

How Hard Is It To Be A Good Person?

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Every time a mom or dad leaves the house, or drops their child off at daycare or school, there is a classic moment when they turn to their child and say, “Be Good!” We want our kids to be good when we’re not around because basically we want them to grow up to be good people. But what does it mean to be a good person?

Children are often confused by the vague notion of “being good” because even when they’re trying to be good they still get into trouble. So we clarify for them, “hitting your sister is bad”, “telling a fib is bad”. And we keep clarifying as they grow up, “doing drugs is bad”, “cheating in school is bad”,

etc.

All the while they are growing up in a world full of people doing very bad things, night and day, day and night, all over the world. Badness is rampant, out of control. It’s a scary world and it always has been because a lot of people never figured out what it means to “be good”, and they also never figured out why they should.

How Many Times Do I Have to Explain This?



I imagine that if God had a physical form He/She would look like an exasperated parent pulling their hair out and asking the question, “*Why don’t they get it? I’ve given the 10 Commandments, I’ve explained in every language and through each culture, I’ve given examples and stories and told them the consequences, I’ve tried everything and they still just don’t get it!*”

At least I think that sometimes God must feel this way while watching humanity try to grow up.

But because God is Good and God is Love, then I imagine that most of the time God focuses on the good stuff, and is grateful for it.

Let’s Make It Simple

When children are young we have to simplify concepts and put them in very concrete terms so that they can understand. I recently found a book by a pediatrician, Dr. Harvey Karp, who says we have to communicate with young children as if they were cave men. His belief is that children between the ages of one to four go through four stages of “evolutionary” growth, each stage being linked to the development of the brain, and each echoing a step in prehistory humankind’s journey to civilization. Fascinating. The book is called, *The Happiest Toddler on the Block*.

During the time when I was studying child development and parenting techniques, and then working as a parent educator, I found that most of the strategies for raising children to “be good”, were also applicable to adults. Seems strange, yes, but in reality we are all still in a process of growing up. We are still learning how to “be good”, or how to be the best we can be. After all, Jesus said, “*be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect*”, and I don’t know about you but I’m not quite there yet.

Following rules help us learn how to be good.

When raising children it’s a good idea to have a few rules set in stone, not a lot, but just some basics that you can always refer back to. It seems to me that God had this same idea a very long time ago when Moses was given the 10 Commandments. Let’s take a quick look at those basics.

1. Love God with all your heart
2. Don’t worship other things or people

3. Always say God's name with love and respect
4. Set one day of the week aside for God
5. Love and respect your parents
6. Don't murder or intentionally harm people
7. Always be faithful to your husband or wife
8. Don't take anything that doesn't belong to you
9. Always tell the truth, be honest
10. Be happy with what you have, don't envy others

Now I suspect that regardless of what culture, religion or country a person comes from, that these are the basics that we all try to teach our children – even if we don't follow the rules ourselves. Jesus made it even more simple by saying, *“love God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself”*.

Why is it so hard to be good?

Well, there's always a reason isn't there? There's always an excuse: *“He did this to me, he deserves to be hurt”*, or *“everyone talks like that, it doesn't mean anything”*, how about *“they never loved me anyway”*; and the list could go on and on. We excuse ourselves from following the rules the same way kids do, basically because we don't really understand why the rules are good for us.



In the short term it feels better to follow our emotions, our reactions, instead of taking the time to calm down and consider what's best for everyone. The rules create an environment that is good for everyone, respects everyone, and allows everyone's needs to be met. But our immediate emotions are centered on ourselves. It might be perfectly normal to feel hurt, angry, upset, frustrated, annoyed, outraged and even bitter under certain circumstances – but we always have the choice to let our emotions subside and consider the bigger picture.

What's good for everyone.

The basic rules for being a good person are not just to preserve the status quo; they were created to preserve and cultivate a pure heart. The definition of a good person is a person with a pure heart – a heart that loves unconditionally and does not harbor resentment. A child is born with a pure heart, although still immature. While growing up we may experience the entire array of human emotions but our task in achieving maturity is to be able to let go of the destructive feelings and allow ourselves to be transformed by higher thought processes and a deeper experience of love.

Living life in a way that's unconcerned about goodness, a life that's completely centered on satisfying one's own feelings from moment to moment, is destructive and harmful to oneself as well as to others. We all have to understand in the depths of our heart that our soul really wants to be good, because it's the only way to achieve lasting happiness. Even if we have to force ourselves to pursue the way of goodness in the face of relentless badness – the only way to win is to keep striving to “be good”.