

COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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Disciplining Your Children.

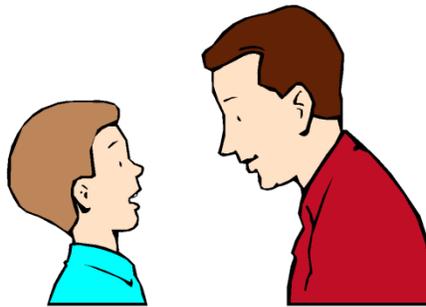
Let me ask you a question, "Do you love your child? Do you care about how he or she will grow up and what kind of person they will become?" If you are concerned, listen very carefully to the words of Solomon, "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly" (Prov. 13:24). The wisest man who ever lived made it clear that one of the best ways you can show your love for a child is by your guidance and discipline. Do you believe that? Do you associate love with discipline, or do you think that discipline is just harsh and mean?

Many people today have various concepts regarding discipline. What does discipline mean? How can you discipline with love and wisdom? The three greatest errors in discipline are: 1) withholding correction, 2) over-disciplining, 3) or incorrectly disciplining. Do you realize that Scripture speaks about all these extremes? The Bible commands that you should, "not withhold discipline from a child" (Prov. 23:13) However, the Bible also warns that to be harsh with your child, "stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1). In addition, harsh discipline would be one of the incorrect ways to discipline. How then can you keep the balance and train your child effectively following biblically balanced discipline?

What is Discipline?

When the discussion of discipline comes up in conversation many parents today ask, "What is discipline, and what is its purpose?" The answer to this question is

fundamental for every parent. Simply said, discipline is balanced correction to give a child an understanding of what is right and wrong. Discipline shows a child that there are always consequences for sin (Prov. 10:13; Numbers 32:23; Rom. 6:23).



Take time to effectively instruct your child!

Discipline and correction in a child's life are also essential to help them resist the sin and the wickedness that is within their own hearts. Solomon declared that, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him" (Prov. 22:15). The word *foolishness* in this passage means sin or perversity. Therefore, corrective discipline turns the heart of a child from their sinful behavior and rebellion. Why is rebellion an issue? Rebellion is what leads your child to hell. Do you want that? Of course not, no parent would ever want this for their child. This is why Solomon taught, "Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell" (Prov. 23:13-14). The word *beat* in verse 14 can be translated to lightly strike (Strong's Concordance). This verse in no way encourages child abuse or harsh beatings. If you bruise your child

from spanking you have misunderstood and misapplied this instruction! I will address this issue of spanking later in this article.

The purpose of all corrective discipline is obedience in a child (Eph. 6:1-4). Parental discipline develops respect and reverence toward God and towards you as the parent (Heb. 12:9). When God disciplines and corrects you, His purpose is to produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness in your life (Heb. 12:11; Deut. 8:5-6). David said, "Blessed is the man You discipline, O Lord; the man You teach from Your law." (Ps. 94:12 NIV). The word *blessed* means happy. Therefore, your happiness is His goal. So, you must realize that your child's ultimate happiness must be your goal as well.

The chief purpose of discipline is to change the heart (Prov. 22:15). God knows what is in the heart of man. Jesus taught, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matt. 15:19). Jesus wanted people to deal with the real issues that defile them, not to simply fulfill external religious rituals. But, the question is, how do you get to the heart issues with discipline?

How to Discipline?

The real goal of parenting is not managing behavior, but teaching and training the heart! For very young children the concept of the heart is too abstract for them to comprehend. Therefore, begin with simple explanations of what it means to be kind, loving, and giving. These are the correct choices of the heart. As

"She is your companion and your wife by covenant" Mal. 2:14

your children grow and mature, make heart attitudes your continual focus.

How do you actually deal with the heart of your child? Let me explain several ways.

