Grace Evangelical Free Church

Issues & Answers: Raising Godly Children

Child rearing is a great challenge, but also a great privilege: “**God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it**’” (**Genesis 1:28**).

• Children are the natural result of marriage, which God blesses.

• In the very beginning, in the Garden of Eden, God created marriage, blessed it, and encouraged the bearing and raising of children. The role of the parent is a sacred trust from God.

**Psalm 127:3-5a**: “**Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. [4] Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one’s youth. [5a] Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.**”

• Regard your children for what they are — that is, God-given blessings!

• “...**a heritage**...**reward**...**blessed is the man**” —proving to be a blessing and a continual source of joy.

1. **TRAIN your children —**

**Proverbs 20:11**: “**Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right.**”

• A child’s conduct is important to God and should, therefore, be of great importance to parents.

• “**A child is known by his actions...**” — A child’s conduct is obvious to onlookers. It is actually a part of your total testimony.

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

• This is the Bible’s promise, period. Treasure this conviction, apply it, hold onto it.

• Training a child involves repetition, reinforcement, encouragement (repeat);

• The training your child most needs is in two areas: (1) in character, and (2) in the things of the Lord.

• It has been said that until approximately age 8 (and that will vary with the child), the training of children is comprised mostly of input from us. After that, children can begin increasingly to make sound judgments from that godly input you have been giving them over their earlier years.

**Deuteronomy 6:6-7**: “**These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. [7] 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.**”

• The home is the primary training environment. The church is only a helper to you in the accomplishing of your primary responsibility.

• Parents are entrusted with taking our children from 0% to 100% responsibility for their lives.

• Home is the ideal place for children to:

* learn to get along with others
* learn work skills, social skills, manners, good attitudes.
* Home is where parents model being a Christian and, in turn, present to their children the knowledge and practical opportunities to develop that in their own lives.
* One thing Christian parents must not do, and that is to believe the ancient saying that it "takes a village" to raise a child. Absolutely not! The "village" around you — often unsaved neighbors, secular government-run schools, ungodly media, and the like — cannot be allowed to have significant influence on your children. Otherwise, they will steadily erode the biblical values and truths that Christian parents are building into their children. It is not wise, or even possible, to isolate your children totally from the outside world. But faithfully fulfill your responsibility as parents to ground them in biblical convictions and character formation. Then they will be increasingly ready to face the carnality of our secular cultures and will be a positive influence rather than becoming victims of worldly value systems.

**Ephesians 6:4**: “**Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.**”

• Parents — including Dads! — it is your responsibility to ensure that your children know and serve the Lord.

• Bible reading, prayer at meals, at bedtimes, for needs ... relating the Lord to their everyday lives and activities.

• Be part of a good, Bible-believing, worshiping church, and teach your children to love being “in church”.

• Spend devotional time with them personally. Pray with them, read the Bible with them. Discuss how the Bible applies to them and their (numerous) circumstances.

• Let your home be filled with Christian music. Sing to the Lord with your children. Teach them worship songs.

• Don’t “exasperate” your children. Home is not a Marine boot camp! Rigid, harsh parenting will often lead to rebellion rather than the desired results.

• But do present to them, day after day, in a positive and encouraging way, the “training and instruction of the Lord”.

1. Character training — Address conduct and attitudes that are inappropriate, and instruct them in God’s approach to each character issue. You don’t necessarily need set times of character teaching. It works just fine to seize upon “learning moments” in the midst of their everyday lives.
2. Bible training! You must...must...must read the Bible to your children ... and discuss it with them.
3. **LOVE your children —**

**Titus 2:3-4**: “**Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. [4] Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children...**”

* Children thrive on love.

• Tell your children and show them often that you love them.

• Be sure to affirm them. Praise them.

• Show physical affection. Hug your children, hold them. Lack of wholesome touches and hugs in the home drives some to seek it elsewhere. Unfortunately they too often found it in illicit sexual encounters.

• “Give” yourself to your children, even as “...**Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her**” (**Ephesians 5:25**). Love is at its best when it is giving.

• Give your children portions of your time. Give them your full attention when they talk to you.

• Be involved in their lives and interests ... listen to them ... spend time with them ... include them in housework (you can’t always play with them).

• But love your spouse first and foremost! Dads, the best thing you can do for your kids is to love their Mom.

1. **DISCIPLINE your children —**

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

• Discipline them diligently, consistently, and early in life.

• You say, “I love them too much to discipline them.” No (!) you don’t. The Bible says that you “hate” them if you neglect the discipline they need (**Proverbs 13:24**)

• Start early.

• You’re preparing them, in obedience to **Titus 2:11-12**, to be able to say “no” to sinful inclinations — “...**the grace of God** ... [12] **teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions**...”

• Notice that love and discipline go hand in hand — “...**he who loves him is careful to discipline him**.”

• Remember our threefold key: love, training, and discipline. All three are needed, in a good balance.

