



## Our Children, Their Salvation and Our Responsibility

*Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when His disciples saw it, they rebuked them.*

*But Jesus called them to Him, and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the Kingdom of God.*

*Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."*  
*Luke 18:15-17*

### Summary:

#### Introduction:

- Jesus valued children and desired that they be with Him.
- God has chosen parents to be the primary spiritual influence on children.
- It is critical that parents become childlike in faith toward God.
- The key to parenting is allowing Christ to live His life through us.

#### Frequently Asked Questions:

##### 1. Are children born in sin or are they sinless?

- Children are born in sin. See Psalm 51:5, Ephesians 2:3 for references.
- Begin praying now for children's personal salvation.

##### 2. Is there a specific age at which a child becomes personally responsible to God?

- Yes, but that age may be different for each individual, and only God knows when that is.
- A child will not "automatically" accept Christ when they reach that age.

##### 3. What happens to children who die before the age of accountability?

- We rely on the character of God, which is love, to answer this question.
- We believe that in such a case the child's state in heaven is secure.
- King David believed he would see his dead infant son again: 2 Samuel 12:15-23.

##### 4. Are parents required to baptize or dedicate their children?

- The Bible contains no mention whatsoever of infant baptism.
- We do practice infant dedication, according to the scriptural example of Mary & Joseph dedicating Jesus as an infant: Luke 2:22-24.

##### 5. When should my child be water baptized?

- Child should be baptized on their request, if they can articulate a biblical understanding of their salvation and the meaning of baptism

##### 6. As parents, do we influence our children spiritually?

- Yes, and we are to influence them in a godly manner. Even single parents, or only one Christian parent, can be a tremendously positive influence on a child

##### 7. What specific things can parents do to influence children spiritually?

- Surrender our lives to Jesus.
- Learn our identity in Christ.
- Teach them to know, respect, and follow God's word, become the primary influence in their life.
- Teach by example: 1 Corinthians 11:1 the apostle Paul says: "Imitate me as I imitate Christ."
- Pray for them!
- Participate in a Home Fellowship Group for support, encouragement, exhortation.
- Constantly affirm and communicate our love & appreciation to them verbally and physically.
- Work for a holy and loving marriage between husband & wife, modeling godly principles in the marriage- this is parent's greatest gift to their children, and also (biblically) their FIRST priority.

## 8. What is Biblical discipline?

- It is an act of love.
- Its goal is to train a child to conform to divine truth.
- Should never be carried out in anger, frustration, or vengefulness.
- Loving relationship with child comes before “the rules.”

## 9. Some thoughts on freedom and fun

- Allow children to pursue their own interests and eventually their own occupational choices.
- Have as much fun with children as possible, laugh & play at every opportunity.

Jesus made this statement (in Luke 18) to His disciples after they rebuked those who were bringing children to Him. The disciples were probably attempting to protect Jesus’ time, yet they missed His heart for the children. He had a desire to be with them! An observation of our family relationships today begs the question: do parents have a similar desire to be with their children and to train them in the ways of our Lord? Do we have a deep desire to show them affection and care, give them clear spiritual direction, and influence them for God’s glory; or do we view our children as a distraction and an invasion of our time? Jesus reprimanded His disciples for adopting this attitude!

Whether our children will be subjected to spiritual influences is not in question. The question is – *how* will they be influenced and *who* will influence them the most? Simply put, our Lord has chosen parents, and in particular, the fathers to be the primary spiritual influence for children. Our children are the most precious earthly gift God has given us, and we have the privilege and responsibility to train them in His ways. Though we make mistakes as we raise our children, there is forgiveness and hope in Christ! Let us purpose in our hearts to become the parents that He desires for us to be...*our children need godly parents!*

Our first step in training our children is for us as parents to acknowledge Jesus’ desire that we become childlike in our faith toward Him. Jesus speaks in Matthew 18:3: “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” The disciples were arguing about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus uses “little children” as examples of humility, dependence, and faith, without which the disciples would not even enter the Kingdom. We need these same characteristics as we surrender our lives to Christ and continue in relationship with Him, and we need them in our parenting.

