

## **Nine Steps to Child Discipline**

As in any venture, the absence of a plan evokes fear. Christians fear to witness because they don't have a method; counselors fear to counsel because they lack a strategy, while others fear to teach because they have never learned a system of studying and presenting the truth. When it comes to parenting, the primal fear can be paralyzing.

As I reflect back on my early days of fatherhood, I can only claim ignorance to the extreme. For instance, I was worried about how I was ever going to teach my son to talk. I wondered how I could demonstrate the right shape of the lips, the contortion of the tongue, and the stimulation of the vocal cords to evoke language for him. The fear of teaching him how to talk, however, was soon replaced with a fear that he would never stop!

The icy fingers of fear have gripped the heart of many a parent while holding a tiny new baby for the first time and realizing, "It's up to me to bring this child up properly!" How do you overcome such fear? Like the soulwinner, the counselor, and the teacher, you need a plan.

The purpose of this book is to equip the parent with such a plan, a system of disciplining the wayward child and training him in righteousness. From the offense to the correction, nine biblical, practical and sequential steps are presented. Hopefully, the results of this is that by having a plan, much of the fear can be eliminated, and your child will experience the in-depth changes which God desires.

If you are a brand new parent, this information will be invaluable. If you have older children and you feel it is too late, take heart! The principles you are about to learn will help you as well.

### **STEP #1: SEND THE CHILD TO HIS ROOM**

By sending your child to his room, provision is made for several steps of spiritual preparation which insure the deepest possible working of God in his spirit.

First of all, sending him to his room to be alone allows the Holy Spirit of God time to work on his conscience. He needs to be encouraged to think about the possible damage he may have caused to others and to give some thought to how he has offended and sinned against God.

This time will also allow the child time to reflect upon the seriousness of what he has done. The goal here is not self-centered remorse but a "*godly sorrow*" which "worketh repentance" (2 Corinthians 7:10). The Apostle Paul makes a distinction between having regrets for getting caught, sadness over experiencing a loss and "*godly sorrow*." When he wrote to the church at Corinth, he said to them, "*Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner ... for godly sorrow worketh repentance .. but the sorrow of the world worketh death*" (2 Corinthians 7:9-10). A godly sorrow which worketh repentance must come from the Holy Spirit and result in an awful

awareness of sin committed as well as the need to make it right. Giving your child time to reflect on these things will allow the Spirit opportunity to bring the burden of conviction upon him.

Another reason for this time alone for the child is to clearly establish a break of fellowship with you, his parent. The ultimate and consummate consequence of sin against our Heavenly Father is to experience the pain and agony of the loss of His fellowship. Although we never lose our blessed Father-child relationship with Him, we can lose the sweetness and intimacy of His presence.

When my son was small, I heard a dull “thunk” sound coming from the living room. To my dismay, I discovered him with a hammer in his hand and a hole in the fish tank. At his feet the last drops of water gurgled and bubbled through the fibers of the carpet where several goldfish writhed in frantic desperation. With an angelic look on his face, Jonathan proudly announced, “Daddy, I let dem fishies out!” Although I was aware of my relationship with my son, I knew our fellowship had been broken; and by the sinking countenance of my son, he knew it as well. This break in fellowship is an integral and vital part of the discipline process if it is to reflect God’s way in dealing with us.

While your child is spending this time alone...

## **STEP #2: GET ALONE WITH GOD**

A common mistake of parents is to deal too quickly with the sin of their child, to hasten the identification and punishment of his waywardness. A rush to judgment at this point can be dangerous. By sending your child to his room and finding some solitude for yourself, you are providing time for some important preparations.

This allows you time to “cool off.” Hasty discipline leads to regrets on the part of the parent and may “*provoke your child to wrath*” (Ephesians 6:4). “*He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.*” (Proverbs 14:29). Restraint at this point is very definitely the better part of wisdom. “*Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*” (James 1:19-20).

More than once I have found myself struggling with feelings of anger over the sin of my child. I wish that I could say that I exercised restraint on each of these occasions, but unfortunately, at times I fear I was guilty of “exalting folly” through a hasty spirit.

Not only does a hasty approach fail to work righteousness, it also creates tension in the relationship. “*A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.*” (Proverbs 15:1).

This time apart from your child gives you some needed time to approach God in humble prayer for wisdom and guidance. I marvel at the ignorance with which we, as parents, approach this challenging task called parenting. It is of the highest order requiring the greatest of knowledge and wisdom, and yet of all professions, it seems that any training we receive is “on-the-job.” Even a dog catcher or plumber receives some training before going to work. But a parent is left to his own devices with no diploma or degree in parenting. It seems he is destined to bang around in the dark in hopes of finding a solution. But God is too good to allow you to harm your child. He loves him too much. So He gives you “directions for assembly” called the Bible, and He promises you the answers you need when you need them. *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” (James 1:5).* This, of all times, is a time when you need wisdom.

