

Parenting for Godly Children
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Today we are going to deal with the subject: Parenting for Godly Children. God has given us a number of resources that are very powerful and effective to bring about godliness in the lives of our children. We will look at discipline, instruction, modeling, training and prayer. But before we begin to examine these, I would like to say a few words by way of introduction about some ways of thinking about these resources that are not good, about some attitudes towards these resources that are not helpful.

The first unhelpful attitude is: "This is easy. If we simply follow these Biblical principles for our family we are guaranteed a marvelous marriage and godly children." We might also call this attitude the magic wand mentality. If we just wave this magic wand of using these Biblical resources of instruction and discipline to raise our children, then all problems will go away, and all our children will be Christians. If we just wave this magic wand of love for our spouse, then it is guaranteed that they will love us back. But what about Abraham, whose son Isaac followed the Lord, but whose son Ishmael rejected the Lord? What about Isaac, whose son Jacob followed the Lord, but whose son Esau rejected the Lord? This attitude overlooks the power of sin. Sin holds the unsaved in bondage. And sin in the hearts and lives of those in Christian homes can result in rebellious children and divorce.

A second attitude that is unhelpful and that grows out of the first attitude, is the "It's all your fault" attitude." It says: If your children are not following the Lord or you are divorced, it must be your fault. This view removes the blame from the spouse or child who is rebelling against God and blames the spouse or parent who is trying to follow God. Instead of being an encouragement to those who have been sinned against, this attitude discourages and judges them. People who have gone through these things are usually very aware of their sins and their failings. What they need is some very positive encouragement that we, the body of Christ, love them and care about them. Let us be sure that as we seek to encourage others to use these powerful Biblical resources for raising godly children and for living with our spouses in holiness – let us be sure that we really are encouraging them, not condemning them, not proudly and arrogantly and foolishly looking down our noses at others who are going through terrible struggles in their households.

A third unhelpful attitude is: "I don't fit in here. Everyone else at church has a godly spouse and godly children." New Christians will often have this attitude. Also, Christians who have gone through a divorce or had children rebel against them may feel this way. First of all, it is not true that everyone else has a godly family. We all have to struggle with sin in our own lives and the lives of those in our families. As sinners saved by God's grace, we all need the encouragement and wisdom of each other. And those who have gone through severe struggles often have greater wisdom to share as a result of their experiences. We as the body of Christ need to encourage everyone that the body of Christ is here to be a help and blessing to all.

Finally, a fourth unhelpful attitude is: "This is hopeless." Those who have experienced a rebellious teenager or lost their spouse through divorce will often swing to the opposite end of the spectrum and become depressed, thinking that there is no hope of having godly children and a godly spouse. Some may be thinking that they have blown it, that it is hopeless, and that their family can never be what God wants it to be. To you, I say, do not despair! Do not blame yourself for the sinful actions of others, but do ask God to help you obey him in all your actions.

And don't give up on God! Human sin abounds all around us, including in our Christian families, for everyone in our families is a sinner, but God can change hearts and lives. God is more powerful than all the terrible things that sin produces in the lives of people. God still loves you and is still working in your lives and the lives of your children to bring about his good and perfect will. God turned around the heart of Jacob, the deceiver, and caused him to depend on God. God turned around the heart of Paul, the

persecutor, and made him one of his greatest servants. God can still do miracles in the hearts and lives of your family members.

Having given these introductory thoughts, let us now consider the resources that God gives us for parenting for the goal of godly children.

The first of these is discipline. **Discipline** and especially the form of discipline known as spanking are frowned upon by our society. We are told that it does not work. Actually, it works very well when it is used properly and for the proper purposes. But discipline is often used in the wrong manner and for all the wrong reasons and then it does not work. Parents will often ignore all sorts of wrong and sinful acts by a child, until that child disturbs that parent's peace. Then the parent will lash out in anger and punish the child. This is not loving discipline that seeks to train the child to be more godly. What does this kind of discipline say to the child? It says that godly behavior is not important to their parent. All that is important to the parent is that they not be disturbed.

To be effective, discipline must be consistent, persistent and insistent. If you punish one offence and let the next one go, your child will soon learn that there is a 50-50 chance that he will not be disciplined, and he will be willing to take the risk.

