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**Family Values (Part 4)**  
**Grace for Mistakes**  
Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today, we are picking up Part 4 In a series we started called *Family Values*. In Family Values are these shared beliefs that Mom and Dad have on our hearts first and then we pass them onto our kids. They are determining our priorities, our decisions and how we treat each other.

I'm excited about this morning's message because this is one of the core shared beliefs of the Cunningham Family. It's part of our Family Constitution. Years ago, Dr. Gary Smalley, when we were starting our family, said, "You need a family constitution. You need a list of all the shared beliefs that you hold true as a family, you hold one another accountable to this list, and one of the ten on our list is We offer Grace for Mistakes and avoid repeating mistakes. And that is the key.

So today, I'm excited to jump into *Grace for Mistakes*. If you want to be a parent of grace, one that offers grace for mistakes – it means you have to parent with truth and love. Truth without love is cruel. Love without truth leads to that permissive parenting that we are going to look at in just a moment.

So, we want to parent with grace, leading out in both. And this can be tricky. This is the challenge for us often. But we avoid these fear-based motivations like threats, guilt, intimidation, to get compliance out of our children. We want our kids to do the right thing and make good decisions for the future, not just for the moment, but for their future. We don't want them to do the right thing just to avoid consequences.

We want them to do the right thing, avoid mistakes, when possible, avoid repeating mistakes, we want them to learn from their mistakes, not just to get out of the moment, but to set themselves up for the future. We never want to shame our kids. In moments like these, we want them to learn from them.

My son, Carson, is probably the one and in our family... Whenever Amy and I would talk about where we were blowing it as parents, like we just did not do a good job. That was a mistake. Do you forgive us? My son always took that so personally. And there were a couple of times when he was small that I would say to him, "Hey, Dad didn't do too well right there son, I am so sorry. He would go, "Stop saying that. No, you did great." He would always try to coach us away from disgraced parenting because he just didn't want us to ever think we were making mistakes. But we say it around here plenty. There is no such thing as a perfect parent. When we do make mistakes, even as parents, we have to learn to apologize and seek forgiveness.

Before we go too far with this... you know in every one of these messages in this series, I've wanted to talk to the children as well as the parents. I've started by talking to the kids in most messages and then moving on to the parents, but for all of us, I want us to look at the core tenant of our faith that we hold to as a church for those who would call themselves Bible believing Christians. We believe in grace. We sing about grace.

Here's where it starts, the whole doctrine that builds out

in Romans 3: 23, we read ***For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*** In other words, all of us need grace.

When you get to Ephesians 2: 9, ***For it is by grace you have been saved through faith.*** This is not from yourselves; it is the gift of God. Salvation is not something we earn. Salvation is not something that we hopefully do enough good works, cut out bad works, and in the end it all works out for us. No, that's not how salvation works at all. Salvation comes to us by faith alone in "Christ alone and the grace that we receive is a gift from God.

When Proverbs talks about grace and how people deal with their sins, we don't ever want to be a family that... Part of parenting with grace means we want our kids to bring their mistakes to us so we can help them process them. We don't want to teach our kids how to hide their sins, how to conceal their sins, and that's what the motivators of guilt

and shame do. Guilt and shame can get a kid to be like, *I don't want to make Mom and Dad mad so I'm not going to tell them what I just did.*

But the grace-based parent... Hopefully this is taking place in your home. The grace-based parent is having the kid come to them and say, "I made a mistake and the first thing I thought of was to come to you and share it with you so you can help me avoid repeating this in the future.

The Bible says ***whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper.*** Hiding them is not what we want, ***but he who confesses and forsakes,*** turns from, repents from, moves in the opposite direction... ***then forsakes them will obtain mercy.***

So, with all of this, I just want to take us to... not to spend a lot of time today in this online zero gathering for this, but your home should be the safest place to make mistakes. Why? Because you have children for not even a couple of decades. It's like zero to 18. Let's say it goes to 20. When they are small, I just see what a blessing it is that they have older people, parents, in their life that can walk alongside them as they make mistakes, as they sin, point it out, call it out, help them avoid it in the future, let them know how to take this to their heavenly Father.

The world is not offering them that, no way. The world is not giving them a second chance, but, mom and dad, the home should be the safest place.

And lessons learned can be very difficult. When we moved to Branson 25 years ago, we moved down T Highway. We had a bunch of Cedar trees cleared in front of the house. Right as we moved here, in front of the house, there were three massive piles of cedar trees, taller than me, stacked up there in the front yard.

