

What Were You Thinking?

Hebrews 5:2 [The high priest] is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. NIV

I suppose I was 17 on that fateful day. I was getting my parents' car ready for a date that night. I vacuumed it out and cleaned it up. I hopped in, popped it into reverse, and took my foot off the brake. As the car crept back I glanced over my shoulder just in time to see the garage door bursting at its seams. I slammed on the brake before punching through the door, but it was too late—at least too late to keep Dad from finding out. Boards were cracked and beyond the repair capabilities of a 17-year-old with only an hour to clamp, glue, reinforce, and paint before Dad returned. I couldn't think of a good enough lie to cover my tracks. I was toast. The ensuing conversation went something like this:

“What were you thinking?”

“I don't know.”

“Why weren't you looking behind you?”

“I was.”

“And you didn't see the door?”

“Well, I didn't look until it was too late.”

“What were you thinking?”

The conversation seemed to have turned back on itself.

As a dad myself now, it's a little challenging to deal with the lack of thinking occurring within the noggin of my own children. The same children who know more than me when it comes to English, music, history, and Scripture memory, are the same ones who can ride their bikes right into the neighbor's mailbox. Or put a hole through the wall while wrestling over the door. Or bust out a window by trying to knock on it to scare another child. Or nearly rip the driver's ed instructor's arm off when she tries to take over the steering wheel. The opportunities to say, “What were you thinking?” abound.

In all honesty, I *do* take most of those opportunities. Sometimes it just feels good to say it, and sometimes I'm genuinely trying to figure out just what is going on inside those heads. It's just one of those things that need to be said at times. You just can't expect to get a Lego stuck in your nose without someone politely asking, “What were you thinking?” (Actually, I made up that one. It's not that I'm out of real-life examples. I'm just trying to spare my kids further embarrassment.)

Back to the door. A few years after remodeling the garage door, I was vindicated. Dad himself gave that same door its final blow. It seems he started backing up just a smidge before he turned to look to notice that the door was closed. I guess we all could use a little grace at times.

I think that is the key. We need to understand that we all need grace. We all make mistakes and occasionally we even make mistakes that are unbelievably mindless. In the verse above, the high priest is able to be compassionate with people's weaknesses, because he recognizes his own weakness. As parents, this same principle should apply to us. Our kids need correction and instruction, but they also need gentleness and mercy, just like we do. At least that's what I'm thinking.