

What Should I Do When My Child Is Having a Meltdown in Public? | Ep. 58

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SUMMARY

In this episode of the Connected Families Podcast, hosts Jim and Lynn Jackson discuss the concept of obedience in parenting, emphasizing that the goal is not immediate compliance but rather fostering a loving relationship with God that inspires genuine obedience. They address common parenting challenges, particularly regarding emotional outbursts in public and the importance of preparing children for difficult situations.

- *Immediate obedience is not the ultimate goal of parenting; instead, fostering a loving relationship with God is key.*
- *Compliance without heart can lead to children behaving like "little Pharisees" rather than developing true obedience.*
- *Parents should focus on building trust and understanding with their children, allowing for mistakes and learning opportunities.*
- *Preparing children for challenging situations, like grocery shopping or zoo visits, can help mitigate meltdowns.*
- *Emotional outbursts are normal; parents should remain calm and supportive rather than embarrassed or punitive.*
- *Engaging children in problem-solving and discussing feelings ahead of time can promote better behavior.*
- *Authenticity in parenting is crucial; parents should model their own struggles and reliance on God.*
- *The journey of parenting takes time, and creating a safe environment for children to express themselves is essential for their growth.*

Speaker 1: Hello, friends. Welcome to the Connected Families Podcast. I'm Stacy Bellward, your host. I'm so glad that you tuned in today. In today's episode, I asked Jim and Lynn Jackson, co founders of Connected Families, to answer a few commonly asked questions that parents like you have sent in to us.

Speaker 2: Here we are again, episode number 58. I kind of hate to say this because. Because it feels a little bit. Yeah, it feels empty in here without our normal moderator, Stacy. I know.

Speaker 3: I miss her already.

Speaker 2: We're missing Stacy. Stacy is not able to moderate us today talking about our common questions because she's got some stuff going on and can't be with us. But we felt like it was important enough to stay on track and schedule. We're going to do this without her.

Speaker 3: We are.

Speaker 2: How are we going to do it?

Speaker 3: By God's grace.

Speaker 2: By God's grace. By our inner Stacy, indeed. You know what? I think I'm going to take on the inner Stacy role. Sort of go for it. I sort of want to position you, Lynn, as parent coach around some of these questions and just draw on some of the experiences you've had and some of the wisdom. And the first question we're going to take a stab at here is the question of obedience. We hear from people all the time.

Speaker 2: It seems like what you're saying, Jim and Lynn and Connected Families Team, is that immediate obedience is not the goal of parenting. If that's not the goal of parenting, what is the goal? Why isn't it immediate obedience?

Speaker 3: Because Jesus wants our hearts to. The Father wants our hearts. He doesn't want our external behavior. Jesus was very, very clear about that in his ministry. I just read Matthew 23 this morning about woe to you Pharisees who wash the outside of the cup, but the inside is full of yuck. So if we train our children to obey with not that inner heart, we could well be training little Pharisees. So obedience is meant to flow out of a love of God and receiving his love first and then loving him back.

Speaker 3: Our obedience.

Speaker 2: So what I hear you saying there is that what the Pharisees did, even though they thought it was obedience, was not right. It was something else. And I know there was words even in that passage you're referencing about woe to you Pharisees, you brood of vipers. I mean, he was really vicious with these people who made a premium of behaving properly, calling it obedience. But Jesus said that the inside of their cup was dirty. The outside was clean.

Speaker 2: So just because you're behaving Right. And I'm putting my fingers up in quotes, like, just because you're behaving right doesn't mean that it's obedience. What do you call it if it's not obedience?

Speaker 3: Well, it can often be just compliance where I don't want to get in trouble. I don't want anybody to yell at me. So I'll do this thing that my heart is not in. And either as soon as they leave the room or as soon as I, you know, graduate to independence, I am going to embrace a whole different set of values. And no parent wants that for their kids. We want to grow kids that love and obey God.

