

PERSPECTIVES ON PARENTHOOD

From the beginning, the family has played a critical role in the outworking of God's purposes on earth. As the fundamental building block of society, it was designed to provide the context for the nurture and training of each succeeding generation. The family was also designed to reflect and flesh out spiritual truth. Scripture uses the imagery of the family to speak of our relationship with God in Christ. As believers, we are adopted children in the household of God (Rom. 8:15-17). We are also heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17; Eph. 1:11; 3:6). The living God is our loving Father (Heb. 12:5-11), and we are His children (1 John 3:1). These analogies illustrate the high calling and responsibility which accompanies Christian parenthood.

In this booklet, we will look for biblical principles on loving, teaching, disciplining, and developing children of spiritual and moral character.

PERSPECTIVE, PRIORITIES, AND PURPOSE OF THE HOME

Perspective

According to Psalm 127:3-5, children are a gift from the Lord. They are God's possession, not ours. He has temporarily placed them under our care; in effect, our children are "on loan" from God for the 18 or so years they are under our

roof. We have been given the task of raising them up from a state of complete dependence to a state of complete independence so that we can release them to God by the time they reach maturity.

It is urgent that we as Christian parents recognize this truth. Failure to do so will lead to unbiblical attitudes which can have a devastating impact on the self-image and development of our children. One such attitude is excessive possessiveness. Believing that their children are their own possessions, some parents do not adequately prepare them to leave the home. Because of this attitude, parents become overprotective and fail to give their children the growing independence, skills, and responsibility that they need. As a result, they are not equipped for life in the outside world. Even after they marry they may be psychologically or financially dependent upon their parents, and this hinders their ability to leave, cleave, and establish a one-flesh relationship in marriage.

Another unbiblical attitude is reflected in the problem of parents who build their entire lives and marriages around their children. Too many parents seek to fulfill their own ambitions and dreams by identifying themselves with their children and living their lives through them. This vicarious attempt to find fulfillment always leads to frustration and disappointment because the children rarely meet such expectations and leave home so soon. It also places them under an intolerable demand of performance standards that they are physically, emotionally, or mentally incapable of attaining. Perhaps the most difficult biblical principle to

apply as a parent is the need to accept your children as they are. Your true source of identity is in Christ, not your children. Your child may not be as physically or mentally capable as you would like, but if you realize that he is God's possession and not yours, you can accept him for who he is. The practice of this truth can liberate your children from the fear of rejection and failure. If you as parents have not formally given your children over to the Lord, why not do it now?

Priorities

Perhaps the greatest ongoing challenge in the practice of the Christian life is to keep one's priorities in the biblical order. It is easy to let the good become the enemy of the best by making a career or a ministry supremely important. When this happens, we begin to neglect our personal devotional lives, our husbands or wives, and our children. The scriptural priority sequence is clear: God first, family second, career- ministry third. We should regularly remind ourselves of this order and examine the way we spend our time in light of it. This may mean the elimination of unnecessary responsibilities and the limitation of outside activities. Good children are the product of careful cultivation, and this requires time.

Purpose

The Christian home has been called "a laboratory for the application of biblical truth in a relational setting." It is a training ground for the impartation of values, for learning how to give and receive love, and for the development of relationships. Parents are responsible to provide for their children's material needs

(family finances are discussed in the booklet on stewardship). But they have also been entrusted with the responsibility of shaping their children's character and guiding their spiritual, psychological, intellectual, emotional, and physical growth. This is not to be left by default to outside institutions. The primary spiritual and moral training of children should be in the home, not in the church or school.

