

Parenting 1.01



Bible-based Basics for new parents

by
Gordon A. Rampy

Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.

Proverbs 1:8-10 New International Version



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Parenting - - It's a lot more difficult in today's world



Along with the first of our four sons came an acute case of panic. The word *responsibility* had suddenly taken on new meaning, and I wasn't sure we could handle it. With zero experience in child rearing, how was I supposed to know how to behave as a father? The consequences of my performance were all too obvious. Success or failure wasn't just a matter of a grade on a report card, nor would it make or break my career. It was a *person* that I held in my hands — a miniature human being whose course through life would forever be influenced by *my* choices. A sobering thought.

So naturally, when my most respected source of wisdom arrived, I took advantage of the opportunity for counselling. Without burdening him with my fears, I asked my father, "What should I do? Should I be strict, or permissive?" His answer surprised me, and the absence of further elaboration surprised me even more. "Just give him lots of love and you'll do fine," he said. That was it. Next topic.

As I look back on that moment with more than forty years of life's educational experiences to help me understand his wise counsel, I believe he had given me, in those few powerful words, the advice that he might have wished someone had given to him. He could easily and authoritatively have followed with a list of rules, commandments and principles, but that would have reduced the impact of the message: *Be motivated by love; the rest will take care of itself*. Indeed, we who are Christians, see in God the example of that same motivation as he deals with us, his treasured possessions.

So why should I set out to produce a list of rules, commandments and principles for new parents? The answer is simple. This is not the same world that surrounded me, my wife and our infant son in the mid-1950s. In that day, families typically consisted of an adult male who drove the family car to work while the adult female to whom he was married remained behind to care for their home and children. Alternative life-styles, single-parent homes, day-care centers, hour-long commutes, multi-vehicle garages and little league transportation hassles had not yet become the norm. Television was just an infant; shopping malls and Big Macs had not yet been born. It was a kinder, gentler, and far less complicated world. Life was not a juggling act.



But today, as every young parent knows, life is a juggling act and time has become a very scarce commodity. We've even coined the term "quality time," because we know the value of being together as a family. And yet, too much of our time lacks quality in that it fails to contribute to the training and bonding that should be inherent in family life.

In those simpler times, children did not face the barrage of conflicting messages that confront and confuse them today. In music and video they are taught that violent behavior, filthy language and unrestrained sex are typical of adult society. But the words they hear from their parents and church leaders present a different version of how life is supposed to be. You say, "So what's new?" And you're right — this has been going on for a long time. What *has* changed is the quantity — the relative amounts of the two messages. Instead of a boy furtively sneaking a peek at a dirty magazine when he got a chance, television, movies and recorded music now surround him with morally distractive images he can scarcely avoid.

Finally, and surely most important among the factors which have changed in our culture, is how we view authority. We have become so charmed by the principle of equality that *obey* and *submit* have been stricken from our vocabulary. Individual rights are worshipped. Even children are encouraged to make their own choices with neither rules nor experience to guide them. We are conscious of the impact this new perspective has had on employment, education and marriage, but we should also recognize it as the underlying cause of the antisocial behavior we see all around us and which we view as the destruction of our culture.

Indeed the world *has* changed, and my father's simple recipe for successful parenting is simply not enough. To restore the family to its intended position as the foundation of a moral society we must reaffirm and teach the basic, biblical principles God prescribed for effective child rearing. Other prescriptions address the symptoms; this one addresses the cause. If parents will let Him guide them, God will surely bless their efforts, even to third and fourth generations.

G.A.R.

ONE

The Challenge: Be Fruitful and Multiply! (Genesis 1:28)

God has handed you the controls for shaping a life.
What are you going to do with them?



1. Why these articles on parenting?

You don't have to be Christians to feel an immense burden of responsibility when that first child arrives. As new parents your world has suddenly expanded dramatically and you have become aware that another human being now depends on you for survival, for growth and for its ability to walk safely through the coming years. But Christian parents recognize that God has given them a weighty responsibility that goes far beyond simply increasing the world's population (multiply, Gen. 1:11,22). The challenge given to man was not only to multiply, but also to be fruitful, and being fruitful requires that we use the talents that God has given us to mold and shape that new life so that the world will be a better place because of it. In short, we are challenged to be profitable stewards of a fragile treasure that God has entrusted to our care.

No one enters the world with the skills needed to be a good parent. Those skills must somehow be acquired by the time they're needed, a process that once may have been more natural and effective than can be expected in today's fast-paced world. While Biblical principles for child rearing were once well known, few today are even aware of the fundamental charge found in the Book of Proverbs to "***Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it.***" Instead, the well-intentioned, but highly destructive, theory of parenting based on enhancing a child's self-esteem has permeated our culture.

[See: Proverbs for Parents, page 9](#)

Parenting 1.01 is designed to help young parents who simply don't know what to do or which way to go. They recognize their responsibility but have neither the experience nor the example of their own up-bringing to guide them, and yet they are able to see the terrible consequences of parenting failure in a growing population of antisocial teenagers.

The challenge God gives us, as articulated in Proverbs 22:6 (above), includes some implications that are worth noting. It assumes that **a person should live by a certain standard, that he can be molded, and that the molding process is most effective when the person is a child.** Common sense is well confirmed by recent research which has revealed the incredibly rapid development of the brain prior to and immediately after birth. The critical importance of environment during the earliest years is clear, demanding that parents begin the training process at birth and recognize that course corrections become more difficult as patterns of behavior become established.

Do the required parenting skills come naturally? No, they don't, but the Bible and experienced, successful parents can help to supply them.

2. What do you hope to learn here that will help you meet the challenge? Read Proverbs 1:1-9.

The wise author of the Proverbs offered counsel for "**attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair . . .**" These are the things you can hope to derive from these articles if you, young parents, are willing to behave in a disciplined way as you take on life's most important challenge. It's not easy, but we will offer a few basic rules that can give you confidence that someday you will look back and say, "It was a job well done." There is no greater reward.

(Some things you won't get from *Parenting 1.01*: Hints about potty training, breast feeding, dealing with teething, etc. Also, it should be understood that the advice is predicated on the assumption that parental responsibility is shared by a husband and a wife; the single parent must recognize his or her handicap and try to apply these principles accordingly.)

3. Why should you expect to learn anything from this teacher's teaching?

You didn't come here for entertainment, you came because you were looking for help. That's good; that's Step One toward your goal of successful parenting. In fact, your chances of reaching that goal are enhanced simply by your concern and your determination to *think about* the problem. But to keep you on the right track, we recommend that you take advantage of as many Christian-oriented parenting guides as you can absorb — books, videos, articles and web sites — to supplement these basic principles. We don't claim to have all the answers, nor do we provide guidance on many important topics, such as developing integrity, challenging to strive for excellence, etc. But we do claim that following our simple rules will insure that you will be able to establish yourselves in a position of respect and confidence, from which your words and examples can effectively and constructively mold the life of your child.

