

RAISING CHRISTIAN CHILDREN

A **MANNAHOUSE** RESOURCE



INTRODUCTION

A child is a gift of God, a little package of human potential placed in the hands of parents to be nurtured and shaped according to the plan and purpose of God. **A child raised in an atmosphere of love, under biblical training and discipline, will grow up to be a responsible and productive adult, bringing great joy to the diligent parents.** On the other hand, the scriptures warn that “a child left to himself brings shame to his mother” (Prov. 29:15).

A pastor rightly made the observation, “There are no problem children, only problem parents.” The happiness, stability, and destiny of a child’s life rests in the philosophy employed in his upbringing. Too many parents have failed in this regard, resorting to liberal and humanistic approaches to raising their children. The kids are the losers, later suffering the manifold consequences of sin and selfishness.

The Christian parent has access to the keys for successful parenting in the scriptures. In this booklet we will examine the biblical principles for raising Christian children.

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THE BLESSING OF CHILDREN

“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is His reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them” (Ps. 127:3-5).

Children are a blessing from God meant to bring joy, reward, and fulfillment to the parents. In our offspring, we are able to be co-creative with God, reproducing life that, in essence, is a combination of ourself and our mate. Though children require constant care and attention, their presence sets in motion that responsible, self-sacrificing love that is depictive of the nature of God. This kind of love is to be at the heart of the family and, likewise, becomes the basis of a society.

Christian parents must be responsible to the purposes of God with their children. Although we call them “ours”, they actually belong to God. They have been entrusted to our care for a short season, but their nurturing and training is to prepare them for eternity.

God's great concern for children is seen in a number of places in the Bible. Jesus challenged His disciples' intolerant attitude toward children by saying, "*Let the little children come to Me . . . for of such is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 19:14). Previous to this, He had revealed that children have angels that stand in the presence of God constantly watching over them.

All human life is created in the image of God (Gen. 1 :26). The prime responsibility of parenting is to help develop and shape the child into this image. This is a tremendous responsibility considering the enemies that work against us (i.e., the world, the flesh, and the devil). Our faith, though, rests in the divine guidelines given to us in the Word of God, along with the encouragement that "*He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*" (1 Jn. 4:4).

Children who are raised in the "*training and admonition of the Lord*" (Eph. 6:4) will be a source of blessing to their parents. **The time and energy spent laying a foundation of faith and righteousness in their lives will later pay large dividends as they develop into responsible men and women of God.**

GOD'S PATTERN FOR CHILD REARING

God's pattern for child rearing can be summarized under three basic commands: 1.) love, 2.) discipline, and 3.) teach. These three areas of parental responsibility are patterned after God's own method of fatherhood. God is the perfect father, employing the right blend of these three areas in fashioning His children into His likeness.

In the following pages of this booklet we will examine these three essential areas of parenting. God's approach to child rearing is best understood by appreciating the interaction between the love of God and the nature of man.

GOD'S PATTERN FOR CHILD REARING

The philosophy of humanism, with its various schools of psychology, has greatly erred in assuming the inherent goodness of man. The Bible rightly defines man as a sinner. It is our nature to sin. Because of his transgression, Adam received a fallen nature which he passed on to the entire human race (Rom. 5:12). David understood this and declared, "*I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me*" (Ps. 51:5).

The major characteristics of the Adamic nature are sin, selfishness, independence, and rebellion. Unless given proper love, training, and discipline, a child will develop and mature with these qualities dominating his or her life.

THE LOVE OF GOD

The Bible teaches that “*God is love*” (1 Jn. 4:8). His love is characterized by perfect affection and benevolence. He wills the best for all of His creation and acts accordingly. His methods of love, training, and discipline in child rearing emerge from His perfect love and wisdom relating to the fallen nature of man.

Our response to this should be, “*Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?*” (Heb. 12:9). As parents, we must readily submit to God’s method of raising our children so that they too might “*live*” and bring glory to God. **We must diligently instruct, train, and discipline our offspring, bringing them into subjection to the ways and principles of God.**

INDIVIDUALITY

Just as every snowflake has a different structure and design, so God has created every person as a unique individual. **Every child has his or her own God-given temperament and personality.** These inherent traits give a child his own disposition and nature.

A child's temperament is that combination of character traits, tendencies, gifts, and abilities that are unique to him. A child can be extrovert or introvert, active or passive, strong-willed or flexible, mathematically inclined or more artistic. These are just some of the general differences.

Though God's principles for child rearing are consistent and universally applicable, parents must tailor their approach to their child's individuality. There must be no compromise with proper training and discipline, but there must also be a consideration of the child's temperament and personality. God shapes us individually into unique expressions of Himself. Parents have the same assignment with their children.

