say they probably were 11 on down, something like that.

Ann: Yes.

Sam: So I'm going to get them up in the morning, I'm going to breakfast them, make sure they're ready for school, have their hair brushed and whatever, and get them off to school, except for the four-year-old, who was with me all day, Paton. Get them after school, after-school snacks, meal, supper, bedtime, Scripture memory—all that stuff—baths, get them to bed.

Ann: I am very impressed right now.

Bob: I'm exhausted right now! [Laughter]

Sam: Yes, that's the point! So, one of the things that I did—and this is germane, now, to this book, *Parenting with Loving Correction*—is I decided that while I was there and while I was the adult who was—

Bob: —in charge.

Sam: —going to be responsible for stewarding these four opportunities, when they come home from school, snacks are the order of the day, and that's fine, appropriate snacks, but after four o' clock, no snacks. It's a new rule at their house.

Well, I was fully anticipating that this would meet with some push-back, because it's a new rule, and besides, they're hungry. So they had multiple reasons to think, "Could we have another, King?" [Laughter]

But I established the rule early in the day. "Now when you get home from school tonight, you can snack. At four o' clock, no snacks till supper."

Ann: So you prepped them early.

Sam: Yes, right. Talk about it; that's fair. Tyrants spring rules on people.

Bob: Right.

Sam: Good legislators prep the people and have listening meetings and all that sort of thing.

Ann: That's wisdom.

Sam: I think so. So, pick them up after school, reminder, "You can have snacks till four o' clock; after four o' clock, no snacks."

Well, four o' clock comes, no snacks, and I'm starting to hear, "I'm hungry." Then the tone starts to intensify a little bit. "I'm hungry! I'm so hungry, Grandpa!"

"Supper will be in a little bit."

I held the line, “No snacks till supper.”

The next night, only one said, “I’m hungry, Grandpa.” Third night, no comments. They knew, “When supper gets here, we can eat, but at four o’ clock there’s a cutoff.”

Well, they ate better at supper.

Bob: Right.

Sam: We enjoyed conversation better at supper. There just was a better family dynamic that “we’re in this together,” and this rule isn’t hurting anybody. Nobody is becoming malnourished because they can’t graze till supper.

Now, my enforcement—I’m on the energy question—that took energy. I don’t know how many times I had to say, “Nope. Nope, sorry. Supper will be in a little bit. It’s on the stove.”

That takes energy from parents, and when you’re burning through energy, there’s a grace for it, but the more grace you’re burning through, the more you want to—you know, you can run your engine at high speed a long time, but once in awhile you have to stop and change the oil, as it were. So it does take energy from parents, but I think the payoff is well worth it, and it was in that particular instance. So I think the children win and the adults win, because by the third night, nobody said a thing.

Dave: So you hear that story and you’re like, “Of course! Why wouldn’t any parent do that?” Here’s the question: why don’t parents do that?

Sam: Well, I think we’re revisiting some of the rationale mentioned earlier. Some are tired, some don’t know that they could do it, some don’t want to invest the energy...

Bob: I’ll tell you what it was for me, because Maryanne tended to be the more authoritarian parent in our household. I tend to be the more permissive. I’m the fun dad, she’s the rules mom.

Ann: Oh yes, this is Dave Wilson.

Bob: Does it sound familiar to you?

Ann: Yes. But I’m not resentful at all [Laughter], always having to be a bad guy.

Bob: Honestly, part of, I think, what motivated me in this direction was, I think there was some fear in my heart that if I was too rigid with my kids I would lose their hearts, that the relationship would somehow deteriorate.

Looking back, I recognize that was more about my fear than it was about what was there in reality. I mean, if I could do the do-over, I would know that when I say, “No,” and they say, “You’re the meanest dad there is,” and get mad and storm out, I haven’t lost them. That’s a momentary, childish eruption that doesn’t mean they’re not going to snuggle with me that night, right?

But as a parent, I was fearful, Sam, of, “I don’t want to be too rigid, because I don’t want my kids growing up going, ‘I just hate my dad.’” You know?

Sam: My experience has been, both with my children and my grandchildren and those rare episodes—and I’m so grateful they were rare, very rare—where I most sternly had to consistently chasten the child, punish the child—within 30 minutes they’re sitting in my lap and we’re playing a game together and the endearment is there, the belongingness is there, the past is the past, we’ve buried the hatchet. Yes, I don’t think we need to fear that.

We should hasten to say that correction takes place best in an environment where there is lots of affirmation.

Bob: Yes. The reason *loving* correction is in this is because unless loving is the atmosphere in which correction’s taking place, you’re going to have problems, if it’s all correction and no loving, right?

Sam: Yes. In fact, you use the word no loving. “No” is loving, but if all they get is “no,” “No this, no that, no never, no, knock it off,” and there’s not enough yeses, the nos become very unappetizing. In fact, they’re hard to take anyway, but if the child knows there are lots of yeses, lots of permission, lots of, “Let’s do this together,” lots of, “Let’s experiment with this,” lots of happiness and smiling and laughing. “A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down.”

Ann: Well, I like that in your book, that you talk about rewarding obedience and not disobedience. What’s that look like?

Sam: So, let me illustrate it. I was at the store just a couple weeks ago, in line behind a woman with two small children, one of them in the cart, and she has a cart full of stuff. She’s trying to get it on the conveyor belt for the checkout clerk, and the little boy in the cart is having a hissy fit.

I would insert in here, parents, you can tell the difference in the cry of your children. You know when there’s an injured cry, they just pinched their finger; and you know when there’s a tired cry and so on. Well, there’s also a defiant, “I want to be in charge,” cry. “I want to have my way!”