What do you want for your children? It is important to think through your basic objectives as a parent. Without specific objectives and goals to carry them out, parenting can become a hit-and-miss affair. What kind of adult do you want your child to become? Add your own objectives to the following list and then prioritize them:

- Self-acceptance
- Obedience
- Financial responsibility
- Healthy relationships with others
- Discovery and development of spiritual gifts
- Vital walk with the Lord
- Respect for authority
- Growing responsibility
- Generosity in giving
- Good stewardship of time and talent

What are you currently doing to accomplish these objectives in the lives of your children? More than anything else, we should want to present our children to the Lord as people who will love and serve Him. We don't have all the answers, but we do have biblical principles and a relationship with God who alone can provide the competence, compassion, and control we need to raise our children in the "discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE CHRISTIAN HOME

A home that is characterized by the presence of Christ should be attractive, not repellent. There should be an atmosphere of love, acceptance, openness, forgiveness, and honesty. The Christian home is at its best when it is a positive place of fun, constructive and creative activities, encouragement, enjoyment, and relaxed attitudes. This becomes possible when Christ is the cohesive factor in the life of a family and when parents set the example of personal commitment to Him.

When Christlike attitudes prevail in parents, each member of the household is made to feel that he or she is an important part of the family. Husbands and wives are to model before their children the qualities of mutual respect and concern for one another in the Lord. As this atmosphere extends to their relationship with their children, they will sincerely respect the worth and uniqueness of each child. This recognition of the individuality and dignity of each family member is manifested in a positive and encouraging attitude. When people are sarcastic rather than supportive, relationships disintegrate. Since it takes about

five positive comments to overcome one negative remark, it is important for parents to be on their children's teams, not on their backs. They should avoid favoritism and comparisons of one child with another. It is especially important for parents to openly admit their mistakes and ask forgiveness from their children when they embarrass or insult them, break a promise, or mistreat them. In this way, honesty and esteem for each individual become ingrained in the thinking of the children.

Here are some additional suggestions for improving the atmosphere of the home:

- Be supportive of each other as parents and do not undermine your parental authority by contradicting one another in the presence of the children. If you disagree with the way your husband or wife handled a situation, discuss it later if possible.
- Ask yourself, "Am I fun to live with?" If the answer is no, what needs to be changed?
- Allow children to grow and learn at their own rate. Encourage, but don't push.
- As a parent, stay in a learning mode. You can learn much from your children. Be willing to change your behavior, your perspectives, and your attitudes.
- Periodically have a family council to encourage the expression of opinions and problems.
- Have one or more family pets.
- Do not let your children play one parent against the other.
- Practice biblical forgiveness without nursing grudges or dwelling on the past.
- Treat your children with courtesy; compliment and encourage them

whenever possible.

--Support the creative expression of each member of the family

through hobbies, lessons, and the development of skill and talent.

SPIRITUAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Spiritual Development

Prerequisites

Deuteronomy 6 outlines an essential program for the spiritual development of children. One of the prerequisites is found in verses 4-5: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." As parents, we cannot impart to our children what we ourselves do not possess. Unless we have a growing relationship with God in Christ, we cannot expect our children to desire the same. The first prerequisite to being a godly parent is to love God with our minds, emotions, and wills, and this requires an ongoing relationship of trust, dependence, and communion with the Lord (see the booklet on the spiritual life). It is only as we respond to God's love that we can walk in it; spiritual vitality must be in our hearts before it can be in our homes.

A second prerequisite is found in verse 6: "And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart." We must not only respond to God's love, but also to His Word. Scripture speaks to every dimension of life, and our effectiveness in any area depends on the degree to which we know and apply

relevant biblical principles. If we try to raise children by doing what comes naturally, we will be ineffective.

A third prerequisite to the spiritual development of children is a readiness to share experiences of God's work in our lives (verses 20-23), particularly in specific answers to prayer.

In effect, then, we are living models for our children. What we are communicates far more than what we say; spirituality is more caught than taught. The intimacies of home life soon expose an artificial front, so there is little point in teaching what we do not practice. We must demonstrate with our lives the reality of our faith. The greater the correspondence between what we are and what we say, the more completely our children will identify with our standards. If parents are committed to growth and positive spiritual change, their children will pick that up. If they are committed to the importance of seeing others come to Christ, their children will also learn by that. Children will not walk in the ways of God simply because they are told to do so. They respond to reality, not to lip service or pretense. Few things are more confusing than people who give good advice but set bad examples.

