



DISCIPLINING YOUNG CHILDREN

Disciplining children can feel like diffusing a bomb on a roller coaster. It's always a wild ride, and you never know when it might blow up.

The Bible provides extensive guidance on parenting, emphasizing discipline, instruction, and setting a Godly example. If we are children of God, why not look to the Bible to teach us how to discipline?

Here are a few examples of parenting and discipline in Scripture: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). This verse underscores the importance of raising children with a strong moral and spiritual foundation. However, it's crucial to recognize that not all children are the same. In the original language, the phrase implies, "Raise a child according to their bend." Every child has a unique "bend"—a God-given nature, personality, and potential, yet also one affected by our fallen nature.

The primary role of parents in discipline is to discern how God has uniquely designed their child's bend to serve His purposes. This means guiding each child toward a path that aligns with God's plan for their lives. Some children may be similar to you, while others may be entirely different. If you have more than one child, they may also be very different from one another. We can discipline children differently while upholding and sharing the same core familial values.

Each child has distinct needs to rise to God along their unique bend. Therefore, your approach to discipline must match the individual needs of your children, not simply replicate the way you were raised or rely on what feels easiest. God calls parents to intentionality, shaping each child according to their God-designed potential and purpose.

“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deuteronomy 6:6–7).

Notice what happens first: the commands of God must “be on your heart.” As parents, we must first submit ourselves to the discipling love of our Heavenly Father. By allowing His guidance to shape our lives, we model what it means to live in obedience to Him.

Only then can we effectively fulfill the calling to consistently teach our children about God’s nature and His Word in the rhythm of everyday life. Our own relationship with God becomes the foundation for leading our children closer to Him.

DISCIPLINE LOVINGLY

Sometimes we act surprised when children act out and require discipline. Is God surprised when we act out? No! What if we looked to the ultimate disciplinarian for guidance? When disciplining children, ask yourself, “How would God treat me?” He is the perfect parent. How would He discipline the child He has entrusted to you?

Disciplining children isn’t enjoyable—it can feel like punishment for you as much as for them. The key to effective discipline is patience. Staying calm in the middle of a fit or tantrum is crucial. Equally important is consistency. When you’re tired, it’s tempting to let things slide or neglect discipline, but once a standard is set, it’s essential to redirect children back to it consistently. This is one of the primary ways children learn boundaries. Parenting is no place for laziness!

We can’t only discipline when we’re mad, embarrassed, or hurt. Discipline must be steady and intentional, just as God is consistent with us. Our children learn a lot about God’s nature through the way we discipline them:

- If we’re too hard: Children grow up with a strict, harsh view of God.
- If we’re too lenient: Children grow up with a soft view of God’s judgment.
- If we’re neglectful or absent: Children grow up wondering if God is present or even cares.
- If we are inconsistent: God’s plan and heart is difficult to know.

This is why both consistency and patience are so vital. The way we discipline not only shapes their behavior but also shapes their understanding of God’s character.

James 1:19 says: “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.”

Ephesians 6:4 says: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

What does “slow to anger” or “provoking to wrath” mean? It means being calm, understanding, and deliberate. Gather all the facts, hear everyone equally, and remove emotion from discipline. Disciplining from emotion is where many parents incur regret.

PARENTING MISTAKES

You will mess up. Give yourself grace. Our Heavenly Father gives us grace every single day.

Never be afraid to admit a parenting mistake. Your children will learn that you have imperfections and are still growing.

James 4:10 says: “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

Showing your children that you make mistakes isn’t a weakness—it’s a positive trait they can learn from. It doesn’t always have to be revealing a parenting mistake but be mindful not to model an unrealistic image of perfection. Admitting appropriate errors in your decision-making shows your child that growth is a lifelong process. When children see you acknowledge and correct mistakes, it helps them recognize their own opportunities for growth.

Remember, confession is vital, but repentance is the true gift. When we recognize an error, it’s important to learn from it and strive to “go and sin no more.” Living a life of continual confession without change teaches the wrong lesson. We must not simply confess to relieve guilt but also commit to making better decisions moving forward.

Both parents and children are on a journey of learning. As we model humility and genuine repentance, we help our children understand the power of growth and the grace of God.

Sometimes, as parents, we act irrationally before we fully understand the situation. Listen to why a choice was made and make disciplining decisions without emotion. If you’re still emotional, it’s best to wait before handing out consequences. Waiting to address the issue from a calm state is one of the wisest parenting strategies you can use.

STEPS TO TAKE

1. PRAISE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR: Disciplining doesn't only occur when mistakes are made. Positive reinforcement is often more effective. When you see children make a good decision on their own, or go above and beyond, praise them. For example, if they clean without being asked or take out the trash, applaud their efforts and tell them how much they have helped!

2. PROVIDE STRUCTURE: Children need structure. Allowing them to stay up late, eat whatever they want whenever they want, or inconsistently enforcing rules can sabotage their growth. If they don't have your direction, they will create their own. Providing clear and consistent boundaries benefits both you and your children.

3. INCORPORATE SCRIPTURE: Choose a verse and have your children write it five times, then explain its meaning. Don't overwhelm them with quantity—focus on understanding.

4. ENCOURAGE PHYSICAL EXERCISE: Physical activity can help redirect children's attention and let off steam. Ask them to run, do jumping jacks, or engage in another simple exercise. This can serve as a redirection rather than a punishment.

5. REDIRECT WITH CHALLENGES: In the early moments, just prior to crisis (when you see the gears grinding), try giving a simple challenge, such as, "Name five red things" or "What do you see that starts with the letter 'b'?" If redirection works, return to the issue after emotions have calmed.

6. OFFER CHOICES: Giving children choices is an excellent way to address stubbornness. Say, "I'm giving you two choices, and if you don't choose, I'll choose for you." This approach lets children feel empowered while still operating within the boundaries you've set.

7. BE WISE: Let's be honest: intentional sin is much different from unintentional sin, and they don't often warrant the same response. When a child deliberately breaks a rule, it requires a different approach than when an accident happens out of carelessness or lack of awareness. Both situations need correction, but the method should reflect the heart of the behavior—address deliberate disobedience with firm guidance and treat accidental mistakes with patience and teaching.

8. BE REALISTIC: We don't discipline our children so we can love them; we discipline them so others will love and respect them. Ensure that your discipline isn't driven by a desire to make your family appear perfect or to boost your own image. Discipline should be about laying a strong foundation for your child's future—a foundation that fosters healthy relationships with God and others.

Psalms 127:3 reminds us: "Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward."

We will make mistakes as parents, but our mistakes don't define us. Remain humble and seek Godly advice. If we treat our children as the gifts from God they are, they will pass that love and discipline to their children and beyond.



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