I. TEACH YOUR CHILDREN

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

God has an intended direction in which each child should go. First, each individual is to pursue a way of life reflecting righteousness and faith (I Tim. 6:4). Secondly, every person has a unique destiny in life, a place of service and contribution designed by God for him.

Parents have the primary responsibility to see that their children receive the instruction and training that will prepare them to fulfill these two goals.

The two most important methods of teaching children are instruction and example. A child must be instructed in proper behavior, morals, work habits, attitudes, respect for rules, etc. Parents must assume a teacher’s role through the duration of a child’s formative life.

A picture is worth a thousand words. Parents must set a good example in their own lives of what they want to impart to their kids. On the following pages we will present some of the necessary areas to include in teaching your children.

1. MANNERS, MORALS, ATTITUDES

Teaching manners, morals, and right attitudes should begin at a very early age. Small children should be taught to wash their hands before meals, how to behave at the table, and how to say “Thank you”. They should be taught to share their toys, and how to respectfully relate to adults.

Parents should use every opportunity to structure and teach right attitudes. Children should be taught to control their anger and fits of emotion. Learning self-control at an early age will spare them a lot of trouble later on. They should also be taught to forgive those who hurt them, however petty the offense may seem to us.

Children must be taught truthfulness, morals, and modesty. Television programs must be carefully screened by parents for their moral content. We should observe the impact of friends and playmates upon them and teach them to stand upon their own principles. They should be taught modesty of dress and behavior.

2. RESPECT FOR RULES

By training children to respect rules, we indirectly teach them respect for authority and order. God would have all things be done “*decently and in order*” (I Cor. 14:40). Rules set necessary boundaries for children and create a sense of order and structure in their lives. They help them to accommodate themselves to the laws of society and the commandments of God.

There are essentially two dangers involved with rules. One is failing to establish firmly set rules. The other is legalistically establishing and enforcing too many petty rules and regulations.

Children are, by nature: undisciplined and feeling-orientated. Their nature drives them to resist order and to test the strength of those rules that have been established. **Parents must be ready to punish infractions against established rules. However, we should avoid giving our homes the atmosphere of a military camp.** An older Christian lady once wisely made the observation, “It’s hard to put a big head on those little shoulders”, referring to the need for kids to be allowed to be kids.

3. BUILDING WORK HABITS

One of the most loving things parents can do for their children is to teach them how to work. We are exhorted in Proverbs 6:6 to “Go to the ant . . . Consider her ways and be wise.” Why? Because the ant knows how to work and prepare for the future. A child’s future success depends upon the development of good work habits at an early age.

Even young children should be required to participate in household chores such as emptying wastebaskets or helping mom set the table. As they grow, they can clean the living room or help dad wash the car.

Parents should take time to teach them how to do a job correctly, patiently remembering that you didn’t do it right the first time either. Children should be required to see a job through to the end.

Building the habit of productivity through schoolwork, household chores, odd jobs, music lessons, etc. will harness a child’s potential and insure a responsible adulthood.

4. BUILDING SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Children can learn good manners, morals, attitudes, proper respect for rules, and good work habits and still be failures if they do not grow up to serve God. **Our first priority must be to bring up our children “in the training and admonition of the Lord”** (Eph. 6:4).

Our kids must be trained in spiritual disciplines: reading the Bible, prayer, worship, and church attendance. In this case, our example is not enough. They must be guided and trained. Especially with a child, the spirit may be willing, *“but the flesh is weak”* (Matt. 26:41).

Family devotions are important in providing set times for prayer, worship, and Bible study .. Our homes, though, should be saturated with a Christian atmosphere where there is frequent prayer and discussion of the Word of God.

Children should be required to attend church and taught how to worship. Parents should endeavor to bring God into their children’s world by praying about their concerns.

If spiritual disciplines are instilled in children while they’re young, they will more easily bring them into adulthood.

II. DISCIPLINE YOUR CHILDREN

Discipline is a divine method of child rearing. The scripture teaches “*For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives*” (Heb. 12:6). Through discipline, we are exercised toward righteousness and holiness (Heb. 12:10).

God’s mandate to parents is that they should love the Lord God with all their heart, soul, and might, and that they should diligently teach their children to obey His Word (Deut. 6:5-7). **The goal of all instruction and discipline is that our children would love and honor the Lord and obey His commandments.**

Discipline must be used in conjunction with instruction. If our teaching and instruction is not met with obedience, we must respond with discipline. **Discipline has a two-fold purpose: to punish, and to correct.** Through punishment, our child learns the vital lesson that if we disobey rules or instruction, we must suffer for it. A little physical pain now prevents much more severe consequences later.

The other aim of discipline is to produce a correction in the child's attitude or behavior (Heb. 12:11). It is to restore him to a place of humility and obedience.

