

The background of the cover features a silhouette of a man and a child standing on a hill, looking out over a sunset. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of purple, pink, and orange. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow. The man is on the left, and the child is on the right, holding the man's hand.

# Child Discipline

eBook Series:  
*Issues Facing the Churches*

**David Cloud**

## ***Child Discipline***

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This edition February 2012

ISBN 978-1-58318-164-5

This book is published for free distribution in eBook format. It is available in pdf, mobi (for Kindle, etc.), and epub formats from the Way of Life web site.



Published by Way of Life Literature  
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[www.wayoflife.org](http://www.wayoflife.org)

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4212 Campbell St. N., London Ont. N6P 1A6  
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Printed in Canada by Bethel Baptist Print Ministry

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# Introduction

The following is excerpted from the 532-page book *KEEPING THE KIDS: HOW TO KEEP THE CHILDREN FROM FALLING PREY TO THE WORLD*, which is available in print and eBook editions from Way of Life Literature. The book is a child-training manual, a marriage manual, a discipleship manual. It is a manual for parents, grandparents, pastors, and youth workers.

## Chapter Titles

- Can We Keep the Kids?
- The Necessity of Priority
- The Necessity of a Biblical Conversion
- The Home: *Consistent Christian Living*
- The Home: *The Husband-Wife Relationship*
- Child Discipline
- The Church
- Separation from the Pop Culture
- Discipleship
- The Grandparents
- What if the Kids Are Already Rebellious?
- Candor, God's Grace, and the Power of Prayer
- Ten Tips for Daily Bible Reading
- How to Lose Your Child Before He Is Five
- A Checklist for "Keeping the Kids"

Effective child discipline is one of the most important aspects of “keeping the kids.” Such discipline must be accomplished within a framework of a godly home environment, which is why we dealt with this (consistent Christian living, husband-wife relationship, etc.) separately in the previous chapters.

The Bible says, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

We discussed this verse at the beginning of the book (*Keeping the Kids*) in the chapter “Can We Keep the Kids?” I believe it is God’s promise for godly childtraining. It does not mean that the child will never struggle with submission to God and human authority, nor does it mean that the child will necessarily exhibit perfect sanctification and surrender. It simply means what it says. If the child is trained in the right way he will not depart from it when he is old, and that age varies from child to child.

Parents need to go to God’s Word for instruction in discipline, and not to the world or to Christian psychologists. The Bible is given by divine inspiration and is able to make God’s people “perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). This means

that the Bible has everything we need for faith and practice. The word “perfect” does not mean sinless perfection; it means thoroughly furnished or equipped to do God’s will in this world. It has everything necessary for godly husband-wife relationships and for effective child training.

There are Bible-based books that can help parents in this all-important task of training their children. It doesn’t come naturally; it must be learned. Many Christian parents were not raised in a godly home themselves, so they have never seen these things lived out. Two books that I recommend are the following:

*Rearing Spiritual Children to Serve the Savior* by Terry Coomer. God has given Pastor Coomer some special wisdom about building a godly Christian life and family. In addition to publishing helpful materials on this subject, he conducts family conferences in local churches. He may be contacted at For Love of the Family Ministries, P.O. Box 535, Elwood, IN 46036, 765-552-1973, [www.fortheloveofthefamily.com](http://www.fortheloveofthefamily.com), [tlcoomer@juno.com](mailto:tlcoomer@juno.com).

*Training Your Children to Turn out Right* by David Sorenson (Northstar Ministries, 218-726-0209, [www.northstarministries.com](http://www.northstarministries.com), [dhs.northstar@charter.net](mailto:dhs.northstar@charter.net))

Materials are available, but they must be used. I would challenge parents to get these books and sit down together

and go through them and discuss them. Analyze your family in light of God's Word and decide what changes need to be made.

Churches need to emphasize this matter and give more practical instruction than they usually do. It is the church's responsibility to teach God's Word, and it is God's Word that contains the instructions on how to train godly children. A message on the home and child training every year or so is not enough! This theme needs to be regularly woven into the preaching and teaching. (For more on this see the chapter on The Church under the section "A church that seeks to build strong families.")

The following are principles of child discipline that are emphasized in the Scripture.

## **Understanding the Child's Nature**

"Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him" (Proverbs 22:15).

A sound child training philosophy begins with understanding the child's nature. According to the Bible, he has inherited a sinful nature from Adam that is naturally bent toward foolishness rather than wisdom.

Modern child psychology begins with the idea that human beings are basically good and seeks to develop that inherent goodness and build “self esteem.”

The Bible begins with the doctrine that human beings are fallen by nature and seeks to bring them to conversion and regeneration by the tools of conviction, repentance, and faith through the instrumentality of the Law of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to spiritual growth by tools such as communion, surrender, obedience, and separation.

## **Obedience and Respect for Authority**

The first objective of godly child discipline is to teach the child obedience and respect for authority so that he will submit to God. The child must be taught that God is a holy, law-giving God who must be obeyed and that disobedience brings punishment. This prepares the child to understand God’s character and the reality of the moral universe and it instructs him in the foundational principles of salvation.

Since the child cannot see God, he must be taught to respect divine authority through learning to respect parental authority.

Bob Nichols, missionary to Brazil, says,

“The first thing you need to do is establish your authority in the lives of your children. If you never establish authority, they’ll never respect you. Too often I’ve seen parents asking their children if they want to do this or that. But when they are young, you don’t ask them, you tell them. They need to learn to obey authority. Too often parents don’t establish their authority in the lives of their children, and that is very tragic. Once you establish that then you have to be sure to give clear commands to your children, that they understand what you are requiring, and if the command is given they need to carry it out. If not, that is direct disobedience.”

Pastor Gene Haymaker observes that the high percentage of young people who leave church is partly the cause of parents who “refusal to restrain.” He says,

“Proverbs teaches us that foolishness is to be driven from our children through correction, but this is something that I believe is missing in many homes. Boundaries, standards, and even consequences have been abandoned in a belief that children inherently want to do right. It is sad when parents prefer to be their children’s friends rather than embracing their God-given role of parenting, and when they leave their children to themselves even though the Scriptures teach that a child left to himself brings shame. The refusal to restrain our children is not love, but rather evidence that we do not love them as we ought. According to the Scripture, a father who loves his son chastens him (Heb. 12:6).”

Pastor David Sorenson gives the following counsel,

The first major, absolute rule that I would suggest for your family is to demand obedience. Few things in family life are more fundamental than teaching children to obey. We positively, absolutely always expected our children to obey when they were given clear instructions (Ephesians 6:1). ...

If children are consistently disobedient, it means that the parents, at some point, have not trained them to be obedient. ... We positively demanded that our children obey us. If they did not obey, there were immediate and consistent consequences. Every time. Every single time! Obedience is critically important. Not only is obedience important to maintain order in a child's life, but it also has a profound spiritual implication. ... **when children become accustomed to disobeying their parents and getting away with it, they are likely to adopt the same attitude toward doing God's will.** ...

Parents, you will do your children a great spiritual favor by insisting on obedience. You are establishing a precedent in their lives for them to obey God as they mature and become independent. ...

Insisting on obedience is a basic way of training a child to subordinate his or her old nature to standards of right. ... In our home, when one of the children was directly and overtly disobedient, it was dealt with immediately. There were no ifs, ands, or buts. ... There was no debate. ... If one of the children was punished for having been disobedient, we always made very sure that she understood her punishment was because she disobeyed....

Our children need to learn that every single time they violate a household rule, there will be a predictable and unpleasant experience. Children seem to think that if they whittle away at their parents long enough, the parents will wear down and then give in. Consistently enforce your rules (*Training Your Children to Turn out Right*, pp. 62-64, 71).

**Parents must use every opportunity to teach their children obedience, and the training and discipline must be consistent.** If it is inconsistent, off and on, it will not work and, in fact, could do more harm than good.

For example, I have seen many parents tell their child to do something and then back down and do it themselves when the child refuses. I recall a father who was watching his son playing outside. When the child took some bean husks and threw them into a play sandbox, the father told him to get the husks and put them into a trash bag nearby. The son ignored him. The father told him again and again was ignored. The child looked at him but didn't move. Finally, the father got up and did it himself and let the child get away with open disobedience. The child should have been spanked the very first time he refused to obey and spanked sufficiently so that he was forced to obey and was left with a bad taste for disobedience. That process is not as easy as getting up and doing the thing yourself but it is godly child training and will bear good fruit in time.

Ignoring disobedience, even some of the time, will also bear fruit in time, but it will not be good fruit.

**Children must be taught to be respectful of authority figures other than parents**, whether grandparents, teachers, pastors, police, or even adults in general. If children do not learn to respect human authority, they certainly won't respect God's authority. The Lord has ordained a chain of authority in this world, and godly morality has a lot to do with submission to that authority. Respect to God demands respect to the authority that God has ordained (1 Corinthians 11:3). Submission to authority is greatly emphasized in the New Testament epistles.

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1).

“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord” (Ephesians 5:21-22).

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6:1-3).

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love

for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

"Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity. (1 Timothy 5:1-2).

"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (1 Timothy 5:17).

"Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work" (Titus 3:1).

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17).

"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well" (1 Peter 2:13-14).

"Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king" (1 Peter 2:17).

"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives" (1 Peter 3:1).

**Children need to be taught to do things that exhibit respect for authority.**

They need to be taught to speak respectfully to adults. The “old-fashioned” custom of teaching children to learn to say “yes sir” and “no sir” to their elders was designed to educate them to respect authority. Missionary Bob Nichols says, “I’ve always insisted on my kids saying, ‘Yes sir’ and ‘no sir.’ I know that’s not real popular, but it shows respect and kids need to do that.” At the very least the children should be taught to use respectful language with adults instead of slang.

Children need to be taught to answer adults when they are addressed. Many children are shy, it is true, but they also like to play silly games and they must be taught to come out of their comfort zone and show respect to authority and not be allowed to follow their natural tendencies. As I travel on preaching and research trips in many parts of the world and have preached in over 500 churches, I have often asked a child his name or some other question and the child has refused to answer. Many parents excuse this behavior instead of training the child properly.

Children need to be taught not to interrupt adults when they are talking.

They need to be taught to greet adults when they come into their presence, instead of ignoring them and continuing with their own business. The latter is an act of disrespect. This is especially true if the adult is an authority figure, such as a grandparent or a teacher.

