

**Youth Culture Lesson**  
**Finding Teachable Moments in Culture**  
**From *YouthWorker Journal* and YouthWorker.com**

**Busted**

Mom Brings Home Rioting Son

By Paul Asay

**What Happened:**

When Freddie Gray died in police custody in Baltimore on April 19, much of the city erupted in anger. When Gray was buried April 27, peaceful protests turned into riots. Dozens of rioters began throwing bricks and bottles. Several police officers were injured, and hundreds were arrested. The Maryland National Guard was eventually called in to help.

Many community leaders were grieved and outraged by the riots. “We owe it to ourselves to do better,” Laquicha Harper, 33, told CNN; but one mother took matters a step further.

When Toya Graham saw her son, Michael Singleton, on television in a mask and holding a brick, she stormed down to where he was and took him to task. “Are you kidding me?!” she hollered, grabbing him and dragging away from the scene, smacking him in the head all the while. Neither she nor he knew they were being filmed, but they soon found out. More than 8 million people viewed the mother-son confrontation on YouTube.

“I’m a no-tolerance mother. Everybody who knows me knows I don’t play that,” Graham told CBS. “He knew. He knew he was in trouble... That’s my only son, and at the end of the day I don’t want him to be a Freddie Gray. I was angry. I was shocked, because you never want to see your child out there doing that.”

Some critics said Graham was out of line, hitting her 16-year-old son the way she did. Others have dubbed her “Mother of the Year.” Baltimore Police Commissioner Anthony Batts complimented the angry mom. “I wish I had more parents who took charge of their kids out there tonight,” he said on April 27.

One of Graham’s biggest fans? Her son, the no-longer-rioting Michael Singleton. He admits he was embarrassed, but he’s taking his mom’s lecture to heart. “I understand how much my mother really cares about me,” he told ABC News, “so I’m just gonna try and do better.”

**Talk About It**

Most of us probably haven’t had our moms or dads drag us home from a riot. However, most of us know how it feels to disappoint them, and we’ve all felt their wrath. Do your parents ever exasperate or embarrass you when they’re disciplining you? When have you not deserved your punishment? When did you get exactly what you had coming to you?

Have your parents ever embarrassed you in front of your friends? How? Did that encourage you to change your behavior, or did it just make you mad? What is your parents’ most effective tool in their discipline arsenal? Showing anger? Disappointment? Taking privileges away? Do they sometimes just sit down and talk with you about something?

Have you ever felt that God was disciplining you? When?

Graham understood why folks were angry about the Freddie Gray situation, but she didn't think that was any excuse to riot. "Two wrongs don't make a right," she said.

Have you ever been wronged, but then overreacted and made the situation worse? When? What was the result? What about your parents? Have they ever overreacted?

**What the Bible Says:**

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 'that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.' Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:1-4).

"For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:11).

"Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid" (Prov. 12:1).

"My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of His reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom He loves, as a father the son in whom he delights" (Prov. 3:11-12).

Paul Asay has written for *Time*, *The Washington Post* and *Christianity Today*. He writes about culture for *Plugged In* and has published several books, including his newest, *Burning Bush 2.0* (Abingdon), available now. He lives in Colorado Springs. Check out his entertainment blog at [Patheos.com/Blogs/WatchingGod](http://Patheos.com/Blogs/WatchingGod) or follow him on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/AsayPaul) at @AsayPaul.