

Christian Principles *of Parenting*



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Introduction

Children are absolutely amazing! Human babies, even while they are in their mother's womb, can hear and react to sounds. Once born, they are acutely aware of their surroundings, and their brains crave and absorb all sorts of stimulation. Their developing sense of trust forms around the interactions between their parents. Shortly after they are born, they can distinguish the smell of their mother's breast milk from that of another woman. When they are 5 weeks old, children are more responsive to their mom and dad than strangers or casual visitors. They demonstrate this with smiles and sweet sounds. Children first begin to follow their parents with their eyes, then later on hands and knees. It doesn't take long until little babies, the most defenseless of newborns, will become attached to their parents. By 9 months, many infants scream when their parents try to leave, as if to say, "I can't bear to be without you." And this is how babies fall in love with their parents.

There is evidence to support that infants and their parents are biologically wired to forge a close emotional tie, which develops slowly over the baby's first year of life through an ongoing dialogue of coos, gazes, and smiles. Children sense, even at an early age, whether they are valued and important to Mom and Dad. Children begin by following parents and do so, in some respects, all their lives. *How then are parents to lead?*

But, first things first! If you want to become a parent, you had better think it through. If you are already a parent, think about your

parenting skills and look for ways to improve them. Think long and hard about the responsibility to teach and train a child. Are you empathetic, patient, interactive, loving, devoted, stable, and sensitive to someone else's need to eat, play, feel safe, and be left alone? Becoming a parent is easy but parenting is another matter. This pretty much sums up our society's way of thinking:

Want to have a dog?

"Gotta get a dog license."

Want to drive a car?

"Gotta get a driver's license."

Want to go duck hunting?

"Gotta get a hunting license."

Want to practice law in this state?

"Gotta get a state license."

Want to become a parent?

"Uh...just do it."

Haven't we all heard mothers and fathers say, "Having kids is one thing, but raising them is another"? There's a lot of truth to that saying. Figuring out how to train a child begins with knowing what proper behavior is—then teaching it, to say nothing of enforcing it. Resolving how you help children reach their potential is one of the most debated questions facing parents, even after thousands upon thousands of trendy advice books that tend to contradict each other.

A revealing article in a special issue of *Newsweek*, entitled "Good Kid, Bad Kid," portrayed the problem this way: "Should a 9-month-old be taught not to pull on Daddy's glasses? Can a 14-month child really be expected to share toys? Can a 2-year-old be guided out of temper tantrums?" The article goes on to ask,

"How do you get your child to do what you want them to do when you want them to do it—while still maintaining a positive relationship?" Good question!

Those years from the cradle to the empty nest can be so fulfilling, or they can be heartbreaking. The Bible tells us that God intended children as a "blessing." King David, who had "good" kids and "bad" kids, put it this way: "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them..." (Psalm 127:3-5).

It's easy to see what God had in mind for parents from the very beginning. He created them "male" and "female," then blessed the human "kind" by telling them to "be fruitful, and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). But there's more to it than just that! There's a greater purpose to having children than populating the earth!

The earlier verses in this first chapter of Genesis reveal that God was in conversation with another "God Kind" when He said, "Let *Us* make man in *OUR* image, after *OUR* likeness."

In other words, when the Creator made the very first parents He began a process of reproducing himself! Not that Adam and Eve were God, or made of God essence, for they weren't—they were made from the dust of the earth. They were "earthy" and physical.

Being made in God's image meant Adam and Eve favored God in His "general" appearance. They were created with arms and legs, a head and torso, eyes, and hair. They also had feminine and masculine capabilities and the genetics to continue birthing children who are made in God's image. That's overwhelming!

Do you realize the magnitude of what God is doing? Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and all generations leading to you and your spouse, and to your children, are made in the LIKENESS of God.

It's clear from the very beginning that God had more than just a passing interest in His human creation. Having put man and woman on earth, He was personally involved with instructing His children on the very laws He wanted them to observe. He told them there were things they *could* do, and then He let them know there were things they *were not* to do. Sound familiar?

God's interest in parents and their children has not diminished. Since He made us, He knows what's best for us. And, as a loving Father, He has given us principles to help us with our families. Everyone who has been a parent knows parenting is twenty-four/seven, or a full-time job.

Although we are brought up with a concept of the "perfect" family, so many mothers and fathers will tell you they were not prepared for parenthood. Once they became parents they quickly learned that teaching and training children is extremely demanding, with so many unpredictable moments. Parents have found themselves involved in multiple crises when they were tempted to throw up their hands and cry out, "What do I do now?"

THIS BOOKLET DOESN'T PROPOSE ANY MAGICAL SOLUTIONS OR PROVIDE YOU WITH INSTANT WISDOM. What it offers is a glimpse at principles for Christian parenting—meaning the suggestions have a biblical basis. Like so many facets of life, reading about it is one thing, but doing it is another. Your goal is to "bring them [your children] up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). The rewards for doing so will be your greatest blessing.

1 An interesting Development

As any parent will tell an expectant first-time parent, "There's nothing I can tell you that will really prepare you for having children." To a great degree, that's true. But, parents can do a lot to educate themselves for the lifetime experience of having a family. As you anticipate having kids, you should read, study, and talk to successful parents to learn all you can about what lies ahead. Even so, with "textbook knowledge" and a wealth of advice from well wishers, the real education for parents begins as soon as you know there is a precious life in the womb. Then, after birth, it rapidly accelerates!

Most parents want to have some inkling of what they can expect as their child develops. They also want to know what they can do to help teach and train their child as he matures.

To help you identify the particular stages of early child development, here's a brief thumbnail sketch of the tendencies and behaviors to watch for. Don't overreact to these behaviors. They are signals of normal progress.

The First Year

- 1 month old—Is able to respond to loud sounds and bright patterns. Calms down when held or cuddled. May recognize a parent's voice or make eye-to-eye contact.
- 2 months old—Cries to show distress or pain, coos when happy or excited.
- 3 months old—Smiles often to others or while sleeping.

The child may cry differently when his mother leaves him with other people. Begins to sort out who's who in his life and may prefer certain people over others.

- 4 months old—Laughs while playing and may cry if playtime is interrupted. May act passively, studying each toy or face that comes near. Shows curiosity when inspecting a rattle, and dependency when wanting to be held.

- 5 months old—Becomes more assertive as he learns to reach for objects—shows anger when someone tries to take away a toy. May begin to handle stresses better because of maturing nervous system.

- 6 months old—May fear strangers. Responds positively to other children. This is the time when he will try to put things into his mouth. It's time to begin teaching him that there are certain things he can't have.

- 7 months old—Most likely will test parental authority by refusing to follow directions. He shows humor and laughs at funny expressions or positions.

- 8 months old—Smiles at, pats, or even kisses his mirrored image—can distinguish between himself and the image. He rejects being alone or confined in a crib or playpen—fears being separated from parents—as he learns to crawl. When meeting a new person he may bury his head in his parent's shoulder, and refuse to make eye contact with the person.