Parenting can be the most rewarding and, at the same time, one of the most challenging aspects of our life. The pain we feel when our children are sick, hurting, struggling, in trouble, or rebellious can be overwhelming. We may ask ourselves what we could have done to prevent such problems, or we may make a list of the “should haves.” What is necessary during such times is the comfort of Christ’s love and the compassion of brothers and sisters being poured out on us. “Pat” answers and condemnation have no place! We all have made and will continue to make mistakes as parents. An expectation of arriving at the perfection of “mistake-free” parenting is bondage! At the same time, we cannot excuse ourselves from training our children spiritually both in word and in deed. We are not expected to be perfect, but we can and should be **faithful**. That is why we must come to Christ ourselves in childlike faith, humility, and dependence. We all need Godly wisdom as we lead and parent our children, and that is exactly what Christ provides for us as we stay dependent on Him (1 Corinthians 1:30). The key to parenting is allowing Christ to live His life through us. What a relief to know that we don’t have to parent on our own strength and wisdom! We have all experienced that frustration. God loves each one of our children so much that He desires to love and parent them “through us” as we stay surrendered to Him. This is great news for every parent. We will still experience great challenges, but we will also experience the joys and rewards of parenting.

Children are very important to Jesus and the Kingdom of Heaven. There is great comfort in this, yet many parents still have questions concerning their children’s spiritual condition and the role they have in it. Let us look at some common questions.

### 1. Are children born in sin or are they sinless?

As cute, innocent, and helpless as a newborn baby may be, he or she was still born in sin.

*"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me."* Psalm 51:5  
*"The wicked are estranged from the womb; They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies."* Psalm 58:3

Babies and toddlers demonstrate their sin by impatient crying and by having tantrums, which will get progressively worse if a child succeeds in manipulating their parents in this way. A child does not need to be taught how to be selfish or tell a lie. They possess that ability from the beginning because they were born with a sinful nature.

*"...among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others."*  
Ephesians 2:3

Even though they have a sinful nature, we should not view our children as "demonic," though we may occasionally (in jest!) be tempted to apply that label. Instead, we need to acknowledge and understand that they have a need for Christ just as every person does, regardless of their age. *"ALL have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23) and therefore every person needs salvation. Though our children do possess a sinful nature, they also possess a dependency and humility that is precious to God and to us. That is why Jesus uses them as an example of how to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. As our children grow older, that humility and dependence will be strongly challenged by the enemy and by their flesh. They will need Christ's forgiveness and empowerment for righteousness. If you are not already praying, begin praying now for their personal salvation!

## ***2. Is there a specific age at which a child becomes responsible to God and therefore needs to repent of sin and personally place his or her faith in Christ?***

The answer is yes. Each child will come to an age of responsibility before God. Only God knows exactly when a child is capable of accepting or rejecting Jesus as Lord and Savior. The Jewish ritual of Bar Mitzvah celebrates a boy's transition to manhood at the age of thirteen. At that point, Jewish tradition considers the individual responsible for knowing and living out the law of the Old Testament. This is an example only, and should not be taken as doctrine. Some children may be younger, or even older, when they become responsible.

Our children will reach an age when they are capable of accepting Christ, however this does not mean that they will "automatically" accept Him and be saved. God loves our children more than we do; we must trust Him with the timing of their maturity and acceptance of Him as Lord. Again, we must continue to pray for our children's salvation!

## ***3. What happens to children who die before the age of accountability?***

In this area we rely on the character of God, which is love: *"He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."* (I John 4:8) We also rely on God's loving character regarding aborted, miscarried, and mentally disabled children and adults. He knows the heart and capability of every child and He will never make a mistake. Based on God's love for them, and their inability to comprehend the gospel message, we believe their eternal state in heaven is secured. A passage of scripture that deals with this issue is found in II Samuel 12:15-23, in which the Lord demonstrates His divine displeasure by taking away the child resulting from the adulterous affair between David and Bathsheba. After David repents and God's judgement is carried out, David says *"I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."* This passage indicates that David believed he would see his son when he himself died and went to be with the Lord. Praise the Lord!