My background as a chemist, inventor and successful businessman has little bearing on my credibility as a parenting counselor. But what really counts is the fact that I was blessed with a wonderful wife who has provided four wonderful sons and given me forty-seven wonderful years of love, joy and peace. Those sons, of course, are my real credentials. All are happily married (once), busily engaged in generating grandchildren, and actively participating in church activities as teachers and deacons. Bert and I can proudly claim to be **experienced, successful parents**, and for that we thank the Lord.

4. Is parenting harder today than it was for your parents? How? Why?

In some ways, the American Dream has turned into a nightmare in which *more* is never enough. The media have taught us to want things that fail in their promise of happiness, but we seem nevertheless to devote more and more of our precious time to reaching for them. In the process, the integrity of the family has been sacrificed. Parents have increasingly accepted alternatives to being with their children so they can afford a "better" lifestyle. Consequently they're finding it harder to nurture than their parents did.

Another factor that's adding to the parent's burden is the escalating level of morally distracting messages put out by the media. There seems to be no end to the increasing sex, violence and tasteless language that is piped into our family rooms. Each new generation of parents must contend with a larger demon.

5. How do you rate your parents as parents? Would you do the same as they did? If not, why not?

Most of us think we turned out pretty well and give our parents reasonably good marks. But some whose folks were excessively strict are determined to go easy, while those who never knew a "no" want to take a much firmer stand. We hope you have come to us, not to find justification for your theories, but to learn the basics of parenting from a reliable source that has provided sound guidance for thousands of years.

6. What is the most valuable legacy your parents have imparted to you?

If you were brought up in a home where God's name was held in reverence, where His words were treated with respect, and where Christ was worshipped as a priority, the answer to that question is easy: *your parents' most valuable legacy was a Christian home*. That should be your objective, too, along with providing a good name, a good education, an appreciation for beauty, and a good sense of values.

CONCLUSION

You have a God-given responsibility to "***train your child in the way he should go.***" Meeting that challenge will require that you, as life-molders, discipline yourselves to follow the guidance the Lord has provided. It won't be easy, but in the end it will be far easier and infinitely more rewarding than the alternative.

Next: Is it enough to teach survival skills?

PROVERBS FOR PARENTS

1:1-9 The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young--let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance--for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.

3:21-26 My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble; when you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared.

4:20-22 My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body.

5:11-14 At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent. You will say, "How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors. I have come to the brink of utter ruin in the midst of the whole assembly."

5:22-23 The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly.

6:20-23 My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life,

10:1 The proverbs of Solomon: A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son grief to his mother.

12:1 Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid.

13:1 A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke.

13:18 He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored.

13:24 He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.

15:5 A fool spurns his father's discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence.

15:10 Stern discipline awaits him who leaves the path; he who hates correction will die.

15:20 A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish man despises his mother.

17:6 Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.

17:21 To have a fool for a son brings grief; there is no joy for the father of a fool.

17:25 A foolish son brings grief to his father and bitterness to the one who bore him.

19:13 A foolish son is his father's ruin, and a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping.

19:18 Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death.

19:26 He who robs his father and drives out his mother is a son who brings shame and disgrace.

19:27 Stop listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge.

22:6 Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

22:15 Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.

23:13 Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die.

23:14 Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.

29:15 The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother.

29:17 Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul.

TWO



Is It Enough To Teach Survival Skills?
 Consider carefully just what you intend
 to accomplish by your parenting efforts.

1. What does it mean to teach our children “survival skills?”

Mothers of young predators in the animal world teach their offspring how to hunt successfully so they can survive on their own. As parents, you, too, have a responsibility to teach your children self-reliance, the ability to earn a living, and how to avoid the destructive forces in life. This is a basic objective of the parenting process and results from a natural concern (love) for your child's welfare. In the absence of physical or mental handicaps, a child who remains dependent on others well into adulthood is a living reproach to his parents. In a letter to one of the early churches, Paul the Apostle urged, **"Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody"** (1 Thess. 4:11-12). That was good advice then and it is just as appropriate today.

2. If how to survive was all we taught our children, would we have discharged our responsibility?

Important though it is that parents teach their children survival skills, the challenge to be "fruitful" stretches their responsibility much further. If we look at survival training as elementary education, the secondary level could be summed up as "Three Eternal Rules." John Rosemond, renowned parenting counselor, offers these three basic rules for successful living that parents must communicate to their offspring:

1. ***Whether you realize it or not, whether you accept it or not, you are completely responsible for the choices you make.***
2. ***If you make bad choices, bad things will happen — maybe not right away, but sooner or later.***
3. ***If you make good choices, it is considerably less likely that bad things will happen.***

Contemporary philosopher Paul Harvey put it this way:

My Wish for You

We tried so hard to make things better for our kids that we made them worse. For my grandchildren, I'd like better. I'd really like for them to know about hand-me down clothes and homemade ice cream and leftover meatloaf sandwiches. I really would.

My cherished grandson,

I hope you learn humility by being humiliated, and that you learn honesty by being cheated I hope you learn to make your bed and mow the lawn and wash the car. And I really hope nobody gives you a brand new car when you are sixteen. I hope you have a job by then.

It will be good if at least one time you can see a baby calf born and your old dog put to sleep. I hope you get a black eye fighting for something you believe in.

I hope you have to share a bedroom with your younger brother. And it's all right if you have to draw a line down the middle of the room, but when he wants to crawl under the covers with you because he's scared, I hope you let him.

When you want to see a Disney movie and your little brother wants to tag along, I hope you'll let him. I hope you have to walk uphill to school with your friends and that you live in a town where you can do it safely. On rainy days when you have to catch a ride, I hope your driver doesn't have to drop you two blocks away so you won't be seen riding with someone as uncool as your Mom.

If you want a slingshot, I hope your dad teaches you how to make one instead of buying one.

I hope you learn to dig in the dirt and read books. When you learn to use those newfangled computers, I hope you also learn to add and subtract in your head.

I hope you get razzed by your friends when you have your first crush on a girl, and when you talk back to your mother that you learn what Ivory soap tastes like.

May you skin your knee climbing a mountain, burn you hand on stove and stick your tongue on a frozen flagpole.

I hope you get sick when someone blows cigar smoke in your face. I don't care if you try beer once, but I hope you don't like it. And if a friend offers you dope or a joint, I hope you realize he is not your friend.

I sure hope you make time to sit on a porch with your grandpa and go fishing with your uncle. May you feel sorrow at a funeral and the joy of holidays.

I hope your mother punishes you when you throw a baseball through a neighbor's window and that she hugs you and kisses you at Christmas time when you give her a plaster of Paris mold of your hand.