- 9 months old—Interacts with familiar people (playing peek-a-boo, etc.). Repeats his actions if applauded. He is beginning to assess moods and imitate them—if he sees someone crying, he may cry too.

- 10 months old—Begins to show twinges of jealousy—cries

or whimpers when a sibling is at the center of attention. Starts to become aware of social approval and disapproval.

- 11 months old—May want to have a security blanket or toy for comfort in strange places, or be assertive among siblings; likes to imitate gestures and sounds.

- 12 months old—Leaving him at home becomes more of a problem—most likely he will cry when you attempt to leave.

The Second Year

- 13 months old—Expect him to become more demanding and seek constant attention. His personality begins to emerge. He may be an explorer, a tease, a showoff, outgoing, or reserved.

- 14 months old—He can turn more aggressive as he learns to walk. May throw objects in anger. Enjoys playing alone, but still likes to perform for an audience.

- 15 months old—He now communicates feelings with a clear intent or purpose; will become aware of when familiar people are missing. He offers toys to others but will quickly want them back.

- 16 months old—Communicates with gestures instead of words—may fling his arms or move away to say no. May strike at parents in anger.

- 17 months old—He begins to respond correctly to instructions. If scolded, he will cry; if praised, he will smile—he may shy away from other children. Give him time to adapt to new situations and reassure him with your presence.

- 18 months old—Frustration may trigger tantrums. May tend to act on impulse due to limited understanding of good and bad, rules, and warnings. Communicates his desire for closeness

by crawling into his parent's lap. He still has no sense of sharing with others.

- 19 months old—Enjoys getting out of the house and exploring new environments. He may want to play with others in a group. Praise becomes a motivation to obey simple rules. (Give precedence to rules that keep *the child* safe, as well as *others*—prohibit hitting, pinching, biting, spitting, or kicking.)

- 20 months old—He begins “pretend” play—acting out what happens around him. May develop a fear of thunder, lightning, big animals, or the dark. (Install a night-light if his sleep is consistently disrupted. The most important thing is to reassure the child of his safety.) Although he may warm to a stranger, he will tend to cling to mother or dad.

- 21 months old—May sympathize with other people or recognize their feelings. He expresses love for his parents by hugging and smiling. The toddler tends to still be possessive of toys, but may relinquish objects that belong to someone else. (Begin to teach him about sharing.)

- 22 months old—Begins to cooperate with others, and is much better at communication. Enjoys playing with other children. (This is the best time to build self-reliance, by being away from your child for short periods of time.)

- 23 months old—He may begin to fear failure and become frustrated with new activities. He may be willing to play alone, but also likes to follow or imitate his siblings. (This is a good time to give the toddler some privacy, but set aside private time to spend with him.)

- 24 months old—Could become manipulative and bossy; he learns rules through trial and error. He now is able to explain his

feelings and desires with gestures and simple phrases. This is also the time he learns to trust others. Expect him to play well with other children—may hand toys to another, or imitate others through pretend play. However, he may show signs of jealousy or revert to babyish actions when a new sibling arrives.

First Six Months of the Third Year

- 25–30 months old—The world is seen almost exclusively through his personal needs. May throw a tantrum when he is angry or frustrated. Expect him to have frequent mood swings—he may pout or feel guilty when scolded. He is learning how to express sadness or stress; his siblings take on a greater role in everyday life. May enjoy group play; the concept of “friendship” is beginning to be understood.

Last Six Months of the Third Year

- 31–36 months old—He learns what's acceptable and what's not. May find it difficult to concentrate on new tasks. Will begin to develop a conscious awareness of being a family member. He will show pity or sympathy to familiar people. However, sharing parent's attention with siblings can be difficult—may insist on being at the center of play and may dislike sharing the limelight with peers. This is certainly the time to set limits on dangerous and antisocial behavior. Be consistent with the rules.

Four to Eight Years Old

Now it's appropriate to shift the emphasis from shaping behavior, to shaping attitudes. Expect a child's attitude to be inconsistent as he adjusts—between rebellion and obedience.

These years can be difficult as he gains in physical strength, and vacillates between extremes. Parental example becomes increasingly important. Kids will sense the disparity between what a parent *says* and what the parent *does*.

Nine to Twelve Years Old

Having proven himself in attitude and obedience, he should need fewer new rules and less discipline. He is not suddenly free to do whatever he want to do, but he should be encouraged to make more decisions about his daily life. Begin to increase his responsibilities at home and in his social circles. Use these preadolescent years to teach that there are INEVITABLE CONSEQUENCES for choices.

Family counselors will tell you the first five to seven years of a child's life are the most critical for the development of personality, character, and emotions. The question is, what part will you play in helping your child develop during that time? And equally important—if you're not influencing your child, who is?

Dr. Brenda Hunter, in her book *Home By Choice*, offers this thought: The person who *teaches* your child to talk is the person who teaches your child to *think*. If your child is in daycare eight to ten hours a day, that might send a chill or two up any parent's spine.

Some say it takes a village to raise a child; for others, it's the neighborhood daycare. But make no mistake about it, YOU are the best teacher your child will ever have, and YOU will do the best job of parenting your child.

Dr. Kevin Leman, in his book *Becoming the Parent God*

Wants You to Be, offers “ten commandments” for parent-child relationships. Here are the essential points:

The Ten Commandments for Parents

1 *My hands are small; please don't expect perfection whenever I make a bed, draw a picture, or throw a ball. My legs are short; please slow down so that I can keep up with you.*

2 *My eyes have not seen the world as yours have; please let me explore safely. Don't restrict me unnecessarily.*

3 *Housework will always be there. I'm only little for such a short time—please take time to explain things to me about this wonderful world, and do so willingly.*

4 *My feelings are tender; please be sensitive to my needs. Don't nag me all day long. (You wouldn't want to be nagged for your inquisitiveness.) Treat me as you would like to be treated.*

5 *I am a special gift from God; please treasure me as God intended you to do, holding me accountable for my actions, giving me guidelines to live by, and disciplining me in a loving manner.*

6 *I need your encouragement...to grow. Please go easy on the criticism; remember, you can criticize the things I do without criticizing me.*

7 *Please give me the freedom to make decisions concerning myself. Permit me to fail, so that I can learn*

from my mistakes. Then someday I'll be prepared to make the kinds of decisions life requires of me.

8 *Please don't do things over for me. Somehow that makes me feel that my efforts didn't quite measure up to your expectations. I know it's hard, but please don't try to compare me with my brother or my sister.*

9 *Please don't be afraid to leave for a weekend together. Kids need vacations from parents, just as parents need vacations from kids. Besides, it's a great way to show us kids that your marriage is very special.*

10 *Please take me to...church regularly, setting a good example for me to follow. I enjoy learning more about God.*

2 Which Way Will They Go?

Parents are entrusted by God to generate spiritual growth and to nurture those within our care. It is sobering to know that parents—not the church, school, or community—are the ones held ultimately accountable for their children by God. From the first moments of life children begin to learn. Like little birds with their mouths open our children begin to hungrily “take it all in,” and all parents will teach from the book of their own learning. But, to do this humanely and in a godly manner, we must know God’s way and be guided by His will in our lives.