I'm from Illinois, I grew up in Illinois. We didn't have cedar trees and anytime we would need to start a bonfire, we would use a little bit of accelerant, so I just went out one day and I'm going to take care of these three piles, so I pour a little gas on them. I waited a while. So, the cedars were pretty brown before I started these fires. I remember pouring the gas and Amy was on the front porch a couple hundred feet away, and I, like a late 28 something, naive young man walked up with a match, lite it and that I still have eyebrows and hair today is amazing to me because the explosions that came out of that shot into the sky, Amy yells from the front porch, "Should I call somebody?" she wouldn't have made it to the phone by the time this thing was already incinerated.

So, I learned a very important lesson that day that cedar trees do not need gas to get them going. Fast forward a few years, we are at another house here in Branson and there is a big ole pile of cedar trees in the backyard that I have to get taken care of, but I've already learned my lesson which is no gas required. But I was about to learn another very important lesson and that is cedar trees that were cut down six or seven months ago that are very brown, stacked together, there felt like there were a couple of gallons of gas on it already and you would have thought I had really learned my lesson. I didn't put gas on it, but that time, the Fire Department did get called by our back door neighbor who came out on the back porch, screaming, thinking we were burning our house down. But, as you can imagine, by the time the fire department showed up, the fire was out, my face was as red as could be, not from embarrassment, but from trying to contain the fire with my garden hose.

I am now 52 years old, and I can tell you I will never again light a cedar tree on fire. I've learned my lesson. Gas, no gas, it doesn't matter, I am not playing with fire and cedar trees. And that... Think about it. It's taken me five decades to figure this out. And for some of you I want you to start thinking about what are some of the decisions the dumb decisions, the mistakes that you have made in life that you have repeated and repeated and repeated.

So, I think the home should be the safest place to make mistakes, but not just make mistakes, but your home should be the safest place to learn from mistakes. Where we offer grace to one another.

This whole message comes out of the Family Devo cards that our church created years ago and the D in the series is the dog. We've been teaching this card to our kids since they were like five and seven years old. The D was my son, Carson's favorite card. Proverbs 26: 1 says, ***As a dog returns to it's vomit, so a fool repeats folly.***

I would ask the kids all the time when they were growing up – Do we allow mistakes in the Cunningham home? Yes we do. What do we try to avoid at all cost? And it is repeating those mistakes. Wisdom learns from mistakes. A fool makes the same mistake over and over again. This is the *talk time* on this card. A wise person learns from his or her mistakes. We all make mistakes. The real issue is whether or not we will learn from them.

So, here's some questions, Mom and Dad, that as you turn this off in just a few moments, that you can ask your kids. Gather around the table, gather around the family room, and just have a little conversation about this.

Can you share a time when you really messed up? I just told you about my fires. What can you learn from that mistake? Ask everybody in the family to name something. And maybe some things will be revealed this morning.

What will you do to make sure that you do not repeat that same mistake?

So, I want to jump back into Proverbs for just a moment as I talk to the young people.

Your mom and dad are going to ask you these questions and I'm going to encourage you to answer them honestly, but as your pastor I just want to share with you briefly today, three ways that you can avoid repeating mistakes. If you're like, "I don't know why I keep doing this. I don't know why I keep making this mistake.

Number 1 - listen to older, wiser voices. You have them in the room with you right now. Parents and some of you have grandparents in the room. It may be coaches, teachers, but find some older, wiser voices.

{proverbs 12: 15 says, ***The way of fools seems right to them. They get stuck in their ways because they do their own thing. They never listened to anyone. But the wise listen to advice.***

Number 1 - Find a mentor, find someone who can encourage you in life at whatever age. Here's why this is important. I have found this to be true of mentors in my life. They will teach you intentionally and unintentionally. They will give you intentional lessons, things they instruct you in. And then you'll be watching their life and see them say or do things and be like, *That's a lesson I can learn without going through it myself.*

I think this is important... Zig Zigler puts it this way – *Fools never learn from their mistakes. Normal people learn from their own mistakes.* But there is one level deeper and I love this. *Wise people learn from other's mistakes.* This is why it's important to listen to older, wiser voices.

I know sometimes mom and dad, grandma or grandpa, we sit they are just going to need to experience this for themselves and I get it. Experience is a great teacher. But, young people, one of the reasons why, as you leave home, and mom and dad ask you so many questions is because they are figuring some things out before you go down the wrong road, a road they've already been down. A road where they learned a hard lesson.