The second reason for prayer is to appeal to God to work His conviction upon the heart of your child. By the power of your personality and the force of your will, you can strike fear into his heart; but you, as a human, can never accomplish what only God can do. *“It is God which worketh in you [and in your child] both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:13).* Notice it is God Who has the power to move upon your child’s will. Furthermore, He holds the very heart of your child in His sovereign hand and can turn it any direction He desires. *“The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.” (Proverbs 21:1).* This is not a reference to huge rivers like the Ohio or Mississippi, but irrigation ditches commonly found on the lands of farmers in Bible days. The same source of water fed the back forty acres as the front forty, and the flow was controlled by a gate which could be maneuvered to direct the water in the direction the farmer desired. By pulling a lever, he could funnel the water as he pleased. God has His hand on the lever of your child’s heart. He can direct it in any direction He pleases. He is in absolute control. That is why it is so important for you to appeal to Him and rely on Him to bring conviction and change into the heart of your child. These few moments of imposed solitude will go far in preparing your child for lasting change.

### **STEP #3: QUESTION YOUR CHILD**

The temptation of the novice parent is to charge wildly at the child with a pre-established list of accusations against him: “You lied!” “You stole that!” “You hit your sister!” and other charges are made posthaste with disastrous results. It is a truism that “Accusations attack the will, but questions prick the conscience.” The conscience is the target at this point, not the will. The only effect of strong accusations on the will is to harden it into resistance and rebellion, making it more difficult for any deep change. It is far better to approach the child with some key questions to guide his thinking into conformity with God’s.

The Lord Jesus Christ gives us a pattern to follow. He skillfully used a series of questions to help His listeners arrive at a predetermined conclusion. He knew where He wanted

them to go; but rather than pushing them there with accusations, He led them with questions. On one occasion, Jesus had gone into a synagogue on the Sabbath day to teach. He spotted a man whose right hand was withered and in need of healing. The self-righteous scribes and Pharisees who were present wanted to accuse Him of sin and tried to trap Him. *“And they asked him saying, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?’ that they might accuse him.” (Matthew 12:10).* At this point, Jesus could have told them exactly what He intended to do, or for that matter, simply have healed the man outright. Instead, He skillfully posed some incremental progressive questions which convicted their consciences. *“And he said unto them, ‘What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep?’”* By asking these questions, He confronted them with the truth He wanted them to learn. After this preparation, *“Then he said to the man, ‘Stretch forth thine hand.’ And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.”* The conclusion was inescapable; the will of God was for the man to be healed. But Christ wanted to address the conscience of the witnesses. A wise parent will emulate our Lord in this approach. You may know the violation of which your child is guilty, and you may know the ultimate conclusion you desire him to form. By leading him through well-thought-out questions to form his own conclusions, you allow the Spirit of God to convict him of sin. “Johnny, what did you say about your sister?” “Was that a true statement?” “If it wasn’t a true statement, what kind of statement was it?” “What does God call that?” “Did you tell a lie?” “How does God feel about lying?” “What do you feel is the right thing to do now?” “It’s good that you want to seek God’s forgiveness. Is there anyone else whose forgiveness you need?” “Do you think you should seek your sister’s forgiveness, too?”

#### **STEP #4: REINFORCE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES**

Principles are different than rules. Principles are broad, overarching truths which apply in many situations while rules are designed to deal with a specific situation. For example, it is one thing to say “Don’t smoke!” It is quite another to teach the principle of God’s ownership of your body and the importance of glorifying Him in everything you do with your body. The principle of ownership includes smoking but is not limited to it. It also includes drinking, drugs, illicit sex, gluttony, anorexia, bulimia, tattooing, body piercing and other sins against the body.

No wise parent should avoid handing down a judgment or fail to address any of the particular sins listed above, but the question is, how do you address them? At some point, of course, you will have to give a firm “yes” or “no,” but the biblically savvy parent will have more to base his response upon than a weak “Because I said so! That’s why!” He can bring his decision under the umbrella of what God says and bring the full authority of God’s wishes to bear on the issue at hand.

Paul taught that lasting change comes from obedience which comes from the heart which is traceable to the head. *“But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin but ye have obeyed*

*from the heart that form of doctrine delivered unto you.” (Romans 6:17). Teaching and applying biblical principles is powerful admonition which in time will be embraced by the heart and lived out in the life.*

During this time of imposed solitude while the child is still in his room (see Steps #1-3), you have an excellent opportunity to instill biblical principles in the heart of your child.