The Bible is God’s written revelation for every man, woman, and child. Within its pages, God reveals instructions for living, a

record of His interaction with man, answers to fundamental questions about life, and the truth of who God is and His PLAN and PURPOSE for all humanity.

The Bible represents God’s thinking, and, as such, is the foundation of ALL knowledge. The Bible says Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). In Proverbs 22:6, God even gives parents a conditional promise:

TRAIN up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

The word *train* in Hebrew is *chanak*, which means “to dedicate.” (You can also see how the word *chanak* is used as *dedicated* in Deuteronomy 20:5, 1 Kings 8:63, and 2 Chronicles 7:5.) While it is understood that the primary meaning of Proverbs 22:6 is not about dedication, this idea cannot be overlooked. Perhaps “dedicated to train and teach” might sum it up.

Many parents may believe this verse guarantees child behavior, but it doesn’t. What it does imply is the *LASTING IMPACT* of parental guidance. It means that what a child learns in his earliest years will be with him all his life.

Parents know there is always the chance that, even though the child KNOWS what is right, he may not do it. As he makes his own way, he is going to face situations that demand perception, judgment, and choices. What he was taught as a child will always be with him to HELP him make right decisions—but, the choice will be his.

Further consideration of Proverbs 22:6 opens up the

realization that parents are expected to work at helping their children know “the way they should go.” Knowing God’s way is central to effective parenting.

If you don’t know what God expects you to do and how He wants you to live, you can learn! Use each day to teaching God’s standards for mankind: Teach your children about the beauty and freedom of God’s code of conduct for His people; teach them about the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5). Once you’ve grasped them, then teach them to your children. In fact, the first formal charge given by God to all parents is found in Deuteronomy 6:4–9:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE UP. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Children learn through repetition, so work with them. Teach and talk with them wherever you are—in your house, on a vacation, or visiting neighbors. Be “caught” reading from the Bible in front of your children, LIVE by God’s standards—of decency, fairness, courtesy, love, generosity, and honesty—and your children will get the message.

If children hear their mom and dad talk to God in prayer, then they, too, will want to talk to God. Children need to see and

hear that a relationship with God is more important than any other activity. They’ll “get it” if you will be diligent.

Children learn around the clock. They are always listening, watching, and imitating. When parents are “too busy” for their kids, the children know it. If a parent unintentionally favors one child over another, the siblings know it. If they hear a parent swear, they will think it’s okay to swear, too. If children hear their parents “shade the truth,” they may try telling “little white lies” too. When they see the attitudes and interaction of their parents with others in day-to-day life they accept this as a standard. So be watchful what you say and do to others.

Yes, children are “an heritage from the Lord...” They are precious gifts from God, to be loved, taught, and directed, and like any important, VALUABLE gift, they need to be handled with loving care and a deep sense of responsibility.

Our children are “at home” for about eighteen years and then they are off to make their own place in the world, often including a new family. While a child is with you, you must diligently reach his heart, stir his soul, and fashion his character.

The lives of parents are open books for their children to read. Children react to the way you talk with them, honor them, share with them, and love them.

Very little escapes the watchful eyes and vulnerable heart of a child. They are keen observers. The following poem gives some valuable insight into this knowledge:

When You Thought I Wasn't Looking...

When you thought I wasn't looking: I saw you hang my first painting on the refrigerator. I immediately wanted to paint another one.

When you thought I wasn't looking: I saw you feed a stray cat. I learned that it was good to be kind to animals.

When you thought I wasn't looking: I saw you make my favorite cake for me. I learned that little things can be the special things in life.

When you thought I wasn't looking: I heard you say a prayer, and I knew there is a God I could always talk to. I learned to trust in God.

When you thought I wasn't looking: I saw you make a meal and take it to a friend who was sick. I learned that we all have to take care of each other.

When you thought I wasn't looking: I saw you give of your time and money to help people who had nothing. I learned that those who have something should give to those who don't.

When you thought I wasn't looking: I felt you kiss me good night. I felt loved and safe.

When you thought I wasn't looking: I saw you take care of our house and everyone in it. I learned we have to take care of what we are given.

When you thought I wasn't looking: I saw how you handled your responsibilities, even when you didn't feel good. I learned that I will have to be responsible when I grow up.

When you thought I wasn't looking: I saw tears come from your eyes. I learned that sometimes things hurt, but it's all right to cry.

When you thought I wasn't looking: I saw that you cared. I wanted to be everything that I could be.

When you thought I wasn't looking: I learned most of life's lessons that I need to know to be a good and productive person when I grow up.

When you thought I wasn't looking: I looked at you and wanted to say "Thanks" for all the things I saw when you thought I wasn't looking.

Always remember that each of us—parent, grandparent or friend—influence the life of a child—Author Unknown.

3 One Plus One Equals Three

For decades the “traditional” family has had three vital components: a father, a mother, and kids. Not so today. Although the one constant is still the children, a household may or may not have a biological father or mother at home. Single-parent households are on the increase as are adoptions into same-sex relationships. More so than the mother, Dad is becoming a vanishing breed.

Now, we all know a child is not conceived without a father and a mother. So, why aren't dads there for their children?

For some reason, a man's role as a father for his family isn't deemed as important as it once was. In too many cases, a man “fathers” a child and then abandons the mother and offspring. Couple this with our increasing divorce rates, and we have a generation of children without dads at home. Does this matter?

Research by University of Pennsylvania sociologist Frank Furstenberg shows that three-fourths of all children of divorce have contact with their fathers less than TWO DAYS a month! That's a staggering statistic, and a very sad one. Does it make any difference if Dad is "at home" during his child's early years?

As a by-product of a father's absence, we see that children of fatherless families have significantly more problems with the law than families with fathers. We know what a "juvenile delinquent" is—we've heard them, seen them, and maybe we were one of them—but the standards for describing a juvenile delinquent have changed.

The term "juvenile delinquent" used to bring to mind a child who rebelled against parental authority, often exhibiting distasteful behavior like smoking, swearing, or rudeness. But, things have changed! Today's juvenile delinquent is all that and more. Many, sadly, are in jail for rape, robbery, armed assault, and murder. And what about teenage pregnancies, child abuse, gangs? Our western culture is swimming in a sea of children in trouble or headed for trouble.

Like a deadly virus, parental negligence has been spreading through our society for several decades. Unruly children seem to have the upper hand on their parents, whether at home, the mall, restaurants, schools, buses, movie theaters, grocery stores, or visiting friends and neighborhood families! Something isn't working and something needs to be done.