**Proverbs 22:15**: “**Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of corection will drive it far from him.**”

Critical to our understanding which leads to our action is to grasp two distinct Hebrew usages: **the** rod and **a** rod. The difference may seem slight, but in fact the preceding article—whether “the” or “a”—determines meaning. “**The”** rod is always metaphorical, as in **Lamentations 3:1**—“**I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.**” On the other hand, “**a”** rod is always with reference to a concrete object—a straight stick that might have been used as a tool of measurement (**1Sa 17:7**, **Rev. 21:16**), a symbol of authority (**Is. 14:5**), or a staff used in herding sheep (**Lev. 27:32**). In every case, when the word rod is used with reference to the training or discipline of children, it is preceded by the article “the”, connoting that the usage is metaphorical. Used metaphorically, therefore, rod-like discipline (a) is consistent and true, (b) emanates from a legitimate authority, and (c) establishes boundaries and (d) compels a choice of action and/or change (no action and no change is also a ‘choice’). Further understanding of the metaphor can be had by noting that “the rod” is also used to refer to God’s righteousness, as in **Isaiah 11:4**, where The Lord is described as smiting the earth with “the rod of his mouth.” Rod-like child discipline, therefore, is righteous. It is in keeping with the nature of God’s discipline of us, his children both adult and child, and consistent with His Plan for us.

Nowhere in the whole of Scripture does God prescribe a specific form of discipline for children. He only emphasizes, time and time again, that discipline is to be effective, discipline must embody certain characteristics and emanate from a legitimate authority figure who is acting with righteousness. Therefore, the mere fact that a parent spanks does not mean his discipline has been “rod-like.” A spanking delivered impulsively, in anger, definitely fails to meet the standard. The angry, out-of-control parent is not acting righteously. His impulsive outburst is self-righteous. It communicates his anger, but it is unlikely to do anything but cause resentment on the part of his child. That sort of spanking is an example of what Paul was referring to when, in his letter to the Ephesians, he exhorted fathers to not exasperate their children. A parent exasperates his/her children whenever he behaves toward them in an exasperated fashion, which certainly fits with spankings that are delivered impulsively and out of anger.

These understandings should serve to free parents from a narrow approach to discipline such as might result from a literal interpretation of “**the rod of discipline**,” and enable them to match their discipline to the specific nature of any given misbehavior and the context in which it occurs. Is it not inconceivable that God wants parents to spank in response to every instance of misbehavior? How could God in his infinite wisdom and mercy demand spankings for misbehaviors as disparate as a child belligerently refusing to clean his room and a child simply forgetting to clean his room? Both require discipline, but the same response to both events would reflect neither mercy nor good sense, much less wisdom causing exasperation.

Understanding the difference between “a rod” and “the rod” also leads to the realization that discipline and punishment are not one and the same, that discipline is first and foremost leadership, not punishment-ship. Yes, punishment is part and parcel of discipline, but in the final analysis, it is but a relatively small part. In fact, parents who understand that effective leadership is conveyed primarily through authoritative speech (as in, “**the rod of his mouth**”)—speech that is clear, unequivocal, reflects steadfast commitment to a goal, and compels action consistent with that goal—will rarely have to punish their children.

• You can’t afford not to discipline your children. Do it in combination with much love and godly training ... and they will bring delight to your soul. There are additional methods of discipline as well, such as “timeouts”, removing privileges, etc.

Some thoughts about AGE LEVELS for discipline —

• BABIES —

• Teach them “no” with loving firmness (not physical). Some successful parents recommend starting this verbal training at about age 6 months.

• Don’t overly “baby proof” your home. The home is their training ground. Just remove cherished and dangerous items. Children must learn that there are “NOs” in this world.

• TODDLERS —

 • Lots of consistent training and appropriate discipline are generally needed.

• Self-test: Does my child obey me the first time I ask? If not, there is work to do.

• Do it right at this stage and it will be much easier later on. Training and discipline done now will most likely help you to not have difficult teens.

• Teach them boundaries, and give them much freedom within those boundaries. That teaches independence, but also self-control and respect for authority.

• PRESCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY —

• Continue the trio of training, love, and discipline.

• Work hard at this stage on developing right attitudes and good character.

• PRETEENS AND TEENS —

• Continue to use other forms of discipline (remove privileges, etc.).

SOME FINAL SUGGESTIONS —

• Public discipline? Deal with the transgression at home.

• Again, expect obedience the first time, every time, as God does.

• Don’t let children “play” one parent against the other.

• Don’t conflict openly with your spouse about discipline.

• Don’t provoke your children. Be fair and just.

• Don’t tempt them to lie — “Did you do that?!!” — when you already know that they did it!

• Don’t make idle threats, such as: “One more time and I...”

• Be consistent. A rule is a rule. Enforce it consistently.

• When you do discipline, make it count. Then pray together, look for repentance, then forgive and drop it.

• Don’t compare children openly — “Why don’t you act like...?”

• Don’t belittle them, because “**the glory of children are their fathers**” (**Proverbs 17:6**).

• Don’t nag. You shouldn’t have to nag a well-trained child.

• Don’t keep putting them off. Put down the paper, or close the laptop, and listen to them.

• Spend quality time with them. But don’t let it put your spouse into a secondary place of priority.

In sum, TRAIN them, LOVE them, and DISCIPLINE them as needed. You will have lifelong delight watching your children live out their lives as productive, godly adults.