They are wanting you to learn from their lesson and we can. We are fools, the Bible says, if we don't listen to their advice. We are fools if we don't listen to hey, I did this, I hung out with this person, I went to this place, and this ended up happening. And the same is going to be true for you if you go down that road. We are fools if we don't listen to that.

Number 2- Cut off friendships that keep getting you in trouble. Do you ever notice that the trouble you get into and mistakes you make, the people that are gathered around you? ***Walk with the wise and become wise for a companion of fools suffers harm.***

Do you want to make wise decisions? Do you want to avoid repeating mistakes? find friends that are wise, cut off the friendships... I know this is hard. You've been friends for ten years. Yeah, but that person is headed in a wrong direction in life. Young person, listen to mom and dad. Cut friendships, relationships out of your life that keep getting you in trouble.

Number 3 – listen and think before you speak. Carpenters like to say this before they cut wood for a project – Measure twice, cut once. That's a pretty good rule for us speaking too. Think twice, speak once. Like think this through a couple of times before you blurt it out.

Proverbs 23 says, ***it is to one's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.*** Meaning the person that's bringing anger towards them, the resentment toward them, the bitterness, just meeting that person where they are at. a wise person just walks away and says, "I'm just going to listen right now. I'm not going to speak. I'm going to think about this, I'm going to think about this before I just blurt it out.

***Proverbs 26: 4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly or you, yourself will be just like him.*** If You're going to be wise in a room full of fools, you're going to find you're probably going to be the last to speak. Probably some of the best advice I ever got from older, wiser pastor leaders in my life... Bill Rogers was an elder at our church for years and he would tell me all the time, "Ted, when you're in a room and you find yourself to be the one leading the meeting, always be the last one to talk because if you blurt out your thoughts and opinions, it's going to keep other people from sharing.

What wise advice. I do not need to be the first to speak. ***Fools find no pleasure in understanding, but delight in airing their own opinions.***

So, you will avoid so much strife in life if you find older, wiser voices and learn from their mistakes. We're talking about avoiding repeating mistakes? How about avoiding the mistake altogether. How about making wise decisions. Cutting the people out in your life that keep you on the path of bad decision making. And then, think, think, thnk. Be a good listener. Be someone who understands what's going on in the room and learn to speak less.

So, now, with that, I just want to end our time. We are not going to spend a lot of time, and we are not going to spend a lot of time today on this, but I just want to encourage the parents because this is about grace for mistakes and we want to be parents that offer grace to our kids when they make mistakes and help them avoid repeating mistakes. So, here's the question I was asked probably 20 years ago in Dr. Gary Smalley's book *The Key to Your child's heart*, which came out over 40 years ago. He covers four parenting styles; three we need to avoid, and one we need to embrace.

What is your parenting style? The first parenting style that we want to avoid is the dominant parent. This is the parent that says rules are rules. It's my way or the highway. This is the parent who rules with the iron fist. The dominant parent is usually one with very high standards and high expectations, constantly raising the bar for their children and challenging them to excel.

This was in the news years ago, the cover of Time Magazine with Tiger Mom. The dominant parent seldom offers warm, caring support. Everything is black and white when it comes to their kids. They want their kids to be raised right, but all too often, they fail to explain the reasons for the rigid rules. "Just do what I say, you don't need any explanation. The problem with this is children tend to grow up in this, and they do not accept their parent's values. It leads to rebellion. The child may be attracted to other children who rebel against their parents and their parent's rules. Children become loud and demanding of their rights and teachers will tell you this. In a classroom setting, the child causes disruption in order to gain attention from others. We want to avoid the dominant parent.

The next parent would be the permissive parent. Many of you just heard me talk about the dominant parent. You're swinging in the other direction. If the dominant parent is truth without love, now we are moving to love without truth. This is the parent you see in Walmart or Target going, "Please don't get angry with me, you're making a scene. Permissive parents tend to be warm, supportive people, but weak in establishing and enforcing rules and limits for their children. One of the major reasons why some parents

are too permissive is this fear that their children will end up resenting them or they will end up causing damage in their children if they are too strict. And the fear of confronting their child actually might produce the very things they fear.