Speaker 3: And that's where fear often comes in. Parents are afraid not to require. Require immediate obedience because they think that's how that outcome will happen, but it's really not. And I get the desire for immediate obedience. When it was chaos in her house, man, I would have been happy if I'd had a little bit of that on a day.

Speaker 2: Well, and is there a time and a place for a parent to just admit, I need you to behave a certain way in order for us to be okay and get out of here and be on time? Whether that's obedience or not, I don't care. But we need to go, and if you're not in the car, we're leaving?

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Speaker 2: Is that what you're talking about?

Speaker 3: Well, not exactly. I'm talking about if you truly are committed to developing obedience in a healthy, helpful way, there's times when you tell your kids, this is one of those instances, because this is important, and there'll be a consequence if you don't. So kids should know that there will be times when you will expect them to be quickly obedient or there'll be a consequence, but that a lot of the times your goal is going to be something, something else.

Speaker 2: So what I'm hearing in that is that there are times when to require our children to behave a certain way is an okay thing for us to do as parents and to be kind about that, to be clear about that, to let our kids know what will happen if they don't behave the way they ought to in this situation.

Speaker 3: Right.

Speaker 2: Is that obedience is really the question that's in the crosshairs. And I'd suggest maybe or maybe not.

Speaker 3: Right.

Speaker 2: Because if that's our M.O. for parenting, if that's what we do each time we're going to require obedience, then our kids are going to comply because they have to, to stay out of trouble. But they're not going to develop the heart values around it.

Speaker 3: Right.

Speaker 2: Ideally, we get to a point in our family where we look at the kids and we say, this is one of those times kids, where you just got to trust me. We got to go. There's no time for explanations. And they look up at you because they trust you. And you've earned that trust through repeated efforts to talk and build wisdom into them and to help them understand the whys of this requirement that they look at you and they understand and they do the thing with a willing heart, not with an unwilling heart.

Speaker 2: So it's really the willing heart that is at the core of obedience, isn't it?

Speaker 3: Yes, absolutely. And we really see this priority on heart in the way that Jesus called John the Baptist

to pave the way for him. So the most important and final prophet job in the Bible was preparing the way for Christ. John the Baptist job description was essentially two things. One was turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and could read parents, so keep your heart connected to your child. And then the second was and turn the disobedient to obedience.

Speaker 2: It's not.

Speaker 3: No, it says turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. Jesus did not want to come to a bunch of people that were ready to just toe the line and step in behind the Pharisees. He wanted to come to people who were relationally connected and loved the wisdom of God and then they would be ripe for his teaching. And we think that that's true of our children as well.

Speaker 3: When we keep our hearts connected to them and put a priority on developing wisdom, it's so much more natural for them to want to follow this Jesus that we love.

Speaker 2: So in developing wisdom as we've come to understand it and fill in the blanks where I miss it, here is about giving our kids some rope to make mistakes. It is about when they make mistakes or misbehave or sin. At the core of all of this is the problem of s both ours and our kids. Right. You know, when this is all in play instead of just putting a consequence in place so that next time they do the right thing because they're afraid not to.

Speaker 2: It's about engaging with this and opening our kids thinking parts of their minds to develop some why rationale around this kind of stuff, Right?

Speaker 3: Absolutely. And we see Jesus teaching this call to wisdom. And wisdom isn't formed in an instant because kids have to process. So in Matthew 21, Jesus tells a parable of the two sons and the father gives a command. The first one says, no, I'm not going to do it. But then later he thinks about it and he changes his mind. The second son says, oh yeah, I'll do it, dad. And then he doesn't. Now the context of the parable is a confrontation of the Pharisees.

Speaker 3: But Jesus asks who was the obedient son? And everyone answers, the first one, the one that had some time to think about it, had a change of heart and then obeyed. So just a principle that we can gather from that is that we can give our kids a little time to think about something. So maybe it's offering them a couple of choices and saying, you know, connecting first, giving them a couple of choices and say, I'm going to give you time to think about that so that you can make a wise choice.