Ann: “I want that candy at the checkout line!”

Sam: Exactly. Well, apparently, she'd led him to believe somehow—I'd say he was maybe two years old—that she was going to buy some Twizzlers, and there they were, they were in the cart, but she hadn't gotten rid of them yet. He's demanding, and most the checkout area in the store is aware that this is going on.

She's feeling embarrassed, I'm sure...

Ann: Oh, the poor mom is humiliated, yes.

Sam: Right. I'm not on her case about this. You're asking how does it work.

So, she fishes through the cart, finds the Twizzlers, hands them to the clerk so we can pay for the Twizzlers first, then she opens the package, while he's crying, pulls out a Twizzler, and gives it to him! Now, I would ask, what did she just do?

Ann: She rewarded his disobedience.

Sam: She rewarded his hissy fit!

So the principle that God has wired into the universe is that behaviors that are rewarded tend to be repeated. So, she rewarded his hissy fit, his demanding cry, actually his defiance, because she told him no several times. So she hands him a Twizzler.

So I watched. He bit the end off the Twizzler, held his hand out over the edge of the cart, and dropped it on the floor.

Ann: On purpose.

Sam: On purpose.

Dave: Oh boy!

Sam: And demanded another one. A hissy fit. Just a screaming fit.

So she pulled out another one and gave him another Twizzler. You know, she's paying him to do this!

Dave: Right.

Sam: Instead of rewarding his cooperation, she's rewarding his hassle factor, if you might call it that. [Laughter]

Dave: Did you say anything to her?

Sam: I didn't. Jurisdiction matters. I mean, if it's your own kid that's one thing, and if it's a stranger in a checkout line—a lot of judgment calls there, and I wouldn't fault somebody if they did say something, and there are people who would handle it, maybe, differently than I did, which is just watch it happen and then wish her well as she went on her way.

Ann: You wrote your book.

Sam: I tried to engage both of the children in conversation.

Dave: Yes.

Sam: What I would say to her is that if you want to just placate the child so that you can get done with the shopping and get out of the store, just beware you just made your problem worse. Are you sure you want to pay that cost to get out of the store?

The child would not be injured if you just let him cry. He can learn to wait. Isn't waiting one of the hardest things in life we do, even as adults? We so hate to wait, but delay of gratification, that's part of maturity.

We help our children when they have to wait for some things—not that we intentionally torture them by extending wait periods, but a reasonable wait is, "Get out of the store and you can have your Twizzler."

Dave: Now, would you have, in this situation, say it's your granddaughter, grandson, and the same thing's happening, or it's your son years ago, daughter years ago, would you have said, "No, you're not going to get a Twizzler now," or would you have said, "If you can ask more politely, I'll give you a Twizzler"? "If you stop the crying, stop the whining, and ask for one more politely," rewarding the good behavior, not rewarding the bad.

Sam: It's a good question. My answer would vary based upon how old the child was, and I didn't know this two-year-old in the shopping cart, but with my children, we had the conversation before going to the store, and my daughters loved going to the grocery store with me! We would get two carts. For a number of years in our marriage, I would go to the grocery store, Vicki would stay home, and I'd take the girls, and it was an adventure, one girl in each cart.

Bob: Are you pushing both carts?

Sam: I'm pushing one and pulling the other. [Laughter] As they grew older I would invite them into decisions I thought they could make. Now, early on I just would hand them stuff, and then their decision is where to put it in the cart. They'd stack and restack and then restack and re-restack.

But later I'd ask, "Which kind of soup should we get? Which kind of cereal should we buy? Do you think we're out of lettuce?" and invite them into the shopping. "This one costs this much, this one costs this much; what do you think we should do?"

But we had the conversation ahead of time, and they knew that if you are belligerent, which is different than just being active or mischievous or you happen to knock something off the shelf inadvertently or something like that—"if there's a belligerence, we'll just leave the carts right there and we'll get in the car and go home, and you won't be happy about it."

Bob: You hit on something, and we talk about this in the *Art of Parenting* video series. It's what you're talking about in the book, Sam. For correction to occur, there has to be instruction before there's correction. I see a lot of parents assuming that a child is going to know how to behave, not coaching a child, not doing the instructing, not having those huddles in the parking lot before you go in and execute the game plan in the store.

When you pull in and say, "Okay, here's what's going to happen: we're going to go into the store, it's going to take us about 20 minutes. You may get bored at some point, but I want this behavior to be like this, and it'll be a good experience if we get this, and maybe we'll go to the park this afternoon if it all works out well here. But if it doesn't go well here, it's not going to be a good day the rest of the day."

You get them understanding that, and then in the middle of it you can say, "Remember what we talked about in the car?" and you can draw on that.

Sam: Not only talking in advance in the car, but it can happen in the moment, in the store.

Bob: Right.

Sam: Something happens in the store, you can say, you know, "You're not in trouble about it this time, but if you do that again... Are we clear? Look me in the eye now. You understand? If you do that again, that's an offense, that's trouble for you."

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Thanks for listening. Thanks to our global broadcast producer Marques Holt, our mastering engineer Dennis Leake, our global broadcast manager Rhonda Street. We hope you've enjoyed the broadcast, Bob.

Bob: Now, tomorrow we're going to talk about why it's so important for parents to not only set boundaries, but not capitulate, not to weaken on those boundaries. Sam Crabtree joins us again tomorrow; hope you can be back with us for that as well.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I'm Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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