Younger children even need to be taught to respect the older children. Missionary Bob Nichols says,

“We always taught the younger ones to obey the older ones. A lot of times the younger don’t want to listen to the older, but God put us in the order in which we are born into the families with a design and purpose. So they have to understand that.”

None of these things come “naturally.” Naturally, the child follows the way of his fallen heart, which is selfish, insubordinate, and disrespectful.

Teaching obedience and respect for authority is a major part of child discipline.

## Making Much of God's Word

It is the Word of God that has the power to sanctify us and build us up in Christ. It imparts conviction, enlightenment, spiritual strength, faith, wisdom, repentance. Consider the following Scriptures:

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Joshua 1:8).

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper” (Psalms 1:1-3).

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psalms 119:9).

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalms 119:105).

“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12)

“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2).

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19)

Wise Christian parents will fill their homes with the Scripture, teaching it to the children, memorizing it together, discussing it.

David Sorenson writes,

If there is a basic truth that is universal in training children to be godly, it is the necessity of building a foundation of the Word of God in their lives. This is true

for any born-again Christian and that includes the children of God's people. I fear that Christian parents come to rely on Christian media, Sunday School teachers, church youth programs, and Christian schools to see their youth turn out right. All of these are potentially good and can be a great help; however, the foundation for godly living is often missing in the lives of the children and youth of God's people. That foundation is a daily absorption of the Word of God.

A young person from a Christian home can go to a Christian school or be home-schooled with a godly curriculum, be faithful to Sunday School and church programs, go to church camp, and be carnal, rebellious, and worldly. Or more frequently, they are just lukewarm and go with the flow, but there are not true spiritual convictions in their hearts. The reason is as simple as it is singular. They are not in the Word of God on a daily basis.

It makes little difference if one is a young person or a seasoned adult. Apart from daily consumption of the Word of God, any believer will be carnal and more worldly than godly. God said to Joshua, millennia ago, 'This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success' (Joshua 1:8). That promise and promise has never been abrogated. When a young person, or anyone for that matter, saturates his mind with the Word of God so that it soaks down into his heart, it will modify his behavior. It will impact his heart and mind.

That is why the Psalmist wrote long ago, 'Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee'

(Psalm 119:11). The idea here is not so much rote memorization of Scripture as it is filling one's mind with God's Word to such a degree that it soaks down into the heart. When that has happened, we will not sin against God. The will has been changed.

As a pastor, I watch children from Christian homes who are in Christian schools or are home schooled. Their parents make sure they are at every service and youth function of the church. And yet, these same kids are rebellious, carnal, and have a worldly attitude. Why? Because they are not in the Word in a meaningful way. It's as simple as that (Sorenson, "Seven Principles in Training Godly Children").

Missionary Bob Nichols says,

"One of the things that we did was concentrate on teaching the children the Word of God and Bible memorization."

A respondent to our questionnaire wrote,

"We are a Navy family so we have had the privilege to be members of several churches. At every one the children's teachers were shocked by my children's knowledge of the Bible. We home school and the Lord has inspired me to create a Bible curriculum to give regular daily instruction in the Scriptures. The kids love it!"

## **An effective family altar**

The daily family altar is very important. It is a time when the family can meet regularly and consistently to worship God and study His Word. It is a time to read the Bible and discuss it. It is a time to memorize Scripture. It is a time to pray together.

Pastor Gene Haymaker says,

“The day of family altars is disappearing as quickly as our youth. Families have relegated the teaching of biblical truth to their church and to their Christian schools. It is my belief that the number of homes having a family altar, where the entire family is involved, would directly correspond to the percentage of young people leaving the church. The primary agency for teaching children biblical truth is the home.”

Dave Sorenson gives this following advice for family altars,

Every family's schedule will be different, but we found doing so at the breakfast table to work well. Let us consider several pointers for establishing a simple, but ongoing family devotions.

**HAVE A PURPOSE.** Over the years we focused on primarily two areas in our family devotions. One was to explain the matter of salvation to our children. They needed to understand the need for it, what Christ did for us on the cross, and the way to be saved. When our children were young and before they were saved, we

often focused our daily devotions on this crucial topic. The other major matter we focused on was Christian and godly character. Because the practice of righteousness is at the heart of Christian character, all throughout their formative years, we repeatedly discussed the principle of righteousness, the practice thereof, and verses which illustrated these.

**HAVE A PLAN.** One route to success for a family devotion time is having a simple operational plan which does not require a great deal of preparation. One method we have used over the years, particularly in teaching godliness and righteousness, is to take one chapter of Proverbs a day according to the days of the month. For example, if the day of the month is the 29th, I would go to Proverbs 29. There I would seek out a verse or two which stood out and go over it very briefly. Once we had gone through Proverbs, we might then go to Psalms and look for an appropriate verse in a three chapter sequence. For example, if the day of the month was the 15th, I might peruse Psalm 45-47 for a verse to dwell upon. (There are 150 Psalms and seeking a good verse over three chapters was simple and always worked.) Of course, we might go elsewhere to deal with specific problems. Having a well-marked Bible wherein verses which have blessed us or otherwise stood out were underlined made it very easy to conduct family devotions this way. That underlining was done during personal Bible reading times. We then had a season of prayer wherein various members of the family took turns praying.

**KEEP IT SIMPLE.** One of the great hindrances to family devotions is that most people do not have a long-term method of sustaining a day-after-day and year-after-year devotional plan. The plan mentioned above is simple and eminently Scriptural. It is virtually

inexhaustible. Most parents are very busy with the affairs of life and don't have time to prepare extensive family devotions. Pre-planned devotional guides cost money and usually run out after a month or two. However you do it, have a simple plan of teaching your children the things of God. God has given that charge to the parents in general and to the father in particular (Sorenson, *Training Your Children to Turn Out Right*).

Pastor Ken Shaver describes his family's devotions as follows,

"In the Shaver family, devotions consist of a moment of Scripture memorization, a time of singing, a time of Bible reading (sometimes we also read a Christian biography or story like *Pilgrim's Progress*), and a short period of prayer. We always have tried to include all the family, maybe one reading, one picking out a song, one praying, and everyone quoting Scripture. We also do not try to make it an in depth Bible Study, although as our children grew older, we would spend a few weeks on issues like modesty, biblical principles for entertainment, and other relevant things. Additionally, we would work very hard at keeping it light, and upbeat. In our home, we just tried to take a few minutes to focus on the things of God and, as I mentioned earlier, draw closer together. There are many good family devotion books available, but most of the time we would just take a different chapter of the Bible and take turns reading it."

A good starting place is Genesis, which gives the foundation for the rest of the Bible. It teaches where we came from, how the world began, what God is like, how

trouble came into the world, why man is like he is, the great flood, the tower of Babel, and the beginning of the nation Israel.

Missionary Bob Nichols says, “I try to lead my family to memorize 14 verses a month. We’ll go over the verses as a family, and what a tremendous help that’s been.”

There are many things beyond Bible study and memorization that can be done during family devotions when time permits. The family can read biographies together and discuss them. They can read material pertaining to creation science. The book *A Closer Look at the Evidence* by Richard and Tina Kleiss contains 365 interesting brief studies on fascinating facts of life that support creation. It is available in a KJV edition from Bethel Baptist Print Ministry. See the list of recommended publishers at the end of the book.

Nothing, though, should take the place of studying the Bible itself.

### **Training children to have a private daily devotional**

“... from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures” (2 Timothy 3:15).

One of the most important things that parents can do for their children is to help them develop a habit of daily Bible study. Though I grew up in church, I do not remember any instruction or challenge whatsoever about this.

It is by the Word of God that the young person can cleanse his way in this wicked world (Psalm 119:9). It must get down into the heart and soul and thus permeate the individual's life, and this will not happen unless reading, study, memorization, and meditation become a daily practice.

We know that reading the Bible alone will not produce salvation and sanctification; it must be received and obeyed. But we also know that salvation and sanctification *will not* happen apart from the Word of God, because "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

It is never vain to put the Word of God into the child's heart. Even though I wasn't saved when I was young and didn't take the Bible seriously, the teaching and preaching had a deep affect on me and after I was converted at age 23, much of it came back to me and I had a good head start in my Christian life.

Again we quote from Pastor David Sorenson,

The foundation for godly living is often missing in the lives of the children and youth of God's people. That foundation is a daily absorption of the Word of God. A young person from a Christian home can go to a Christian school or be home-schooled with a godly curriculum, be faithful to Sunday School and church programs, go to church camp, and be carnal, rebellious, and worldly. Or more frequently, they are just lukewarm and go with the flow, but there is not true spiritual conviction in their hearts. The reason is as simple as it is singular. They are not in the Word of God on a daily basis. Following are some suggestions on how to correct this:

1. *Start early.* When our children were small, we had them read from the Bible as soon as they could barely read. It was short, but they started late in their kindergarten year.

2. *Plan their reading.* The Bible is a complex book, even for adults. When our children were small, we had them read in I John because of its simple vocabulary and syntax. At first, we had them read just a verse or two a day. As they progressed through grade school, the daily reading assignment grew to a chapter a day and by the time they were in junior high school, we had our girls reading four chapters a day. That is the basic amount to read the Bible through in a year. But the greater point is that we planned their reading for them.

3. *Provide positive incentives.* When our girls were small, we prepared a chart which was on the refrigerator and as they did their requisite daily Bible reading, they received a star on their chart each day.

When they had faithfully filled their chart for several weeks or a month, we planned a special reward for them.

4. *Enforce the policy.* We made sure that our girls did their daily Bible reading as assigned. A refrain oft heard at the breakfast table was 'Did you do your Bible reading this morning?' Though they eventually grew out of the charts and stars on the refrigerator, we still checked up on them throughout their adolescent years.

5. *Just do it because it is right.* As the girls grew out the stage where they needed little incentives, we shifted to the philosophy of doing your Bible reading just because it was right. As we developed the principle of righteousness in the meantime, it was easy to mesh the practice of daily Bible reading with the principle of righteousness. Indeed it is right to be in God's Word each day (*Training Your Children to Turn out Right*).

Pastor Mario Schiavoni says that he and his wife started their kids out by having them spend time meditating on a Bible picture book even before they could read. They have taught their children to have their devotionals first thing after they wake up. He says, "It is quiet around the house first thing in the morning because everyone is having their devotionals."

For more on this see the chapter "Ten Tips for Daily Bible Reading."