Dr. Robert Moradi, of UCLA School of Medicine, an observer of the interaction between children and their parents, feels a father's participation in early childhood is significantly important. He says, "Children whose fathers help care for them

are less likely to become violent; they have higher IQs, better impulse control, better social adaptations—all of the elements of mental health are better."

Research further shows that infants whose fathers took an active role in their care were less likely to cry when separating from a parent or in the presence of a stranger. And that's only the beginning of a lifetime of good things that flow from having a father actively involved in the life of his child(ren).

On the downside—a recent study published in the *American Journal of Sociology* found a direct statistical link between single parenthood and virtually every type of crime, including mugging, violence against strangers, car theft, and burglary. Seventy percent of all juveniles in long-term correctional facilities did not live with their father growing up, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Fathers spending time with their children should not be considered as an option; it's a privilege and crucial for the healthy development of the family.

Although we hear occasional feminist declarations that fathers are not necessary, statistics prove otherwise. For the sake of our children, it is imperative that a father be involved.

Studies clearly indicate that children whose fathers are thoroughly involved in their care do better socially and cognitively than kids whose fathers play a more marginal role. What's more, involved fathers are themselves happier than the marginal ones.

The leadership to train and teach even the most "difficult" child should come from BOTH a loving father and mother. God never intended it to be just the mother's job.

If children are hurting for lack of family time, it's not a women's issue—it's a FAMILY issue. Children need BOTH parents!

Each parent brings variety to his or her child's development. Studies have shown that from as early as six weeks (some suggest even three weeks) of age, a baby can differentiate between his mother and father. Studies illustrate that, almost invariably, babies make the same distinction, becoming calm in the presence of their mother, while aroused and stimulated by the approach of their father.

The interactions between a baby and his father, as well as his mother, follow a pattern that transcends social class and cultural expectations.

Each mother has a distinctive way of cradling her baby, and will hold him that way nine times out of ten. A father, by contrast, in nine times out of of ten will pick up his baby differently each time—even including upside down!

Mothers make more use of toys in playing with their children; fathers are more likely to use their own bodies as portable, interactive monkey bars and rocking horses.

Dr. Moaradi (quoted earlier) says fathers help children "individuate"—he lets them be a little more independent. Fathers are more willing than mothers to let a child out of their sight, and on average will let a baby crawl as much as twice as far before retrieving him. They will allow more exploration.

When a child confronts a new situation—a dog, a stranger, a new toy—mothers protectively move closer, offering the reassurance of their familiar presence; fathers tend to stay back and let their child explore it alone. Both modes of parenting—the reassuring and the challenging—contribute to and balance a

child's emotional growth.

Remember, there's nothing more important to a child's upbringing than his parents.

You are your child's first teacher, and, as such, you should represent the very best for a child to imitate and follow. WHAT A PARENT DOES, SAYS, AND "IS" WILL FIND ITS WAY INTO HIS CHILD. It just happens!

That's why it's absolutely imperative for parents to develop good moral character. Children will pick up on the "bad" and "good" points of parental behavior and character. As mentioned earlier, a child carefully watches his parent's attitudes and actions. If Dad gets mad and shouts or becomes violent, he is *teaching* his child. The mom who lies about why she has taken her child out of school, or does not support a teacher who found her child cheating, *teaches* her child a less than desirable moral message.

We may wish it to be otherwise—"do as I say, not as I do!"—but parents profoundly affect a child's character. If parents want their children to exhibit good behavior and demonstrate honorable character, then they must have those qualities!

If you want your children to know about God, let them see God in you! It begins with your own *personal* study of what God expects of you.

Adam and Eve did not automatically inherit skills for discipline, direction, and encouragement. They needed help from God, just as all parents do today.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:7,10-12, Paul describes his leadership style as both a father and a nursing mother. Paul understood the control and influence he had over the lives of those he loved.

Through this analogy of a nursing mother and a caring father, Paul looked at the new Christian as though he or she were his own son or daughter. It also demonstrates his aptitude for “fatherly” and “motherly” direction.

To help you evaluate your own leadership style, follow the apostle Paul’s example and determine your personal child-training style.

Consider how you love, exhort, lead, discipline, and work with your children. It is sometimes a little uncomfortable to be introspective, but you must be aware of how you interact with your family.

Keep in mind that children are not assembly-line products, but unique individuals. Even though children may have the same set of parents, each child will display his own personality and will have differing needs. To help you evaluate yourself, answer these questions:

- Do you allow any freedom within your authority, or do you allow too much freedom?
- Do you allow a child to speak freely with you and share his thoughts, or are you intimidating to your children?
- Do you correct without encouragement, and are you overly critical?
- Do you give patient and calm guidance? Are you gentle with your children?
- Do you allow your child to grow in responsibility, or do you assume it entirely yourself?

- Do you encourage personal initiative?
- Do you spend time being affectionate, laughing, and playing with your child?

4 Great Expectations

It’s the responsibility of parents to use God’s standards to judge the “rightness” of something, and then to establish the rules that reflect these standards.

The rules must be thought out in advance, not as you go along! This just causes confusion, and is unsettling to everyone.

While we don’t mean to confuse our children, we certainly can. Here are some things parents can do that will *definitely* cause confusion:

- When we fail to explain what’s expected of them
- When we punish in anger
- When we change the rules with frequency
- When we break promises
- When we focus on the negative rather than the positive

God makes sure WE know the rules—the rules don’t change, and He ALWAYS keeps His word. Can we do less for our children? They have a RIGHT to know what is expected of them, and to be encouraged to do their best along the way.

During Jesus’ day, children had few rights within the law. It’s as if they weren’t all that important. But, Jesus thought otherwise! Jesus made it a point to make time for a child.

During one of His busy days of healing and answering questions about the law, Jesus made time for “little children.” Oh, He could have easily ignored them or brushed them away. He had a thousand things to do. He was very busy, with places to go and cities to visit. But, instead, He made time for these little ones and used them as an example to His disciples for all ages. Notice this insightful account in Matthew 19:13,14:

“Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for such is the kingdom of heaven.’”

He didn’t just yell at them, ignore them, or give them direction from across the crowd. He didn’t put them into someone else’s care. He did what we as parents should do. He stopped long enough to notice they needed a little of His time—He touched them and let them know He cared. If Jesus made time for children, should we do less?

There’s an old schoolyard saying that’s been around for years. It goes, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” That’s not true. Maybe we shouldn’t let “words” hurt us, but nonetheless they do.

The words used by parents as they teach, train, and love their children are so important. Pick your words carefully! Parents who belittle their child or tease to the point of legitimate frustration are not using good principles for parenting.

Think what a child thinks when he hears his parents say that he is “a fool,” “a dummy,” “an idiot,” or imply that “you don’t do anything right,” or “you’re good for nothing.” Words like

these wound a child and robs him of self-confidence and value.