A child with a permissive parent senses that he or she is in the driver's seat. And they get really good at learning how to manipulate the rules. They get really good at pitting one parent against another. This child often feels the greatest degree of insecurity like leaning against a wall that appears to be firm but ultimately falls over. They score very low in self-respect. They don't know how to control themselves; they don't know how to deal with responsibility, this is the one that sometimes they get dropped off at college, the dominant parent was rules, rules, rules, control all the way to the end. That kid didn't know how to handle responsibility.

Then you have the permissive parent with the same thing. They just didn't know what to do when they got to school because the school is going to have rules and they have curfews and all of that. The child learns that because standards are not firm, rules can be manipulated.

Then you have some that go even further than that to the neglectful parent.

I don't want to be a neglectful parent either. They tend to lack that loving support and control over their children. It's the parent that's just absent. *I don't have time for this. Work it out yourself. Take care of this yourself.* In this home, the child lacks emotional accessibility. This neglect teaches the child that he is not worthy of spending time with. Again, this child develops insecurity because the parents are never predictable. They never know if they are going to be around. This child tends to do poorly in school because of low motivation.

We don't want any of those first three. I know at times, we can run to each one of those, but this is what we are going for and this is what Gary challenged me years ago with – The loving and firm parent. I don't want to be dominant; I don't want to be permissive. I want to be a loving and firm parent.

Loving and firm parents usually have clearly defined rules, limits, and standards for living. They take time to train their children to understand these limits and give clear warnings when a child has transgressed and established and established limits

But they also give support by expressing physical affection and spending personal time with each child. The Loving and firm parent is a healthy and balanced combination of the dominant and permissive parent.

We've been doing this at the end of every message. I took kind of the loving and firm parent notes and thought back. My kids are raised now in their twenties, so last week, ,Lain shared his letter and he's has small children in the home and he shared his letter dealing with his shared belief and core value of living in the moment and not on technology and you have a dad now n the throws of it, in the middle of managing all of this technology with the kids.

So, you get mine as kind of looking back on my parenting. It's been good for me to look back, for me to own my parenting for the mistakes that I made, for the grace that I need from even my kids.

This was probably the hardest hit letter for me so far. In this series, we're only four parts in and we have another month left of this series.

To my kids: thank you for allowing your mom and I to learn and grow as parents. You showed us so much grace. We are all in the process of learning and growing. You showed mom and I the grace that I know you will show your children one day. I'm already praying that my grandchildren will experience that. And I know you're going to show them that grace too. I always tried to be a loving and firm parent. We had clearly defined rules, limits, and standards for our home. I tried to live these out in our home in a healthy and balanced way, and I didn't always get it right. Again, thank you for the grace you showed me.

I'm grateful that our family knows how to repair when we hurt one another. Walking in integrity doesn't mean every decision you make will be the right one, that's okay. When you make a mistake or a bad decision, own it. Don't explain it away with a bunch of words to weasel your way out of it. Take personal responsibility and say, "I was wrong." You will never gain the trust of people until you fully own your mistakes, intentional and unintentional.

Be the first to say I'm sorry. Ask for forgiveness but never demand it. The other person may need some time to process and that is okay too. When someone hurts you and apologizes, listen for understanding. Listening tells the other person that you value them, and you value the relationship. It doesn't mean you agree with them or that you see it

exactly from their point of view. Forgiveness and trust are not the same thing, so you may forgive but need to establish some new boundaries in that relationship.

If a relationship ends, don't let bitterness and resentment take root in your heart. It will hurt you in your relationships moving forward. Show people the same grace and mercy that your heavenly Father gives you. Know and rely on the unconditional love and unlimited grace he gives you. He is our source and gives you everything you need to offer grace to others.

Father, I thank you for the opportunity and for the technology, for the team that gathered here today to record this weekend so that our people could be safe with the weather conditions. I thank you for the homes that are trying to learn this message. There is so much thrown at us in the world today that to let home be a safe place for these mistakes and for these lessons to be learned. I pray for the parents watching today that they will seek to be loving and firm parents in what they do. I pray for children who are obedient in the home, and they honor their father and mother by following and listening to these clearly established rules and limits. It's not that we avoid truth. We are truth and love which is what we are seeking as grace-based parents.

For the one watching right now who doesn't understand grace at all, for them to understand today that they are a sinner and the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord that today, before they even think about the grace and mercy they offer their children that they would first and foremost receive that from you through the gift of Christ Jesus. And that today would be the day they repent of their sins and confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead.

Thank you for what you continue to do at Woodland Hills family church. we are grateful and we pray all of this in the name of Jesus. amen