#### **STEP #5: DISCIPLINE UNTIL THE WILL IS BROKEN**

Essential to any discussion to the subject of corporal punishment (spanking) is a clear understanding of what biblical discipline is. The Bible term includes (chastening,” “nurture,” etc. *“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth...for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.” (Hebrews 12:6,10).*

The word “chastening” suggests “the broad ideas of education ... instructing ... training ... to chastise with blows, to scourge ... suggesting that Christian discipline that regulates character...”<sup>3</sup> The goal of spanking is to instill Christian character, to train the child. The means is physical pain and discomfort.

“Discipline” not “Punishment”

There is a basic difference between this discipline and what is commonly called punishment. Discipline is done out of love, punishment out of anger. Discipline is for the good of the offender, punishment for the satisfaction of the one administering the strokes. Discipline is with an eye to the future, punishment is with an eye to the past. Discipline always instills hope, punishment instills despair. Discipline promotes holiness, punishment promotes anger.

Use a Neutral Object

No where in the Scriptures is the parent instructed to use his hand in the disciplining process. The Bible promotes the use of the “rod,” a word with the various meanings of “a slender and flexible shoot or twig, a branch or bough, a staff for walking, a shepherd’s crook used in tending his flock, and the scepter of a king as an emblem of power.”<sup>4</sup>

The general meaning conveyed is that this is an object used to represent authority and inflict pain. It is significant that the use of the rod is promoted while the use of the hand is not. I believe the reason for this is that the child should associate his pain with a neutral object rather than a part of his parent’s body. One small child was seen carrying his daddy’s paddle out of the house. “Where are you going with that, son?” his father asked. “I’m going to throw it away.” replied the boy. “Why do you want to do that?” “Because I hate it!” Far better for the child to hate the rod than the parent.

## Hide Your Face During the Spanking

During the process of the spanking, it is wise for the parent to insure that the child does not witness the grimace of the parent's efforts or any expressions which could be interpreted as anger or uncontrolled rage. From a sensitive child's position and perspective, this could inflict a greater wound than the physical suffering. It is the child's actions which are rejected not the child himself, and he does not need to be confused by any images which might signal otherwise.

## Continue Only Briefly Beyond the Child's Brokenness

An ever-present danger in this process is that of extremes in the discipline. Too little pain produces rebellion. "*...let not thy soul spare for his crying*" (*Proverbs 19:18*). On the other hand, too much pain can create anger. "*...provoke not your children to wrath*" (*Ephesians 6:4*).

Finding the right balance can be tricky, but one indicator that the child's spirit is broken is that he stops resisting and demonstrates a yieldedness to his just deserts. Squirming, screaming and bawling replaced by sobbing is one evidence. It is vital not to go too far beyond this point.

Some suggest that the child be told precisely how many strokes will be administered, but this assumes that all children are created equal when it comes to discipline. It is important to adjust the duration, style and intensity of any discipline to fit the temperament of the child. For some, a look, a word or at most a stroke or two is sufficient. For other children, this would be a cakewalk. Be flexible in adjusting to the individuality of each child.

All of us must learn to surrender our will to God's, but this is something that has to be learned. The godly parent is a key player in God's plan for teaching the child to do this. Chronic resistance to the parent's will conditions the child to resist God's will. But teaching the child to surrender the will of the earthly father or spiritual authority will prepare them to better yield to that of the Heavenly Father.

## **STEP #6: ALLOW TIME FOR BROKENNESS**

After the child has been thoroughly dealt with by the parent, he needs to be left alone for a period of reflection and brokenness. The full implications of his sinfulness rarely sink in immediately, but now that he has been questioned and has had biblical principles reinforced into his thinking, the Holy Spirit can use this time to impress upon him the exceeding sinfulness of his waywardness.

Another reason for this time of solitude is to bring to bear one of often overlooked and undervalued needs of the disciplining process: a break in the parent-child relationship. The implications of this can best be seen at the cross.

The cross was a grievous burden for our Lord to bear. But one of its most painful aspects to Him was surprisingly not the physical pain but the break in fellowship with His Father. The Father had made Christ to become sin for us, and He could not look on His Son. For the first and only time in history, the fellowship between the Son and the Father was broken. This, far more than the physical suffering, was the agony of the cross for the Savior. *“In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment...” (Isaiah 54:8).*

Leaving the child alone for a period of time will underscore the heaviness of his sin. The break of parental fellowship combined with the opportunity to feel the full weight of sin will produce a needed “godly sorrow unto repentance.”