Speaker 3: And then I'll be back and see what you think. Then you follow through with whatever you know is going to be the result of the choices. But giving kids time to process, not coming to them with our angst and okay, you can do this or you can do this, because that's loaded with power, control type stuff from the parent. So giving kids some time to think is one principle from scripture.

Speaker 2: So I'd like to get really practical with this if we could. Like I'm sitting here listening to you and I think this is all great principled wisdom for parenting. I'm still imagining that parent who might be listening. You know, they're in a situation in their head that happens commonly with them and their kids. And I'm guessing you get coached about this sort of thing frequently. Okay, I'm the parent who comes to you and says, okay, Lynne, you've taught me a few basic things about the connected families framework.

Speaker 2: And I kind of get it and I get the foundation and I get the connecting part and all that. But whenever I go to the grocery store, I've done everything I know how to do with my 4 year old. And it just seems like before we even go in, I start to get afraid. And so I let them know what to expect like you taught me. But I let them know and we go into the store and that four year old just whines to get the thing they want every time.

Speaker 2: And I tell them if you whine, you know you're going to have to go into the cart, you can't run off and get it, put them in the car. Then it escalates and gets worse. And it seems like 9 times out of 10 I bring my 4 year old out of whatever store I'm in. Crying. And sometimes I'm crying too. So doesn't that child need to learn to obey me?

Speaker 3: Well, yes, in the big picture of life. And what do you think is the best way to help them learn to want to obey you, not to be coerced into obeying you.

Speaker 2: That's why I'm here talking to you. Like, you know, think about rewards and I think about letting the child do this or that. Okay, so wisdom of the righteous. How do I teach a four year old the wisdom of the righteous for going to the store? I don't know.

Speaker 3: Well, if I had a little four year old like that, I think I'd start problem solving and just start with agreeing.

Speaker 2: Where.

Speaker 3: Just give me a little time here to start by talking about. Boy, going to the store is tough sometimes, isn't it? You get frustrated and I get frustrated and we end up mad and sometimes we're both crying when we leave.

Speaker 2: So this is while I'm going into

Speaker 3: the store or beforehand.

Speaker 2: So see, that's where you catch me, the young parent. Like I'm just so busy going from one thing to another that I forget to be proactive.

Speaker 3: Right.

Speaker 2: Okay, so this is advice for enlisting the child's brain in all of this before we're in the heat of the moment.

Speaker 3: Right. Because when you start into that store, you've got your neurological script of what you do in the store, your child has theirs. It's going to go the same way unless you make a plan to do it differently.

Speaker 2: So what you just did is approach me before we go to the store sometime, maybe, maybe the day before or the hour before or whatever, and you start having a conversation with me that, that gets me thinking and curious about some stuff.

Speaker 3: Yep. So I might ask you, you know, what's hard about going to the store? We both get frustrated, don't we? Do you get frustrated, Jim?

Speaker 2: I get mad. You don't let me get grapes.

Speaker 3: Oh yeah.

Speaker 2: Or whatever's on my mind at the time.

Speaker 3: If it was grapes, I'd probably let you get them. You want the molasses cookies. I know you.

Speaker 2: You don't let me get cookies.

Speaker 3: Yeah, that's more like it.

Speaker 2: I was just obsessing about something. So whatever it is kids obsess about, you know, that's top of mind for the child. So I obsess about a thing at the store. The toy I want, the food I want, the sweets I want, the three dimensional experience in the back where they let you touch the lobsters. I don't know what goes on at the grocery store. Actually, I do. When I was a child, I loved going and looking at the lobsters.

Speaker 2: I would break away from my mother

Speaker 3: and go look at the lobsters. Oh, random. Where were you going with that one?

Speaker 2: So I, as a four year old or a five year old have my obsession about what pleasurable thing I'm going to get to experience when I'm at the store.

Speaker 3: It was the lobster for me.

Speaker 2: It was. Well, it was candy too, like anything sweet. Mom, can we get this ice cream or that ice cream or. Yeah. So you're helping me think through this ahead of time, right?