These things I wish for you -- tough times and disappointment, hard work and happiness. Are we friends, Or are we not? You told me once. But I forgot. So tell me now. And tell me true. So I can say....."I'm here for you." Of all the friends I've ever met, You're the one I won't forget. And if I die before you do, I'll go to heaven and wait for you.

by Paul Harvey

But an even higher level of education should be the goal of Christian parents. If, as scripture teaches, man's ultimate purpose is to bring honor to his creator, then attaining personal happiness cannot be his sole objective. The writer of Proverbs refers to a higher goal, "**doing what is right, and just, and fair**" (Pr. 1:3), and Jesus personalized it in the familiar Golden Rule, "**do to others as you would have them do to you**" (Mt. 6:12). While happiness is a natural and reasonable ambition, children should be taught at an early age that they have a responsibility to their fellow human beings and to the world God has allowed them to live in.

3. If your child, age 2-5, causes a disturbance at a wedding or a church service, how does that make you feel? Why do you feel that way?

If you have a normal sensitivity to the rights of those around you, you probably feel embarrassed, exasperated, helpless, frustrated, and maybe even angry. And that's how you *should feel*. But you should also feel a responsibility and a determination to gain control so that there is never a repetition of the experience. Unfortunately, many parents see the situation differently. They expect others to be patient and tolerant of their darling's misbehavior (after all, he's just a child!) and, besides, they feel there's plenty of time for training later. That's just like a teenager's response to being told, "Smoking will kill you." — "Yeah, I know. I'm going to quit, eventually." Of course, by the time *eventually* arrives, addiction has made quitting a monumental challenge.

Parents should recognize that the embarrassment they feel when their child misbehaves in a public setting should be just as motivating when the misbehavior occurs at home where obedience can be taught with appropriate firmness. In other words, the child who has been taught to obey at home will seldom be an embarrassment to his parents in public.

4. If your child, age 15-18, is escorted home by a policeman for shoplifting, how would that make you feel?

In this case, the situation is serious and, while you may feel some of the same frustration, embarrassment and anger you felt in the scenario described above, you're probably going to have another emotion that is much more gut-wrenching; the frightening realization that *somehow you've failed* and now it's too late to do anything about it.

Discipline is a word we usually associate with child behavior, but in fact, discipline begins with parental behavior. It's not easy to recognize the seriousness of seemingly insignificant concessions to a child's will. But the reality is that *experience teaches*, and patterns are easy to establish but extremely hard to change. Parents must **discipline themselves** to be firm and consistent, even while they enjoy the beauty, charm and innocence of that precious and lovable gift. The choices you make today are certain to have consequences tomorrow.

5. List some characteristics you hope to instill in your child (1) by age six and (2) by age eighteen.

At the top of the list of characteristics which should have been instilled in your child by age six are **respect for your authority** and **love for you**. He should have grown to love you simply because you have behaved loveably toward him, and he should have learned to respect your authority because he knows that bad choices consistently produce bad results (elementary education).

By age eighteen the secondary and also, we hope, the higher levels of parenting should be behind you. In any case, it's too late to worry about it. Your child has reached adulthood, and your training should have made him self-reliant, self-disciplined and respectful of all authorities — God, parents, teachers and government, and he should exhibit due concern for those less fortunate and for the rights and feelings of all. In addition to those very desirable traits, successful parents will somehow have prepared their child for a lasting and happy marriage. That preparation will have come primarily from the example of your own marital relationship and from your teaching about the nature of the marriage commitment. Perhaps no other aspect of parenting will have more visible and enduring consequences.

6. What are the benefits you expect to achieve as you train your children, that is, benefits for you, benefits for them, and benefits for God?

Benefits for you: Parents who discipline themselves to carry out their responsibilities with love, patience, kindness and consistent firmness can expect a harvest of peace and harmony within the home. You will enjoy being with your children and be proud of their behavior. You will have peace of mind, knowing that you are preparing them as best you can for a fruitful and rewarding life.

Benefits for them: A home environment that is characterized by rules that are enforced with love and firmness leads to a sense of security and confidence. Disciplined children will invariably have better relationships with other family members, peers and ultimately, a marriage partner. Training that includes teaching about God and our proper relationship to Him leads to a sense of purpose and responsibility.

Benefits for God: By discharging our responsibilities as stewards of the gift of life, we offer God the only things he cannot provide for himself: *glory, honor and praise*.

7. Are you confident that you will achieve your objectives as parents? Why? Why not?

The first parents, Adam and Eve, made a mess of it. After their own disastrous demonstration of lack of discipline, this couple went on to produce a son, Cain, who murdered his brother, Abel, in a fit of jealous rage. Surely those parents must share some of the responsibility for that kind of undisciplined behavior in one of their children (Genesis 4:1-14). Actually, the story teaches little about parenting except that we can hope to profit from the parenting experiences of our predecessors, a luxury the first parents didn't have.

Whether or not you have confidence in your ability to attain your parenting objectives, success will come only if you have **discipline, determination and direction**. We can provide the direction (there have been a lot of successful parents since Adam and Eve), but only you, with God's help, can supply the discipline and determination. *Bon voyage!*

CONCLUSION

As responsible parents, your goals should go far beyond simply teaching survival skills. They should include instilling a clear realization that personal choices have unavoidable consequences, and that true success in life means to "fear God" and *to do what is right and just and fair*. Success in reaching those goals will benefit you, them and God.

Next: What helps and what doesn't.

**The fear of the LORD
is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and discipline.
Listen, my son,
to your father's instruction
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.
They will be a garland to grace your head
and a chain to adorn your neck.**

Proverbs 1:7-9 (NIV)

THREE



What helps and what doesn't. The elements of successful parenting.

1. Knowing what you want to achieve as parents, what are the ingredients that will produce a product that meets your expectations?

Right family relationships.

Perhaps the most basic, yet highly controversial, issue in family relations today is leadership. Who's responsible for this organization? Where does the buck stop? In no other institution of our society — government, school, business, social club or religious group — is there any question about the need for a clear line of authority. But if one spouse has less than an equal share in the family's decision making responsibility it is seen as somehow demeaning and contrary to the principle of equality. Common sense clearly supports the concept of a single, recognized leader, but it does not require that those who follow are in some way inferior beings. In the New Testament the apostle Paul dealt with the subject of family (and church) leadership explicitly, comparing the relationship of Christ to His bride, the church, with the relationship of the husband and wife in a marriage. He then followed up with instruction about children and parents.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-- for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise-- "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

(Ephesians 5:22-6:4)

Distasteful as those words may be in today's culture, *submitting* and *obeying* are keys to success in parenting. Traditionally and Biblically, the reins of family leadership belong in the hands of the husband; and his, too, is the final responsibility for providing and protecting. If that is the husband's role in your marriage, it will greatly simplify your lives as parents.