It has been observed that no little child will think more of God than he thinks of his father. If a father ignores his child, is unkind to his wife, or is unfair, the child will have a problem with a distorted image of God. Modeling is the most effective method of teaching, whether for good or ill. A healthy view of God is best

communicated by parents who have allowed the Holy Spirit to make them authentic, loving, Christlike people. This requires nothing less than total dependence upon the Lord. Apart from His power, we are incapable of fulfilling the high calling of Christian parenthood. This is especially true of the single parent who often has less free time and yet must fill the dual role of father and mother. We should be praying on a daily basis for our families and with our families.

Principles

Deuteronomy 6:7 provides a foundational principle for the spiritual development of children: "and you shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 up." This is the "teach-talk" principle--teaching refers to formal instruction and talking refers to informal instruction. In both cases, the communication of biblical truth takes place in a relational setting.

As we have seen, we must live our convictions, but we must also explain them. There is a danger in some evangelical homes of religious activities becoming so church-oriented that they become a substitute for Christian teaching in the home. The Scriptures, however, commission parents to be the primary vehicle for the inculcation of the Christian world view in the thinking and behavior of their children. It is their responsibility to teach their sons and daughters to know and pursue the ways of God. Thus God said of Abraham, "For I have chosen him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the

way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; in order that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him" (Gen. 18:19). The other side of this coin is God's judgment upon the house of Eli because of his failure to rebuke his sons for their godless behavior: "For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them" (1 Sam. 3:13). Eli was a devoted priest but a defective parent. His indifference as a father led not only to his children's downfall, but also his own. Parental instruction must be corrective as well as preventive. If we do not shape our children's thinking and values, someone else will.

Parents communicate biblically when they train their children to relate the Word of God to practical, everyday life. "A father tells his sons about Thy faithfulness" (Isa. 38:18b). Formal times of teaching can be associated with family worship (see below). But the informal times of teaching that arise spontaneously in the circumstances of life are even more important. We can make spiritual knowledge pleasing (Prov. 15:2) by being creative and by looking for receptive and teachable moments. Everyday incidents can become effective vehicles for communicating biblical truth. If parents only acknowledge God at grace before meals, children will get the impression that God is not very important. But if they sprinkle their conversation at various times in the day with talk of God and His Word, children will see that all of life relates to the Lord.

A second foundational principle comes from Deuteronomy 6:8-9: "And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." This is the "bind-write" principle--spiritual truth must be bound up in our actions ("hand") and attitudes ("head"), and it must be inscribed in our private ("doorposts") and public ("gates") lives. In short, it must move from our hearts into our homes, and from our homes into our habits. When it is woven into the fabric of our lives, it affects every aspect of our character, and Christian character becomes contagious when children see it acted out every day. Joshua illustrated this principle when he said, "but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15b).

Evangelism and Discipleship

Our children are a gift from God (Ps. 127:3), and He has temporarily entrusted them into our care. Part of our God-given responsibility as parents is to evangelize and disciple our children. We need to pray for them and ask for insight into their character so that we can raise them in the most appropriate and individual way. And at some point, each child should be privately confronted with the claims of Christ on his life. In a real sense, evangelism should begin in the home and reach out from the home into the community.

Similarly, if we disciple other people and fail to disciple our own children, our ministry will reflect the wrong priorities. First, we must integrate the Word of

God into our own lives, second into our families, and third into others. We are responsible to teach our children the skill of making practical decisions based on biblical principles. We are also the primary vehicles through which children gain their self-image, and it is important that we gradually help them see who they really are in Christ. Children need to understand that as believers in Jesus, they are unconditionally accepted and loved by Him and that they have eternal worth and significance. It is our parental task as Christians to instruct children in the way of the Lord and to teach them to trust Him, love Him, and obey Him (cf. Deut. 4:9; 31:12-13).