### **How to Interpret and Study the Bible**

I would add that at an appropriate point the young people need to be taught how to use basic Bible study tools (e.g.,

concordance, Bible dictionary, Bible atlas, commentaries) and how to rightly interpret the Bible so that their study time will become increasingly profitable and exciting. Otherwise, it can become just an empty ritual.

We deal with this in the chapter on discipleship. (For a more extensive look at this see the Advanced Bible Studies Series course “How to Study the Bible,” which is available from Way of Life Literature. We also have a DVD on this subject.)

## **Discipline Must Begin Early**

“He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Proverbs 13:24).

“Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying” (Proverbs 19:18).

The word “betimes” in Proverbs 13:24 means early. Compare Genesis 26:31 and 2 Chronicles 36:15. The discipline must begin as soon as the child can understand what the parent is communicating, and that is usually within the first few months. If discipline doesn’t begin early it can be too late and the child won’t respond properly. The child must be disciplined “*while there is hope.*” The best time to train a teenager is when he or she is a toddler.

When my wife has training classes for Christian mothers in Nepal who are newly converted to Christ, they are always amazed to hear that they should begin training and disciplining when the children are infants. Recently she had our daughter-in-law bring her two-year-old and six-month-old daughters into the class to demonstrate how she disciplines them. They were flabbergasted, because they typically think that nothing can be done until the child is about five years old!

The late Pastor J.B. Buffington, said,

“I’ve heard people say, ‘Everything went along alright until my children became teenagers and then something happened.’ But I beg your pardon, that’s not the case. Most of it happened before five years old. That’s why I exhort mothers, ‘Don’t let anybody be a baby sitter of your children except you and other godly people.’ In those first five years, attitudes, security, goals, and many other things are already developed, and they will come into full blossom in teenage years. A child is like a computer. What you put in comes out. You can put something into a computer and pray that something else will come out, but it won’t happen. I urge you not to waste time, to start early.”

For more on this, see the chapter “How to Lose Your Teenager before He Is Five Years Old.”

## Effective Use of the Rod

“He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Proverbs 13:24).

“Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him” (Proverbs 22:15).

“The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (Proverbs 29:15).

“Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell” (Proverbs 23:13-14).

The rod is mentioned four times in Proverbs in association with child discipline. This is the proper biblical instrument of discipline. A rod is not a fist; it's not a slap; it's not a club or a brutal leather whip; it's not a kick; it's not yelling; it's not threatening. Webster's 1828 dictionary defined a rod as “the shoot or long twig of any woody plant; a branch, or the stem of a shrub; as a rod of hazel, of birch, of oak or hickory.” See Genesis 30:37 and Jeremiah 1:11. Previous generations called the spanking rod a “tree switch.” My maternal grandmother used switches from the trees that grew around her house in central Florida, and they were so effective that all of her

many children professed faith in Christ as adults and had successful marriages and no divorces.

### **The rod must be used instead of man-made alternatives**

The Bible emphasizes the use of the rod for correction, but mankind has devised a thousand alternatives. Humanistic psychology thinks that it knows more than God about human nature and proposes a wide variety of manipulative rewards and punishments that avoid the use of the rod. Even many Christian parents in Biblebelieving churches draw back from using the rod and try to find an effective alternative.

Missionary Bob Nichols says,

“My dad didn't get saved until he was 37, and my mom and dad didn't go to an Independent Baptist church until a few years after that. Consequently, my mom set me in a corner quite a bit. She put me there and told me to think about what I'd done. Of course, I didn't think about that. I was thinking about my friends out playing ball or something like that. I thank the Lord for my parents. My dad was a man of tremendous character, and he taught us to work and to be honest and not to lie. But sending kids to their rooms or putting them in a corner breeds rebellion. It doesn't get the job done.”

## **The rod must be used when the child is rebellious**

A biblical rod is a rod *of correction* (Prov. 22:15; 23:13). It is used to correct a child that refuses to obey verbal commands and instruction. It is used to correct disobedience and rebellion.

Dave Sorenson describes how that one of his girls had to be corrected for her stubborn rebellion,

When one of our girls was small, she decided one evening that she did not want to stay in her bed. She had been put to bed, but she decided she wanted to get up. She climbed out of her bed and came out into the living room. She was lectured about the fact that it was her bed time and that if she got out of bed again she would be spanked. She was placed back in her bed. A few minutes later, she came out again. As promised, she was paddled and placed back into her bed. ... A few minutes later, she came out again. She again was paddled and placed back into her bed amidst rather rebellious crying. She was throwing a tantrum. After a while she proceeded to get out of bed and come out again into the living room. As far as we could tell, there was no legitimate reason for her to get up. She just did not want to stay in bed. Again she was spanked. This went on for about a half an hour, but she finally got the message; if she openly defied Mom and Dad, she would be spanked. It was consistent. It happened every single time. ...

That night a major battle was won. Her rebellious little will was broken. She had tried her hardest to challenge parental authority, and she had lost. ...

Did we as parents enjoy spanking our little girl? We hated every moment of it. She was our pride and joy. Nothing would have pleased us more than for her to have cuddled up to us out in the living room, but we knew how she needed to have discipline developed in her life (Sorenson, *Training Your Children to Turn out Right*, pp. 71, 72).

### **The rod must not be spared (Prov. 13:24)**

This means to draw back from using it, to fail to use it.

*The rod can be spared by withholding it altogether.* Many parents commit this sin.

*The rod can also be spared by withholding it from time to time when it should be used.* Some parents start out using the rod properly, but they then slack off. Others use the rod from time to time, but they do not use it consistently.

There are many things that will tempt a parent to spare the rod, such as a child's cries (Prov. 19:18), the child's lies (e.g., insincerely saying "I'm sorry" as soon as he realizes that he is going to get a spanking), physical weariness, impatience with the slow process of discipline, interference by well-meaning but misguided friends and relatives, and mental frustration. But if the rod is spared when it should be used the child will not be properly disciplined.

Consistency in discipline is essential, because inconsistency actually trains the child to disobey.

“If a child is told not to run in church, and the parent sees the child run and does nothing about it, that is inconsistent discipline. Parents, the child needs to know the rules and that if they break the rules they will be disciplined” (Terry Coomer, *Rearing Spiritual Children*, p. 62).

As David Sorenson says,

“We positively demanded that our children obey us. If they did not obey, there were immediate and consistent consequences. Every time. Every single time!”

*The rod can also be spared by withholding it from some of the children.* It is not uncommon for parents to be stricter with a firstborn child, for example, than with those that come later. It is especially common for older parents who have a child out of season to spare the rod.

**The rod must be used with sufficient force to correct the child (Prov. 23:13)**

The rod should hurt enough to get the point across and to bring real heart-level submission. The *foolishness* that is bound in a child’s heart must be “driven” away, and this takes proper force, firm resolve, and steadfast perseverance (Prov. 22:15).

If the rod is used but the child still persists in disobedience, it has not been used with sufficient vigor or persistence. Parents often fail at this point. They use the rod *a little but not enough* to bring the desired results, and they then become convinced that it doesn't work. *The problem is not with the rod; the problem is with its half-hearted, inconsistent misuse.*

I recall some Christian friends who had a two-year-old boy who was extra large and extra stubborn. The mother would "spank" him by giving him a couple of swats on his thick diaper with her hand and he would literally laugh it off and persist with his mischief and rebellion. Not surprisingly, by the time the child approached his teenage years he was uncontrollable. The biblical use of the rod would have stopped that fearful rebellion in its tracks and would have saved the family a lot of heartache and the child a lot of sorrow.

The foolishness that is bound in a child's heart must be "driven" away (Prov. 22:15).

**The rod must be used without multiple commands  
and threats**

Many parents fall into the trap of telling their child "no" repeatedly and warning and threatening instead of calmly,

swiftly, and consistently using the rod to train the child to obey at their first command. If he doesn't obey after ONE command, he should be spanked with the rod until he does obey. If he is given multiple commands before he is spanked with the rod he is actually being taught NOT to obey and he is training his parents more than they are training him. He learns that his parents don't really mean it when they give him a command or even when they warn him, because they let him get away with multiple acts of disobedience.

Pastor Sorenson says,

As a pastor, I have visited in thousands of homes. I have witnessed the following scenario played out numerous times. ... Mom (or, sometimes Dad) would say to Junior. 'It's time to go to bed' (or some other parental directive). Junior ignored his mother and continued to watch TV. ... After a few moments, she would say, 'Junior, I told you to go and get ready for bed.' He replied, 'Awe, I don't want to.' Mom let that go by. A few moments later, Mom became a little hot about the matter. She raised the volume of her voice and said, 'I TOLD YOU TO GET READY FOR BED.' Junior replied, 'But Mom, I want to watch my program.' Mom tolerated that counter for a few more moments. She then announced, 'THIS IS THE LAST TIME I AM GOING TO TELL YOU. GO AND GET READY FOR BED!' Junior, by now himself getting exasperated at being shouted at, shouts back, 'I TOLD YOU, I DON'T WANT TO!' Finally, Mom shouts, 'I'M WARNING YOU. MARCH RIGHT NOW, OR I AM GOING TO WHIP YOU.'

Variations of that scene go on by the thousands every single day. The real culprit was not Junior. He knew from considerable experience that Mom could be ignored. Mom was too lazy to get up and deal with the situation. She, in fact, was in her own way contributing to the delinquency of Junior. ...

One might say, 'If I handled the situation described above as recommended, there would be a pitched battle.' Well, you had better get on with the battle and win the war while it can still be won. The day is coming when you will not be able to win the battle or the war (*Training Your Children to Turn out Right*, pp. 69, 70).

### **The rod must be used wisely and in the context of communication with the child**

Following are some wise rules about how to spank a child, from the book *Raising Children in an Ungodly World*:

1. Make sure that the children understand the rules.
2. When discipline is necessary, take the child aside privately and tell him that what he has done wrong and how he will be disciplined.
3. Carry out the discipline with self-control, explaining first to the child what will happen.
4. Hug the child and tell him that you love him.
5. Explain why the discipline had to happen and why their actions were wrong; talk with them about how they can correct his in the future and suggest alternative actions.