The word obey is rarely heard in wedding ceremonies today, but in the home, obedience must surely characterize the relationship between children and their parents. This is not optional if you are going to be successful in the training process. Sharing leadership within the family **must never** extend to the children, no matter how much you may believe in democracy! The writer of Proverbs put it very well: "**Folly is bound up in the heart of a child**" (Pr. 22:15). We can hope that folly is not found in the hearts of good parents and that they fill their role as coaches, not players.

Good genes.

Choose your child's grandparents carefully! The scriptures tell us that God punishes children for the sins of their fathers "to the third and fourth generations" (Num. 14:18). In fact, you might be surprised, as I was, to learn how much your ancestors influenced the way you are today. My great-great-grandmother, Lydia Lever, for example, was clearly the source of the religious influence that flowed from generation to generation in my lineage.

Researchers in the fields of genetics, brain development, and behavioral science seem to be reaching a consensus that genes are indeed important, but their importance is not in dictating individual characteristics, but rather in determining how we respond to the early environment that will produce those traits. (See "Fertile Minds," "What Parents Can Do," and "The Day-Care Dilemma," *Time*, February 3, 1997) You may say, "So what's the difference?" But the effect is to put far greater responsibility on parents to "**train a child in the way he should go**," rather than merely to provide a climate in which he can freely develop according to his genetic instructions.

Providence.

The saying, "God helps those who help themselves," is true, assuming "*those*" are trying to do the Lord's will. Indeed, as parents we depend on the guidance that He has provided in the Bible, and we can expect and pray that He will support us by filling in the blanks when we fail to do our jobs like professionals.

Having parents who were good examples of caring parenting.

Knowing how to be good parents, as we said earlier, isn't a skill we're born with. But it is a skill that, if we were very fortunate, our parents taught us by their example. If we left home with a deep and abiding love and feeling of respect for our parents, chances are they gave us a leg up on the task. (And what a marvelous legacy that would be for you to pass on to your children, too!)

Love for the child and a determination to do what is ultimately best for him. (Discipline.)

Most parents love their children; it would be contrary to nature if they didn't. But often that love shows itself in ways that seem kind and caring, while actually doing harm. It's only natural to want to give a child virtually anything he asks (or cries) for, but common sense, parenting counselors and the Bible are unanimous in teaching that you **must not**. Loving parents know that medicine (or a shot) may not be pleasant, but it's good for the child, and parents who can follow that same principle when discipline is required are the ones who actually demonstrate the greater love.

Instruction.

An obviously essential ingredient in successful parenting is instruction, that is, the process by which you teach such things as tying shoes and moral standards. Put effort into your responsibility; don't assume that in time your child will automatically learn everything he needs to know.

Teach him how to swing a bat, teach him table manners and teach him goodness. And if you are really serious about teaching moral values, take him to church and send him to a Christian school!

Example. Example. Example.

Your child will mirror your values and your actions if he respects you. No aspect of parenting is more important than example. Be assured that you will not succeed in any element of training that does not reflect your own behavior.

Good fortune.

"The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all." (Eccl. 9:11) There are no guarantees in life; we may do our very best as parents and still our children may disappoint us. But you can be sure that without conscientious and disciplined effort, disappointment is certain.

2. What are some of the factors and conditions that get in the way of success?

Competition.

After age 5-6, messages from peers, the media, and even teachers will often compete with yours. By that time you should have thoroughly established yourselves as good examples and as the voices of authority so that those competing messages carry as little influence as possible. But don't forget that you have every right to protect and shield your child from influences that are clearly negative. While they are children it's foolishness to ask them to know the difference between good messages and bad. That's your job!

Not being there.

Fewer and fewer families today enjoy the luxury and blessing of a home where the mother is able to be at home with her children. Very often the job of child-rearing must be turned over to someone else for at least some portion of the day. When that becomes a necessity, the parenting responsibility requires that very careful consideration be given to the choosing of a care-giver who will support, not undo, your efforts.

Stress.

Juggling too many responsibilities interferes with focus on the family. With two parents struggling to maintain jobs and a home, nerves and tempers are easily stretched to the breaking point by evening when the children come into the picture. The subtle message that children can't avoid receiving is that they really aren't very important.

Bad genes.

Yes, it is possible to inherit traits that make life extra difficult (and sometimes, extra easy) for parents. Aggressiveness, willfulness, and mental and physical deficiencies all present special challenges that require greater patience and, in many cases, help from professionals. But don't let genes be a cop-out; remember that nature responds to training.

False prophets.

In an age when we feel that science has, or soon will have the answers to all our problems, it's easy, natural and extremely common to look for the most reliable parenting guidance in those who hold Ph.D. degrees rather than in a two- or three-thousand-year-old book such as the Bible. But it's not hard for someone like me, who has lived long enough to see the results of following the

advice of some of those "false prophets," to know that unless their teachings are compatible with that book, they're worthless. Many psychologists today are reaching that same conclusion, so you can expect to find some very sound counsel among the Ph.D.s if you search for it.

Selfishness.

Unfortunately, some parents know what they should teach their children, but aren't willing to make the sacrifice in their own behavior or habits to model those values themselves. Years ago, I was able to conquer the smoking addiction simply because I knew it was foolishness to expect my boys to stay away from cigarettes if I couldn't. I'm thankful that none of them took up that health-destroying habit.

Marital conflicts.

When husbands and wives can't agree on the course their parenting efforts should take, the children are the losers. When the ones they should respect above all others are at odds about the rules, the standards and the enforcement, children have no way of sorting out the right course, and the result is confusion and insecurity. Each parent must support the decisions and authority of the other, so spend some time discussing your policies privately, then follow an accepted course, even if you can't reach full agreement. Never dramatize your disagreements in front of your child.

Misplaced forbearance.

Tender hearted, compassionate parents are often unable to bear seeing their child in pain, even when that pain is clearly needed for training. For these parents, imposing punishment is out of the question. Their resulting permissiveness leads to the child's insecurity, self-centeredness and ultimately to an inability to cope with real world relationships.

Misplaced attention.

It's not unusual for one or both parents to be excessively devoted to a child, typically the first, focusing loving and constant attention on him and quickly responding to every whimper. The child soon learns that he is the sole occupant of the center of the universe and begins life with an inordinate sense of self-importance. Sometimes the devotion is shown by only one parent as a reaction to a perception that the other party is too strict or too harsh toward the child. This can be an especially serious problem because it produces a sense of rejection in the "strict" parent and may lead to even harsher treatment of the child.

