

Salt & Light

Spring 2004

The Newsletter of the Social Concerns Ministry Team

You are the salt of the earth...
You are the light of the world...

Educating and informing the church body in light of biblical principles

Mt. 5:13-14

Editorial Note:

This issue of *Salt & Light* tackles the vital and challenging topic of disciplining children. It does so in two sections—the first considering why it is so important to discipline children and the second examining specific forms that such discipline can take.

Separate pieces in the first section consider the connections between discipline and spirituality, discipline and security, and discipline and love. The second section focuses first on the most controversial form of discipline, spanking, and then goes on to discuss a variety of other forms of discipline—both punishments and rewards.

In the postmodern era when standards of most sorts are increasingly under suspicion, a fresh consideration of the role of discipline in the formative years of life is especially timely and needed.

The Importance of Disciplining Children

The Discipline-Spirituality Connection

From: Joe White & Jim Weidmann, www.family.org

What does the way you discipline your child have to do with his or her spiritual growth?

Here are four answers:

1. The way you discipline can shape the way your child thinks and feels about God. As Dr. James Dobson wrote in *Raising Them Right: God has given us the assignment of representing Him during the formative years of parenting. That's why it is so critically important for us to acquaint our kids with God's two predominant natures: His unfathomable love and His justice. If we love our children but permit them to treat us disrespectfully and with disdain, we have distorted their understanding of the Father.*

On the other hand, if we are rigid disciplinarians who show no love, we have tipped the scales in the other direction....

Janna grew up under the harsh discipline of a perfectionist mom. "Even at six years of age, I was required to have nothing wrong with my appearance or surroundings," Janna recalls. "She constantly yelled at me, like you yell at a dog." By the time Janna was a teenager she was furious at God, "blaming Him for everything."

Contrast that with the experience of Courtney, whose father worked

hard to balance love and justice in his discipline. Today she declares, "I am so blessed to have my dad. He puts so much love into us. I can see Jesus shining through him."

2. A child who is allowed to defy parents probably will reject God's authority as well. Dr. Dobson says, "One of the characteristics of those who acquire power very early is a prevailing attitude of disrespect for authority. It extends to teachers, ministers, policemen, judges, and even to God Himself. Such an individual has never yielded to parental leadership at home. Why should he submit himself to anyone else?"

3. Kids without boundaries often fall into activities that distract them from following Jesus. Tim Smith, in his book *Life Skills for Girls*, told the story of Jenny, a high school freshman who responded to a gospel presentation at the end of a concert. Jenny became active in the church youth group—but not for long. She was allowed to go to two parties every weekend, where she drank at least three beers a night. She was also permitted to date Todd, a senior who introduced her to tequila and marijuana. Eventually, Jenny stopped going to the youth group, saying she wanted nothing to do with her "old, immature friends from church."

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The Discipline-Spirituality Connection

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4. The goal of discipline is to help kids develop self-discipline, a quality vital to discipleship. Without self-discipline, kids will find it hard to start or stick with quiet times, Bible memorization, or anything else. There's a reason these things are called "spiritual disciplines," after all. They take time and effort. They take saying no

to other pursuits.

Ed and Susan discovered the connection between discipline and self-discipline when their kids were in elementary school. "No Nintendo till your homework is done!" these parents found themselves saying frequently in the early grades. Then it was, "It's *your* responsibility to remind me to sign your agenda for

the teacher."

Slowly but surely, the kids learned to resist the lure of the Mario Bros. until they'd finished their assignments and to manage their time. Discipline became internalized, and persistence became a skill the kids could apply to prayer, Bible study, and service to others. †

The Security of Discipline

From: James Dobson, *The New Dare to Discipline*

During the early days of the progressive education movement, one enthusiastic theorist removed the chain-link fence surrounding the nursery school yard. He thought children would feel more freedom of movement without the visible barrier surrounding them. When the fence was removed, however, the boys and girls huddled near the center of the playground. Not only did they not wander away, they didn't even venture to the edge of the grounds.

There is security in defined limits. When the home atmosphere is as it should be, children live in utter safety. They never get in trouble unless they deliberately ask for it, and as long as they stay within the limits, there is happiness and freedom and acceptance. If this is what is meant by "democracy" in the home, then I favor it. If it means the absence of boundaries, or that children set their own boundaries in defiance of parents, then I'm unalterably opposed to it....

Some suggestions:

1. Define the boundaries before they are enforced.
2. When defiantly challenged, respond with confident decisiveness.
3. Distinguish between willful defiance and childish irresponsibility.
4. Reassure and teach after the confrontation is over.
5. Avoid impossible demands.
6. Let love be your guide. †

Loving Discipline

From: Kevin Leman, *Making Children Mind Without Losing Yours*

What I see and hear is that, in too many homes today, otherwise sophisticated and educated parents are still not sure they know the difference between discipline and punishment, between permissiveness and loving nurture. I believe that difference is clearly spelled out in a brief passage from the New Testament where the Apostle Paul writes:

Children, obey your parents; this is the right thing to do because God has placed them in authority over you. Honor your father and mother. This is the first of God's Ten Commandments that ends with a promise. And this is the promise: that if you honor your father and mother, yours will be a long life,

full of blessing. And now a word to you parents. Don't keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful. Rather, bring them up with the loving discipline the Lord himself approves, with suggestions and godly advice.

