

SPIRIT-EMPOWERED DAD

Lesson 12: A Spirit-Empowered Dad Balances Discipline with Grace

Main Idea: Too many dads see discipline as nothing but administering punishment for wrongdoing. But the primary objective of Biblical discipline is not punishment but learning that shapes a child's behavior and enables them to live the full, healthy, whole life you desire for them. In this lesson, you will begin the journey of adding grace to discipline.



SIGHTLINE: Acquire Your Target

A Spirit-empowered dad has a biblical mandate to train his child to do what is right (Proverbs 22:6). This training includes discipline. In fact, the word discipline means “to train.” Too many dads see discipline as nothing but administering punishment for wrongdoing. But the primary objective of biblical discipline is not punishment but learning that changes and shapes a child's behavior.

Biblical discipline calls for grace. The classic Christian definition of grace is “unmerited favor.” In the context of discipline, grace can be best understood as “unconditional love.” After all, that is what grace is.

Don't misunderstand the meaning of grace when it comes to children's discipline. Some think that showing grace means a dad should not punish children—that kids do not have to face the consequences of their actions because the punishment for their behavior has been removed. While it is true that Jesus took the punishment for sin when He died on the cross (grace in action), this does not mean that punishment should never be used in parenting. In the context of disciplining a child, remembering the definition of grace as “unconditional love” can help dads better understand the relationship between grace and discipline.



CROSSHAIR: Focus On Your Target

Many fathers struggle when it comes to disciplining children. Too many times, they find themselves swinging between being too lenient or too hard with their children. To complicate matters, each child is different and their response to different forms of discipline varies. What works well with one child may have no positive effect on another. Furthermore, a child's poor behavior often triggers a dad's emotional response. He may begin to lose control and take his disappointment and anger out on the child in an inappropriate way.

Discipline isn't easy but bringing discipline into your child's life is one of the most loving things you can do for them. A Spirit-empowered dad must remember that the purpose of discipline is not to punish but to train. Discipline is training a child to do what is right. It works best when it incorporates love, grace, and age-appropriate punishment (consequences). Punishment by itself may do nothing but put a "pause" on bad behavior. Discipline's objective is not just altering the child's behavior on the outside. For the desired change to last, it must be internalized. Discipline is most effective when it creates a desire in the child to adopt the right attitude, which leads to appropriate behavior.

Men's Ministries suggests a three-part disciplinary process for Spirit-empowered dads. The first part of the disciplinary process is to define your expectations. You cannot hold your child accountable for things they do not know they are supposed to do or not do. Often, dads do not clearly communicate to their children what they expect. The younger and more inexperienced the child, the clearer and more concrete the explanation of desired behavior needs to be. Keep it simple.

The second part of the disciplinary process is to reinforce desired behavior. Discipline is not just punishment; it is also the rewarding of good attitudes and behavior. Feel free to use creative methods to foster desired outcomes in your child's behavior. This is not "buying" good behavior but showing your child in a way they can understand why it's better to behave the preferred way.

The third part of the disciplinary process is to administer appropriate punishment for bad behavior. Children may behave inappropriately even after you have encouraged a desired behavior. Even though you may have warned them of the consequences, they still misbehave. Some form of corrective action or punishment is needed in these situations. Before acting at this point, it may be helpful to analyze the misbehavior that has occurred. Answering four questions may help clarify the problem and help to ascertain the best form of discipline or corrective action. These questions include



- Did the child know that their behavior was wrong?
- Are your expectations consistent with what the child is capable of doing?
- Is the misbehavior serious, or are you overreacting due to your own tiredness or lack of patience?
- Was this an accident or something that the child could not control?

Depending on the answers to these questions, a Spirit-empowered dad can know how to proceed in the discipline process. The effectiveness of discipline is going to depend largely upon the punishment or corrective action used. Before deciding on which form of discipline to use, consider the age, mental capacity, and uniqueness of the child.

Finally, the seriousness and frequency of the offense should be considered. A Spirit-empowered dad should ask himself

- Does this punishment fit the offense?
- Is it fair to punish the child for this?
- Are my emotions under control?
- Many times, a dad will need to be creative. Special circumstances may call for special treatment. The following are a few of the more commonly utilized forms of punishment/corrective action:
 - Time-out and/or isolation periods
 - Taking away privileges
 - Grounding
 - Assigning additional work or some form of activity that the child will view as burdensome, but which produces something of value.
 - Physical punishment, such as a single swat to the child's clothed bottom.