In today's culture a great deal of rhetoric has been devoted to the subject of parents needing to spend more time with their children. Indeed, that is a problem, simply because there isn't much time available for families to behave as families at all. But the burden of guilt that has been placed on parents has caused some to feel that their first responsibility is to their children. Not so! A husband's first responsibility is to his wife and hers is to him. In Genesis 2:23-24, the text defines the relationship between a husband and his wife:

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

The responsibility of husband to wife and wife to husband supersedes all other relationships. We are stewards of our children, but only for a time; God made the bond between spouses permanent.

CONCLUSION

Success in parenting depends on many factors, but the most important is reliance on the word of God for direction.

Next: Preparing the Ground.

FOUR

Preparing the ground.

See the parable of the sower, Mt. 13:8, page 20.

Discipline - - the foundation for learning



1. What does "preparing the ground" have to do with parenting?

In the parable of the sower, Jesus illustrates how different types of people will respond to the "sowing" of the gospel message. He teaches that the only long-lasting, productive response will come when the seed falls on "good soil." Of course, farmers and even back yard gardeners know that good soil doesn't just happen; it requires careful, planned preparation and diligent effort. Parenting is like that, too. The seed of your instruction, no matter how wise and well-intentioned, won't have long-lasting results unless your child is first taught to respect the sower. Discipline provides the preparation you need to make your teaching effective. This is the underlying message of Proverbs 29:15: "*The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but the child left to himself disgraces his mother.*"

2. Why has the word "discipline" taken on such an ugly image?

The founders of our nation would be amazed to see how far we have extended the principle they knew as "freedom". In fact, today there are few aspects of our personal lives over which we accept any control at all. Our individual rights allow us the freedom to "express ourselves" by going naked in public, by using obscene language in the media, and by distributing pornography in the name of art. It seems that discipline is acceptable only if it is self-imposed. To discipline another person is to restrict his rights, and that implies the forced subordination of his will to yours; attempt that and you better be ready to hire a lawyer! For some parents today there is even a reluctance to restrict the behavior of their own children, simply because they feel that to do so would violate their rights. Using physical means to enforce rules would be unthinkable. Yes, to some, discipline has become a dirty word, and parents who recognize their God-given responsibility to apply it often find themselves on the defensive.

3. What does the Bible teach about parental discipline?

When we read the vivid language of Proverbs 22:15, "***Folly is bound up in the heart of a child but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him,***" the picture that comes to mind isn't pleasant. But I'm sure what the writer had in mind wasn't brutality — a responsible parent disciplines lovingly, not harshly — and the "rod" equates to a spanking with an open hand (or, as my wife found effective, a fly-swatter). The point is that discipline and discomfort are inseparable and necessary ingredients in the training process.

The Parable of the Sower

A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Matthew 13:3-8 New International Version

Just as a good farmer prepares the soil in order to produce a good harvest, prudent parents will discipline their children so their instruction will be effective.

In the New Testament there is a passage that clearly describes the relationship between love, discipline and punishment as they apply to parenting: (Hebrews 12:6-9)

" . . . the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. . . . For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!"

Yes, it's true, discipline is painful, but children respect parents who love them enough to apply it.

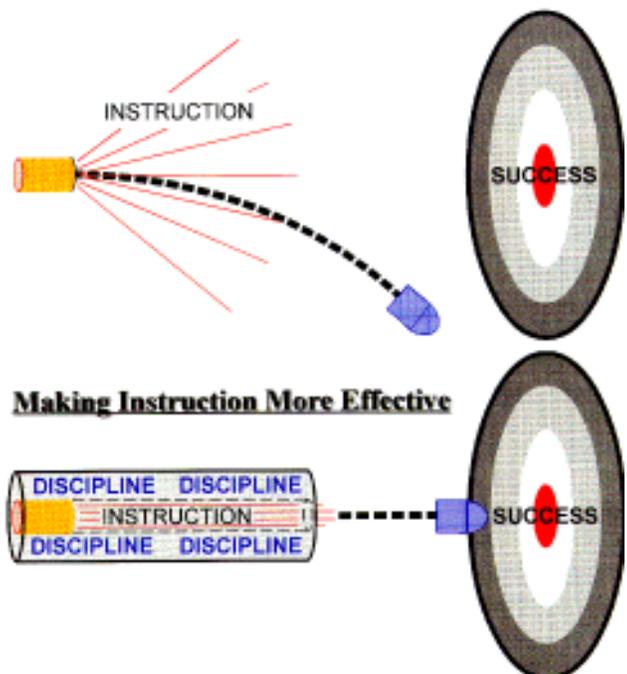
4. How does discipline increase the effectiveness of instruction?

I once happened to observe a young mother with her two small children as they walked from a building toward a parking lot. The mother, carrying the smaller child in her arms, was concerned about the older one's safety and screamed at him repeatedly to stop as he ran happily toward their car. But he just laughed and ran on, completely ignoring her orders as if they were playing some sort of game. Fortunately, there was no sad ending to the scene, only frustration for a mother who had not learned that discipline has to be established before instruction can be effective.

My great-great-grandmother, Lydia Lever, was a Sunday School Teacher in England when she was seventeen. In her teacher's manual I found this instruction: "***Always maintain a powerful control over your scholars; and on no account allow any child to disobey you; to submit to this would be to slacken the reins of authority, and to encourage disorder and confusion. Harshness is not necessary, but decided firmness is indispensable.***" The world has changed since those words were written in 1829, but discipline is still the foundation for instruction. If you don't have the respect of your children, you can't expect to teach them.

In my early years I was a rather active kid and enjoyed such pursuits as making toy soldiers from molten lead and creating incendiaries with my chemistry outfit; exciting and educational hobbies that aren't available to our much-protected youth today. One day, at the age of eight, I decided to conduct an experiment with a .22 caliber bullet on a gas range we had in our basement. Placing the bullet upright over a moderate flame, I took cover and waited anxiously to see what would happen. It didn't take long. After the explosion I carefully examined the basement ceiling directly above the range, expecting to find a hole or at least a mark where the bullet had struck. I found neither, and never even located the bullet.

So what does that story have to do with parenting? I was too young to appreciate it at the time, but the explosive power of the gunpowder in a bullet's shell has to be concentrated (focused) on the projectile or there won't be much force avail-



able to drive it. That's the purpose of a gun barrel. When a bullet is fired from a gun barrel, all the power of the propellant is directed against the bullet and the barrel's aim sends it speeding to the target. My bullet had no barrel, so who knows where it went! **In parenting, discipline plays the role of a gun barrel for the driving force of parental instruction.** Discipline allows your instruction to be focused so you can have a reasonable chance for success. And don't forget; the gun barrel does its job early; the bullet goes most of the way to the target on its own.