6. Always emphasize that obedience is required by God, and that is not just our own program.

Every time this has happened in our home, step 4 has never been evaded by either child or parents. In fact, step 4 in the discipline process has often been some of the more special times in our relationship with our children. It says that we love you unconditionally and that our children know that sincerely. When a child can tell you that they love you after they have received a spanking from you, it means they can sense your sincerity and self control. I am not saying that as parents we have done this faultlessly every time. I certainly have made mistakes along the way (e.g., not admonishing in private and even allowing anger to rule instead of Christ) but even with a few sinful mistakes here and there, God has been gracious to us in the discipline of our much-loved children (Ken Ham, *Raising Godly Children in an Ungodly World*, p. 197).

“I always appreciated that Dad would always tell us not only what we did wrong, but why it was wrong. When we would get caught doing something, and we already knew why it was wrong, he would still tell us again anyway, just to reinforce the reason. We were never confused about discipline. Dad’s explanations made it clear” (Ham, p. 204).

Missionary Bob Nichols says,

“The children realized that when we spanked them, it wasn’t against them or their person but it was against their actions. We wanted to correct their attitude or actions. We would take them aside and correct them and then spend time in prayer with them and then hug them. They knew that the correction didn’t come because we were angry or we were embarrassed for

the Nichols' name or something like that, but that they were acting against God and God's Word."

Nichols adds the following wise suggestion,

"You need to maintain eye contact with your children. I have noticed in many cases that the children's eyes wander when they are being corrected, but they need to look right into the parent's eyes. This is a form of rebellion, too. They're saying, 'I'm here but I'm not at home.' They need to be accountable for what they've done."

Unwise and hasty and angry use of the rod can provoke the children to wrath and drive them away from the parent.

Communicating with the child is essential. Otherwise he or she can be confused and frustrated and might consider the parent unreasonable.

The parent needs to be ready to apologize when he or she makes a mistake in discipline.

Parents must confirm their love to the children during the entire process.

## No Sassing or Resisting

Effective child discipline requires that the parents not allow the child to sass back or to resist the discipline.

David Sorenson says,

[Another] basic rule in our house was that disrespect, defiance, sassing, or any other form of overt rebellion toward us as parents absolutely was not tolerated. Nothing would bring judgment more swiftly than for me to hear our children sassing their mother. They were taught ahead of time that defiance or disrespect was not allowed, period! ... 1 Samuel 15:23 says, 'For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft...' It is Satanic in its origins. And rebellion begins with a smart mouth. ... Children are born with a rebellious, sassy spirit, and the sooner it is nipped in the bud the better. ...

One of our children would, at times, fight the spanking. She was informed that if she fought and resisted, whatever the original punishment was, it would be doubled. Now, that may seem harsh. However, it did not take too long for it to soak in that **rebellion, even during punishment, would not be allowed.** ...

As a result of dealing with it as soon as it raised its ugly head, it had pretty well been purged by the time the girls were of school age. ...

**Do not believe the foolishness that if you deal directly with rebellion, you will only cause a child to be more rebellious. Rebellion and defiance will**

**grow like an ugly, malignant cancer. The earlier it is dealt with, the better. ...**

One might think that our home was a rigid, authoritarian, Spartan environment. To the contrary, it was a warm, fun, loving place; and one of the things that made it such a sweet place was that there was so little conflict (*Training Your Children to Turn out Right*, pp. 66-68).

This is a very important point. The Bible says foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, and that becomes evident in a multitude of ways. Children do not act reasonably! They act foolishly. They have many ways to act out rebellion, and if one doesn't work they try another. For example, they will whine and whimper or throw a fit or cry effusively and refuse to quiet down. Those are acts of a foolish heart and statements of rebellion, and the child must be taught that he is not allowed to do such things. He must obey. Period. He must not be allowed to spoil the atmosphere of the home (whether his parent's or someone else's) or a social get together with his sinful foolishness. A wise parent can tell when the child is crying because he is genuinely hurt and when he is putting on a selfish act of rebellion.

## **Discipline for Actions and for Attitude**

Many parents fail in child training by disciplining only for actions rather than both for actions and attitude. They allow the child to get away with having a bad attitude as long as they are outwardly obedient, but this encourages bad character. It reminds us of the little boy who was told by his father to sit down. Knowing that his father would spank him if he disobeyed, the little boy complied, but as he sat down he said, "I'm still standing in my heart!"

Children have a multitude of ways to get the same point across. They make funny little sounds; they make faces; they are sullen. This is not the type of obedience that is acceptable to the Lord, and wise parents will not allow it.

Terry Coomer writes,

"Something that is very important is that we should discipline for attitude. When a child says 'no' to you or makes a face, proper discipline is in order. In this battle of the wills you may have to spank more than once" (*Rearing Spiritual Children*, p. 58).

This was emphasized to me in an interview with Missionary Bob Nichols,

“Another thing I have noticed in parents is that they don’t watch for attitudes. Attitude is all important. You can do something with the wrong attitude and it doesn’t turn out right. If you tell them to wash the dishes or take out the garbage or whatever, if their attitude isn’t right they aren’t going to get a reward for it. They are still in disobedience, and it needs to be corrected. A lot of people correct for misconduct, but they don’t go into attitudes. We disciplined for attitude problems. We didn’t allow moodiness. You can wake up with a smile just as easily as you can wake up with a frown. Parents shouldn’t allow moodiness in the lives of their children. We corrected moodiness instantly. If they had a bad attitude, there was immediate correction. We didn’t allow it.”

Nichols also makes the important point that the children must be taught to get along with one another. The parents must not allow them to bicker and act selfishly.

“We never let our children fight. We never let them cut down or ridicule each other. We didn’t allow it. If you were around my family, you would realize that they have a deep respect for people’s children and they enjoy being around kids of all ages.”

Pastor Mario Schiavoni also emphasizes this point,

As far as sibling rivalry (bickering, snatching things, making one another cry) I’ve seen it in some of the church families and I try to gently say to the fathers not to tolerate that. I’m guessing that maybe they do tolerate it to a point, until it gets totally out of control. We’ve always had zero tolerance of that type of thing

with our children. Basically it was one strike you're out. I think children sometimes act out what they have seen on television, but my children haven't been influenced by that. We taught the children to be best friends.

We've tried to discipline everything from the overtly outright snatching to the attitude or the words spoken out of tone.

I can't help but think that the key is the role model. If the child sees the parents bickering with one another over silly things, I can't help but think that this influences the child. Our boys are six and nine and they share a bedroom, and it's not an issue. They're mates [friends], and I think they are good mates with their older sister, too. We've had them at home right through, home schooling and all, and they get along well. They learned to get along when they were little.

Along this line, the younger children should be taught to respect and obey the older ones, as we have already noted. Missionary Bob Nichols says,

"We always taught the younger ones to obey the older ones. A lot of times the younger don't want to listen to the older, but God put us in the order in which we are born into the families with a design and purpose. So they have to understand that."

## **Discipline in Love**

"My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD

loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Proverbs 3:11-12).

“He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Proverbs 13:24).

If the parent doesn't have the right attitude when using the rod it won't work and it might produce the exact opposite of godly submission.

We respond to love. The Bible says that we love God because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). When parents love their children and demonstrate it clearly and consistently, the children respond in kind and their hearts are kept close to the parents and they remain open to parental instruction.

One respondent to our questionnaire wrote,

“The most important thing is to love them with a sincere, godly love. Not the liberal ‘do as you want, be who you are, non-judgmental’ love. This doesn't keep the kids, because it draws them to the charismatic and liberal churches. The world and Satan are the ones that ultimately get our children in this kind of liberality.”

Pastor Dave Sorenson emphasizes the necessity of love in child training,

Another concept endemic to godliness is the matter of love. ... [It] is important that our homes be an aquarium of love. In all your teaching, discipling, and admonishing of your children, always season it liberally with love.

See that your children have no doubt whatsoever that you love them. Tell them you love them. Show physical affection in an appropriate fashion such as hugs and discreet kisses. Always be there when they need you. Never be too busy for their school functions or programs. Love them even more than you love yourself.

Not only is it right to love your children, it will enable you to most effectively teach and train them. When they unquestionably know you love them, they know that you have their best interests at heart (*Training Your Children to Turn out Right*, p. 136).

Terry Coomer warns about parents who yell at their children,

Parents who yell and scream all the time are only building a rebel. The child will hear you yell and scream and ignore you and when he grows up he will never listen to a thing you tell him. I have talked to many parents who have disciplined in this manner and they firmly believe they are disciplinarians. 'You know, Pastor, my kids got it when they back-talked me. I hit them right in the mouth. I yelled and they listened.' Sure they did, right up until the day they got out of your house. Now they live the way they want, which does not include living for God. You did not train them, you browbeat them! They longed to get away from you.

Listen carefully; proper discipline of the child requires not disciplining in anger. When our children disobeyed, we calmly went into the bedroom and talked with them about their disobedience and spanked them on the area God has provided. We always told our children that we were displeased with their behavior and God was displeased. We then told them we loved them and

wanted them to grow up to have good character and to be obedient to the Lord. We also told them that Jesus loves them and wants them to have good character. We always hugged them and made sure they knew we loved them and the discipline was for their own good. Quite frankly, we really never had to spank either child after the fourth grade (*Rearing Spiritual Children*, p. 58).

John G. Paton, the famous missionary to the New Hebrides islands who suffered much for Christ and won many headhunters to the Saviour, in his biography described the training and discipline he received as a child. He grew up in a happy but very religious and sober home and the discipline was effective in the lives of each of the eleven children. After describing the way the family spent their Sundays and how the children were carefully catechized in Bible doctrine throughout the week and how his father used the rod of correction when necessary, he observed:

“Of course, if the parents are not devout, sincere, **and affectionate**,--if the whole affair on both sides is taskwork, or worse, hypocritical and false,--results must be very different indeed! God help the homes where these things are done by mere force and not by love!” (*John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides*, 1891).

## Consistency and Persistency

One of the most important things that the parents can do is be consistent and persistent with their discipline and training. This is true for punishing disobedience, family devotions, teaching responsibility, you name it. Stopping and starting will render the discipline ineffective. The parents must establish some solid biblical principles and just keep on keeping on. We have mentioned this, but we want to emphasize it further.

Missionary Bob Nichols says,

We have to be consistent. My oldest boy remarked the other day that what he appreciates is we always came back to things, such as daily family devotions. From time to time we had events in our lives that got us off schedule, so we would miss a couple of days, but we came back. You have to be consistent. Your life will have interruptions and problems and difficulties and you might have to readjust or lay something aside temporarily, but you always come back to it.