For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should teach them to their children, that the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children, that they should put their confidence in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments (Ps. 78:5-7).

It is especially important that each child learns to cultivate his own walk with the Lord. Children do not automatically develop true spirituality simply because their parents have these qualities. No one matures in the faith vicariously or by osmosis. Since God has no grandchildren, they must develop their own personal relationship with Christ; they need their own experiences of the reality of God. This means that they should be encouraged to spend some time each day in the Word and to learn about answered and unanswered prayer by growing in their own prayer life. As they mature, the dimensions of trust and commitment should move from the level of theory to the level of practice. Our real goal must be to teach them that their

relation to Jesus Christ is more important than their relation to us. This means that we must seek God's will for our children above our own.

Proverbs 22:6 is perhaps the most frequently used passage on the spiritual development of children: "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." The word for "train up" is related to the concept of dedication or setting apart, but it also has a derivative idea of creating a taste or desire. Thus, the first part of this verse means to dedicate a child to the Lord and create within him a desire to know God. The word for "child" is used both of young and older children, indicating that this process should take place throughout the developmental years. The phrase "in the way he should go" means "according to his own way." Because each child has a unique personality, the most effective training is suited to differences in age, abilities, and temperament. Children need to be treated as individuals. In effect, then, this verse tells us to dedicate our children to the Lord and create a taste within them to know Him in ways that are appropriate to their ages and personalities, and when they mature, their spiritual heritage will remain a part of them.

Personal Development

Prerequisites

Just as the spiritual development of children requires example and instruction, so does the personal development of character, conviction, and commitment in children. We need to be students of each child and walk in

dependence upon the Holy Spirit for the proper balance of affirmation and discipline in day-to-day living.

One prerequisite to the personal development of children is meeting their physical and psychological needs. Clearly, provision of basic physical needs like proper nourishment, clothing, shelter, and protection is necessary to all other forms of growth (2 Cor. 12:14; 1 Tim. 5:8). Children also have psychological needs including the security that comes from love and unconditional acceptance. Without strong bonds of parental affection, a child may develop feelings of insecurity, inferiority, and inadequacy. Because his personal worth needs are unmet, he can become manipulative, anxious, and rebellious. A child's self-image is shaped more by his parents than by any other force. If the bridge of love is flimsy, biblical truth will not get across, no matter how much it is taught.

It is essential, then, that parents fulfill their children's physical and psychological needs in their growing years. However, we should remember that our real task is to move through the gradual process of weaning them from complete dependence on us to complete dependence on Christ.

A second prerequisite to the personal development of children is teaching by example. Children are such imitators that the power of example does more to train a child than anything else. It is as we become embodiments of our own teaching that we establish true authority, but this takes personal discipline and conscious effort. Elton Trueblood observed in [The Recovery of Family Life](#) that

"The parent makes the mistake, frequently, of concentrating on the child when he would help the child more if he would concentrate on himself."

A picture is worth a thousand words, and a thousand words cannot overcome a bad example. In the first five years of a child's life, we communicate far more by climate than by concepts. It is during these years that basic attitudes like honesty and trust are developed. Like spirituality, convictions are more effectively caught than taught. As they grow, children learn more from who we are and what we do than from what we say. Values are relationally communicated. Children mimic and internalize the values they live with. Those who live with criticism learn to condemn; those who live with jealousy learn to hate; those who live with anger learn to develop a flaring temper; those who live with acceptance learn to love; those who live with approval learn to like themselves; those who live with fairness learn justice; and those who live with honesty learn to value truth.

Children instinctively detect phoniness. When they pick up discrepancies between their parents' lips and lives, they are less likely to embrace their ideals. If you do not earn your children's respect when they are young, you certainly won't have it when they become teenagers. If as a Christian you live with a double standard, your children are likely to have only one--the world's. It is when they learn to respect you for being a genuine and consistent person that they will also accept your ideals. Because of the power of example, you must be what you want

your children to become. This demands both dependence on God and personal discipline.