5. How are discipline and punishment related?

The clear and consistent threat of punishment produces respect for the authority of the one who administers it. This in turn permits focusing on the primary objective: instruction. No loving parent enjoys having to punish a child, but few realize how important it is to be firm and consistent early in the process so it won't be required very often. When a child learns that punishment for infractions is certain, the frequency of infractions (and punishment, of course) drops dramatically. Because children are children and memories are short, there will always be slip-ups, but you can be assured that effective discipline does not require continual, never-ending conflict during the childhood years if you, as parents, discipline yourselves to be firm and consistent.

Fear of punishment is intended to be motivation for obedience. Another motivator that has its place in parenting is reward. But be aware that while rewarding a child is useful and effective for teaching the value of working hard to reach a goal, it does nothing to promote respect for your authority. A parent who tries to inspire good behavior by offering tempting incentives makes himself feel noble, but the child will give him no more respect than he gives Santa Claus.

6. What is the best method of punishment?

The best method of punishment is the one that is most effective with the least harshness. When the time for punishment arrives, the parent must exercise God-given common sense and compassion while keeping clearly in mind what he is trying to accomplish and why this moment is important for both parties. That means he must be in control of himself. Common sense, compassion and reason are not qualities of an enraged parent. I believe that a parent can feel anger as a result of a child's disobedience and still retain his self control; but rage is another matter. To punish while in a state of uncontrolled fury risks doing serious physical and emotional harm to the child and may justify a charge of child abuse. (It will almost certainly also have serious consequences for the marriage.) If it is your nature to lose control of yourself under any circumstances you need help, possibly professional help. Don't wait till someone you love is hurt.

When administering punishment, factors such as the child's age, his nature, and the severity and frequency of the offense will come into play. A parent quickly learns that one child may be sensitive and easily intimidated, while another responds only to strong measures. Act accordingly; don't be tougher than you need to be to make your point. Both corporal and restrictive methods have their places in the parent's list of options, but keep in mind that restriction will be most effective in the later stages of childhood.

Realize that when you punish you are punishing because of disobedience, not simply for the particular infraction of the moment. For example, when your child fails to obey an instruction to be quiet in church, you punish him because he disobeyed, not merely because he created a disturbance. While he should learn to be especially well-behaved in that setting, you need to be able to require obedience in any setting — at your discretion — without having to explain your reasons. Unquestioned obedience comes only when you have instilled respect for your authority; that's what punishment is all about!

CONCLUSION

Responsible, loving parents who intend to teach their children appropriate behavior and a value system that will carry them safely through life must understand the importance of preparing their charges so that their training can be effective and enduring. This means establishing, at an early age, a high level of respect for your authority. Discipline, the process of firmly and consistently punishing disobedience, is necessary for establishing that respect.

Next: A balanced approach to discipline.

Five

A balanced approach to discipline.

In control, but keeping your cool.



Ask any experienced, successful parent about discipline and you're likely to get this response: You have to be balanced; not too strict and not too permissive. It's just plain common sense. Parenting is not the place for extremes, because at one end of the scale you have failed in your responsibility to train, while at the other you have failed to demonstrate the compassion and tolerance that go with realizing that children are children; they love, they feel, they react and they learn; they're not machines or computers. Let your heart and your mind work together, not alternately, as you respond to your parenting responsibilities.

1. When in the child's life should discipline begin?

Your effort to discipline your child should begin as soon as he can relate the discipline to his actions. Let me explain. When a child is born, nature goes all-out with one objective in mind: survival. That tiny little bundle of joy can do absolutely nothing for itself, it must depend on others and, of course, that means Mama. But to insure that Mama responds effectively, nature has provided two strong motivating forces: deep and selfless love in the mother, and in the child, the intense, demanding, ear-grating noise known as crying. Together, these produce quick solutions to all the child's problems and survival is assured.

During this period, a very natural training process is going on — the infant is instinctively struggling to gain and maintain control over its environment; it is training its parents. The child learns that its screams will produce results — attention, at the very least — and uses that method to communicate as long as it's effective. This is a process which some parents fail to recognize, and one that is often allowed to continue far too long. (We've all observed children who are quite capable of speaking, yet whine or grunt insistently till they get what they want.)

So after that necessary, initial period of infancy when responding to the immediate needs of the baby is vitally important, there should be, and normally is, a transition toward establishing parental control. This is a gradual process that begins quite simply when a mother realizes, usually from the tone of the child's crying, that her chain is being pulled and decides to let the little one start to learn who's going to be in charge. At this point, deliberately showing loving, playful attention when the child *is not* being demanding will help to teach the child that it can be comfortable and secure without being ugly. Now you have begun to discipline, that is, to show that you, not the child, are in the driver's seat. Simple techniques such as using a disapproving tone of voice or putting the child down when the fussing begins can continue the process effectively, long before physical methods become appropriate.

2. Doesn't discipline mean there will be a constant battle with the child?

Fortunately for parents, there are two factors that work to prevent on-going strife. The first is that the child, under normal circumstances, wants to be in good favor with his parents. Second, the child is not stupid — he will quickly learn that obedience results in a higher level of personal comfort. This means that the frequency of punishment diminishes rapidly and should become extremely rare when the parents understand and apply the basics of successful discipline: **firmness and consistency**.

Unfortunately, too many parents fail to apply discipline with firmness and consistency, so the child gets mixed messages and a feeling of uncertainty about his boundaries. The result is a constant, on-going war which leads to exasperation on both sides. Remember, you the parents must be disciplined to act responsibly **every time**, before you can expect to instill respect, obedience and security in your children.

3. Won't firm discipline alienate the child from his parents?

Yes, you can be sure that punishing in anger and without forgiveness, mercy, understanding and love will alienate and exasperate the child. But demonstrate those qualities and you will gain both his love and his respect as you bring him up in the training and instruction of the Lord! (See Ephesians 6:4.)

The difference between vengeful punishment and punishment that is motivated by love and a desire to train is easy for a child to recognize, and the effects are exactly opposite. So in order to be certain that there is no misunderstanding, some parents make a point of coolly, patiently and deliberately explaining the reason for the action before applying "the rod of discipline."

4. Consider the involvement of emotion and reason in the discipline process.

The writer of Proverbs 23:13 ("***Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die.***") understood the dilemma that confronts most parents when they face the responsibility to discipline. Our hearts tell us we love and forgive the child, but our minds tell us that a lesson must be taught. He counsels that we must be firm, even though the lesson is painful for both parties.

5. Are there some basic rules for keeping the respect of my children?

Absolutely! Of course, the first rule is to be firm and consistent as you establish and enforce rules. The second is to be *respectable* in your behavior; this means showing confidence and fairness. The third rule is very often neglected by parents because they don't realize its importance: Parents must never permit their children to show disrespect by hitting, talking back, or by responding to an instruction with a "no" or a "why?" To allow a display of disrespect, even when the child does it in a playful way, cannot be tolerated.