You have to be not weary in well doing. I think that many parents quit too early. Discipline of a child is like a diaper. A young baby doesn't have internal controls, so you put external control on him. Then as he begins to develop internal control, you can remove the external. So you'll spend a lot more time disciplining your children when they are younger. As they begin to develop the internal ability to withstand the wiles of the devil and to stand on their own, then you don't have as much correction as you do in the beginning.

When it comes to correction, sometimes it looks like it just isn't working. Pastor Mario Schiavoni comments on this as follows,

“Discipline is a key, and we must try to be consistent. I know that there were times with our firstborn when it seemed like the discipline wasn't working. She was very strong willed. You discipline and discipline, but then one day something happens, something clicks. It is something that we have tried to encourage our church family about. It might not seem like it is working, but it is. It takes time to get through, but the penny will drop. We saw that with our own. You have to just keep disciplining. With our oldest we had more issues when she was about six and seven. That's when it became a real battle.”

My oldest grandson went through a dictionary definition of the “terrible twos.” His parents spanked him and spanked him and spanked him, but it didn't seem to have much effect. Suddenly, though, when he turned three, he calmed down and responded to the discipline.

Parent, if the discipline doesn't seem to be working, go back to the drawing board (the Word of God) and make sure that you are exercising the discipline properly. Are you using the rod with sufficient force and with consistency? Are you training the child to obey instantly, as opposed to giving multiple commands and threats? Are you using the rod in combination with love? Are you

communicating with the child, making sure that he understands what you expect? Are you refusing to allow the child to sass or resist the discipline or have a bad attitude?

If the answer is yes, then just keep on keeping on and trust the Lord to give the fruit.

“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:11).

## **Involvement and Communication**

Parents need to know exactly what is happening in their children's lives and exercise godly oversight and control. They need to know where the child is and what he is doing, who his friends are, what music he listens to, what games he plays, what books he reads, what internet sites he visits. This is a parent's responsibility.

Pastor Tony Evans says,

“Communication has been one of our big things. When you have a lot of children they get lost in the group, so we have made a point of individual days and times. I might take one of the children out to breakfast before school or for a coffee and chat, and that is that child's time. I think we have kept communication going that way. We feel that communication between the parent and child is tantamount to being able to mould their lives for the Lord. Many times when children reach teenage years they don't want to have anything to do with their parents, but I think a lot of time the problem is that communication links weren't set up early in life. So even when they were four and five years old, we were taking them on dates, one on one, so that we could be connected and involved. That's been one of my venues for discipleship. We've sat at McDonalds and done Bible studies.”

Even at church, parents are responsible for their children and must not give this responsibility to someone else.

The parent needs to know what is going on in every situation. It seems to be rare for parents to discuss with their children what goes on at church. Too many parents just assume that the children are O.K. In fact, though, parents need to communicate closely with their children about every aspect of church life, from the Sunday School class (if the church has them) to the content of the preaching.

This is a great discipleship opportunity. It is an occasion to answer biblical questions, to find out what the children are thinking and whether they are having doubts, to teach them how to make wise decisions (about friends, etc.), to model godly submission to authority by supporting the disciplinary decisions of teachers and church leaders, to instruct them in how to handle problems, and many other things.

One man told me that through talking with his 12-yearold son about what goes on at church, he learned that most of his son's peers aren't serious about the things of God. He has used this as an opportunity to stay close to his son by showing that he is interested and sympathetic and to teach him spiritual lessons, such as the importance of not following the crowd but making his own decisions before the Lord and choosing the way of wisdom rather than folly.

Another man wrote of the benefit of discussing the preaching with the children.

“Children should have opportunity to worship alongside of their parents so they can learn the culture and attitudes of the Sanctuary. The questions that followed the preaching gave us the opportunity to discuss and at times be amazed at the things that mattered to our children and even the things they misunderstood.”

If the parent believes that there is danger to the child in a certain setting, he should act to protect the child. The following testimony is from a mother who is taking this job seriously.

It is the parent's responsibility to train their children at home and in church. I am sorry to see a lack of leadership from the pastor in some ways. All pastors need our prayers and encouragement. I try to encourage my pastor by praying for him and sending a note of thanks from time to time. Pointing to the strong points can build up their spirits. Too often they receive critical criticism. Constructive criticism, on the other hand, is good to receive when shared in the spirit of love and concern. I am a mother trying to teach my daughter purity, modesty, servant-hood, thoughtfulness, and other Christian virtues. I want her to be selfless rather than selfish. I cannot change others, but I can show by my example to my daughter what Christ is like by how I choose to live. I am thankful I live out in the country away from the influences of town life. To make a difference, we must be Christ-like in all we say and do. Parents need to be involved with their kids and KNOW what they are being taught and WHO their friends are.

My daughter did not attend the Wednesday night children's program last year because I felt that the children were too 'out of control,' meaning *they* are in control more than the adults running the program. Too many adults lack the courage to make children mind and listen, and sadly that means there is disruption going on. The children that want to listen and learn are frustrated by the kids that don't behave, which then can cause them to not hear and learn the message being delivered. Being afraid to hold kids accountable is not being Christ-like in my opinion. So my daughter was the only child last year listening to the pastor's Wednesday evening messages. I have shared my concerns, but I can only control what goes into my child's heart and mind.

I am responsible for her training. I do home school. I am raising her to KNOW Jesus as LORD and Saviour of her life. I don't want her to just 'know about' Jesus. My daughter is exposed to godly teaching off internet radio. I have DVD's by David Cloud to help teach us. I love my daughter. I want her to grow in God's Truth and his righteousness. Without God's help, I could not. With God, I can. I'm asking the LORD to deal with my heart in areas I lack insight and wisdom as well. God is so good and faithful. Let God be praised in every way.

I would be very surprised if this woman's daughter turns out to be anything less than a disciple of Jesus Christ. The mother is more concerned about her daughter's spiritual well-being than she is about fitting in at church or even about pleasing the leadership. That is healthy and wise and right. This mother is properly respectful toward the church leaders and has compassion toward them, but she knows

that she is responsible before God to make the right decisions for her children. This mother is 100% committed to doing her part to train up her daughter in the way she should go and is trusting the Lord for the results. This is exactly what it takes to “keep the kids.”

One of the most important things parents can do is to maintain close communication with their children. When struggles arise, as they will, the parents need to know what is going on in the child’s heart so they can intervene in a godly manner.

Parents should talk with teachers and others who deal with their children to find out how they are doing. One Sunday School teacher told me that most of the boys in his class do not appear to care anything about the lesson. He feels that they are only in class because they are made to attend by their parents. It makes you wonder about these parents. Do they not know this or is that they do they not care? I asked this Sunday School teacher if he had approached the parents, and he replied that he hasn’t been on the job very long and was hesitant to do that at this point. I believe that he should talk to the parents and let them know what he sees, but it is also the responsibility of the parents to approach him.

Parents must make the home a place of enjoyment. Pastor J.B. Buffington, in his 1970s sermon “How to Lose Your Teenager before He is Five Years Old,” said,

Now, I don't believe that the children should break things and I believe they should learn how to clean up their messes, but there is something more important than the furniture and the carpet and the piano, and that is the people who live there. I like to live at home. That is where I can kick off my shoes in the living room. That's where I can relax and enjoy myself; and Mom and Dad, you need to make sure that your children feel that way. There have been very few nights that my children have asked to stay away from home. If the home is a place of joy, they will bring their friends there. Before a child is five years old, he knows if the home is a place of happiness and a place where he can enjoy himself.

Now, I don't believe in a dirty house. There is a difference between a dirty house and a house that is comfortable and a bit 'messed up.' A house that is dirty hasn't been cleaned, but a house that is messed up is lived in.

When your children become teenagers, what will they think about the place called home? Laughter? Joy? Home ought to be the place where you can bring your friends and have fun. The most important thing for parents to do is assure their children that they are more important than anything in that home. Sure, you teach them how to take care of things, but they must understand that they are the really important things to you.

## **Father and Mother in Harmony**

“My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother” (Proverbs 1:8).

Twelve times the book of Proverbs mentions both the father and mother in the context of child training (Prov. 1:8; 4:3; 6:20; 10:1; 15:20; 19:26; 20:20; 23:22, 25; 28:24; 30:11, 17).

Pastor J.B. Buffington warns,

“The child quickly learns to manipulate the situation when he sees that the mother and father are not agreement about his discipline. He or she will even risk getting into trouble just to see mom and dad have a fight. When you discipline, the parents must be in harmony and must show the child that they are in harmony. The mom must say, ‘If daddy said it, that’s right.’ The dad must say, ‘If mommy said it, that’s right.’ They must support one another and work out any differences in opinion in private.”

## **Keeping the Child’s Heart**

No amount of training and discipline will work if the parents do not capture and keep the children’s hearts. If their hearts become estranged from the parents, the children will experience spiritual shipwreck.

The heart is the center of the individual's life. It is mentioned 833 times in Scripture!

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

The wise parent says, "My son, give me thine heart..." (Prov. 23:26). When children are young, they naturally give their hearts to their parents, and a parent can keep that child's heart if he deals with him or her in love and godly wisdom.

Pastor Terry Coomer observes,

"Let me ask you a most serious and sobering question. Do you have your child's heart? You as a parent have to get the child's heart. Not only must you get the heart of the child, you must keep the heart of the child. ... I can hear someone say, 'Pastor, I knew a Christian family where there were three children and two of the kids grew up to serve the Lord and one was a horrible rebel.' The answer is here; the parent did not *have* the heart of the rebel or he did not *keep* the heart of the rebel. ... You have to get the child's heart! The problem in every spiritual problem is the heart! Parents, rebellion begins in the heart. Children's lives wander because their heart wanders. ... The one who has the child's heart will eventually have his life and his loyalty" (*Rearing Spiritual Children*, pp. 70, 72).

Following are some of the ways that a child's heart is stolen from the parent:

*1. The heart can be stolen by parental hypocrisy.*

When parents are hypocritical and do not walk sincerely with the Lord in the home, the children become discouraged and frustrated and they are easy targets for the devil. We have dealt with this in the chapter on “The Home: *Consistent Christian Living*.”

*2. The heart can be stolen by an unwholesome husbandwife relationship.*

As we have said, one of the most important things a father can do for his children is to love his wife, and one of the most important things a mother can do for her children is to love her husband. One respondent observed,

“Have a loving relationship that is ongoing with your wife helps keep the children’s hearts. When the children see that, they know they have a place of security. Giving your spouse love and affection in front of the children is a positive as well.”