While discipline is a powerful tool for godliness, it is often treated as the only tool. Parents rely on discipline alone and fail to give biblical instruction and training. Discipline cannot produce godly children by itself. Its purpose is to get the child back on the path of listening and responding in obedience to the Word of God and the godly instruction of the parent. It is very effective at doing that. But it is not sufficient to bring about godliness in children all by itself.

The goal of discipline for very young children is to bring them under the control of the parents. Only then can you effectively instruct and train them. You cannot teach a child who is out of control. Your first goal is, by age 5 or as soon as possible, to get them to obey you immediately, without arguing, complaining or whining. If you allow them to argue, complain and whine about being disciplined, then they are not obeying you. You must teach them that they are to obey immediately, and then discipline them the first time and every time they disobey your instructions. It is very helpful to explain to your children ahead of time what the discipline will be for different offenses that are committed frequently. Not all offenses are worthy of a spanking, but arguing, complaining and whining about the discipline are worthy of additional swats with the paddle.

Getting children to obey immediately without arguing, complaining or whining will be a struggle that will require much discipline when you first decide to be consistent. You may have to spank them repeatedly that day and for several days. But the rewards of getting them to obey will be that the need for discipline will greatly decrease, and the harmony and peace in the home will greatly increase.

A word or two on spanking children. Spanking should sting; it should hurt. Spanking should make the child not want to get spanked again. If your spanking does not, then it only hardens the heart of your child against responding in submission. A few sharp swats on the rear end with a paddle with the pants down should be adequate to make the small child not want to get spanked again.

Spanking is a very effective form of discipline up until about the age of 10. After that time, other forms of discipline will be needed. During these early years the amount of discipline should be declining and the amount of instruction and training should be increasing.

One of the common errors that parents make with very young children is to talk too much to children that are in need of discipline. Instruction given to a young child that is in rebellion is wasted breath.

Discipline them and get them under control. Once they are repentant and under control, then your instruction will be of value. And one of the common errors that parents make with older children is to talk too little. Talk with your older child all the time about the Lord and his commandments and his will for their lives. They are old enough to take in great amounts of instruction about the things of God. Deut. 6:6-7 says: *"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your*

children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” In other words, look for ways to talk about God’s will in every event of life.

But remember that discipline is not an end in its self. You can’t discipline your children for all their sinful acts for the next 70 years of their lives. Discipline is simply a means to an end. Once you have them under control, you have about 15 years to instruct and teach them in God’s values, so that, when they leave the home, their Christian values will be rooted in their heart, and they will act in righteousness, not out of a fear of punishment, but out of a love for God and a desire to please him.

Instruction is the next tool that we can pull out of our toolbox and use for the raising of godly children. The book of Proverbs is an example of a father using this very tool. Earlier we read Proverbs 3 and you saw the words of a father, namely Solomon, to his son.

Solomon encouraged his son to see the goodness of God. Verses 11-12 say: *“My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.”*

Solomon encouraged his son to see that God blesses those who live for him. Verse 1-2 say: *“My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity.”*

Solomon encouraged his son to see that the way of sin is hard and brings God’s judgment. Verses 31-35 say: *“Do not envy a violent man or choose any of his ways, for the LORD detests a perverse man but takes the upright into his confidence. The LORD’s curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous. He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble. The wise inherit honor, but fools he holds up to shame.”*

And Solomon gave his son very practical advice for living in a godly manner in the details of each day’s life. Verses 21-30 say: *“ 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. Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, “Come back later; I’ll give it tomorrow”-- when you now have it with you. Do not plot harm against your neighbor, who lives trustfully near you. Do not accuse a man for no reason-- when he has done you no harm.”*

Fathers and mothers, the book of Proverbs gives us divine inspired wisdom to teach to our sons and daughters. It is vitally important that parents see the importance of taking the time to teach the Word of God to their children.

But we must not stop with merely reading the Bible to them at bedtime or talking about it after supper. The book of Proverbs gives us an example of how we should be applying the teachings of Scripture to the issues that our children face each day. How will you apply the Word of God when your children come to you with these and other requests? Father, a friend at school invited me to a party at his house. I don’t think they will have any drugs or alcohol there. Can I go? Mother, all the girls at school are wearing bikinis to the pool party, why can’t I? Father, school isn’t doing anything for me. I plan to drop out and get married now. Mother, a boy at school asked me to go on a date with him. I’m 15 and he’s 16. He’s going to take me out for a drive. There will be another couple along. Can I go? Even better, what do you need to teach them now to prepare them for the issues they will face?