Parents who begin very early to consistently punish acts of disrespect are not likely to have to deal with the scourge of parenthood, the tantrum. Such displays of temper are far more likely where parents have failed to be firm and consistent about discipline and have convinced the child that there are limits to his parents' will to maintain control. But if a tantrum does occur, be certain that you do not yield in any way, and that the child is immediately isolated until he returns to normal. At that point it will be prudent to spank or restrict the child in such a way that your message is clear: This kind of behavior is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Remember that a tantrum is a display of anger in which the child wants to hurt you for not acceding to his demands. Since he knows he can't physically harm you, he will try to get to you by making your life miserable in some other way — screaming, thrashing, breaking things, and very often attempting to hurt himself — all in an effort to cause you enough distress to realize that it's easier to give in to him. The solution is always to show him that his behavior hurts him far more than it hurts you.

6. What about making rules?

For best results, make only those rules that are necessary for training and keeping the peace within the family. Make as few as possible and repeal the ones that don't work but, above all, enforce the rules you establish! Children gain a sense of security from knowing what's expected of them and what the boundaries are, but too many "noes" enforced with due strictness can lead to exasperation and fear.

CONCLUSION

Prudent parents recognize that their stewardship calls for *preparation of the soil* if they are going to reap a harvest of family peace and harmony and produce a son or daughter who is well grounded for a godly life, ready to carry on the values transfer process to the next generation. That preparation requires the early administration of discipline with firmness and consistency, so that the instructional process can be carried out effectively.

Next: The values transfer process.

The values transfer process.

Will your children live by the standards you live by?



About ten years ago I suddenly developed a strong interest in family history. Since then, many hours in courthouses and libraries have produced lots of names, places and dates, and, in a few cases, homely details that reveal images of flesh-and-blood characters. While neither notoriety nor nobility has shown up among my forbears, there is a clear pattern of belief in the god of the Bible and of diligent effort to improve one's lot in life — characteristics that are shared by most of those who made their way from Europe to America. Those are among the many virtues that have been passed on from generation to generation. But today, sociologists are questioning whether the natural process through which this transfer of values has always occurred may now be threatened by new, powerful influences in our culture; children may no longer adopt the standards of their parents as a matter of course. As responsible parents, your job is to see to it that the values you believe in are transferred to your children. Achieving that goal may require special effort.

1. What are the characteristics of our culture that you feel are badly in need of change?

America has become a world leader in divorce, crime, drug and alcohol abuse, materialism, lack of civility in behavior, speech, music, entertainment and dress. Lack of integrity and racial intolerance at all levels of our society are serious and growing problems. We seem to be living in a world that a New Testament writer described nearly two thousand years ago:

. . . There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God-- having a form of godliness but denying its power. . .

(2 Tim. 3:1-5. New International Version)

2. What do you see as the principal causes of these cultural deficiencies?

There are many causes that can be cited, but three seem to stand out. First is that what we know as "the media" is unregulated, profit-driven and extremely influential; they feel no responsibility for the social consequences of their activities. Second, technological progress has opened the way for a two-worker economy, reducing the influence of parents on the family. And third, in our increasingly urban and sophisticated society, accountability to the community or to a higher authority is no longer a significant influence on behavior.

3. How are you going to combat these forces in your family?

The only weapons available to parents for countering the destructive forces that are at work to destroy families are *discipline*, *instruction* and *example*. By establishing respect for your authority, teaching the principles you believe in, and demonstrating that you actually live by those principles, you will have done all you can to prepare your child for life. Of course, this is a rather

simplistic statement that addresses an enormously important and complex set of issues. But the fact is that in the early years of your child's life, you passively (by example) and actively (by instruction) establish in him an attitude toward such things as religion, drugs, divorce, etc., which determines how he will respond to them many years later.

You should instill an awareness of *being different* (not better) and not like the rest of world. Teach him that you march to a different drummer, the God of the Bible. Be an active, regular member of your local congregation. Make devotion to God a vital and visible part of your family life. Many families establish regular times to be together for Bible reading and prayer as a means of building a consciousness of their proper relationship with God.

One of the most important policy decisions parents are faced with relates to television; should we simply pull the plug, or should we develop a plan that will protect our child from the bad, and yet let him enjoy and learn from the good? Many parents are taking the first approach and completely eliminating TV from their home environments. I think you should give serious consideration to doing just that. Try it out for a few months to test the results. The positive effects, such as developing closer family relationships and stimulating creativity in the child, are obvious. You may find that it opens a brand new world.

Without solid data to back me up, I suspect that *limited* exposure to morally corrupting television messages will have little impact on a child under six. This means that when you establish a policy that puts restrictions in place during those early years, the real benefit will come later, when the child is more apt to be susceptible to believing that TV represents the real world.

But there is another, more subtle effect of prolonged TV watching that is starting to concern professional educators. We've all observed a steady decrease in the length of time an image remains on the television screen, especially in movies, cartoons and commercials. Constant exposure to these fleeting pictures may be producing a generation of children whose attention span is severely limited, with serious consequences for classroom learning ability.

Whatever you decide to do about the TV issue, you can be certain that your own watching habits will have more impact on your child's attitude than any policy you may establish. If Mom lives on a steady diet of "soap," she shouldn't expect to be successful trying to teach her children that TV is harmful to moral health.

4. What must you teach now to avoid the factors listed above (No. 1) being exhibited by your children?

Divorce - Try to model the ideal family relationships in your family (page 14) so that your children see marriage in a positive light. Teach them the nature and permanence of the marriage commitment by your example and your instruction.

Crime - Show that you respect the authority of the law. Instill in your child a sensitivity for the feelings and rights of others. Point out to them the human consequences of criminal acts — the pain, the loss and the suffering that they cause.

Drugs/alcohol/tobacco - As early as possible, instill ardent fear of these agents; teach your children how they can destroy life. Explain the meaning of *addiction* and show how easily these substances can take control of a person.

Materialism - Avoid the excessive use of *things* as rewards, goals and objectives. Teach your children that happiness is derived from relationships, worth and service, not from possessions. Encourage and display concern for those less fortunate and let them see that you are willing to share.

Carefully consider your family's approach to Christmas gift giving. We live in an affluent society where most parents find themselves financially able and willing to inundate their children with toys and games in an annual orgy of indulgence. It seems that they do this knowing all the while that it's wrong and that it doesn't produce the joy and gratitude that they intend. Grandparents recognize the problem, too, but usually fall right in step with the parents. If you want to break the cycle — and you should — start now with a plan to make Christmas mean something besides materialistic madness!

Civility - Display and require respect, politeness and courtesy in all dealings within the family. This means that Mom and Dad are careful to say *please, thank you and may I?* to each other and that they require the same from their children. Place proper emphasis on manners, speech and dress; they offer opportunities to bring honor or dishonor to God, to the family and to the child. Don't feel that your child has a right to dress or style his hair any way he pleases; teach him that there are standards that apply to your family that may not be those of his peers.

