

Lesson 10

The Discipline of Children

Teaching and Molding Your Kids

Before you begin:

Read the Following Passages:

- Proverbs 4:23
- Hebrews 4.14-16
- 1 Peter 5.7
- Luke 23.34
- Hebrews 12.11
- Proverbs 22.15
- Proverbs 29.15
- Matthew 18.3
- Ephesians 6.4

Someone once said, *on the front side of life, every boy and girl is in a fragile state of flux.* And that is so true. The role parents play is so vital. It is essential that we learn how to be there for our children in the ways they really need us. The tragedy of parental neglect is real. But also, the handling of our kids with rough treatment is equally tragic. The insensitivity of some parents has led to their children being scarred for life.

Viewpoints on parental discipline can be very strong. They often stem from our personal experiences. Some may have faced physical harm or situations bordering on abuse, while others might never have experienced physical discipline. For instance, I am the only child brought up by devout Christian parents who never mistreated me. This undoubtedly shapes my views on the topic. Many might have been raised in a strictly religious setting where rules were rigid, but the broader message of the gospel was not integrated into all facets of upbringing.

Our reactions are deeply influenced by our backgrounds. As everyone's experiences differ, finding a universally "balanced" approach to the topic is challenging. These varying viewpoints mean that people might prioritize different facets of parental discipline. Our pasts play a significant role in shaping our beliefs and determining what we consider to be the prevailing missteps in our

individual contexts.

So, how can we learn to be more understanding and patient as parents, while still disciplining them (training them) to become who they need to be?

Give Your Children the Freedom to be Vulnerable, Just Like God Does for You

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens—Jesus the Son of God—let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need, Hebrews 4.14-16.

Every soul yearns for a safe haven—a place where burdens can be laid bare, feelings expressed, and healing embarked upon. For adults, approaching the cross often becomes this sanctuary. There is a tangible space there for the weight of heavy hearts and the myriad emotions that accompany our life's journey.

One of the most profound aspects of the cross is that it offers no room for condescension. When we come before it, we aren't met with an abrasive lecture meant to straighten out perceived flaws in our thinking. Neither do we hear a mocking tone for our insecurities. Instead, God meets us with grace, unbounded and indiscriminating. He doesn't "card" those who come searching, as though some are deserving and others are not.

God's throne room is an epitome of a safe haven. When we approach Him with a transparent heart, there are no pretenses or masks to maintain. Imagine Jesus, standing beside us, making us feel at ease even in our most raw and vulnerable state. He sees beyond the blemishes we often hide from the world. For in His presence, there is no sin too heinous, no doubt too overwhelming, and no heart too shattered for His grace to mend. This comforting path towards God is one we all should embrace.

I think this serves as a template for how we should cultivate our relationships, especially as parents. Our children, filled with innocence and vulnerability, should find in us a reflection of the grace they would find at the cross. It's vital to provide them with an environment where they can freely express their vulnerabilities without fear of judgment.

We often assure our kids, "You can talk to me about anything." But do we truly embody an environment conducive to such conversations? Sometimes, the very reason children withhold their sentiments is due to an anticipated reaction—perhaps a lecture, a sharp rebuke, or tragically, in some families, even abuse.

We need to remember that our children often grapple with vast mood swings, intense imaginations, and deeply felt fears. They need stability, love, and understanding. They need parents who neither dismiss their feelings nor amplify them but address them with a balanced, gentle understanding.

For instance, when your child comes home with tales of a budding first love, it's easy for us, through the lens of experience, to dismiss it as fleeting “puppy love.” Or when an honor student receives a less-than-stellar grade, we might minimize their concerns, believing that one poor grade won't define their academic journey. Similarly, if they express feeling isolated at a new school, we might hastily conclude they are overreacting.

But herein lies our responsibility as caregivers. While our perspectives are honed by adult experiences, our role isn't to overlay our understanding onto theirs but to empathize, to see the world through their fresh eyes, and to guide with tender wisdom.

Grace calls us to mirror the love and understanding we receive when we approach the cross. Just as Jesus welcomes us with open arms, devoid of judgment and filled with grace, let us create a nurturing space where our children can grow, learn, and thrive. In doing so, we not only draw them closer to us but also pave their way towards the everlasting love of God.