1. Always use the Word of God. Why is the Word of God so important in getting at your child's heart? The Scripture has been specifically tailored by God to convict the heart. *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart"* (Heb. 4:12). When you correct your child explain what God's Word teaches about that particular issue, without forgetting to also explain what the alternative entails. The Spirit takes His Word and uses it as a sword to speak directly to the heart.

2. Speak to the conscience. Paul makes a direct correlation between his conscience and his heart. He said, *"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart"* (Rom. 9:1-2). The conscience has been specifically formed by God to either accuse or excuse a person's actions (Rom. 2:15). Remember, the conscience affirms the truth of the Word of God in the heart. You must speak to the conscience of your child. You do this by using the Word of God as you speak to their faults or to encourage them in their successes. God's Word does both, it convicts and encourages. Both conviction and encouragement will sensitize their conscience.

3. Ask heart probing questions. Solomon said, *"Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out"* (Prov. 20:5). What your child thinks in his or her heart is deep water, and must be drawn out. You are the best person to help them draw it out into the light, because you know and

understand them best. Your ultimate goal is that their own heart will become their counselor as they grow and mature. Asking your child a question is what stirs their own heart and mind. This helps them to listen to their own conscience. When you ask questions such as, "Why did you make that choice? What were you thinking? What did you want? Did you consider what would happen when you took that action?" These are the questions that stir and probe the thinking of the human heart. This is why Jesus asked similar questions. He asked, *"Why do you think evil in your hearts"* (Matt. 9:4)? *"Why are you fearful, O you of little faith"* (Matt. 8:26)? *"For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so"* (Matt. 5:46-47)? Jesus asked these and many other questions to teach and to discipline the hearts of those He wanted to change.

However, you won't know these questions if you have not drawn the deep water from your own heart. Your counsel to your child can only result from examining your own heart, and responding to your own conscience before God. In other words, you cannot help your children realize truth or take actions that you have not first taken yourself. Paul said, *"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received"* (1 Cor. 15:3). Therefore, are you asking your own heart probing questions? Do you listen to your own conscience? Are you allowing the Word of God to speak, convict, and pierce your heart?

4. Prayer. If you want God to touch your child's heart you must encourage them to pray. Scripture connects the heart of man with prayer. David said to God, *"Your servant has found it in his heart to pray this prayer to You"* (2 Sam. 7:27). When a child prays they are bringing the issues of their heart to

God. You must teach them to pray as soon as they can speak and reason. Jesus taught men always *"to pray and not lose heart"* (Luke 18:1). Prayer is where your child will find God's encouragement to not lose heart in the struggles of their life. Encourage your children to ask for a willingness of heart to stop their sinful behavior, and strength of heart to obey God. Encourage them to open their heart to God and seek His help for their needs.

In addition, you need to pray for your children often. If you want God to touch their hearts, then cry out to the only One who can reach their hearts and bring the changes necessary. Prayer is one of the greatest weapons you have in fighting the battle for your children's hearts. Remember, Samuel the Prophet made a commitment to pray for the people of God. He assured them, *"As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way"* (1 Sam. 12:23). Are you committed to praying for your children like this? Your prayer for them is effective and accomplishes more than you will ever know. James affirmed, *"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much"* (James 5:16). Whether you immediately see results of your prayers or not, believe that God is at work in their hearts. Jesus promised that if you will pray, He would work (Matt. 7:11)!

5. Parallel stories. Another way to communicate truth to your children's hearts is to use parallel stories when you speak to them about spiritual truth. A parallel story can get past the intellectual roadblocks and hardness of heart that resists the truth. This method of reaching the heart is best seen when the Prophet Nathan spoke to King David about his sin of adultery and the murder of Uriah (2 Sam. 12:1-7). David had resisted God's conviction upon his heart for his sin for many months. Finally, Nathan came to David and told him a story about two men. One was a rich

man who had many sheep, and the other a poor man who had only one pet lamb. The rich man had an out-of-town guest come and he took the poor man's lamb instead of taking one from his own flock. When David heard this story he immediately became angry and said that this man should surely die. At that moment Nathan said to David, "*You are the man!*" (2 Sam. 12:7). David was instantly convicted after hearing the story, and acknowledged his sin (2 Sam. 12:7-15). This example powerfully illustrates the effective use of parallel stories, and their ability to break through a hard heart.