Speaker 3: Talking about we're both frustrated, what can we do? So we have a good time in the grocery store and then just start coming up with ideas and talking about that. And maybe you need a pad of paper with a pencil attached or maybe you need a little bag of snacks that you can kind of draw on so you're not so hungry that you're freaking out about the sugar because your blood sugar is low.

Speaker 2: And you're going to talk to me and give me some options about what that might be to help me.

Speaker 3: What would be important to you?

Speaker 2: What else will you talk to me about ahead of time?

Speaker 3: What would happen if you got down and started to run and then I'd pick you up and I'd tell you that I love you but that I need to keep you safe. And then you'd go in the cart for a while and then that you'll have a chance to settle down in the cart and then get back out and try it again and maybe even help me push the cart because that big muscle pushing would be helpful.

Speaker 2: So you're engaging me in a whole bunch of different full body ways in all of this. My brain, my muscles. What are you doing with yourself as a parent? To prepare for the fact that all of this planning that you've done may not help me the first time.

Speaker 3: Right. Because it's going to take a while to establish different habits. So to just have some scripts in my head, it's like this is a process. This won't be a problem when he's 13. So just hold on. You know, just some of the things that we can calm ourselves down with and not, okay, now it's going to go perfect just because I did a little problem solving with my child, but to just recognize if I can model obedience to God, that is the way that I will best help my child learn obedience to God.

Speaker 2: Wow.

Speaker 3: So if while they're running off I'm praying and then I pick up my child and I pick them up with a loving hold. And I said, you know what, God is with us right now. This is so hard for both of us. He loves us.

Speaker 2: Yeah. So that's that thing that you do that you've always done so well, which is figure out how to personally for yourself really welcome Jesus. The power of the Holy Spirit right into the midst of the mess. Which is going to lead well into the topic that we've been asked to discuss after the break, which is when our kids melt down in public and how do we go through that? You've already kind of begun that process and so what are some practical things we could do there?

Speaker 2: So we'll see you on the other side.

Speaker 1: Hi friends. We have an online course that you could start today called the Power of Less Arguing, More Wisdom. We get lots of questions from parents and every day here's one of them. My 4 year old son struggles to focus. I often find myself repeating requests like go get your jammies on multiple times before I believe that he's even heard my request. What can I do to help him hear me sooner and encourage him follow through?

Speaker 1: Well, we have an answer for that. Parents, my co worker Chet Hengay and I are certified coaches. We learned really early that asking our kids curious questions instead of telling all the time was a complete game changer. I mean telling over and over, go get your jammies on. It gets tiring, doesn't it? Well, the Power of Questions online course will teach you how to make a big shift. Instead of a me versus you tone where the parent feels responsible to get the child to do what they're supposed to do and the child reaction exists.

Speaker 1: Chad and I learned that we can shift the tone of our house to a teamwork mentality where parents and children of all ages come together to solve problems. You know, problems like the wet towels are on the bathroom floor 90% of the time. Well, the Power of Questions, Less arguing, More wisdom is a four sessions course. You can sign up yourself and take it today or grab a few friends and do it as a group. Sandra said this after finishing the course.

Speaker 1: The Power of Questions online course gives a solid foundation for why and how to ask thoughtful, meaningful questions. I love how the course takes you through practical steps that helped our entire families start to build the life skill of asking quality questions that build understanding and grow wisdom. We even watch parts of it with our 8 and our 10 year old children to ignite problem solving. Well, I love that testimony and you can find the Power of Questions online course@connectedfamilies.org or you can find a link in our show Notes.

Speaker 2: Okay, well, we've been talking about meltdowns in the store and it's a good segue into the topic of really the next question that we get. And it's not just about the store, but it's about public and kids who just are having a hard time controlling their emotions and they have emotional outbursts in public places and parents get embarrassed and so they get strong and firm about this, which seems to backfire. You've talked a little bit already about the importance of preparing ahead of time and helping to put some choices about how that might go.

