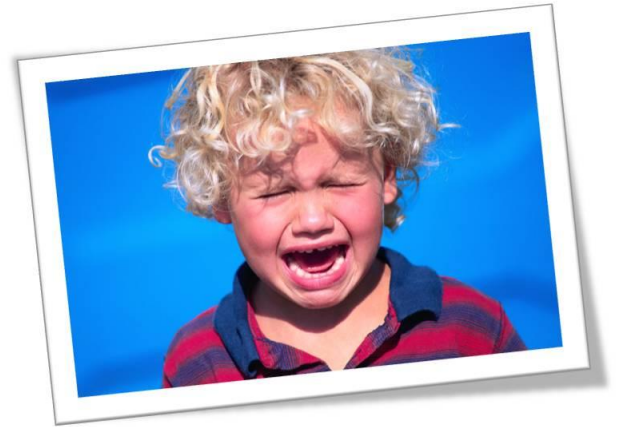


Spilled Milk

It didn't take long. After three good warnings to sit down and stop reaching, the sweet, curly-topped 4-year-old stood on his chair....and reached for something. Halfway through the reach, he knocked over dad's tall glass of milk, which landed on his dinner plate, shattered and sent a splat of milk across the table and onto dad at the same time. The sticky white liquid then dripped off the table and onto the floor. This was

the very same floor that earlier that day mom had taken pains to wash thoroughly and treat to a coat of wax. Being well beyond her due date for baby number three, mom was trying to keep the home orderly and clean ahead of the fact.



Everything happened at once. Mom firmly removed the 4-year-old from his chair and after two good whacks on the seat of the pants, sat him down on the other side of the kitchen. Dad tried to contain the dripping milk and head for paper towels at the same time. The surprised 4-year-old sat with indignity and began to howl. Older sister, who was six, just sat and watched everything.

It was supposed to have been a quiet meal in a clean kitchen at the end of a long day. Instead it was as if a firecracker had been set off in the middle of the table. As mom wiped milk and removed broken glass from the table, her hot tears dripping down on it all. Older sister just sat and with wide eyes and watched everything.

Eventually, order was somewhat restored to the scene. A sniffling 4-year old was firmly planted back in his seat. Dad went for another plate and glass of milk. Mom wiped her face and took a deep breath. Older sister continued to sit and watch everything.

In a rare moment of pause and quiet, older sister speaks:

"Mom, do you wish you didn't have us?"

Both parents froze and stared at each other. It was one of those times when God gives you the words without your even asking for help. Isaiah 65:24 says, *"Before they call, I will answer..."*. What could have been another disaster became a calming, reassuring moment for the child.

"No," mom answered as she reached for older sister's hand, "we would never wish we didn't have you. We are so thankful we have you and we love you both very much. What we do wish is that you would obey us the first time." Smiles made their way around the table, except for the 4-year-old, who wanted to suffer a few minutes longer. Lots of hugs were dispensed after the meal, and before long it was time for bed.

Later, as mom sat recalling the events of the day, she understood it all: Does God ever wish He didn't have us? Do we obey Him...the FIRST time? And when we send milk and glass flying in every direction, are we surprised and indignant at the gentle but firm discipline we receive?

The lessons to be found in this story are almost unlimited: chastisement and discipline, unrewarded efforts, showing love, obedience, instruction, and grace under fire.

Not only are children a gift to us from God, they are our greatest teachers in this life. Often, in the middle of chaos that accompanies them we don't sense the instruction in it all. When we get all huffed up and disagreeable with our children, we are huffed and disagreeable with God. They are clear and distinct gifts from Him. They are ongoing opportunities to demonstrate the same kind of grace God demonstrates toward us. Growth in grace stops the moment we don't put this into practice.

God doesn't love us because we are lovable. It is His nature. And in John 13 He says we must show the same love to others. *"Love as I have loved you."* I Corinthians says, *"love suffereth long and is kind....."* How easy it is to be kind and love our children early in the day when we are fresh! But God says even when there are explosions at dinner and bedtime, show love.

We must remember to carry over this kind of love and grace into other aspects of our lives, and with other people. Spilled milk can be an opportunity