Ephesians 6:1-4 TLB

One of the astounding things that I see again and again today is that many children do not feel loved in their own homes. In a survey of twenty-two hundred teenagers from Christian homes across the United States, 79 percent claimed they felt a lack of love at home. This startling figure was reported by Craig Massey, personality and radio family counselor who conducted the survey. In

order for discipline to work, the first thing that must happen is that the child must feel genuinely loved.

Parents should give themselves to their children. Giving of yourself (not things) to your children is an essential ingredient for effective discipline. Many times parents apologetically ask me, "What do I have to offer my children?" I always respond, "You have yourself."

The simple truth is, children want us and our time. In summary, never forget that children expect adults to discipline them. If the discipline is loving, it will be geared toward instruction, teaching, guiding, and above all, holding a child accountable for his or her actions. †

Forms of Discipline for Children

To Spank or Not to Spank?

According to the wisdom of Proverbs, there is a place for physical discipline: "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him" (13:24). And "The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother" (29:15). In its reflection on the fact that God subjects people to physical and other afflictions, the New Testament echoes similar concerns: "The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son" (Hebrews 12:6).

Yet, even in the midst of such passages there is a warning: "Chasten your son while there is hope, and set not your heart on his destruction" (Proverbs 19:18). Physical discipline can be harmful if misapplied, so the counsel of two church leaders (who support a limited use of spanking in particular

situations) is important to keep in view. According to James Dobson in *The New Dare to Discipline*:

"No one who has a history of child abuse should risk getting carried away again. No one who secretly 'enjoys' the administration of corporal punishment should be the one to implement them. No one who feels himself or herself out of control should carry through with *any* physical response. And grandparents probably should not spank their grandkids *unless* the parents have given them permission to do so."

Pat Fabrizio (*Under Loving Command*) adds: "To be consistent is so important. What can be more frustrating to a child than to never know quite what to expect from us. It is our inconsistency as parents that provokes and discourages our children. One day we feel stern and say 'No' to something and the next

day we feel indifferent and preoccupied and in order to save ourselves the inconvenience will allow them to go ahead or overlook "little" disobediences. When we operate with the rod in this way, it becomes something else other than training. It is brute force to make the child cater to our moods. I believe this kind of bullying strengthens their resistance to authority. They are provoked to anger, become discouraged and rebel. 'Fathers, provoke not your children, lest they be discouraged.' (Colossians 3:21). We as parents must be obedient to follow through each time we speak.

But it takes diligence. This is why we cannot possibly do it in our own strength or on the strength of any motive other than obedience to God." †

Punishments and Rewards

From: DCFS, *Nurturing Parents*

There are many other forms that punishment can take. For example:

1. Loss of Privilege. A privilege is ... granted by the parent. Privileges can be watching TV, playing with a certain toy in the house, etc. If a child misuses the object or misuses the privilege, they lose it for a while. Take away a toy or a privilege only when the child misuses it (thrown, broken, etc.).

2. Being Grounded. When a child leaves the yard without permission, an appropriate punishment is being grounded to the yard or house. The child must know it wasn't appropriate to leave the yard. If the child does not understand the behavior was inappropriate, grounding will not work as a punishment. Again,

it's important for children to know what is expected of them.

3. Parental Disappointment. Parental disappointment is a simple statement which expresses the disappointment a parent has in a behavior the child has chosen to perform. The intent is to build some caring and an awareness in the child of the parent's disappointment. An example of the use of parental disappointment is: "Son, I want you to know how disappointed I am that you chose to hit your brother (or whatever the misdeed). I'm sure the next time you're upset, you won't hit your brother and you will tell him not to take your toys." If the behavior is recurring, a parent may follow this statement telling the

child he is either grounded or has to take a time-out.

4. Restitution. Restitution means that there is a "pay back" or logical consequence for a specific misbehavior. The goal of restitution is to make good of a wrong. If children choose to color on the walls, the pay back is to clean the wall. If stealing is the problem, the restitution is to pay back the stolen money.

5. Time-Out. Time-out is a temporary isolation of the child from others because they chose to act inappropriately. It is a technique that lets children know that when they choose to behave inappropriately, they have to be by themselves for a

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while sitting quietly. Time-out is not solitary confinement in some dark room.

It is not a threat of the loss of a parent's love or protection. Time-out is a temporary isolation of the child from others because they chose to act inappropriately.

Discipline involves far more than punishment. Rewards are essential. Examples include:

1. Praise. Praise is the single most powerful reward a child, or anyone can receive. Use Praise for Being (I love you; You're a great daughter) and Praise for Doing (What a great job washing the car; Good effort in buttoning your shirt) two or three times each day with each child. Don't forget—give yourself a pat on the back. You deserve it.

2. Nurturing Touch. There are three types of touch: hurting, scary

and nurturing. Each of us has a personal touch history which includes all three types of touch. Gentle hugs, back rubs, soft strokes of a child's back with gentle rocking are all nice, positive types of nurturing touch. Everyone wants recognition. Nurturing touch is a nice way to let children know you value them. Use nurturing touch with praise. Together they make a powerful combination.

3. Privileges. Privileges serve as excellent rewards for children. A privilege can be [an allowance or]

extra TV time, getting to stay up past curfew, getting a few extra stories read at night, or other behaviors your children enjoy. Privileges should never include basic needs the child has such as fun times as a family, security, love or trust.

4. Objects. Some parents like to reward their children with various objects in addition to praise and touch. Objects can include almost anything that ranges from stickers to assorted toys. Find out what your child likes and occasionally reward him or her with an object. †

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