If you want to penetrate the heart of your child, ask God for simple parallel stories that you can use to illustrate your point. Then ask, "Would you like it if someone did this to you?" Or, "Do you think this was right?" Then wait for the truth to penetrate the heart!

6. Don't belittle or compare. One thing I always like to remind parents about is never compare their child with their siblings or friends. This sets up an instant animosity with the person you are comparing them to, and hardens the heart of your child. They will perceive your comparison as favoritism. When your child hears, "Why can't you be like _____? Or, _____ would never do that," it will always be counter-productive to reaching their heart. Think about it, do you like to be compared or belittled because you are not like someone else? Of course not! Then don't do it to your child! Simply, deal with the problem or issue based on the infallible mirror of Scripture, and not the imperfect example of another sinner. Remember the hatred and jealousy that resulted with Joseph's brothers because of the favoritism of Jacob (Gen. 37:3). Jacob's actions had life-long consequences for his entire family.

Keys for Disciplining

If you want your discipline to be effective keep the following principles in mind:

1. Communicate clearly and specifically to your child what is wrong and unacceptable behavior. Make sure to also communicate what heart issue is behind the behavior you are warning them about. For example: (not giving or not sharing a toy = selfishness) (talking badly of another = being unloving or jealous or unkind) (tattling = anger or seeking revenge).

2. Remember, the younger a child is, the harder it will be for them to reason through an attitude or behavior as you do, therefore, keep it simple.

3. You must enforce every rule you make. When your child is young make as few rules as possible. Even God had only ten original commandments!

4. Save yourself time and frustration by child-proofing your cabinets, using non-turn plastic door knobs, or anything to make your job easier.

5. When a problem occurs, get all the facts first. Who was involved? What exactly happened? You do not want to sin against your child by being unjust because of a lack of information.

6. Determine to the best of your ability the intent of your child's action. Was it rebellion, an accident, childish irresponsibility, a lack of ability to follow your rule, or their lack of understanding of what was required? Rebellion requires discipline, an accident does not.

Forms of Discipline.

All forms of discipline show your child that there is a consequence for sin. Discipline should always be in accordance with the balance between what your child knows and the rebellion that follows. This is why you should never spank an infant, because he or she does not have sufficient knowledge or understanding or intent to willfully rebel against you. Therefore, graduate your discipline accordingly as your child ages.

1. Verbal reproof. Discipline should always begin with a verbal reproof or correction (Prov. 29:15; 17). This gives clear knowledge to their conscience to grasp the infraction.

2. Time out. When the same infraction occurs send your child to a time out on a chair near where you are working, or in their bedroom. This is withholding good from them which is one way God disciplined His people (Jer. 5:25).

3. Loss of privilege. When the infraction occurs again take away a certain privilege, blessing, or toy (Gen. 31:9; Jer. 16:5).

4. Spanking. Your last resort should be to spank. Many parents use this as their first option, however when God disciplines with His harshest reproofs it is always after His people have refused to be reformed by His gentler reproofs (Lev. 26:23). Study these passages, (Prov. 13:24; Prov. 19:18; Heb. 12:6-9).

Common Errors

1. Don't allow anger to control or motivate you. Remember, the wrath of man does not produce "the righteousness of God" (James 1:20).

2. Not getting all the facts before disciplining. Remember, an older child can reason and remember much better. This means that they have greater capability to deceive or mislead you. Be careful to always get *all* the facts.