Speaker 2: But, you know, let's just say here we are, we're in the store. We've even had some conversations with my child. The very specific question that we got that addresses this, that says I try to talk safely and call me with my 4 year old while we're out. And he shouts at me repeatedly what he wants to do and what's not going to happen and he wants to see the animals more than we have time to see.

Speaker 2: And I told him it wasn't respectful and then he needed to be a good listener and that I would give him a reward. And he wasn't happy with the response and it kept going on. And this is such a frequent thing for parents. Like, I'm trying these new things you're teaching me and they're not working, Lynn, it's not working.

Your ideas seem so great when you say them, but when I try them, doesn't work. And I get so frustrated and I'm afraid of where this is going.

Speaker 2: Please help me.

Speaker 3: Well, first of all, it takes quite a while to turn the barge and to.

Speaker 2: What does that mean?

Speaker 3: I'm about to tell you. First of all, it takes quite a while to turn the barge. The barge is like our family, just in all the momentum we have going in a certain direction. And it takes a long time to shift that pattern. Well, families are not sailboats that turn on a dime. They are barges that move slowly as we give persistent effort in a certain direction. And that effort is about being safe and calm ourselves.

Speaker 2: Well, and I would suggest that kids have learned, even if it's warped learning. They've learned when they act that certain way that there's a payoff for them. They get what they want. So if mom and dad change methods and to try to get this to stop and all of a sudden what I used to do to get my Needs met isn't meeting my needs anymore. I might just try harder as a 4 year old to get my needs met by doing the same thing I've always done, only louder and more forceful.

Speaker 3: Well, and it's not this diabolical need for, you know, for control or whatever. It's like kids need connection. They need healthy kind of self efficacy or personal authority validation. Yep. They have some valid needs if they're going to grow up to be healthy people. But sometimes when they're four or however old and they just don't have this fully developed brain, it can just explode and get messy. So the specific question we got was about a four year old at the zoo.

Speaker 3: And I can just imagine the setup for that one. The zoo is an amazing place that both fascinates and exhausts a child. And so then it's really easy for a meltdown to happen. So what's an important starting place is for a parent to go into that going, you know, there may well be a meltdown here that could be unavoidable, but there's going to be parts of this day that'll be awesome. And so when the meltdown happens, I'm just going to be okay with it.

Speaker 3: And I can remember, and I've shared this in some podcasts before, just a day in a big box store when one of our kids had a screaming meltdown and I just stopped and I thought, well, this is another chance to practice getting my value from Jesus.

Speaker 2: You're always so good at that.

Speaker 3: And just that thought just helped me calm down enough. And it's like, who am I in this for? I'm in this for the Lord and my kids and not for the watching eyes. And why would I want to give my personal value

away to a stranger? I'm not going to do it. So I am going to just take a breath and parent in the best way that I can think that my child needs. Yeah.

Speaker 2: And I think there's something in there too about permission for your child to be human. Like, you know, you know what, it's okay. And your okayness doesn't come from getting a child who doesn't lose control of their emotions or who responds really great when you do X, Y or Z method. Your job is to be okay no matter how any of that goes.

Speaker 3: Yep.

Speaker 2: And sometimes it's actually healthy to allow the children to struggle. Especially, you know, you said in the first half of this segment to do some preparation ahead of time. Like, you know, it's hard sometimes when we're at the zoo or at the store or at people's house or at the park. It's really hard to leave. Or it's hard when we, there's something we want to do that we don't have time to do. And last time, what did you do when that happened?

Speaker 2: And next time, what do you want to do when that happens? And okay, let's see how that goes. And then give them freedom to figure that out and stay emotionally aloof. Enough from it all and okay, enough from it all that when, when the child does have that struggle, you can say, oh, this is one of those times, isn't it? Do you remember what you said? Or is it too hard?

Speaker 3: Right. Yeah. When kids are melting down, you know, we just see that as such an all bad thing, but it gives us insight into what's important to them. And so there's things that we can look for in a meltdown that are good things about our kids. So I don't know if you want to play a four year old at the zoo that wants to see every animal. I thought you would. You want to see every animal, don't you?