What if God used this cruel criteria with us? It would be a pretty bleak and scary existence.

Cruel words are never helpful. Kids want to know they are loved, even when they make mistakes or disappoint their parents.

5 Playing by the Rules

Once parents decide on the “house rules” they must be clearly understood by the children. The child may not always agree with the rules; he or she just has to *understand* that the rules need to be followed. Once everyone understands what is expected of them, the rules can be enforced.

If you’ve never sat down with a child and explained the “house rules,” then do it right away. Just make sure YOU know them first!

As you explain them, ask the child to repeat the rule(s) to ensure that the child heard and understood what is expected. When defining your expectations, it’s also a good time to explain the penalties for breaking the rules.

With small children keep the rules simple and few. (Remember, God gives His children only TEN to observe, and we are much *older* children.)

Analyze your parenting skills. Over time, and without noticing, it’s easy to fall into bad habits that actually teach the exact opposite of what’s desired.

There are so many important principles to teach your child, and these are based upon God’s own Law. Here are a few you will want to include:

1) *Teach obedience.* When a parent says “no,” “stop,” or “come here,” the child should respond immediately. “No” isn’t just about discipline. The word “no” isn’t about deprivation. It is a word that signals potential danger or threats to the child’s well-being. A child needs to learn that there is a higher authority that he can trust. Obedience is the key for all the other principles. Children who don’t learn what “no” means will be at the mercy of impulses and desires they don’t know how to control. The results can be tragic.

2) *Teach respect and courtesy.* When children respect their parents, they will find it easier to respect God, those in authority, and others. Fair and firm parenting brings a child to naturally honor the parents’ position of authority.

3) *Teach truthfulness and reliability.* The importance of telling the truth cannot be overstated. Children should not lie or deceive. Children need to understand that a person’s word is a sign of his or her inward character. One’s yes is to be yes, and no is to be no.

4) *Teach honesty in actions.* Children should be taught not to cheat or steal. It is crucial that children learn to take responsibility for their actions and be held accountable. The test of good character is seeing what an individual will do when no one is watching. A parent who can trust and depend on their child to have good behavior in word and deed is a parent who has instilled integrity in their child.

5) *Teach trust.* Parents should know what’s best for their children and children should learn to do what’s asked of them. (This principle is based upon *sound* parental skills—since children should not be asked to comply with

any kind of destructive behavior.) In general, it is reasonable for children to be taught when to go to bed, when and what to eat, what may or may not be watched on television or at the movies, and how to dress appropriately. Parents should also provide instruction and direction for outside influences, such as friends, school participation, and types of entertainment.

6) *Teach self-control.* Teach children to control their personal urges, temptations, and desires. Manners fall under this standard. Manners teach children to have consideration for others, and they remove the attitude of self-importance. Children should be taught to never interrupt conversations (unless it’s an emergency), to have proper table manners, to address adults appropriately, to respect the property of others, to not physically strike or bully others, to not covet what others have, to say “please” and “thank you” and show respect to parents, adults, those in authority, friends, and siblings.

A child who possesses self-control has the ability to make choices about his behavior and habits.

Self-control is the discipline against impulse. It helps with evaluating a situation and understanding the consequences that come with poor choices. A child without adequate self-control will say and do things without thinking of the consequences.

Teaching self-control is important to the safety of the child. A lack of appropriate “restraint” can place a child in danger, especially later in life when confronted with drugs, alcohol, or other harmful addictions. By exercising self-control a child develops responsibility for his actions.

Self-control is a vital key to an orderly lifestyle, family environment, and community expectations. It begins with parental role modeling, where a child initially cultivates the desire to go against his natural inclination.

From the moment of birth to the moment of death, carnal nature struggles with denial and the word “no.” Our society bombards children with the thinking that “anything goes” or “just do it.”

No wonder self-control is so unpopular.

However, the Bible is filled with verse after verse advocating self-control. Here are a few areas to consider:

- *Control your tongue!* Psalm 19:14: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.”
- *Control your work habits!* Proverbs 6:6–11: “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise.”
- *Control your emotions!* Proverbs 16:32: “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”
- *Control your thoughts!* Philippians 4:8: “Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”
- *Control your appetites!* 1 Peter 2:11: “I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.”

The great king Solomon said it best: “Whoever has no rule over his own spirit [that is, no self-control] is like a city broken down, without walls” (Proverbs 25:28).

Teaching children about self-control is essential to their training. Its importance cannot be over emphasized. It should be taught within the framework of love and patience.

A home is not a military camp where kids “snap to” and perform a daily regimen out of fear. They need to UNDERSTAND why self-control is so vitally necessary to THEM!

Spend time talking about this.

6 You've Got Attitude!

A goal for every parent is the development of a “good” attitude in his or her child. (We all know what we mean by good, for it’s very obvious when a child is in a “bad” attitude.) A child with a good attitude is a child open to guidance and instruction. But, how do you “teach attitude” or mold a child’s outlook?

It all begins with the attitude of the parent. Parents teach good attitude by having one themselves! Let’s rejoice in the nature of children to be notorious imitators! What they sense, feel, see, and hear from their parents molds their actions—and therefore the attitude.

All too often parents wait until “it’s too late” to have a serious positive impact on their children. If you wait until children’s teenage years before talking to them about their attitude, you let the most important years slide by. Attitude is important at any age, but particularly so when children are

younger. Begin working with them from the day they are born. Be part of their lives to observe and react to their moods and attitudes.

Here are some sensible suggestions to help a child, no matter his age:

1) *Be a "show and tell" parent.* Be the kind of influence he will be proud of, even to the point that he wants to share you with his friends. Be an example he wants to emulate. Let him see you working through problems, and let him see how you handle mistakes. There's nothing wrong with being human, but there is a great deal wrong with being a hypocrite.

2) *Take an active interest in your child's life.* Get to know his friends, his likes and dislikes, his hobbies. Encourage him for his effort, while letting him learn on his own. If you never allow your child to struggle, to feel frustrated, and experience his own joy at achieving, then you devalue his achievements.

3) *Be a cheerleader, not a judge.* Look for every opportunity to praise hard work and diligence. Cheer him on, even though he's not perfect. When you offer advice or direction, let him know you are behind him regardless. Avoid routine cliches which signal detachment.

4) *Encourage his talents and interests.* Provide an environment for self-expression. Every child has his own unique "style." Be thankful he isn't just like you, and give him freedom to cultivate his own strengths.

The shaping and molding of a child's outlook toward life

takes persistent involvement and intervention. A good attitude doesn't develop overnight or with a few lectures. It manifests itself over years! The sooner a parent cultivates a "right" attitude, the better it will be for the family and the child.

Having a healthy attitude contributes to a willingness for guidance. Children should not be left to themselves; they should be taught the value of obedience. They will listen and learn from a loving teacher.

The lifetime benefits to all are priceless!

