

Embracing Grace

JENN WARREN, EDITOR

I recently had a discussion with some other homeschool moms about morning routines and shared the schedule I crafted for our family that has worked well for the past several months. This schedule was built to work with my children's personality differences, instead of trying to force them into the same mold. One criticism of this unconventional schedule is that, "kids need to learn to function in the real world." I understand the perspective and the need to teach our kids to just get up in the morning, but I disagree with that assessment of the schedule. In teaching my kids to identify their needs and adjust to meet those needs I am teaching them how to function in the real world.

In my house, my son has always risen with the sunrise and my daughter likes to sleep until noon. For years I insisted that they both get up at 7am, get dressed, make their beds, and be at the table for our morning devotions by 8am. My daughter was often late or just plain grumpy and unengaged. My son was bubbly, loud, and enthusiastic. In the evenings, my son was grumpy and lethargic and my daughter was ready to play Scrabble until Midnight. Frustration with each other was common. Until I decided to quit fighting my kid's natural rhythms and instead work with the kids to teach them how to function within their personalities and "real world" expectations. Long story short, we no longer all start or end the day at the same time. Our relationships have also never been stronger.

We started the transition by talking about our personalities. We took a few personality tests, learned about our strengths and weaknesses, and discussed how we are different and how we are the same. Then we talked about respecting those differences and giving grace to each other by not demanding that our individual needs be catered to. In practical terms, this meant that my son had to tone down his enthusiasm and chatter in the morning and my daughter needed to stuff the grumpies and be more tolerant of her brother. We also talked about how society has certain expectations that adults have to be able to function within including typical workday schedules, and that part of growing up is learning how to do that. Then I made some changes to our morning schedule and our days have been much smoother. Plus, my son is learning that he needs to simply go to bed when he is tired, even if everyone else is staying up. And my daughter is learning to go to bed early enough that she can get up at a reasonable time in the morning.

For those curious, our new schedule looks like this:

5:30am - Mom gets up

6:30am - Son is up

7:30am - Daughter gets up

8:00 am - Mom & Son have some time

8:30am - Son starts school & daughter has some time with mom

9:00am - Daughter starts school.

We take lunch together around 12:30pm and our schedules are then in sync until bedtime, when my son heads to bed by 9pm and my daughter has lights out at 10pm.

Within a week of the new schedule I saw huge changes in our family dynamic. I had instantly eliminated the start-of-the-day tension between an extroverted, chatty, early-riser and my introverted, likes-to-start-the-morning-quiet night-owl. At the end of the day, my son is willing to go to bed earlier, *when he is tired*, because he had the time with people that he needs at the start of his day and after he finished his schoolwork, while his sister was still working. My daughter has learned that she will have to keep working in the afternoon, even though her brother is done, because she started later. Also, she can stay awake and read for awhile in the peace and quiet after her brother has gone to bed, but doesn't stay up too late because her "peace and quiet" bucket was filled at various times throughout the day.

The difference a simple change in our schedule has made in the atmosphere of our home is amazing. This change wasn't a big one. It only adjusted the overall schedule of the day by about a half hour, but it honors the differences between my kids and their personalities. It lets them both succeed, even though that success looks different for each one. Beyond that, the understanding my kids now have of how different personalities handle different situations and have different intrinsic needs has made a profound impact on not only their relationship with each other, but also on their relationships with and understanding of others. Embracing these differences has allowed us to develop empathy and grace for those with different needs than ourselves, opening our eyes to the fact that there *are* differences in what people need from others.

One of the definitions of "grace" is a "courteous goodwill toward others." This grace is what we've seen disappear from our culture over the past several years as we've allowed differences of opinion to be defined as character flaws. Instead of fostering critical thinking, our society has embraced mocking criticism of those who differ from us. Unfortunately, this trend hasn't only been in the secular community. We're seeing it in the faith community as well. And we're seeing it among homeschoolers too. In a time and a season when we need to foster relationships, welcome discussion, and recognize that a solution that works for me will not necessarily work for someone else, can I challenge us to embrace grace?

Let us raise a generation of homeschooled kids who can stand firm in their convictions and stand out among their peers because we taught them to extend grace instead of judgement. The strongest leaders have the heart of servants. Jesus said it first when he told his disciples that "whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26, ESV). John Maxwell echoed the sentiment when he said "People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care." In my home, a simple 30 minute shift in the morning schedule brought harmony and peace into our home. My kids are receiving grace from me and are, in turn, learning to extend it to others. How are you embracing grace in your home?

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