*2. The heart can be stolen when a father provokes his children to wrath (Eph. 6:4).*

When this happens, the father loses the hearts of his children and they are easy prey for the world. We deal with this extensively in a later section of this chapter on Child Discipline.

3. *The heart can be stolen by parental neglect and letting the children live largely in their own worlds.*

One missionary who has visited many churches and has observed how that a great many of the young people turn out to be rebels observed,

“I think the most important thing would be to keep close relationships with the children. Lots of parents are too busy with other things instead of being spiritually close to the family. Children grow up in their own world with the videogames, movies, music, headphones, Internet, etc., which causes great rebellion. Once they are old enough to choose for themselves, they will go their own way and not listen to their parents.”

4. *The heart can be stolen by lack of patience and love, by carnal criticism.*

Parents must be very patient and kind with their children. They are delicate. We must have rules and the rules must be enforced and there must be discipline, but we must never forget that they are children and that learning godly character habits and spiritual growth does not happen overnight. It is a long process. The parents must not forget the long and probably arduous process it took them to get where they are.

Many of the respondents mentioned the necessity of showing genuine love to the children. Following are a few examples:

“Give lots of hugs and tell your children frequently that you love them. Even if this gets a bit syrupy do it anyway. Children want this even if they pretend not to. And really mean it.”

“It is important as a parent to show your love and acceptance of them consistently from the beginning. Saying ‘I love you,’ hugs, and actions that support these words are constantly needed to reassure them.”

“Young people don’t need good teachers as much as they need ministers with a pastor’s heart. They need to know that they are cared for before anything else.”

*5. The heart can be stolen by a lack of close communication and involvement.*

Many respondents to our questionnaire mentioned the importance of this. Consider these examples,

“Listen to your kids. Really listen and try to understand what they are going through. Take an interest in the things that concern them, even if they seem very trivial to you.”

“When they come to you and want to talk, it is important that you listen and don’t jump all over them or belittle their concerns. Then they feel safe to confide in you or

bring their questions to you, and you have opportunities to teach and instruct their open hearts.”

“I’d like to share a piece of advice that someone gave me when we adopted our twin daughters in 1990, and that is, ‘You can’t spend too much time with your kids.’ That’s it. Spend time with them every chance you get, even if you are just in the room, doing something else; be there. Be a presence in their lives. And talk at every opportunity. Always welcome their point of view in family decisions. If they know they are being listened to, they ride along. Be genuine about this. When big blow-ups arise, get everybody to sit around the table and work something out.”

“Winning children’s hearts is something that needs to be done when they are young, by spending time with them, teaching them, and developing interests together with them. Do not put them aside for work, or for your hobbies that do not allow them to be around. Do not think that you will be able to win their hearts after you have allowed someone else to win them.”

“I believe that parents can reach the hearts of their children by having a relationship with them. That is, after all, how God reaches us and gets our hearts for Him. Parents in today’s society have too little time for their children. Even when kids are homeschooled, my experience is that the majority of the homeschooled kids are teaching themselves. My nine-year-old son is always coming up to me and asking to do something with me. Now, I can’t always, but if I never took the time to say, ‘Ok, let’s sit down and play a game,’ then he would want nothing to do with me because he would see that I want nothing to do with him. We must make time to put down what we are doing and sit down with

the kids. We parents have to take the time to raise our children. That means spending time with them in God's Word and out of God's Word."

“We believe that one thing that has worked for us has been just staying very, very involved in the child’s life, showing an interest in her, talking to her, making sure she knows that she is the most important earthly thing we have, loving her. We have always wanted her to feel that we are open and can discuss anything with her. As a result, she feels completely comfortable talking to us about just about anything, or, for really embarrassing stuff, to her mother.”

*6. The heart can be stolen by lack of involvement by the father.*

We have already mentioned the necessity of involvement by the parents, but here we want to emphasize the importance of the father’s role. One of the most important ways to keep the children’s hearts is for the father to be involved in their lives and to be fulfilling his responsibility to be the spiritual head of the house. Malachi 4:6 says that Elijah will “*turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.*” Thus, we see that when the father’s heart is turned to the children, their hearts are turned to him. If a father has been unengaged with his children, he must repent of this sin and confess it to his family and set out to make things right.

“We reach and keep the hearts of the children because of our relationship with them. It is their love for us, just as it is our love for our Lord and Savior, which will cause them to continue to respect us and listen to us. I think

back to my own experiences growing up. My earliest memories are of my dad reading me the Bible when I was very young. He cared about our neighbors. I'll never forget him sending my brothers and me out to rake our 90-yearold neighbor's yard. Alongside my dad, we would also shovel his walkway in the winter. Dad made sure we never accepted money for helping out the neighbors. He always had us looking for ways to help those around us. Dad always took the time to sit and talk to me about everything and anything. He was my best friend when I was a teenager. I always felt I could go to him and talk to him about anything. He was very clear about what was sin, and as a result of his teaching me, I also knew very clearly what was displeasing or pleasing to God. Because of my love and respect for my dad as well as for God, I didn't stray into sinful practices which were prevalent in the seventies. I didn't want to disappoint either my dad or my Heavenly Father. Even while at a secular college (Brown University), I devoted myself to my studies, not participating in the darker side of campus life."

One pastor told me that no matter what he is doing with his son, even watching a DVD movie, they discuss what is going on. The father points out things that he sees that are spiritually dangerous, and he encourages his son to state his opinions freely. He is teaching his son how to exercise moral and spiritual discernment. The Bible says that spiritual growth comes when the senses are "exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:14). This pastor and his wife are working to maintain the type of relationship with their children that will encourage them to discuss their struggles and temptations freely. This father

encourages his children to share their hearts during family devotions. The kids have grown up from a young age conversing with their parents about their inmost concerns. It has become a natural thing, and this has carried over as they have gotten older.

If this communication is jealously guarded and maintained, when the children reach adolescence they will still share their hearts with the parents and the worldly “generation gap” will be bridged. The parents will be able to guide their teenage youth through the great pitfalls that characterize this particular time of life.

Some fathers take their children on regular “dates.” One man told me that few things thrill his young daughters more than their “dates” with Dad. He observes that this has helped him keep their hearts. The same man has a close relationship with his son and plans activities that they can do together that will allow them to talk one on one. He testifies that his son’s heart is always tender toward his authority when he makes the effort to stay close to him and to communicate with him.

We have already described how that Missionary Tony Evans has individual dates with his children. Later in this chapter we will describe Pastor Terry Coomer’s dates with one of his daughters during her teen years.

7. *The heart can be stolen when there is a lack of candor and confession and humility on the part of the parents.*

“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21).

8. *The heart can be stolen when there are rules without a clear biblical basis and the children are not taught the reason for the rules.*

Some of the respondents emphasized this as follows:

“Don’t just have rules, have biblically-based convictions. When a child questions them, thank him for asking and give the scriptural reasons. Reassure the children that it is always good to come to the parent with questions, no matter how tough.”

“Always be willing to listen to them. Give honest answers to their questions. Show them respect; respect their opinions. If there is a standard they need to follow because it’s biblical, explain why. Teach them to have a love for the Lord that is separate from yours, to cultivate a relationship with the Lord of their own.

Don’t always hammer at them about right and wrong but also explain to them WHY some things are right and WHY some things are wrong, how that God wants to

protect us from the consequences of bad choices if we will be wise enough to choose the right way.”

9. *The heart can be stolen when the children are not saved and grounded in God’s Word and when they do not know how to apply God’s Word to their daily lives.*

Children that do not have a real personal relationship with Christ and are not grounded in God’s Word are prime candidates to have their hearts stolen by the world, the flesh, and the devil. We have dealt with this in the chapter on “Discipleship.”

10. *The heart can be stolen when there is a lack of prayer.*

Fervent, effectual prayer is one of the most important ways that the hearts of children are kept for the Lord and protected from being stolen by the enemy. We recommend the Sunday School course “Fundamentals of Biblical Prayer.”

11. *The heart can be stolen by a worldly friend, relative, or teacher.*

Parents must jealously and lovingly guard against unwholesome relationships that draw the children’s hearts away from them and toward evil. We previously gave the

sad story of a girl whose heart was stolen by a worldly boy friend.

*12. The heart can be stolen by the world's pop music and its self-centered, rebellious philosophy.*

I have repeated this often in this book, because it bears repeating. Few things have the power to steal a child's heart to the world more than pop music.

*13. The heart can be stolen by a worldly school environment, whether Christian or secular.*

*14. The heart can be stolen by an evil influence that comes through literature or video games.*

*15. The heart can be stolen by a carnal affection for sports, which becomes a bridge to the world.*

There are a few of the ways that the hearts of children can be stolen from the way of righteousness and truth.

Consider the Bible example of how David lost the heart of his son Absalom. We read this sad story in 2 Samuel 11-15. First, David sinned grievously in the matter of Bathsheba and lost his testimony before his family (2 Samuel 11-12). Second, David fell for Amnon's lie and

sent Tamar, Absalom's sister, to her room. After Amnon raped Tamar, David was angry but he did not apologize to Absalom or exercise discipline or deal with the problem in any practical way, as far as we know from Scripture (2 Sam. 13:1-7, 21). Third, after Absalom murdered Amnon and fled away, David longed for him but he did not send for him and deal personally with him (2 Sam. 13:37-39). Fourth, even when David let Absalom return, he refused to talk with him (2 Sam. 14:21-24). Fifth, after Absalom burned Joab's barley field, Joab convinced David to see Absalom, but it was too late; by that point Joab's heart was totally estranged from his father and filled with hatred and he had determined to steal his throne (2 Sam. 14:28 - 15:6).

How did David lose his son's heart? He lost it through at least six of the ways listed previously: through hypocrisy, neglect, poor husband-wife relationship (it is doubtful that David's polygamy would have provided the climate for a quality husband-wife relationship), lack of confession and humility, lack of communication, and lack of discipline.

## **Discipleship**

"And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 6:7).

Biblical child discipline is not merely negative. It involves far more than punishment of sin. It is an overall program of disciplining the child for Christ.

**Discipling children requires teaching them God's  
Word naturally, as a way of life.**

Deuteronomy instructs parents to teach the Word of God “diligently unto thy children,” but this does not refer only to conducting family devotions and taking the children to church. These are very important things, but the parents are instructed to talk of the Word of God “when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”

Talking with the children about the things of God and discussing the Bible and applying it to life's situations should be as natural as talking about the weather, and it should be a daily, continual process.