## ***4. Are parents required to baptize or dedicate their infants unto the Lord?***

Parents are not required to do either. There are a variety of reasons for which some Christians and denominations encourage parents to baptize their infants. Some believe that the baptism washes away original sin. Others believe that baptism places the child into the covenant of grace. Still others believe

that baptism actually brings salvation to the infant. With due respect to those who hold these beliefs or practice these traditions, we must point out that the Bible does not instruct us to baptize infants, in fact the Bible does not contain any mention of infant baptism whatsoever. Original sin is cancelled and salvation occurs when a person understands their sinful state before God, repents of their sin, and receives Christ as Lord, accepting His sacrifice for their salvation. In obedience we are then baptized to identify with His death, burial and resurrection. The conversions in the book of Acts show us this process many times. Individual and household conversions were common, with subsequent baptisms, as each person trusted Christ as their Messiah. The water of baptism does not save people... Jesus saves people as they come to Him in child-like faith.

We do not practice infant baptism. We do practice infant dedication, however this is not a requirement for any parent or child. We believe that when parents dedicate their children to God, they are declaring in accord with Psalm 127:3 that their child is a gift from God: *"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, The fruit of the womb is His reward."* Parents who dedicate their infant are declaring that they will raise the child for His glory!

The only New Testament example of infant dedication is found in Luke 2:22-24:

*"Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him [Jesus] to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord... and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord..."*

Joseph and Mary presented Jesus to God the Father in obedience to the law of Moses. Parents were required by the Old Testament law not only to have their sons circumcised on the eighth day, but also to present their first born (especially males, Exodus 13:2, 11-16) to God. Mary came to the priests in Jerusalem to present her child Jesus to the Father and to offer the appropriate sacrifice for her cleansing after childbirth (Leviticus 12:1-8). Jewish families practiced this presentation as a testimony to their part of the covenant with God, commemorating God's judgement on the first-born of the Egyptians and the exodus of the nation of Israel from captivity in Egypt.

Today our covenant of grace with God is kept through our faith in His Son and not through these laws. Even though the presenting of our infants unto the Lord is not an ordinance of the church, it can be practiced as an application of Joseph and Mary's example of dedicating Jesus to the Father. We should all thank God for our children; dedicating and surrendering ourselves and our children unto God. This is not required publicly. We may do this privately with our families, in our home fellowship group, or in the corporate meeting. Though we have freedom in this area, we encourage parents to involve their community— close friends, family, and home fellowship— in the dedication, so that they and their children will be surrounded by encouragement and supported in prayer. As a church we dedicate children three times a year- contact our Family Ministry for more details. Parents who wish to participate in public dedications should sign up at the Children's Center in advance of the designated days. It is a privilege to dedicate our children unto Him, for they are a gift from Him.

##### **5. When should my child be water baptized?**

We believe that all Christians should be baptized in water after they become believers in Jesus Christ according to the command of Matthew 28:19. The Greek word translated "baptize" in the New Testament is "baptizo" which means "to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge" (Online concordance: <http://www.blueletterbible.org>) and therefore we practice baptism by immersion.

We believe that a child can put their faith in Christ's sacrifice for their salvation at an early age. At this point parents must be sensitive to the child's understanding of salvation and baptism and what they mean. Young children may "ask Jesus into their heart," but they must also at some point come to understand that Christ can only live in them because of His sacrifice for their sins. We suggest that if a child begins to ask about baptism, the parents should carefully talk with their child about the child's salvation experience, and then explain clearly what baptism means and what it represents. After this discussion, the parents should make it a point not to initiate further discussion about the subject of baptism. If the child continues to talk about baptism on their own, and can articulate a clear understanding of what baptism means in their own words, then the parents should speak with their Home Fellowship leader and contact the Children's Ministry Director at the church to discuss their

child's desire to be baptized. It is the parent's responsibility to make sure that the child is ready for baptism. If the parents feel that they cannot adequately explain the significance of baptism, then they should contact their Home Fellowship leader or another mature Christian for help and further understanding.