Remember the Way God Treats You and Reflect That in How You Deal with Your Children

...casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you, 1 Peter 5.7.

This scripture is profound, but amazingly simple. It doesn't say 'some' anxieties or 'legitimate' worries; it beckons us to cast them ALL onto Him. God's grace isn't selective, and His compassion isn't conditional. He invites us to step closer, to share every fear, every doubt, every joy, and every sorrow. With arms wide open, He wishes to wrap us in His love, a love that doesn't judge or belittle but embraces and uplifts.

Despite our often limited perspective, God listens patiently. Even when we come to Him with trivial concerns or matters that may not resonate with the grandeur of eternity, He doesn't shun or ignore. Why? Because His grace delights in granting us solace and blessings, even those we might think we don't deserve.

Take a moment to consider Luke 23, the poignant scene of the crucifixion. Amidst the sheer weight of humanity's sin, Jesus could have been justifiably self-absorbed. Yet, even while nailed to the cross, He demonstrated profound grace. *Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing*, Luke 23.34. The Pharisees, soldiers, and onlookers, all unknowingly trapped in their own limitations, sins, and insecurities, couldn't fathom the depth of the love and forgiveness being offered to them. Jesus, seeing beyond their immediate actions, offered grace, understanding, and forgiveness. They were given what they didn't even realize they needed.

As parents, we ought to exude this kind of grace. As our children are navigating the pathway of growing up, they look to us for guidance, understanding, and a safe harbor. Their concerns might sometimes seem minor from our adult perspective, but to them, these matters are monumental. Dismissing their worries or treating them with condescension because we're preoccupied with our own stresses not only distances our children but may also push them towards seeking solace

elsewhere.

They can often allow their imaginations to run wild and let their minds wander into territories unknown. They may fret about scenarios that seem improbable to us, like fearing a parental divorce simply because a friend's parents went through it or internalizing blame for changes in family circumstances. As caregivers, our response to these anxieties matters immensely.

Parenting with the spirit of 1 Peter 5:7 means creating an environment where our children feel safe to bring ALL their concerns to us. It's about recognizing the depth of their emotions, guiding them with love rather than lectures, providing a strategy instead of dismissals, and understanding their hearts instead of remaining oblivious.

But, Bad Behavior Must Not be Excused

Please do not mistake the previous discussions on grace for a free pass. We must never turn a blind eye to misbehavior or grant unrestricted freedom. It's not about coddling our children or perpetually sheltering them from the consequences of their actions.

Children need guidance, discipline, and at times, a firm hand. We must remember that we are their parents first—a guiding force and a source of wisdom. As a parent, you are not a friend or mere companion.

Bad Choices Bring Consequences

Sin or wrong actions cannot be overlooked, especially during the formative years. When children err, as is natural in their learning and growth, they must understand that their actions have consequences. This doesn't stem from a desire to punish but from a need to teach. Children have a strong, inherent sense of justice. When they make mistakes, an internal mechanism in them needs resolution—a sense that they've accounted for their actions and can then move on.

Our son has always had a fascination with weapons and guns. I bought him a BB gun around the age of 10 and trained him how to shoot. We set up some targets in our suburban backyard that was enclosed with a wooden privacy fence. He is a natural and from the beginning has been a good shot. I really praised him and promised that we would shoot together again soon. But I also warned him not to get the BB gun out unless he was with me. This was around the beginning of our 2-month transition from Indiana to a new church in Ohio. For most of that time I lived in our new home 150 miles away, while the family stayed back in Indiana as the kids finished up the school year. One Saturday morning several weeks later, Zack decided to set up the shooting-range, and he used a couple of Sonic cups as targets on the patio table. What he didn't think about was the direction he was aiming... which was straight toward the patio door. All it took was one shot... which went straight through the Sonic cup... to shatter the patio door glass. I, unaware of what had happened, called my wife about the time she discovered the problem. Before she could answer the phone, I enthusiastically said, "Hey! What's going on over there?" To which all I heard was silence for a few seconds then in a voice I've never heard her use say, "Get away from me.... Now." There were a few more seconds of silence before she collected herself enough to inform

me of what had just gone down.