Proverbs 19:20 says, "Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days." To this principle Proverbs 1:7 adds, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

When children are excited about learning and have parents anxious to teach, there's greater potential for family happiness. Proverbs 10:1 confirms, "A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother."

Utilize the wisdom found in the book of Proverbs in your child's instruction—take the time to sit down with your child and read and discuss these little golden nuggets.

7 The "C" Word

The topic of teaching and training incorporates the hardest of all duties, which is that of *chastisement*. The Holy Word of God shows that parents are *responsible* for correcting their children—it is one of our duties. How this is

done will differ from family to family. However, these differences encompass two extremes—those who do nothing and those who do too much.

Let's take a moment to consider the shameful EXTREME of discipline—which is true child abuse.

With discipline, there can be a danger. When you physically chastise a child when you are frustrated, tired, or angry, it's very easy to "get carried away."

Beating, bruising, and scarring, along with mentally and emotionally battering a child, is obvious abuse, and is perversely contrary to being a "caregiver." There is NEVER, NEVER, NEVER a reason, an excuse, or any justification for injuring a child through any type of abuse. ABSOLUTELY NEVER!

Children instinctively look to parents for protection, sustenance, love, and safety. To betray this trust results in lives that are altered—sometimes irretrievably.

Jesus warns, "See that you do not look down on [fail to value] one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:10). God DOES pay attention to a little child! That's how serious parenting really is.

We are to MIRROR God's love toward our children.

If parents desire to have God-fearing, law-abiding children, then the parents must take the appropriate steps to bring it about. It takes time and effort, for there is no easy method for teaching your children about God. Nor is there a quick fix or miracle drug to get control of the out-of-control child.

The Detroit News on March 8, 1998, reported that doctors in Michigan prescribed 33 grams of Ritalin for every 1,000

residents, 56 percent more than the national average. The use of Ritalin has more than DOUBLED nationally in the past five years.

Critics of the drug say doctors misdiagnose children to help parents and teachers control boisterous children. It makes you wonder if there really are that many out-of-control children or if it is a matter of too many parents who don't know how to control their children!

Obviously, there are children who are suitable candidates for "medicinal" assistance, but parents should not be administering any drugs to their children to alleviate their responsibilities as a parent.

Let's look at a father who, although he loved his children, made tragic mistakes in parenting them.

One of the most rehearsed stories from the Bible features the life of King David. He was a remarkable man on many accounts. He was the youngest son of a family of ten. When we are initially introduced to him (1 Samuel 16), we are drawn to that eventful day when Samuel appears, looking to anoint one of Jesse's sons as king of Israel in place of Saul. God chose David, a keeper of sheep. David later served as Israel's courageous king. His sovereignty was on the scale of the great rulers of Egypt and Persia. God loved him very much.

Although David was a good king, he was not a good father—he was overindulgent, permissive, and neglectful. Although he loved his children, he failed them. He may have been able to lead a nation, but he was unsuccessful in leading his family—he later wished he had.

His beautiful daughter Tamar was raped, his eldest son Amnon was murdered, and his beloved son Absalom was a

murderer—who later led a rebellion against his father David. Absalom would die, hanging by his long hair from a tree.

There was great sadness and tragedy in this family. David learned, the painful way, that he could order grown men to follow him into battle, but he could not “order” his children to behave themselves and live morally.

One obvious lesson from this story is this: Do not allow your work or volunteer service for church or any organization to interrupt your God-given responsibilities to your children. Do not allow distractions to replace loving, training, and directing your child.

David grieved over the conduct of his children. All his adult life he mourned their loss. You can bet that, like most parents, he asked, “What could I have done to make a difference?” or, “Where did I go wrong as a parent?”

He must have spent many a sleepless night worrying about his kids. In the end, he suffered severe consequences for his fatherly lapses.

Although this was a royal family, the children had everyday needs. One of them was “chastisement” administered out of love. It’s the way God deals with those whom He loves. It was the basis of the “father and son” relationship God had with Solomon (David’s son by Bathsheba).

Of Solomon, God said, “I will be his Father, and he shall be my son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men” (2 Samuel 7:14).

Many parents are uncomfortable with the idea of chastising or punishing a child for disobedience. But, parents who love their child will chasten him. This does not imply a parent has a

right to inflict abusive discipline. Again, we remind you that there is never a reason or excuse to physically, emotionally, or mentally abuse a child.

Any parent who uses their authority, size, or power to “damage” a child risks civil chastisement as well as God’s judgment.

To some degree, the resistance to chastisement comes from a misunderstanding of its proper use. According to *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate* dictionary, the English meaning of the word *chastise* is “to inflict punishment” (not necessarily physical, although spanking is implied) or “to censure severely.”

Apply this understanding to child training and you see it as a means for correcting a rebellious child through appropriate corporal punishment. Although it should go without saying (let’s be CLEAR on this point), all correction toward a child should be done in love!

A child should NEVER be punished out of frustration, anger, humiliation, or exhaustion. Out total acquiescence to the biblical permission for chastising our children should be carefully exercised from the motivation offered for God’s chastening. In other words: Let’s chastise our children for the same reason God chastens us! Hebrews 12:5,6 says:

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; FOR WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE CHASTENS, and scourges every son whom He receives.”

Too many parents elect to never discipline their children.

They just tolerate any behavior, whether it's desirable or not. So often this position is taken because parents don't know what to do, or how to discipline. Unfortunately, the "hands off" approach toward child discipline is the easiest way to shirk a parent's responsibility.

You may hear parents say the best way for showing love is to not discipline at all but this is not true. That philosophy is *contrary* to Bible teaching. Scripture tells us that parents who don't chastise their child, don't really love him as they should. Notice what Hebrews 12:8 says:

But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

This verse helps us realize that PRIVILEGES and RIGHTS come with being part of a legitimate family. Part of the implied privilege is the *chastening* that comes from loving parents! That's a foreign concept to liberal thinking.

Simply stated: If parents don't chastise their children, they are treating them as if they were illegitimate, as if they were not their own. Why is this so serious?

Because, even though the illegitimate child hasn't done anything on its own to warrant rejection, it's being denied parental love, devotion, and protection by RIGHT.

It's clear that being loved involves chastising. Chastening is a manifestation of love; the lack of it is a manifestation of neglect.

There's no doubt that "punishment" can be a product of love. If you don't love enough to correct, you are in fact rejecting. There is no real love in rejection.

Just as an adult's soul is cultivated through correcting mistakes and curbing passions, so, too, is the whole education and training of a child. If a child rebels against a parent, and the parent does not punish the child for his actions, the parent is guilty of insufficient and unhealthy love. Proverbs 13:24 says that a parent's lack of discipline is a type of hatred:

He who spares his rod hated his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently.