Two of the respondents to our questionnaire said,

“We parents must specifically, deliberately, teach the values and principles of God's Word to our children. We cannot expect children to automatically absorb what we believe. God's Word commands us to ‘train up’ the children in God's ways, which means to ‘initiate’ the learning and to ‘discipline’ with loving authority the lessons to be learned. When we abdicate our authority

and position as the 'trainers' to others such as school teachers or daycare workers, we are doing a grave injustice to these children by building within them a void of understanding of God and His Ways which will be filled with the lies of Satan and the flesh."

"You should build your relationship with your child at every opportunity, teaching mentoring on every bit of life. Doing the laundry, making supper (for girls) chopping wood with dad for boys, whatever. Just use every moment as time to do things together and to learn about the Lord and life skills."

One man who wrote to share his experiences and thoughts on "keeping the kids" is divorced and faces the heavy trial of trying to raise a step-child for the Lord when the child lives part time with an unsaved parent (who is very belligerent to the fundamentalist Christian faith). As a result of the custody issue, the girl is in public school (against the will of her mother and stepfather), which, of course, compounds the problems she faces because of the evil associations. In spite of these handicaps, this man and his likeminded Christian wife are winning this battle by fervent prayer, building a godly home environment, and maintaining a close relationship with the girl. Their testimony is a good example.

We believe that one thing that has worked for us has been just staying very, very involved in the child's life, showing an interest in her, talking to her when we have her, making sure she knows that she is the most

important earthly thing we have, loving her. Regular discipline.

Talking to her and explaining things that some might think are above her age level, but we have talked candidly with her about death, sex, relationships, etc., just as soon as we thought she was able to understand the issues. Of course, if she brings something up then that's a good chance to meet it head on and talk to her about it. We have always wanted her to feel that we are open and can discuss anything with her. As a result, she feels completely comfortable talking to us about just about anything, or, for really embarrassing stuff, to her mother.

I think talking at an adult level to her (within reason, of course) has been a very important aspect of our relationship with her.

Other important things are never missing church, making sure she knows that salvation and the Lord are real to us, holding up missionaries and preachers as examples, praising young people who are making good choices and pointing out others who are making bad choices, and warning her of the dangers. We constantly stress the importance of choosing the right friends.

As far as life-coaching, when she was about six we started emphasizing the importance of choosing the right husband. We harp on that constantly. We look for ways to bring up the issue. We tell her over and over, it is the second most important decision you will make in life, after getting saved. If you make a bad choice there, you will regret it the rest of your life.

When she was three, we started teaching her seriously about creation and evolution, giving her specifics.

Today, she is pretty well grounded on that very important topic because young people need to get that early to be able to withstand the forces promoting evolution.

Not watching television. Involving her in whatever ministries we could. She helps stuff envelopes for missionaries, etc.

The main thing is this. Turning her out right is the highest priority we have. It's EXTREMELY important to us. It's like life and death to us. So, it gets a lot of our thought, prayers, and attention.

On learning the Bible, our daughter loves to be involved in the learning experience, so we have really tried to make learning the Bible interesting to her. When she was 3-6, we would read a Bible story and then act it out. That makes an impression on a little kid. She couldn't wait to get to the acting out part.

Then at about six years old, we started giving her quizzes about what we were learning. She loves to take a quiz. Now, she's 12, but a lot of times on the road we'll give her a quiz, like: 'Give me a verse that says we can know that we are saved?' 'What king was guilty of murder?' 'What happens after we die?' etc.

Her Sunday School teacher says she is one of the sharpest students he's ever had, that she really knows her Bible.

We have a *Bible Trivial Pursuit* type game, with two levels of questions -- kid questions and adult questions. Some of the kid questions are pretty hard, and she stands just as good a chance of winning as her mother or I do because she's been taught, not by rote but by

involvement. That's why they take tests in school. Too much Bible teaching is done by having someone telling it to you, without you having to give it back. Why don't we have tests in Sunday School?

Pastor Terry Coomer gives another example of this.

"When [my oldest daughter] was sixteen, the Lord laid on my heart to spend more time with her. For the next two years, every Sunday after church we would go get a coke and take a drive. Sometimes we would drive for hours and just talk about the Lord. She would ask spiritual questions and we would talk about them. No subject was out of bounds. We talked about developing our relationship with the Lord. We talked about how to really pray and what she was learning from her Bible. What was God speaking to her about? We would talk about what she was looking for in a young man for a godly husband. I made sure she understood that she needed a young man who would not be led by his emotions, but one who would be led by the Word of God. I explained that a young man who is led by his emotions would eventually lead her into sin. We prayed together and became closer as a father and a daughter. I made sure she understood what her mother and I expected from her when she left our home. The key here was it took time. I had to make the time. To this day she still talks about her drives with Dad. This time spent with our daughter on the Lord's day helped her at a time when she was preparing to leave our home to understand the importance we and the Lord placed on our spiritual lives. Parents, spiritual communication is the first key to rearing godly children" (*Rearing Spiritual Children*, p. 45).

The mother and father that put the Word of God in this central place in the life of their family will see godly fruit that will last for eternity. Too many parents talk about everything but the Word of God. The fathers talk with their sons about sports, fishing, hunting, shooting, and politics; the mothers talk with their daughters about cooking, fashion, makeup, romance novels, boys and other girls, but they do not talk about God's Word. This is a recipe for spiritual disaster.

Of course, before parents can talk effectively with their children about God's Word, they must first learn it themselves. They must establish their own private study time and show themselves approved unto God by being workmen in His Word.

**Discipling children requires teaching them how to serve the Lord and necessitates that the parents serve the Lord with the children.**

If we want to fulfill God's will, we must realize that it is not enough to have a godly, joyful home. We must gear the home toward the fulfillment of God's will on this earth in this present age, and that is capsulated in what is called the Great Commission. Parents need to teach their children that this is Christ's program for this age and show them how to do it.

Some of those who wrote to us on this subject emphasized this matter,

“When you examine the life of the apostle Paul, and also that of the earthly life of the Lord Jesus, you find them giving their lives to two missions: preaching to the lost and encouraging the believers. Devote your family energies to those two missions and you won't waste your lives. Show the children that the church is not merely an audience in the pews that watches the 'show' every week. Make sure that you and your children actively encourage other church members and expect those members to reciprocate. Take your children with you when you do personal evangelism. Let them see and hear the differences between lost people and saved people. Teach them how to share the Gospel and let them contend with the objections of the atheist, the cultist, the New Ager, the religious lost. Equip them with the answers regarding evolution, Bible versions, Christian history, denominations, etc.”

“A pastor who is a great friend of mine was led to Christ by one of his Air Force commanders and present was the officer's seven-year-old boy. After they spoke together, my pastor friend said, 'Your son is so quiet and well behaved.' It turned out that the officer's son had participated with his father as a prayer partner in witnessing. This little boy had been praying for the entire time his father was sharing the truth with my friend. That boy now is a pastor himself with children that share in the joys of what his father allowed him to do as a boy and share in the fruits of witnessing.”

Missionary Bob Nichols says,

“Our children are always in the work with us. Wherever I go I take them. They play musical instruments and know music. They go when we preach and when we go soul winning. They’re involved in AWANAs and discipleship. We try to get them involved in everything. I have had all my boys go through our Bible institute in Brazil, and they’ve had to go through a discipleship program where they learn to win souls. After they win a soul they are responsible to disciple that person and help them grow in the Lord. All my boys have led music in church. As a matter of fact, our church is set up where on Sunday morning we have a 15 minute time during which the young men can sign up to preach or give a devotion from the Bible. It helps them develop their preaching skills and learn to stand before others. Then we have another young man who leads the congregational music each week. The front row in our church is where we have the young people come and play the guitar. We always have some who are learning to play music, both guitar and piano. Then as the boys got older we gave them more responsibilities. We take missions trips up in the mountains and they are responsible to preach and do door-to-door visitation up there. Then to each of my preacher boys I give a responsibility on a rotating basis each year to organize a camp during carnival season. I give the young men the responsibility to organize the camp, so that helps develop their skills. They get an appreciation of the planning and all that is involved. They have to program the events of each day, the Bible times, the speakers, the games. They have to order the food and everything. Giving my boys responsibilities like this has helped prepare them for life.”

Tony Evans, missionary to Japan, echoes this sentiment,

We've always tried as a family to do everything possible together. We've always tried to pray together, to study the Scriptures together, to serve together. Even coming back on deputation, we travel together as family. We're a team and we work together. It's not convenient traveling with five kids and doing Japanese homeschooling in the bus as we go, but we do that.

We don't consider the ministry as something that belongs only to my wife and me, but something that belongs to the whole family. As the children have become old enough to serve in some way, they've all had their own ministries in the church. Benjamin, who is 20, started out with printing things such as the church programs, and slowly that ministry has been handed over to the others. That's the face of the church, so I see that as an important job. They don't only get the back seat jobs. As we see character and growth in their lives, we give them different things. Benjamin heads up a lot of music programs in the church now. He's been doing research and teaching on godly music for two or three years. He leads the woodwind ensemble. They practice every week and they have half an hour of study on the nature of music, where the CCM thing is going, and that sort of thing. Now, as a result of the work he has done, just the last couple of weeks before we left to go on deputation, he taught a series of two-hour seminars to the entire church on that. The week before we left, he and I shared a lecture to about a hundred kids on the same subject. That's something that he personally has developed a vision for over the years, so I can see that the Lord's going to open that up because the Japanese lack training in that area. Ruth has been very involved in the Sunday School. She has a wonderful ability to reach into the hearts of little kids and draw them out and come along side them. She's musical as well, so there are lots of things she does with

Sunday School and the choir. She is good at building relationships with the teen girls in the church, and I think some of her ability to do that links back with her having been in school with the Japanese girls. She's been there with the secular girls and seen what they go through. Even the secular girls come to her at school for counsel. As a result of that she's been able to lead one your girl to the Lord. She's got the ability to listen and open them up. She's just given her life to go back to the Japanese. Susanna is in the wind ensemble. She's got a burden to go back and start teaching in Sunday School.

We deal with discipleship more extensively in the book *Keeping the Kids*.