As parents, we were immediately forced into a situation where we had to choose how to respond. We knew what happened was an accident, but we had to ensure our son understood the weight of his actions. To downplay, laugh at, or ignore what happened would have been a disservice to Zack. So, after the anger of the moment subsided, we worked together to find a suitable punishment for him that would impress upon him the need to follow my instructions and be more aware of gun safety.

Discipline is Tough Love

Hebrews 12:11 reminds us, "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Discipline is tough love. It communicates, "I love you too much to let this pattern of behavior continue."

Amid discussions about discipline, the topic of physical punishment inevitably arises. Some staunchly believe in its efficacy, referencing Proverbs 22:15, which says, "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him." However, Proverbs 29:15 also mentions both the rod and reproof, suggesting that there are various means to guide a child towards righteousness.

The choice of discipline should align with a child's temperament and personality. While physical punishment might work for some, it's ineffective for others. And if it's chosen as a method, it should never be administered in the heat of anger. Anger clouds judgment and can turn discipline into punishment. Waiting, reflecting, and then addressing the situation ensures the child understands the reason behind the discipline.

Ultimately, the goal isn't to instill fear but to guide, to make children comprehend the consequences of their actions and help them grow into responsible, loving adults. Every method of discipline, when administered with love and thoughtfulness, can be a pathway to teaching essential life lessons. It's up to us, as parents—not friends—to find the balance and ensure our children are nurtured, guided, and loved every step of the way.

Principles of Discipline in Proverbs

A few years ago Paul and Catherine Wegner co-wrote a book with Kimberlee Herman called *Wise Parenting: Guidelines from the Book of Proverbs*.³⁸ In that book they included a chart³⁹ that outlines the levels of discipline in parenting from the book of Proverbs. They are:

- Level 1: Teach
- Level 2: Warn
- Level 3: Enforce

It should be our goal to spend as much time as possible in teaching mode (level 1), less time warning (level 2), and as little as possible in enforcement mode (level 3). As time progresses, there should be more teaching and less enforcing. The early years may involve a quick progression from level 1 to level 3 (from teaching to enforcing)... and getting to level three with regularity.

Some parents tend to warn and warn and warn but never get around to enforcement. You may hear them say, "Now Johnny, if you do that again, I'm going to _____." But then the punishment never comes. This is ineffective.

Level 1: Teach

Listen, my son, to your father's instruction, and don't reject your mother's teaching, for they will be a garland of favor on your head and pendants around your neck, Proverbs 1.8-9.

This involves taking the time to explain to your child what you expect as a parent. This happens all the time and is where parents fulfill the principles of Deuteronomy 6.6-9. In teaching a parent should:

- Talk about God and how following Him applies to all areas of life.
- Teach values by modeling for their children what they expect from their children.
- State rules to their children.
- Explain those rules.
- Encourage and affirm their children.
- Explain improper behavior in neutral contexts.
- Connect sin with its consequences so that children see sin's long-term effects

Level 2: Warn

Warning can save a person from danger: Wisdom will:

rescue you from the way of evil—from anyone who says perverse things,

It will rescue you from a forbidden woman, from a wayward woman with her flattering talk,

Proverbs 2.12, 16.

God treats us with patience and kindness, and similarly, we should show patience and kindness to our children. It's essential to seek God's guidance to determine when to give a warning rather than taking immediate action. When we caution our kids, we explicitly inform them of the consequences they'll face if they ignore our advice. These consequences can be immediate or long-term, including the repercussions they'll face if they violate our set rules.

Level 3: Enforce

Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life, Proverbs 4.23.

Insightful parents prioritize their children's inner values over mere outward compliance. As Proverbs 4:23 suggests, the heart's state influences all actions. We should aim for children who are genuine in their actions and intentions, rather than those who only appear obedient, resembling the Pharisees or the older brother in the prodigal son parable. External disobedience often reflects deeper internal issues. During these instances, parents need to use the wisdom provided by God to uphold their principles effectively.

Responding might include speaking firmly to our children, restricting certain privileges, or in some cases, considering physical discipline like spanking. The underlying message from Proverbs, particularly in sections referencing "the rod," emphasizes that short-term consequences can

prevent more severe repercussions later on.