A child's WILLFUL breaking of an established standard must be corrected through appropriate chastisement. Let's say, for example, that a child has been instructed to ask permission before crossing the street. The child has repeated the standard and completely understands the rule. On one occasion (emphasis on "*one occasion*") he crosses the street without permission and receives a verbal rebuke. The second time he is warned that if it happens again he will be punished. If he breaks the rule again and crosses the street without permission, he *must* be corrected through the promised form of chastisement. Although in some measure this will be painful, it will help them remember the rule next time.

There are a few circumstances when a spanking, the severest form of censure, should be applied as corrective love. Be prepared to administer "corporal punishment" when a child *defiantly* resists authority, tells you "no," throws a temper tantrum, hurts or puts another child in danger, or is cruel to animals. None of these should be tolerated. These are things the child should learn to be ashamed of, and they need immediate attention with loving firmness.

Is it wrong to shame your child or make him feel guilty? Marvin Berkowitz, a professor of character development at the University of Missouri, St. Louis, says, "*Guilt and shame are part of conscience.*" In other words, if a child has a sense of disappointing someone he loves, such as his parent, then he is on the way to knowing the difference between what is right and what is wrong. It is a sign as well that he is developing and internalizing a moral compass.

It is his mind telling him that he is guilty of wrongdoing. Shame is a part of growing up and developing a conscience. It reinforces the notion that certain types of behavior are not acceptable. If a child doesn't learn to be ashamed of some behavior before the age of 2 or 3, then you can expect difficult times ahead.

Throughout the Bible a "rod" is used as a symbol for punishment, power, authority, and discipline. It's used as an instrument for punishment in Proverbs 29:15 ("the rod and rebuke give wisdom"). It's used to demonstrate power and authority in Psalm 2:9 ("You shall break them with a rod of iron"). A symbolic rod was used by God to discipline His people (Job 9:34). When a nation rebelled against God, the term "rod" was used to explain the pain given to a rebellious nation (Psalm 89:32; Isaiah 10:5,24; Lamentations 3:1; Ezekiel 20:37).

A "rod" is defined as "a branch or stick used to punish people by whipping." Even though the Bible uses the rod as an instrument for punishment, it must be used with extreme caution! If an "instrument"—such as a ping-pong paddle, ruler, or paint stirrer—is used for punishment, it must be used responsibly. The heart and soul of a child will respond to a

"rod" if a parent uses it correctly.

Discipline leads a child to obedience, as they will want to please their parents rather than risk further punishment.

Perhaps, due to convenience more so than any other reason, many parents use their hand to spank a child. The Bible doesn't say it's wrong to use your hand but neither does it say your hand should be the "instrument" of choice. There's probably a good reason for this. What might it be?

First of all, the hand is used to personify love, protection, and comfort. Using the hand to discipline can associate punishment with the person. Using something other than the hand helps the child focus on the object being used, and not on the person using the instrument.

Secondly, it's too easy for a parent to just strike out at their child with their hand. This kind of reaction is usually an impulse born out of impatience.

Using an "instrument," other than the hand, gives parents time to think about what they are doing. It's helpful to have some time to think about the appropriate punishment.

You never want to make the mistake of striking a child's face where there is risk of injury to their eyes and facial bones. Neither should a child's ears be "boxed," nor should any punishment be administered to the back and legs.

Also, when a parent feels the need to physically chastise their child, they should not yank, push, shake, or pull them.

Whether you use your hand or another "instrument," the part of the body that's best suited for a spanking is "the bottom."

Ideally, if a child is taught and trained out of love, there

should be little need for physical correction.

But, a properly administered spanking will bring a child to a humble and submissive attitude which will then put an end to rebellion or other serious acts of disobedience. All parents struggle with knowing exactly what to do in every circumstance. This is especially true of new parents or parents who were themselves physically abused as children. But, the Bible gives several principles to help with discipline.

Here are few of them. Read through them for understanding and then pray for wisdom in their application. (We also recommend that you talk with a family counselor, your minister, or someone who, from your observation, knows how these principles should be applied.) Don't be afraid to ask questions.

1) Spanking a child should be measured and purposeful. If administered, a child should experience some discomfort. "I will be his Father, and he shall be my son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men" (2 Samuel 7:14).

2) Crying is a part of proper discipline. "Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die" (Proverbs 23:13). "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying" (Proverbs 19:18).

3) Child discipline and training should be exercised early in a child's development. If you wait until grade school years or later, you are getting a late start. "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently" (Proverbs 13:24)

4) Failure to chasten children carries consequences for the family. Parental love DOES include discipline. Shame follows a child without correction—"The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (Proverbs 29:15).

5) Foolishness is natural to childhood. Some youthful pranks are innocent enough, but others can develop into destructive habits. Inappropriate habits of youth need to be changed into healthy habits for adulthood. "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him" (Proverbs 22:15).

6) Even as God chastises us for our good, discipline should always be done for the good of the child. "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chastens not?" (Hebrews 12:6,7).

It's one thing to know that it's okay to chastise your child; it's another to know what you can do to keep from having to do it. Here are some helpful principles that need consideration before physical discipline is given.

1) Spanking should be used as a LAST resort. Do not lapse into the ill thought out habit of spanking first and asking questions later. Not only will this diminish the importance of corporal punishment, but it becomes the LEAST effective way of training a child. Spankings should reinforce a parents' authority and restore respect for rules. If used too frequently, spankings will lose their value.

2) *Before resorting to a spanking, take time to think about what you are doing.* You should never spank your child when you are angry. Physical abuse easily happens when you are not exercising the fruit of the Holy Spirit. While your child is being corrected he should not have to fear unbridled anger. He should be concentrating on changing his improper attitude or behavior. By taking time to “think” before reacting, you will have a better perspective on the proper severity of punishment.

3) *Calmly talk to the child prior to the spanking.* Children need to understand why they are being disciplined. Tell them which rule was broken and help them see the consequences for their disobedience. Do not spank a child for a rule you (as his parent) feel applies but one which to him is unspoken. Children should be held accountable only to what they’ve been taught.

4) *Spanking is for a defiant or willful violation of an important rule that the child clearly understands.* It does not take many swats to make the point. All observant parents knows whether they are reaching their child. Remember, discipline is designed to mold a youthful conscience, not to cause excessive pain. Parents are NOT out to break a child’s spirit; they’re out to BUILD his spirit.

5) *Chastening a child should always be done in private.* There is nothing to be gained by publicly humiliating your child, especially in front of his friends. Besides, someone may have you arrested for child abuse. If you are at a store, restaurant, or any public place, and your child needs spanking, take him home. While this may be inconvenient for you at the moment, it is a lesson the child will not forget. He

will realize *your commitment* to follow through with promised discipline. Also, when you take the child home, his dignity and self-confidence are not on public trial.

6) *After disciplining your child, be sure to hug and reassure him that you love him.* A child needs to know he is still special to you. This is a good time to affirm his good qualities and encourage his desire to do what’s right. (If at home, parents might want to use the moment to pray with their child. Talking with God at such a sensitive time helps parent and child relate to higher authority. Just be careful not to sanction inappropriate discipline with prayer. That misrepresents God.)