Speaker 2: You do. I want to go over there and see the tigers.

Speaker 3: I saw that.

Speaker 2: We had to go past so fast. I want to go right now.

Speaker 3: Oh, I know, buddy. It's just about time for to go.

Speaker 2: Don't go that way. I want to go back to the tigers, mom.

Speaker 3: Do you know what I love about that?

Speaker 2: What? What are you saying to me? You're blowing my mind.

Speaker 3: I love that you love animals.

Speaker 2: I do. I want to see the tiger so much.

Speaker 3: So exciting. I do.

Speaker 2: Can we go then?

Speaker 3: It's too late for that. But we can see two more animals on the way. And we can roar like tigers while we go giraffes. The giraffes are on the way. And then we can see the penguins, but we can roar like tigers. Are you ready? Come on. You look like you want to roar.

Speaker 2: I don't wanna go home.

Speaker 3: Okay.

Speaker 2: I wanna go home.

Speaker 3: Do you wanna, you wanna piggyback ride or you want.

Speaker 2: I wanna piggyback.

Speaker 3: Okay, let's do that.

Speaker 2: In that roleplay, it always. It's like I'm trying so hard and you know I'm not trying out a 10 level. On the 10 scale, I'm 7 level maybe. To do what I think a child would really do when you were pleasant and when you were affirming of something that I love and kind of complimented me in the middle of all of this, a four year old would not say, you're blowing my mind. But it felt kind of that way, like, wow, that sort of starts to reach me.

Speaker 2: So thanks for putting that into this little role play because I think that's the kind of thing that's helpful to parents to see. You didn't solve it. It didn't go away. I may not have responded. I may have been an 8 or a 9 or a 10 on that scale. And you would have just said, well, I guess I'll just have to pick you up and we'll go. And that's okay. Next time we'll try again.

Speaker 3: Do you want to go with your feet on the ground or your feet in the air?

Speaker 2: So hopefully those are a few ideas that can help parents in these two. What are kind of our most common questions that we get? And I don't know, is there any more you want to say?

Speaker 3: Well, I just think kids know if we're parenting for other people or if we're parenting for them under the authority of the Lord. If our parenting changes substantially in different places, that creates insecurity in them. And we just had a conversation with a pastor today about that. When it says, and the pure in heart shall see God, that's not about the perfectly spotless, shiny shall see God, because there's none of us like that. But it's really about the person whose heart is the same through and through that is authentic.

Speaker 3: That isn't a whitewashed tomb or a cup cleaned on the outside that. That parents under the authority of the Lord in the for the best intentions of loving their child in all different kind of circumstances so we can just hang on to it. God is watching me. He wants to love this child through me. And I'm gonna push away my false idol of the opinion of the people that are watching me.

Speaker 2: Yeah. And the shiny behaving child.

Speaker 3: And the shiny behaving child.

Speaker 2: I think there's. There's a call in that, Lynn, to be people who keep examining our own hearts because, you know, the sin that passed into our children passed through us to them.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Speaker 2: The genetic of sin is. Is, you know, Christ has solved it in the eternal realms, but we still wrestle with it. And Paul talks about this a lot. And in the beginning of Romans and Romans chapter seven particularly, we have a struggle with sin. And purity isn't about not having that struggle. It's about struggling honestly, authentically with it and bringing our stuff before the Lord, before brothers and sisters in Christ, and living an authentic life of struggle for faithfulness.

Speaker 2: The fight of faithfulness, I think, is anchored in this idea?

Speaker 3: Absolutely.

Speaker 2: So then we approach our kids not perfect, but serving a perfect God who accepts us with God with His grace and his love. As we wrestle through these things, we

Speaker 1: want to hear from you. What did you find helpful from today's episode? Let us know by leaving a comment and make sure to subscribe to catch future episodes of the Connected Families Podcast. For more information, go to connectedfamilies.org.