It is important that a dad **NEVER** strikes a child in anger or when emotions are not under control. In today's environment, any form of corporal punishment is often viewed as mistreatment of children. Regardless of your personal beliefs on this subject, the use of corporal punishment carries with it the risk of legal action being taken against you. If you should choose to do this, do so understanding the realities of our current world views.

Sometimes the best discipline decision is not to take corrective action but to allow the natural consequences of a child's decisions to play out. While you should never put your child in danger by inaction, sometimes a lesson is best learned by reaping the consequences of actions. Furthermore, it is possible to actually create patterns of misbehavior by stopping the natural consequences.

Finally, when administering corrective action, a Spirit-empowered dad needs to understand the power of words. Avoid shaming your child. Public humiliation can severely harm the psyche of a child. Be careful what you say and how you say it.





BULLSEYE: Zero In On Your Target

- Describe how your dad disciplined you as a child.

- Fill out the type of parent and characterization checklist at the end of this lesson. Ask your spouse, a close friend, or older child for their evaluation. Write personal goals to help you overcome the areas you checked.

- How can the lack of discipline in a child's life affect them?

- How can discipline help a child?

- Give an example of how grace and discipline work together.
- Why is grace difficult to give when a child misbehaves?
- What are some ways you can define expectations of behavior?
- What are some ways you can reward and reinforce desired behaviors?



NEXT STEP:

This section gives you suggestions for how to turn your new knowledge into an action step. Men's Ministries realizes that not all relationships are created equally. If these action steps seem too difficult, adjust your next step so it will fit into your relationship with your child.

- **Courage:** Write your expectations for your children. Make sure you discuss these expectations with them and ask for their feedback. Make any necessary adjustments needed to your expectations.

- **Strength:** For the next 120 days, reinforce your children's good behavior in their love language, at least once a day. What did you discover about your children?

- **Endurance:** Take your older child or teenager to their favorite restaurant and discuss appropriate actions you will take when they display bad behavior. What did you glean from this discussion?



Parent Type and Characterization Checklist

Check the parent types that most characterize your parenting style. Ask your spouse, a close friend, or older child for their evaluation. Write some practical goals to help you overcome these areas.

1. **Authoritarian** (control without guidance)

- _____ “You will do what I said or else” motivation for desired behavior
_____ No moral reason given behind behavior.

Result: Child conforms to virtuous acts out of fear or reproof

2. **Permissive** (guidance without sufficient controls)

- _____ No restrictions, child explores environment unrestrained
_____ No boundaries, child is allowed to do what they want

Result: Child is addicted to the provider of their whims, no self-discipline

3. **Child – Centered**

- _____ Child is the priority over God
_____ Child is a friend, equal peer, and tells parent what to do
_____ Child is put on stage to act out and show off to others

Result: Child is addicted to being the center and equal authority in family

4. **Overindulgent/Excuse**

- _____ makes excuses for child’s sinful behavior
_____ makes general excuses for child’s shyness, not talking, etc
_____ makes manipulative excuses (defends and redefines behavior)

Result: Child is addicted to protector of their actions

5. **Domineering/Manipulating**

- _____ Conditional love used to manipulate the child
_____ Excessive demands placed on the child to meet the parent’s expectation

Result: Wants to meet all expectations for fear of rejection



6. **Manipulating**

_____ Uses guilt statements (“You should have done better”)

_____ Uses conditional guilt statements (“I would like you if ...”)

Result: Prohibitive conscience controlled by false guilt and insecurity

7. **Martyr**

_____ Works off guilt of how much the parent has sacrificed

Result: Dad makes child feel guilty

8. **Threatening/Repeating**

_____ Coaxes, threatens, bargains, pretends to punish with little or no action taken

Result: Child is trained in delayed disobedience

9. **Bribing**

_____ Child’s outward behavior manipulated through bribes, and makes deals for good behavior

Result: No inward motivation to do right; dependency on bribes

10. **Overprotective** (shows compassion at the expense of tolerating evil)

_____ Protects child from natural consequences and reality

_____ Child is an over-sheltered and manipulated environment void of consequences and conflict

Result: child lives in unreality with society and consequences