As we’ve discussed earlier, chastisement is used to conquer rebellion and bring a child into submission to a parent’s authority. Chastening some children may only be a “certain look,” gesture, or body language which they read as a warning and will then correct their behavior. If a child doesn’t respond, then a parent can exercise punishment.

Punishment is the consequence for a child’s failure to respond to instruction. It is the last (not first) line of love available to help a child with obedience. It is the parent’s responsibility to set the penalties for breaking rules or standards. The best time to establish penalties is when you are explaining the rules. The penalty must equal the wrong.

The penalty may be paid with money, time, or loss of a privilege. With careful thought (and prayer) parents should develop confidence in their ability to judge wisely. Restitution is the act of righting a wrong. The act of compensating

“victims” for damage, loss, or injury is a principle children need to learn early on. Restitution is a biblical principle.

The Bible leaves no uncertainty about the consequences for sin. One of the most well-known examples of punishment is the story of David’s adultery with Bathsheba. And, if the adultery were not enough, there is the further tragedy of David’s arranged murder of Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband. Even though David eventually confessed his sin (2 Samuel 12:13) and God forgave him, no amount of tearful, fervent prayer or fasting stopped the punishment (2 Samuel 12:21,22). The penalty for David’s sin was the death of his firstborn child with Bathsheba. David realized the painful consequences of his sin all his life.

Even though David repented of these sins and had God’s forgiveness, he still had to pay a penalty. The same is true of our children when they break certain “house rules.” Children may say “I’m sorry” and clear their conscience, but that is not always enough. Depending upon the seriousness of the mistake, there may very well be further penalties to pay.

To the average Christian parents, disciplining their child is a dreaded task. They would rather do just about anything except follow through with “promised” punishment. But, you must remember, if you fail to carrying out your disciplinary goals, your child will learn to “play you like a fiddle” and your word will lose its authority. Here are a few principles to keep in mind when it comes time to spanking or carrying out some other form of discipline.

1) *Avoid debate*—As a general rule, do not allow your child to talk you out of what you know you should do. As a parent, you are working with your child to prepare them for the real

world. They need to learn to accept the consequences for their mistakes. *Everyone* pays a price for wrongdoing. Don’t encourage a child to argue with you because they “got caught” or show a resentful attitude toward your authority. Teach a child to learn from their mistakes and get on with life. A parent must be consistent and fair in following through with an appropriate punishment regardless of a child’s promises not to do it again.

2) *Let the punishment fit the crime*—On some occasions, if a child has confessed and is truly repentant—having already paid sufficiently for his or her wrongdoing, a parent doesn’t need to do more. However, watch against habitually giving into promises made by your child that you know they will break again, and again. If your resolve to enforce punishment “weakens,” you can bet your child will test you in the same way soon.

3) *Avoid idle threats*—Once you communicate to your child your intentions, you must keep your word. Idle threats teach a child that there is a way around justice. A child needs a healthy respect for all rules and needs to associate punishment with violating family (and societal) standards.

8 The Final Word

As you teach children the truth, be sure what you say and the judgment you exercise has the support of Scripture. You don’t want your children to grow up having to eventually *unlearn* what they were taught. We remind you, if you aren’t sure what’s right or wrong, then **STUDY** to find out. In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul says, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be

ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

How important is it to find the truth and obey it? It's VERY important! Your beliefs impact the way God looks at your children.

Many don't understand this key point mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7, particularly verse 14. To understand this verse you need to know that Paul is speaking about relationships—being single, being married, being separated. He speaks to the “unmarried” (verses 8,9) and then to “the married.” Then, beginning in verse 12, he refers “to the rest.”

Here he identifies men and women in the church (believers) married to mates not in the church (unbelievers). Finally, Paul makes a STARTLING STATEMENT about children which describes a state of consecration.

Verse 14 says, “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified [set apart in a special category] by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.”

The *Moffatt* translation here is “Otherwise, of course, your children would be unholy instead of being consecrated to God.” This means that children, blessed with parents who know God's way, are not cut off from saving knowledge. Because their parents know the truth, they too can be taught God's standards. Children of “converted” parents are set apart in a special category—apart from those lost with no sense of direction!

The best source for problem solving is God's Word and the life of Jesus Christ. Both represent the way and the truth, not the swings of societal views, and the opinions and judgments of men. God's Word is the rock on which we stand; all else is

truly shifting sand.

Today, through the media and news sources, we see the consequences for delinquent parenting stretching through several generations. Mainly due to cultural influences and the natural tendency to take the easiest way, parents are shirking their responsibilities to teach and train their children.

There's no end of argument about whose standard is the right one to follow. How sad that children and families are denied the joy that comes with following God's standards. Every parent who fails to do his part and continues his fascination with the siren's song of neglect and disrespect, contributes to the decline of the family.

Only a fool would offer the argument that parents have little impact on their children and therefore on the world community. Biblical and modern history demonstrate that societies mirror the well-being of the family.

The most teachable children are those who respect their parents and others in authority. And, of course, the greatest authority is God. A vital part of “instructing a child in the way he should go” involves familiarity with the Word of God.

If a child learns to accept God's sovereignty, they will be more inclined to follow instructions, accept responsibility for their actions, and strive toward discipleship.

The Word of God is the single most important source for parenting. Through its pages you find a truthful standard to guide you in life. And isn't it interesting, truth never needs to be updated.

We just need to learn how to apply ageless principles to new circumstances and cultural changes. In recent years, man's

perspective on Christian parenting has changed; thankfully God's hasn't. His immutable love and His laws for parents and children are the same now as they were in the beginning.

Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

Every parent knows that no sooner than a child begins moving, he starts moving away. It's hard to imagine while you're smiling over your cute little newborn, but you've already launched him on a life that will inevitably take him out of your arms, although never out of your heart.

You are his first guardian, teacher, and moral compass. Just as children learn to imitate language and gestures, they also mimic the moral practices they see. Every day is a school day when it comes to moral development.

Now is the time to discover and recapture God's instruction for parents. If you do your part in teaching and training, your children can graduate with honor. □

Additional resources: The Strong-Willed Child, Dr. James Dobson; Becoming The Parent God Wants You to Be, Dr. Kevin Leman; Special Edition, "Your Child;" Newsweek, "The Myth of Quality Time..."; Time, "How to Make Your Kid a Better Student."

All scriptural quotations taken from the New King James Version except as noted.
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This literature is published by the Church of God International, based in Tyler, Texas. Incorporated in 1978, the CGI has ministers and congregations scattered throughout the United States and Canada. We also have churches in Jamaica, the Philippines, and Australia.

The CGI's mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world (Matthew 28:19). We are blessed with four basic tools to accomplish this:

- 1. Personal and local church evangelism.*
- 2. Television and radio broadcasting.*
- 3. Booklets, brochures, and study tapes.*
- 4. The Internet.*

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