#### ***6. As parents, do we influence our children spiritually?***

Parents have much more influence on children than many of us realize. Our salvation and our continuing relationship with Christ not only affect us, but our children as well. In I Corinthians 7:12-14, the apostle Paul describes the benefit of a believing spouse remaining married to his or her unbelieving spouse. In today's society it frequently happens that two unbelievers get married, and then one accepts Christ as their Savior. The Christians in the church at Corinth had asked Paul what to do in such a case: should they divorce their unbelieving spouse or remain married? Paul encourages the believer to remain married if the unbeliever is willing to live with the believer. In this circumstance, the believer sanctifies the unbeliever. The word "sanctify" in this passage is the Greek word "hegiastiai" which does not mean salvation (because the unbeliever is still an unbeliever), but "to set apart." An unbeliever is set apart and comes under direct spiritual influence from the life of a believer. The point of this passage is that in such a marriage the believer is not defiled (made unholy or unacceptable to God) by the unbeliever, rather the unbeliever is sanctified (set apart and influenced) by the believer. God accepts and will bless such a marriage, when the believing spouse prayerfully relies on Him for guidance and strength. Please notice that the children are also set apart by the believing spouse and are under their direct spiritual influence (v. 14). As the believing spouse allows Christ to live His life through them, the children receive the benefit of hearing and seeing Christianity being "lived out" before them. There is tremendous power and influence in the life of the believer! Our children are going to be influenced in either an unclean or a holy manner by us. Our surrender to Christ or our rejection of Him determines which influence we give our children.

#### ***7. What specific things can parents do to influence children spiritually?***

First and foremost, we must individually and personally surrender our life to Jesus Christ, placing faith in Him alone for our own salvation. Anyone who does not have assurance of salvation should seek out someone in the church (friend, Elder, etc.) and learn how to obtain the most precious gift known to us. The salvation of one or both parents has tremendous positive spiritual implications for a child; not least of which is that the child will now come into regular contact with a believer in Jesus Christ.

Parents must learn our identity in Christ, learning also how to allow Christ to live in and through us. We cannot simply perform, or act "religious," or be "pious." We need to grow in an authentic, intimate relationship with Christ and allow our children to see that we are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is very important that our children see Christ and His mission not just as a Sunday morning ritual, but as our life. The goal is not to raise children to be religious but to show them by the example of our lives how to have a genuine relationship with Christ. Remember; our desire is to bless our children with a godly heritage, not a religious one.

We must teach our children to know, respect, and follow God's Word: "*And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.*" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7) particularly with respect to their relationship with their parents: "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother,*" which is the first commandment with promise: "*that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.*" (Ephesians 6:1-3) "*Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.*" (Colossians 3:19)

*The* training of children is to be accomplished through the parents as a consistent lifestyle, rather than solely as a weekly classroom lesson. If we were to lead and teach our children in this manner, what a difference it would make in our children, the church, and us. In honesty, many of us would acknowledge that we have been negligent in this training and have placed undue expectation on "the church" to teach our children for us. Parents have often used the children's Sunday school and youth ministry to replace their Deuteronomy 6:6-7 responsibility. Sunday School teachers and youth ministers

are wonderful gifts to the church, yet they should not become the primary source of our children's Christian training or influence. Parents should be! Children's and youth ministries should supplement the training our children are being given at home. Even as a supplement, Sunday School is still very beneficial to all children (particularly to children of unbelieving parents) and should be an area in which every Christian parent serves.

We do not have to be Bible scholars to teach our children, but we must be willing to grow and mature in Christ and His Word. He will give us the wisdom we need to train our children. We just need to be available and willing. Unfortunately many parents today are self-absorbed and have neglected their children's training. Parenting takes sacrificial love.

Fathers should note that the spiritual training of children is primarily their responsibility:

*"And you fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." Ephesians 6:4*

*Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." Colossians 3:20*

*"You know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children." 1 Thessalonians 2:11*

Mothers are also encouraged to nurture children in God's Word, but Dad should be leading the way. In single-mother families or situations when dad will not lead, then mom must take on the responsibility of guiding their children spiritually.

Are we using life events as "teaching moments?" Are we conducting family worship and devotional time- praising God, reading the Bible, and praying with our children? Consider reading a good children's Bible with your children three or four times a week, asking them questions about the passages you have just read. Encourage the children to share their own prayer requests and help them pray for the requests of other family members. Consider memorizing the books of the Bible and scripture verses together. Listen to a Christian song and talk about the lyrics and what they mean. As a family, serve the elderly and those in need. The possibilities are endless. Be creative, and make it JOYFUL!