3. Spanking infants or teens. The older a child gets the more you need to move from spanking to the use of reason. Spanking should be used less and less and completely phased out by the age of ten or the onset of puberty. As they become teenagers you must change your forms of discipline to more adult methods. As they grow in their reasoning abilities you must use discussion, explanation, examples from your own life as your tools in training and correction. God said to His people, "*Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord*" (Is. 1:18). Use logical consequences so your

children will see the relationship between the infraction and your discipline. For instance, if your child hits someone maliciously with their bicycle, take the bike away for a reasonable period of time (Ex. 22:1; Deut. 19:18-19; 2 Thess. 3:10; Gal. 6:7). If your child fights with or bullies other children at school, have them sit on the bench for their recess times for a day or two.

If your child has maliciously destroyed or stolen something, make them pay restitution to replace the item. Restitution should always come from his or her own allowance or from their personal labor to repay you or the offended party. Children must be reminded that this kind of discipline is the way things are done in the real world (Luke 19:8; Neh. 5:11-12).

4. Not confirming your love after the discipline has been meted out. Remember, God's love is everlasting!

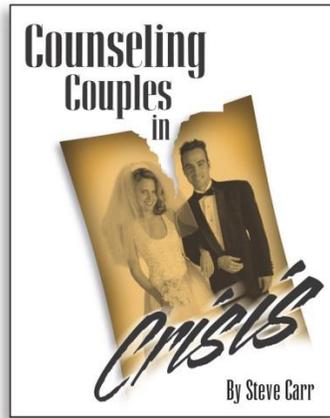
5. If your children grow up and still rebel against God, does that mean that you didn't do a good job parenting? Not necessarily. The children of Israel continued in rebellion against the Lord even though He disciplined them. God spoke through the Prophet Hosea reproving His people when He said, "Though I disciplined and strengthened their arms, yet they devise evil against Me" (Hosea 7:15).

Remember, children are responsible to yield to the discipline, if they do not they are called foolish. Solomon revealed the harsh reality that a child might despise the instruction given to them. "A fool despises his father's instruction, but he who receives reproof is prudent" (Prov. 15:5). Therefore, your child also has a responsibility in the process of discipline. May God give you wisdom in this critical issue of parenting!

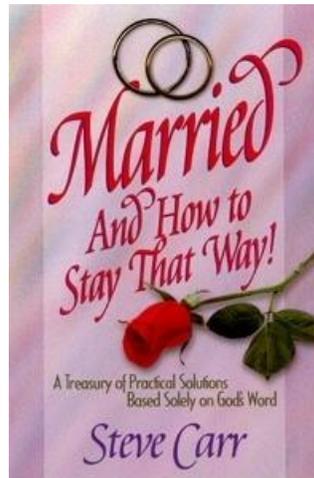
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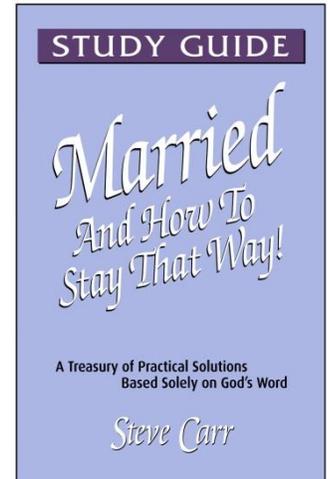
Counselor Training Manual: The *Counseling Couples in Crisis* manual with accompanying DVD training material has been developed for pastors and lay counselors to assist them to counsel couples in crisis. Go to www.covenantkeepers.org for more details.



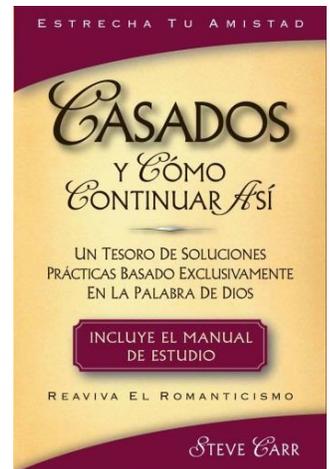
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