## **Teaching A Work Ethic and Responsibility**

The book of Proverbs, which is God's premier book on child training, speaks much about a strong work ethic and responsibility. It warns often about the "sluggard" way of life, which is the way of laziness and undependability.

"Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep" (Proverbs 6:6-10).

“As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him” (Proverbs 10:26).

“The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat” (Proverbs 13:4).

“The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing” (Proverbs 20:4).

Children must be taught the importance of these truths by hands-on experience. Missionary Bob Nichols says,

“Another thing that we have done with our children is that we’ve never lived in a city. We’ve always lived on a farm, so the children have always had animals and always had responsibilities. They were taught to work, taught to take care of animals. They’ve had household duties, cleaning their rooms, the dishes, and such. Unfortunately too many children today don’t have responsibilities, and they sit around with nothing to do, and the devil takes advantage of that. They go into their rooms and hide in their computers and televisions. Children need responsibilities. They need some work to do.”

Children don’t have to live in the country to learn how to work. Even if they live in the city, parents can give their children responsibilities.

This needs to start when they are very small. They must be taught to clean up after themselves. If they make a mess

with their games and toys or projects, they must be required to clean it up. Every time. This instills good habits that will benefit them throughout their lives.

The kids need to learn to help around the house and church in all sorts of ways and not just be served.

## **Continuing Through Adolescence**

Many Christian parents fail at this point, slacking off in oversight when the children reach “teenage” years, but teenagers need more attention and supervision, not less!

I have witnessed many parents that have actually followed their adolescent children into the world! One respondent warned against this strange phenomenon as follows:

“Parents must be completely transparent in being an example to their children. Many young people will go through their own time of weighing what they have learned against what they perceive to be real. When all is said and done, if they see their parents as real; that will win out! Also parents must remain steadfast in spite of what their children do. I have seen many parents rebel along with their kids. Seems they have been ‘faithful’ in order for God to help them raise good kids. When this tactic seems to have failed, then the parents abandon the fundamentalist church, usually for a less ‘legalistic’ option. The child then has nowhere to return, should they ‘come to themselves’ as the prodigal did.

When the prodigal came home, the father was right where he was when the son left.”

Another respondent to our questionnaire made the following important observation,

“It seems to be a trend here that many parents think they need to let their kids make their own choices when they are in their early teens. In my estimation, the kids are not ready to make their own choices about many things at that age, and God still holds the parents responsible for guiding them. If they make wrong choices and follow the wrong friends, they need to be stopped. Parents are afraid to lay down the law today. They are afraid to discipline or spank. They fear this will drive their kids away. I’ve learned that consistent and scriptural discipline has drawn my step-kids closer to me. The fears of most parents are unfounded.”

The average teen in North America has own television, cell phone, mp3 player, computer, internet connection, and video game console. Many have their own automobiles. My dad gave me a car when I was 17 years old, and it was disastrous because I was not mature and had not demonstrated that I could be trusted to make wise decisions.

If children have been raised right and have matured in Christ and the parents have kept their hearts, they can be trusted in some ways, but even then they must be carefully supervised and closely communicated with, because they

lack experience and are prime targets of the devil. We must be vigilant against his wiles at all times (1 Peter 5:8).

Earlier we gave the example of how that Pastor Terry Coomer spent every Sunday afternoon talking with his daughter when she was 16 and 17 years old. That is a wise example.

Pastor Mario Schiavoni says,

“We are seeing that parental involvement is very, very important. We have many parents in our church whose children are just turning the corner from the high school years, and we are seeing that they are allowing their children to make little decisions as opposed to being a strong voice. Parents are backing off. They are stepping back and allowing the child more say than they should have. They are allowing little infatuations to brew. Of course, the older children are becoming little adults; they do have more to offer, but the parents must remain active in guiding, especially when it comes to relationships and possible relationships. Parents need to be more heavily involved during that time.”

Missionary Bob Nichols says,

“You don’t stop when they are teenagers. With one of my sons, his last spanking was when he was 21 years old. I wore him out. He is bigger than me and could have grabbed me and thrown me out the door. Of course, he didn’t try, and I don’t let him know that he could. As a matter of fact, my oldest daughter was 19 when she went to her mother and said, ‘Mom, I need

for you to give me a good spanking. I've got this bad attitude and I can't get over it. Every time that you corrected me, I was able to get victory over it.' That was amazing. She really wanted victory in that matter.”

Many of the respondents to our questionnaire observed that youth begin to drift away when they get their first job. Parents need to oversee such decisions very, very carefully and wisely. If the young people have a weak or questionable testimony of salvation and have not been properly disciplined, they will easily be attracted to the lifestyle of their unbelieving co-workers. It is extremely important that parents not allow their children to take jobs that keep them away from church or from having their daily devotions or that otherwise hinder their walk with Christ.

Consider the following testimonies,

“There needs to be more parental involvement in the spiritual growth of their child and a stronger family unit. Drifting and departure often begin with a driver's license and getting a job and no guidelines (parental) on when they can work and where. It is at this point that most begin to depart from the church. If they stay consistent through this period, (16-19), they will most likely remain. The second most critical period is immediately following, if they leave to attend a fouryear secular university. The influences and atmosphere are not conducive to spiritual growth or faithfulness. I know, as I spent four years in one myself. In the absence of

parental or pastoral influence, this group often drifts from the faith and has difficulty reconnecting.”

“The biggest reason some have stopped coming to church is the lack of discipline by the parents. One young man got a job his sophomore year of high school and began working every Sunday night. This can be prevented by the parents taking the authority and approaching the owner of the store to let them know that their child cannot work on Sundays or Wednesday nights. One other young man just doesn’t get up and come to church, and when the parents are approached about it they say, ‘Well I just didn’t get him up in time, so it is my fault he isn’t at church.’ Yet the boy can get up early in the morning to go to work.”

“We lose about 20% of the young people sometime in high school. Generally we lose them because they get jobs that make them work on Sundays. Once they get those jobs, it becomes easy for them to justify staying out of services and they generally do.”

“We have noticed that many who leave get the idea that if God gives them a job that requires them to work during services, then it is O.K. to miss services. If God gives them a job that requires wearing immodest clothes then it must be O.K. to wear immodest clothes. If God gives them a job that plays rock-n-roll music on the PA then that is O.K. They think they are strong enough to take that and keep coming to church unaffected. Usually though, within six months of getting the job they are missing 50% or more of the services and within a year, they are out of the services completely. As the Singles Director, I have stressed the fact the God has His perfect job for us and Satan has his perfect job for us. However, most of the kids won’t wait upon God to provide that perfect job.”

As the last testimony states, the young people must be taught to live by faith rather than sight. God has a perfect will, but we must both seek it and wait for it. Young people must be taught to live out such verses as Proverbs 3:5-6, Matthew 6:33, and Hebrews 11:24-27. God has promised to lead us and take care of us, but we must put Him first and obey Him and trust Him. If the believer makes his own plans according to his own thinking and perceived needs and then asks God to bless it, it won't work! That person is acting the part of his own god. God is not a puppet on a string, just waiting to do our bidding when we beckon! Almighty God doesn't bless us when we walk according to our will; He doesn't bless us when we walk in the darkness of self-service; He blesses us when we walk in the light and according to His will.

When I got saved at age 23 and started reading the Bible and seeking God's will and saw in Scripture how important the church is (e.g., 1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 10:25), I determined that I would not take a job that kept me out of the services. God blessed that and faithfully provided jobs that supplied my needs but did not hinder my spiritual growth and my preparation for His service.

In the chapter on Discipleship we have given biblical principles in how to make wise decisions in God's will.

When children reach adolescence, it is especially important to guard them against developing an appetite for the world's music. This is one of the devil's most effective hooks. Worldly music is the main instrument that the devil used to capture me when I was a teenager.

Pastor David Sorenson says,

“Perhaps more than anything else, the devil uses the power of music to get his hooks into young people. We do not have the space to elaborate at length about the perils of music. But suffice it to say that the world's music is a primary device of the devil in getting a hold of young people and that certainly includes children in Christian homes. In the years our children were growing up, they simply were not allowed to listen to rock music or any other form of the world's music. We did not allow them to have a radio, stereo, or other type of playback device in their rooms. Technology has changed over the years, but the principle is the same. We currently have a foster daughter in our home, and she is not allowed to play any music on her iPod which is not approved. More Christian young people have been drawn into the world by way of the world's music than probably any other one means. It is powerful. One of the best things you as a parent can do is control the music to which your children listen. You will never regret that decision.”

We conclude this section on discipline in adolescence by saying that **parents must be ready to go into emergency intervention mode if they see any sign of a child**

**slipping toward rebellion and worldliness.** It must not be ignored. It will not go away on its own accord.

One missionary wrote,

“Unfortunately, as more kids came and there were more responsibilities in the ministry, I didn’t spend as much time with the three youngest as I did with the first three. The Lord woke me in 2007 to the fact that I wasn’t spending the time, and I’ve had to spend more time with my younger children. I didn’t lose them, and I thank God for that, but I began to see some rebellion coming in that I didn’t like, and attitudes that shouldn’t have been there. I was so involved in the ministry and trying to help my preacher boys get established in the works that I wasn’t spending sufficient time with my family. That’s a precaution that especially preachers and missionaries must take in their lives, and it’s not just ‘quality’ time; it’s day by day time. If we live right every day, it will be quality time. It must be a day by day process.”

This father saw that there was a problem and he determined to do whatever he could from his side to solve it. He went into “emergency mode” for the sake of keeping the kids.

## **Not Provoking Children to Wrath**

This point is listed last, but not because it is last in importance. In fact, it is probably first in importance.

“Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged” (Colossians 3:21).

Following are some of the ways that fathers can provoke their children to wrath:

- by being unkind, severe, uncompassionate
- by being unreasonable, inconsiderate, unfair
- by being heavy handed, punishing more severely than the occasion deserves, “using a sledgehammer to drive home a tack”
- by disciplining in haste or in anger
- by not explaining the rules
- by unannounced rules that are made known only after the child has broken them
- by being inconsistent in enforcing the rules
- by having too many rules
- by not understanding the children and having unrealistic expectations
- by being distant
- by not listening and communicating
- by breaking one’s promises
  
- by comparing the children with others or comparing one child with another
- by favoritism
- by insulting them publicly

- by being cruel to their mother

In this chapter we have looked at child discipline in its manifold facets. It is one of the most important elements of “keeping the kids.”

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### *Child Discipline*

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