Proverbs 22:6 exhorts us to *"train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."* This verse does not mean that our children will not break our hearts at times, but God's Word will not come back void, so put it in them! Parents - let us proactively teach our children!

As we are training and shepherding our children, we must not underestimate what God can do through them. Often we put limitations on our children's spirituality that God does not. We can make the mistake of engaging our children spiritually only at a superficial level instead of training and equipping them for ministry. The Holy Spirit can empower them to worship, pray, serve and minister to other children (and even adults) if they allow Him to. Our goal is not just to teach our children the Bible for academic reasons, but to teach them how to live righteously by living a surrendered life unto God. Once our children place their faith in Jesus Christ for their salvation, we need to teach them about their identity in Him. They need to learn how to ask Jesus to live through them every day, at home, at school and at play. Please remember that the spiritual training of our children should not be at the expense of fun and normal childhood activity! This is an opportunity to demonstrate that life in Christ is joyful and rewarding. May we allow God to minister through our children as we teach them to trust and rely upon Him.

Teach our children by example. The apostle Paul said, "imitate me as I imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Can we confidently say this to our children? Children are constantly looking for heroes and role models. Why should their heroes not be us, their parents? Many who are regarded as "heroes" today in the sports, music, and entertainment fields do not have the character or values we want our children to imitate. It is so important for us to not only model a life of character, integrity, and biblical values to our children, but to also lavish it onto them. The Bible tells us that faith without works is a dead faith. In light of this, if we teach our children God's word without modeling what we teach them, our teaching will be viewed as dead religion. Be careful, our children are watching! In Matthew 18:6, Jesus warns us not to cause little children to sin. There are serious consequences for those who do! We know

that we are not going to be perfect in the flesh, but it is vital that we avoid being hypocritical! Children can see right through hypocrisy; therefore we need to live an honest and transparent life before our children. We need to repent and ask for our children's forgiveness when we sin against or fail them. This openness will allow our children to see that Christianity is not based on being perfect in our flesh or by "performing" for God, but by placing our faith in His son Jesus Christ. This transparency will give them hope and encouragement.

Our children need the blessing of looking back on their childhood and remembering that their parents made a habit of worshipping God corporately on Sunday, giving Him a regular offering, living in community with other believers, regularly observing communion and being on mission for Him. *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."* Acts 2:42 When our children see us living surrendered lives unto God, it will greatly influence them for Christ and His Kingdom.

As to the observance of communion, we encourage Christian parents to allow their children to participate with them. Since we have the examples of the Jewish children participating in Passover (Exodus 12), Jesus' heart for the children (Matthew 19:14), and our privilege and responsibility to influence our children in a holy manner (I Corinthians 7:14), we believe that it is appropriate to allow our children to participate, but we leave this decision to the discretion of individual families and parents. Please see our paper on the Lord's Supper for a more detailed discussion of this subject. Speaking of supper, families should share as many meals together as possible. This is becoming a lost tradition in our fast-paced modern lifestyle, yet this time together will enhance closeness, communication and unity if practiced regularly.

Parents need to pray for their children! Name them individually before God and intercede for them constantly, praying for their salvation, spiritual growth and their life in general. If a child, particularly a teenager, is not walking in Christ today, we must continue to pray for them and love them unconditionally. We have not been called or given the ability to make our children receive Christ. We can't force them, but we can lovingly shepherd their hearts and trust God with their salvation. We do not have to accept their actions or choices (indeed we must exercise authority over them and over our household) but they need to know that we unconditionally love and accept them. Our acceptance of our children is vital! We must make a distinction between accepting our children's choices and accepting them as our children, verbalizing and demonstrating this distinction particularly in the "heat of the moment" when conflicts arise. Acceptance is the basis of unconditional love, and children may look elsewhere (such as inappropriate relationships) if they don't experience this from us.

If our relationship with our children, young or old, is not where we would like it to be, then we should intentionally make the choice to pursue them with all our heart. Life is too short to continue living in the shadow of un-mended relationships! The Bible tells us to pursue peace with everyone if it depends on us (Romans 12:18, 14:19). We cannot control our children's response, but we can "through Christ" control our choice to continue praying, loving and pursuing them. Remember that our Father in Heaven pursues us with love when we are "unlovable." Should our children expect any less from us? We can't give up on them, but instead pursue them with love!