The song writer put it well: “He washed my eyes with tears that I might see...”

### **STEP #7: LOVE THEM**

Your child needs to know that you hate what he did rather than hating him for what he did. He needs to know it is his actions being rejected and not his person. Sincere and warm expression of your love will give him this assurance.

Hugs, kisses, touches and words will go far to bring healthy closure to the process. This sense of closure, of finalization is very important to the child.

The timing, however, is important. Making this the seventh step is no accident. It is placed here to avoid the well-intentioned but premature expressions of love often shared with the child. It is a syrupy sentimentality which equates forgiveness with haste and instant assurances of love with maturity. Signs of love and forgiveness planted on the school yards of teen killers the day after their wicked shooting sprees send the wrong message. Extending love before repentance may be perceived as a sort of condonement of sin or even a pre-occupation with the needs of the offender over the victims, a mindset which led to the sin in the first place.

But at some point a closure to the incident is needed to avoid leaving the child in a confused state of uncertain rejection with little hope of reconciliation with his parents and less understanding of how to accomplish it.

Expressions of parental love assures the child that the parent is addressing the act of his sin rather than locking him into a state of sin. By dealing with the specific sin and then granting forgiveness and love, it is clear to the child that the break in fellowship is temporary and not permanent. This will go far in equipping the child in the future to distinguish between the difference in the loss of God’s fellowship and His relationship.

The importance of loving your child was underscored in some recent long-term studies on child rearing. It was determined that in the final analysis, it is more important for the child to grow up and leave home with the pervasive sense of being loved than the perfect application of

a grocery list of specific techniques. Don't lose sight of your child's need of knowing he is loved in your slavish devotion to a perfect application of techniques.

### **STEP #8: PRAY WITH THEM**

The purpose of this time of prayer is to lead them in the biblical confession of their sin and to teach them to claim God's forgiveness.

#### **The Biblical Confession of Sin**

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)*

Contrary to politically correct thinking, seeking God's forgiveness does not involve "asking for forgiveness." The key to understanding this is the word "confess" in the above passage. The Greek word is "HOMOLOGEO," "homo" meaning "same," and "logeo" meaning word. Confession, then, means to say the same word as God says. This is a lost art in an age of a therapeutic vocabulary. Calling sinners "victims", for example, will never evoke a biblical process of confession.

Neither will training a child to approach God in a way He does not promote. Rather than teaching them to ask God for forgiveness, they need to learn to claim the offer of forgiveness already available. The way of claiming it is the act of confession. But claiming what is already offered is far different from asking.

Not since Calvary are we told to ask for forgiveness. Because all the punishment for sin was met there, all the forgiveness we need is freely provided by the blood of Jesus Christ. This forgiveness is appropriated through confession.

The prayer of confession involves agreeing with God that what I am responsible for is a sin (not a mistake, someone else's fault, etc.), agreeing with God that the sin is against Him and His Word, and agreeing with God by using the same language to describe my sin that He uses.

It may be necessary to coach your child in this process in the initial attempts at prayer, but time and experience will wean him from this. Have him pray first, then lead him into a fuller confession if the need exists, then you pray aloud for him.

### **STEP #9: LEAD THEM TO MAKE RESTITUTION**

Zacheus was a publican, a tax collector. Publicans were especially despised by their fellow countrymen because they worked in consort with the hated Romans to exact taxes from them. And because Rome did not care how much the publicans kept for themselves as long as they collected the required amount, the publicans had no restraints on what they could demand while they enjoyed all the authority of Rome in collecting it. Needless to say, this made them very rich but also very unpopular.

Zacheus, who was not only a publican but “the chief among the publicans” had a change of heart when he met Christ and desired to do the right thing. His repentance was so complete that it prompted him to declare: “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.” (Luke 19:8). Upon hearing these words, Christ declared, “This day is salvation come to this house...” (Luke 19:9).

The principle of restitution taught in the Scriptures involves making right the damage done by one’s sin. If your child stole something, have him return it; if he broke something, have him replace it; if he hurt someone, require that he make it right.

This is necessary for him to learn more fully of the consequences of his sin and his personal responsibility in correcting the damage it caused.

## **CONCLUSION**

Don’t lose sight of the purpose of all these steps. In the final analysis, the only purpose worthy of your efforts is God’s purpose. He chastens us “*that we might be partakers of His holiness...*” (Hebrews 12:10). Keep this lofty goal before you and you will not lose heart even in the midst of the tedious and chronic diligence required to help your child. Yes, there will be struggles and disappointments in the training of your child, “*...nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.*” (Hebrews 12:11).