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY	
PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLINE	BIBLICAL REFERENCES
Level 1: Teaching the Guidelines	
Principle 1: Teach Appropriate Behavior	Proverbs 1.8-9; 2.1-22; 3.1-35; 4.1-13; 6.20-26; 7.1-5; 8.1-36; 23.24-25
Principle 2: Inform of Improper Behavior	Proverbs 1.10-19; 4.14-27; 6.1-19; 7.6-21; 9.13-18; 22.24-25; 23.26-28
Principle 3: Explain the Negative Consequences of Disobedience	Proverbs 1.10-33; 5.1-23; 6.26-35; 7.22-27; 9.17-18; 10.1; 13.18; 14.14; 16.18, 26; 17.20; 18.13; 23.10-12; 24.17-20
Level 2: Reiterative the Guidelines	
Principle: Give Appropriate Warnings	Proverbs 1.7, 15, 19, 22, 28, 31-33; 2.11-19, 22; 3.7, 11; 4.2, 5-6, 14-19, 23-27; 5.3-16, 21-23; 6.1-5, 9-15, 25-35; 7.24-27; 8.33-36; 9.13-18; 10.1-24, 34; 26.17-19, 27; 31.2-9
Level 3: Enforcing the Guidelines	
Principle 1: A Reprimand with Non-Corporal Punishment	Proverbs 1.8; 3.12; 4.1-2, 10-27; 5.1-2; 6.1-5, 20-35; 7.1-5, 24-27; 23.22-23; 24.24-25; 25.12; 27.5-6; 28.23
Principle 2: A Reprimand with Non-Abusive Corporal Punishment	Proverbs 13.24; 19.18; 23.13-14; 29.15
BEYOND PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY	
Level 4: Government's Role in Discipline	
Principle: Continued Disobedience May Bring Severe Punishment	Proverbs 10.31; 20.30
This level of discipline falls outside of a parent's responsibility. Even in Israel certain forms of punishment were not administered by parents (see Deuteronomy 21.18-21).	

Some Important Take Aways:

1. Pray for your children.
2. Evangelize your children.
3. Use multiple levels of discipline.
4. Love your children, and tell them and show them that you love them.
5. Beware of two extremes: (a) not disciplining and (b) over-disciplining.
6. Fathers, take the lead in discipline.
7. Learn how to discipline each of your children most effectively.
8. Distinguish between family rules and the Bible.
9. Be humble about parental discipline; don't be proud and judgmental.
10. Persevere with a long-term view that trusts God's word.

Pray For

1. The wisdom and patience to reflect God's grace in your parenting, always leading with love and understanding.
2. Guidance of your heart to discipline with purpose and compassion, mirroring God's loving correction as you nurture your children.
3. To create safe havens for your children, spaces where they can express their vulnerabilities just as you can before God's throne, always drawing them closer to His everlasting love.

For Discussion

1. How do our personal childhood experiences shape our viewpoints on parental discipline, and how can we ensure a balanced approach despite our biases?
2. In what ways can parents create an environment that truly embodies the statement, "You can talk to me about anything," and fosters open communication?
3. Reflecting on Hebrews 4:14-16, how can parents provide their children with the same kind of vulnerability and grace that God offers us?
4. How can parents ensure that they don't dismiss or amplify their child's feelings but

address them with genuine understanding and empathy?

5. Given the example of the shattered patio door, how can parents distinguish between accidents and deliberate disobedience, and how should their responses differ?
6. How can parents effectively implement the principles of Hebrews 12:11 in their discipline, ensuring it comes from a place of love and guidance rather than punishment?
7. Considering the references to Proverbs, what are your views on corporal punishment and its place in modern parenting? Are there alternative disciplinary methods that can be just as effective?
8. In striving to be parents first—not friends—how can we ensure we provide the necessary discipline while still fostering a strong, trusting bond with our children?
9. How do the principles of discipline outlined in "Wise Parenting: Guidelines from the Book of Proverbs" align with or differ from modern parenting advice or techniques you've encountered?
10. Considering the emphasis on teaching and warning before enforcement, how can parents ensure they are not over-warning or under-enforcing, thus leading to the ineffective parenting described in the lesson?

³⁸ Naselli, Andrew David. "Training Children for Their Good." *The Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 3.2 (2013): 48-64.

³⁹ Wegner, Paul D., Wegner, Catherine, Herman, Kimberlee. *Wise Parenting: Guidelines from the Book of Proverbs*. (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 2009) 32.