Participate in a home fellowship where our whole family can be prayed for, encouraged and equipped. This is vital, because the family is under attack, and we have no greater weapon available to us than prayer! We encourage every father and mother to participate in a small group where they are encouraged in their roles and responsibilities, and where the group's families pray for each other. Parenting is a difficult task, and we need the prayers, encouragement, and example of an intimate community to support us. God intended that the members of the body equip and encourage each other (Titus 2). As we have stated earlier, no matter what our mistakes have been, there is forgiveness and hope in Christ. Our families are at stake, so let's get together, encourage each other and PRAY! We are called by God to live life together and share alike in the victories and the trials of life. We must resist the temptation to remain isolated; let us raise our children together for His glory!

We should constantly tell our children that we love and appreciate them through words of affirmation and by giving them physical affection (hugs, kisses, etc.). They need to experience our love as well as hear about it. Fathers, we should hug, touch, and kiss our sons as well as our daughters. They need and want it, even though they may not admit it. Our sons will not need physical affection from

another man if they get it from us! Moms, this is true for daughters as well. We cannot over-emphasize this point. Our children need to hear and experience unconditional love from us as parents. The Bible tells us that love never fails... so pour it on! To pour on love to our children, we must be available to spend time with them, not because we have to but because we want to. We cannot make a positive impact on our children unless we spend time with them. Many parents, especially fathers, can claim to spend a lot of time at home, but must confess that they can be "at home," but not with the family. It is too easy to "zone out" by reading, watching TV, playing on the computer, or even by doing "work." There is no short cut here; the quality time will come when we spend quantity time with them. We will have to be intentional and creative in accomplishing this in our fast paced society, but it must become our priority. Many of us did not experience this as a child with our parents. Through Christ, however, we can break that cycle.

Perhaps the greatest gift that parents together can give their children is a holy and loving marriage, in which dad demonstrates love and caring for mom, and mom lives out love and respect for dad. This one gift will create more stability and health in our children than we can ever imagine. It also gives them an example of what married life should look like. If our marriages are not in the place where they need to be, then we must immediately take whatever steps are necessary to improve them. The husband and wife relationship is the primary relationship in the family, and the children are a secondary relationship for mother and father. If parents become so child centered that their world and family revolve around the children, the marriage often dries up and eventually dies. If the marriage is given first priority and constant attention, the husband and wife will be content and the children will feel very secure because of the love and affection they see the parents giving each other. What a gift to give our children!

Single parents, we encourage you not to live in the past or live with condemnation or bitterness. If you do, it can destroy you and your children. If you don't live with your children, we encourage you to become as active as possible in their lives, living out the principles found in the Scriptures. God is more than able to take a difficult situation and bring healing and glory to His name. If you have sinned, confess and repent, asking God to heal you and turn you into a vessel of His love. Your children and everyone else around you will greatly benefit by seeing Christ live His victorious life through you.

### ***8. What is Biblical Discipline?***

Biblical discipline is always an act of love, applied through communication, "the rod" (spanking), and consequences. The goal of discipline is to train someone to conform to divine truth. Proper use of discipline to drive foolishness from the hearts of our children is an act of LOVE. The philosophy that love means never saying no, being permissive, never chastening (spanking), or allowing any natural consequences to affect our children is false and ungodly. Making our children happy at all costs and staying their "best friend" should NOT be our goal when they are young. Our young children need us to be their parents, not their best friends. Adult friendship with our children should be the goal, not the starting point. Love disciplines, sets boundaries, and consistently counters disobedience with consequences when children are young. As our children grow, the methods we use to discipline them will change. For example, we might spank a 5-year old child, but for a teenage child the removal of privileges may become the primary method of discipline. We should never discipline our children when we are angry, but instead ask Christ to give us self-control and wisdom as we proceed. Again, discipline is not vengeance, but love.

Josh McDowell states correctly that "rules without a relationship will create rebellion in our children". We must not push our children away by "laying down the law for their own good," without first establishing a loving relationship with them. When love and grace are present in the relationship, boundaries and discipline will only enhance our children's confidence and security in our love for them, even though they may not appreciate it at the time! Note Hebrews 12:5-11:

"And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom he receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you, as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in

subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness through those who have been trained by it.