The nature of children demands correction. Left to themselves, they gravitate toward sin, selfishness, and rebellion. **Discipline checks the expression of the sin nature, structuring the child's development around righteousness, obedience, and morality.**

Discipline is not optional, it is required. All parents are under God's delegated authority and commandments to raise their children according to His principles. Children are commanded to obey and honor their parents (Eph. 6:1, 2). They must be disciplined whenever there is a deliberate disobedience, an unacceptable carelessness, or a display of rebellion.

In the majority of cases, discipline should be in the form of a spanking. This, of course, may exclude older teenagers who should be punished in other forms such as grounding, loss of privileges, etc. If, in certain cases of lesser offense, another form of punishment is used with children, it must work the intended goal of punishment that produces correction.

GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE

On the following five pages we will briefly consider some of the questions and considerations in the disciplining of our children.

- 1. Parental Agreement** - *“Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?”* (Amos 3:3). **Parental agreement is essential in the disciplining of children.** Both parents must agree to the biblical approach to discipline. If a child senses or observes disagreement, he or she will attempt to pit one parent against the other. If the discipline is carried out, the child may retain the idea that the one who did it was unfair.
- 2. Support One Another** - Often only one of the parents observed the disobedient conduct and determines what punishment is warranted. Sometimes there is a tendency for the other to want to be more lenient. The parent involved should be deferred to and supported.
- 3. Be Realistic in Your Expectations** - The Bible teaches us that God *“pities His children ... for He knows our frame”* (Ps. 103:13, 14). God’s behavior toward us is based on understanding. **We, likewise, must not expect more of**

our children than they can realistically give. Our expectations should be based on their physical and mental abilities. Is their failure to perform a chore correctly due to irresponsibility or inability? Is their grouchy mood based on disrespect or the fact that they are sick or did not get enough sleep?

4. The Role of Reproof - *"He who regards reproof will be honored"* (Prov. 13:18). Some foolish or careless behavior may not reflect disobedience or warrant a spanking. In such cases, reproof is a more effective and realistic form of correction.

5. Make Discipline Proportionate - *"A just weight is His delight"* (Prov. 11:1). Our reaction to a child's unacceptable behavior must be in proportion to the transgression involved. Over correcting may *"provoke ... your children to anger"* or produce discouragement (Col. 3:21, K.J.V.). Some infractions require reproof; others a spanking; still others a spanking and a loss of privileges.

GUIDELINES (Cont.)

6. Don't Discipline in Anger - *"The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God"* (James 1:20). When we discipline, we represent the delegated authority of God. We administer discipline to punish disobedience and bring correction. Discipline properly given leaves a child with the sense that justice has been done. Our anger will obscure this and often cause us to ignore the proper procedure of correction. **Parents should bring their anger under control before disciplining.**

7. Discipline Disobedience Immediately - **The Bible teaches that prolonging the punishment of a transgression produces habits of rebellion and disobedience** (Ecc. 8:11). Once a child is clear on what's right and wrong, his disobedience must be punished immediately. Many parents err by resorting to several warnings or threats of spankings. This establishes the pattern of resistance and testings in the child. If a child does not obey the command the first time it is spoken, he should be punished.

8. Begin While They're Small - Discipline should begin when the child is a baby. An infant soon learns whether he or she can manipulate their parents. Their independent nature runs head on into parental efforts of training and socialization. When it is obvious that a child is demanding his own way and resisting your authority, your displeasure should be communicated. For example, if a child continues to throw food on the floor after being reprimanded, his hand should be spanked. The object is to imprint the principle of obedience at the earliest possible age.

9. Punishment Must Hurt - “Let not thy soul spare for his crying” (Prov. 19:18, K.J.V.). **Punishment must not be physically abusive, but it must cross the pain threshold to be effective.** Pain soon passes, but the lesson remains. A spanking should always cause a child to cry, thereby producing an emotional release, a break in his resistance, and a humility that leads to obedience. Parents should avoid letting natural compassion restrain them from carrying out proper discipline.

GUIDELINES (Cont.)

10. Who Disciplines – Mom or Dad? – Both parents should discipline the children. Children are to “Honor . . . father and mother” (Eph. 6:2). As the head of the house, the father should discipline when he is home. When he is away, the mother should assume this responsibility.

11. Be Consistent – Our disciplinary habits and procedures must be consistent. What is punished today, must be punished tomorrow. The promise that chastening “yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12: 11) is to those who are consistent and enduring. Life styles and behavioral patterns are formed through years of training.

12. What About Teenagers? – If proper discipline is begun young enough, there will be far less of a necessity for it as kids hit the teens. Younger teenagers that are disobedient can still be spanked. Grounding and loss of privileges are also acceptable, but must be watched as to whether they reinforce bad attitudes or further rebellion. Parental discretion based on wisdom should be used with teenagers.