The next resource for parenting for godly children is **modeling**, that is, being a godly example for them. You have heard it said: “Do as I say, not as I do.” Such a statement is worthless. Our children we do as we do, not as we say. If we are to influence our children to be godly, then our children must see us becoming more and more godly. They must see us thinking in godly ways, speaking in godly ways, and acting in godly ways.

This does not mean that we must be perfect. No believer is perfect. Our sins and failures give us the opportunity to model something else that is very important for them to learn, repentance. They need to see us admit when we have sinned, and they need to see us ask for forgiveness. This is how they will learn to repent and ask for forgiveness. But if they see that we do not deal with our sins and that we never ask anyone to forgive us for what we have done wrong, they are likely to never admit sin and to never ask for forgiveness either.

The most important thing that we must model is love. Parents often think that they can create godly children by simply correcting everything the children do wrong. They give little love and no encouragement. Instead, what they create is bitter children who can't wait to leave home and do not care at all about God. You can do many things wrong in your parenting and recover from it, but a lack of love in your words and actions is extremely damaging. Your children need to see and feel your love for them in such an overwhelming way that it binds them to you with a love for you.

In I Cor. 4:16, the Apostle Paul said to the Corinthian believers: “. . . *I urge you to imitate me.*” Father and mother, can you say that to your children? Your children will be influenced by your example, whether you want them to or not. We must make it our goal to set a godly example for our children.

The fourth resource or tool for parenting for godly children is **training**. Children need more than instruction in righteousness. They need more than an example of righteousness. They need hands on practice in righteousness. Parents often give chores to children without showing them how to do the chore. We tend to assume that our children know how to clean up their room, or empty the trash or unload the dishwasher and put the dishes away. But experience shows us that when we give a new chore, we need to take the time to help them learn how to do it. Don't do it for them, but talk them through it to be sure they understand how to do it. You might even have to talk a young child through a chore more than one time, but then they know how to do it, and should be expected to do their chore.

The same holds true for learning godly behavior. We as parents need to help our children read their Bible to us, help them pray to God with us, help them practice speaking kindly to their brothers and sisters, help them ask for forgiveness, help them to do something kind for another person in the family. Our children often receive lots of instruction on what they should do, but very little practice in doing it.

When one child insults another child, that is a good time to require them to say five nice things to the other child. Teach your children to acknowledge each request you make of them by looking at you and saying “Yes father” or “Yes mother,” and then and immediately doing it. And when a child says “Yes, father” with a scowl on their face, take them and stand them in front of a mirror and have them say “Yes, father” over and over until they can do it with a smile on their face. When your child treats another child badly, have them clean that child's room or do something else to serve that other child. Train your children to act in a godly manner. Have them practice godly behavior!

And the final resource that I will talk about today is **prayer**. All parenting, even godly parenting, has to face and deal with the sinful attitudes in the hearts of children. We must remember that we cannot change the heart. Only God can do that. Therefore, prayer is not simply a last resort when we run into problems. Prayer must be first, middle and always present in our parenting. We need to ask God to bless our efforts to raise godly children; we need to pray with our child when we discipline them; we need to pray for God to make our instruction effective when we teach the Word of God; we need to pray for wisdom on how to apply God's Word to the everyday situations that our children face; we need to pray for God to help us be a godly model for our children; we need to pray for wisdom in how to train our children to act in godly manners; we need to pray, pray, pray. Prayer is not a last resort, but a first, second, third, fourth, and all time resort. We must cry out to God to work in our hearts and in the hearts of our children, that both we and they may be filled with a holy burning to live for the glory of God. And we can know that God does hear and answer prayer. In John 14:13 Jesus says: “*And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.*” Jesus does not promise to answer all requests. But he does promise to answer all prayers that will bring glory to the name of God. With such a

wonderful promise, let us be diligent in parenting our children and be much in prayer for their salvation and their growth in godliness.

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