It is important to notice that our Heavenly Father does not punish His children, but reserves punishment for unbelievers on Judgement Day. "Punish" means to avenge, get revenge on, or condemn another person. Romans 8:1 tells us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Since God does not punish us, we should not punish our children. We need to discipline (or chasten) our children in love, just like God does for us. As our young children learn to trust their parents (particularly fathers), during the discipline process, we can encourage them to trust their Heavenly Father as they get older. We should always discipline with loving correction and a view toward redemption. God loves us and this is how He disciplines us. Thank you Lord!

Consider the following verses with regard to discipline and correction:

*"He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly."*

*"Chasten your son while there is hope, And do not set your heart on his destruction."*

*"Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him."*

Proverbs 13:24, 19:18, 22:15, 23:13-14, 29:17

We do not have to be a "kill joy;" we should say "yes" to our children as much as possible, but when we say (in Luke 18) no or give instruction, our children need to respect and obey us.

*"Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord."*

Colossians 3:20

*"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." Ephesians 6:1-3*

## **9. Freedom and Fun**

We need to allow our children to pursue their own interests, hobbies and eventual occupational choices. We can damage our children by trying to force them to be like someone else, including ourselves. We can not and should not try to live our life through them. If we have more than one child, it will come as no surprise that our children are wonderfully yet uniquely created. They have different looks, personalities, temperaments and abilities. The basics of biblical training should remain the same for every child, yet we need to give them the freedom to grow and blossom into the individual God has created them to be.

We should have as much fun with our children as possible and laugh with them all we can. Our time with them at home is short, so let's make the most of it! This is very important. Many young adults leave the church or their "family religion" because there was no fun, joy, or laughter in their home or church. Religion meant being very serious, joyless, and lifeless. We should, in fact, take our relationship with Christ seriously, but when we do, He brings us GRACE, FREEDOM and JOY! Our children need to see and experience that Christians are not "prunes" or lifeless beings. Play, wrestle, swim, and do whatever else will bring our children fun and laughter. Even during these times there will be teachable moments for their spiritual training. We shouldn't always tell them what we'll do for them for fun, but instead ask them what they would like to do for fun. We need to be prepared for some interesting answers, but if it's legal, then let's do it! Let the fun and laughter begin. Frequent pictures (and/or video) will bring back many wonderful memories for our families in the future.

As you have read this, you have seen what an incredible privilege and responsibility we have as parents. If you have not been faithful in these aspects of parenting, do not condemn yourself! Just take responsibility before God, repent, and begin today to allow Christ to parent “through you” no matter what age your children or grandchildren may be. Children are a gift from God; may we as their parents become their heroes in the faith. This is not a “pipe dream”. As we practice these principles, through the power of God, our families will reflect the character and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! To God be the glory in our lives, and the lives of our children.

Recommended material:

The Bible

One Home at a Time – Dennis Rainey, Howard G. Hendricks

Shepherding a Child’s Heart – Tedd Tripp

Biblical Portrait of Marriage – Bruce Wilkinson- Sign up in bulletin

Children’s Prayer Calendar – James Dobson

The Right Choices Bible (Preschool – 12 yrs) – Josh & Dottie McDowell, Joe Boddy

103 Questions Children Ask about Right and Wrong with Answers from the Bible –

David Veerman (Editor), James C. Galvin, James C. Wilhoit

What the Bible says about Child Training – J. Richard Fugate

Students Life Application Bible – for teenagers (New Living Translation or NIV)

How To Be a Hero To Your Kids – Josh McDowell & Dick Day

Parents in Pain – John White

Families Where Grace is in Place – Jeff Van Vonderen

Who Am I – Frank Friedman

Remember:

1. Surrender your life to Christ.
2. Learn your identity in Him (Discipleship 1 & 11).
3. Be with your children, have fun, and show your love to them.
4. Be open and transparent and look for ‘teaching moments’.
5. Pray for (and with) your children and read the Bible with them.
6. Worship God with your family corporately at least weekly.
7. Give an offering and take communion as a family.
8. Be on mission for God as a family (Discipleship 3).
9. Regularly participate in a home fellowship.
10. life is short, live the abundant life in Christ!