Integrity - You are the example of integrity for your child; never deceive him and never let him see you twisting the truth in your dealings with others. Practice what you teach. Keep your word.

Intolerance - Display respect for all people, regardless of race or station in life. Instill a sensitivity for the feelings and rights of others.

CONCLUSION

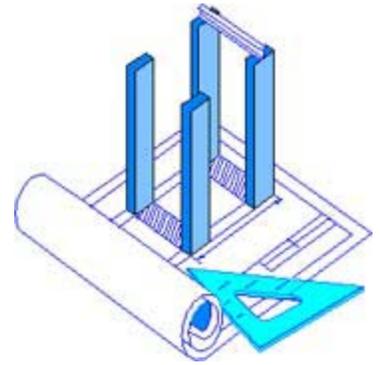
The values you hold to be important will not be transferred to your children without conscious effort on your part. To be successful, you must not only display those values in yourselves, but you must also work diligently to make your training more effective than the media and the cultural influences which are in direct competition with yours. An active, visible resolve to live according to the standards provided by God is essential.

Next: Putting it all together.

SEVEN

Putting it all together.

A framework to build on.



If you have been with me through the previous six articles of this series, you have observed that I emphasized the importance of your attitude toward the parenting job. I have tried to stress that you should be aware of the far-reaching influence of what you do today, *in these first critical years*, and that you need to get started right, so you can avoid serious problems later. You can begin now to establish the pattern that will make the difficult teen years less difficult and you can expect that generations yet unborn will be influenced to follow your lead.

1. What are your objectives in parenting?

The home doesn't need to be a battleground for parents; instead, it ought to be where you are most comfortable. You should expect that your parenting efforts can make it a place where love, joy, peace and harmony are the rule, not the exception, where you can take pride in your children and enjoy being with them.

Your children should benefit directly from your efforts, too, of course. Their world should become a secure one in which they know their limits and look to their parents as providers, protectors and teachers, not tyrants. Your training can be expected to lead to harmony with their peers and, ultimately, with the one they choose as a lifetime companion.

Your success as parents can also benefit God. He asks only one thing of us, that is, that we honor Him. By rearing your children in *the fear of the Lord* you will have accomplished that objective.

2. What are the two basic elements of successful parenting over which you have control?

A newborn that arrives on the scene is in some ways like a computer that is waiting to have programs added to its memory so that it can perform tasks and respond to inputs. It comes with an operating system consisting of genes and DNA (over which you had no control) which will determine to a great extent how the child will develop in response to the two elements of parenting that are your responsibility: *instruction and example*. Every minute detail of your interaction with the infant — holding, touching, cooing, speaking and smiling — is essential to the unseen wiring process that's going on inside its brain. That process will continue at an incredible rate throughout the early years, producing a unique individual, but one who will be largely a product of your instruction and example. He will then go on to apply those learned characteristics as he interacts with the world for the rest of his life. Your challenge, of course, is to provide the kind of teaching and example that will give him the preparation he needs to make that interaction a positive, productive, happy experience.

3. Why is your spousal relationship so basic to your success as parents?

In the tiny world of a very young child, parents are by far the most visible players. They provide virtually the only illustration of inter-personal relationships the child will be exposed to (unless day-care enters the picture). You are models for the qualities that your child will emulate,

such as respect, compassion, kindness, civility, marital faithfulness, etc. It's obvious that those characteristics need to be present in your marriage when the child gets his first introduction to how humans are supposed to interact.

Discipline, the foundation for effective instruction, is often a source of conflict between husband and wife. Rarely is there full, enthusiastic agreement on the subject; one party will almost always tend to be more tender-hearted and permissive than the other. That's normal and may be quite healthy. But open disagreements that can be observed by the child are extremely counterproductive and he will quickly learn to exploit them, playing one parent against the other to his own advantage. Parents must learn to support one another even when they don't fully agree on a particular course of action. Try to resolve your differences in private discussion so the child isn't confused.

4. What is the primary purpose of discipline?

Responsible parents will understand that discipline is necessary to produce respect for their authority and, in turn, to make their instruction effective. Children who display no respect for the authority of their parents will feel free to do as they please and ignore instructions. Of course, this leaves parents in the role of providers and protectors only, precluding their success as productive stewards.

5. What are the secondary benefits of good discipline?

In addition to the basic objective of making instruction effective, discipline leads to a sense of security for the child. Having a clear understanding of boundaries and limits to his behavior instills confidence and peace of mind. An obvious further benefit is a reduction in stress and conflict within the family.

6. In order to be effective, how must discipline (punishment) be administered?

Most parents realize that punishing their child is a necessary and unavoidable part of their responsibility. But few are able to appreciate the importance of being firm and consistent. They fail to understand that a pattern of laxity when they feel good and harshness when they're up tight sends a confusing message to the child. Remember that the certainty of punishment for acts of disobedience and disrespect will quickly reduce their frequency. Don't practice "*snooze alarm discipline*" — waiting till the aggravation is overpowering and then reacting with an angry swat. Treat punishment as an act of responsibility while showing self-control, love and forgiveness. By all means, avoid continually slapping, shaking and jerking as a regular part of your interaction with your children. This is the type of parental irresponsibility that results in violent behavior in the child and totally defeats the objective of instilling respect for your authority!

7. What are the most important, basic principles for effective parenting?

1. Parents must show honor and respect for God, for each other and for the child.

Make home devotionals, church participation, civility in spousal relationships and patience in training part of your lives.

2. Parents should openly demonstrate love and affection for each other and for the child.

Be demonstrative in showing affection to, and in front of, your child.

3. Parents must never tolerate disobedience or disrespect from their child.

This includes striking or talking back to the parent. Make no exceptions. Be firm and consistent.

4. Never overrule your spouse's instruction.

An absolute no-no! Parents must be seen by the child to be in full agreement.

5. Instill respect for all authorities.

In the early years, you are the principal authorities, but when the time comes for school, uphold the authority of your child's teachers even if you don't agree with them.

6. By example and instruction, teach your child righteousness, justice and mercy.

Be and teach all you want your child to be.

CONCLUSION

In this brief series of articles you have been introduced to the fundamentals of a process that is much like building a house. It begins with a solid foundation of Biblical truth and faith in the Creator who charges you with the responsibility to train your child in the way he should go. But these few words of caution and advice serve only to provide a framework on which to build, and a consciousness of the principles that should guide parents as they mold a life that will bring honor to themselves and to God. Fulfillment of that responsibility depends, in part, on how you face the challenges in the years ahead, but you can be confident that adherence to these basics will make success more certain. Make a commitment today to build on this framework and God will bless your house for generations to come.

G.A.R

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

Matthew 5:14-16 (NIV)