WHAT ABOUT THE ROD?

“He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Prov. 13:24).

The Bible promotes spanking as the most effective means of discipline. It awakens and sharpens the awareness that there is a moral power over us and that laws cannot be broken without suffering. The Bible also promotes the rod.

A rod is an instrument or tool used to help us administer firm discipline. It can be a switch, ping-pong paddle, or a wooden spoon. Its advantage over the hand is that it produces the necessary pain without requiring a jarring force against the child’s body. Another advantage is that the rod, rather than the hand, becomes the symbol of retribution.

All spankings should be given so as to be felt without involving too much force and making sure not to inflict any injuries. On occasions where the rod is unavailable, it is better to use our hand than to neglect warranted discipline.

THE STEPS OF DISCIPLINE

The following steps outline the procedure to follow in administering a spanking. These steps reveal the pattern God uses to chasten us and bring us to full reconciliation.

1. Disobedience - **Once an act of disobedience, rebellion, or stubbornness has occurred, the child must be disciplined.** He or she should be taken to a private location for the discipline. Public spankings bring embarrassment for the child as well as other adults.

2. Explanation - **The child should be given a clear explanation for what he did wrong and brought to a place where he acknowledges his transgression** (I Jn. 1 :9).

3. Spanking - The child should be told to bend over their knees or a chair. The rod should be applied with enough force to make him cry. However, care should be taken not to produce welts or bruises.

4. Prayer for Forgiveness – After the spanking, the parent should have the child pray and ask God for forgiveness for the offense that was committed.

The parent should then pray for the child, thanking God for His grace and forgiveness over our lives.

5. Re-Affirm Your Love – The parent should then warmly embrace the child and reaffirm his love. The child should be reassured that you think highly of him and that you consider him to be a good child.

6. Reconciliation With Others – After reconciliation with God and yourself, there must be reconciliation with others. The child must go and apologize to any others who have been offended. This not only will bring restoration to the situation, but will further promote humility. The incident must then be forgotten.

III. LOVE YOUR CHILDREN

“And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers” (Mal. 4:6).

The successful Christian home is characterized by an atmosphere of love. In our quest to be responsible parents, we must take care that our home does not reflect the atmosphere of a classroom, penal colony, or a courthouse.

The home and family should be the center of a child’s happiness. It is so easy to fall into the role of a policeman with our kids, projecting an overly rigid world around them. **We fail if we are faithful only to teach and to discipline, while neglecting to cultivate a relationship of love.** The following are some ways a parent may demonstrate love to their children:

1. Touch – Just as punishment demands physical expression, so does love. The sense of touch can convey care like nothing else. Children thrive on affection. Parents should continue the “cuddling habit” begun with babies

through the earlier years. Even as kids approach the teens, frequent hugs and affection are important. **Families should never cease to demonstrate love through physical expression.**

2. Time - There is no adequate substitute for time together with our children. Christian families should establish set times when they are alone together on “family nights” and “family days”. Kids need a sense of the family unit. **Spending time with your kids produces genuine relationships and conveys your love for them.**

3. Fun - **Parents should be able to have fun with their children.** They should promote recreation in the form of games, biking, going to the beach, etc. A sense of humor is also an invaluable part of a happy family life. Parents should attempt to share in some of the humor and fun of their children. We should also be willing to laugh at ourselves when we are caught in blunders.

LOVE YOUR CHILDREN (Cont.)

4. Listening – Parents need to cultivate the art of listening to their children. Too often, kids receive the impression that we are not interested in their world or that we know what they want to say before they say it. By listening, we can build a genuine understanding of them, as well as communicate our interest.

5. Encouragement – Children receive their basic self-image from our reactions to them. We must be as careful to identify the good and the positive qualities in their lives as we are to point out the negative. **Parents must assure their children of their value and self-worth.**

6. Courtesy – Children are little human beings created in the image of God. **While exercising our parental responsibilities and rights, we must remember to treat them with dignity and courtesy.** This is especially important when they are with their friends. Avoid harsh correction or discipline of your children in front of their playmates.

CONCLUSION

Reading material on raising Christian children provides the necessary insights and guidelines for proper parenting, but expertise is only developed in the day-to-day experience of relating to our kids. Being a parent, especially today, is filled with tremendous challenges and frequent frustrations. We can easily conclude that our best efforts are not good enough. Christian parents have this consolation: God is also raising your children. We must do our best and trust Him to fill in the holes. We must include daily prayer for our children as one of our primary methods of child rearing. The following books are recommended for further study:

Withold Not Correction, by Bruce A. Ray

The Christian Family, by Larry Christiansen

For a brief overview of the main points of this booklet, please re-read the boldly printed words on each page.



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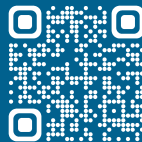
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