Principles

The importance of communicating values by practice does not eliminate the need to teach them by precept. This is the principle of positive instruction. A Christian perspective on values, standards, and attitudes must be qualitatively different from that of contemporary society. Because of our degenerating culture, those who maintain biblical convictions are a minority whose lives stand out in growing contrast to the prevailing winds of morality and materialism. In addition, we must be careful not to confuse the standards of Christians with Christian standards. The former are often cultural; the latter are biblical.

There is also a tendency for people to know more about what they don't want and do than what they do want and do. Without a positive set of objectives, we will tend to react rather than anticipate. Indeed, the New Testament warns us about the negative qualities of dishonesty, disobedience, greed, hatred, injustice, intolerance, jealousy, self-indulgence, and untruthfulness, but it also tells us to pursue the positive qualities of courage, diligence, faithfulness, forgiveness, generosity, gentleness, goodness, honesty, humility, joyfulness, kindness, love, loyalty, mercy, obedience, patience, peacefulness, perseverance, prayerfulness, repentance, reverence, righteousness, self-control, servanthood, thankfulness, trust, unselfishness, and wisdom. It should be our desire not only to embrace but also to

impart biblical convictions (not mere conformity) in the thinking and behavior of each child. Even in matters of doubtful things, we should be "fully convinced" in our own minds (Rom. 14:5). On the other hand, it is wise to periodically reevaluate our objectives and priorities to see if they are on target.

Like spiritual development, personal development of children involves both formal and informal teaching. We can use expected and unexpected events and experiences like tragedies, deaths, births, marriages, and divorces as times of instruction and preparation. It is important to tell them the truth and to be honest about your own failures and successes. Through such events we can teach them about the cause-and-effect sequences of ethical and unethical behavior.

Children will not mature as people unless they are given the freedom to grow and the opportunity to be accountable for their choices. This is the principle of personal responsibility. They are conditioned according to reality when they are fed responsibility in proportion to their ability. This requires the balance of not expecting more than they can produce (which would lead to frustration) and not doing for them what they can do for themselves (which would lead to laziness and helplessness). Growth in responsibility is a gradual process of building a child's skills and self-confidence by gently forcing him to move from dependence to independence. This process should begin by the time he is two and should be complete before he leaves the nest.

Children are taught the how-to's of daily life by learning to accept new tasks and responsibilities. It takes time and effort to instruct them in these tasks (it's often easier to do them ourselves), but good work habits build character. If they are given too much play time they will become undisciplined and learn to hate work. It is a good idea to rotate chores among children so that all eventually do the same ones. They should also learn to appreciate rewards by working for them. Temporary deprivation is better than instant gratification; overindulgence is really a disservice to a child.

Parents are constantly tempted to do too much for their children and make all their decisions for them. Perhaps the biggest reason is that risk is directly proportional to responsibility. Casualties and difficulties are part of the process of learning, and the parent who bails a child out of every problem deprives him of valuable lessons. As he progresses toward adulthood, he must gain both preventive and corrective wisdom. Much of this wisdom is attained through increasing responsibility and independence. As maturity increases, the need for rules decreases.

It is not enough to exemplify and explain standards; they must also be enforced. This is the principle of practical reinforcement. Parents are responsible to channel, correct, and control their children's behavior. One New Testament condition for Christian leadership is that a father "be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity" (1 Tim. 3:4;

Heb. 12:6-10). Family values and standards should be clearly reflected in rules that are enforced. In this way, children will know what is expected of them. It is best to make them as few and simple as possible; cumbersome rules are hard to maintain and lead to excessive nagging, scolding, warning, forbidding, and repression. Even when rules are few, it takes effort and determination to keep them consistently.

Rules are reinforced by positive and negative recognition. Just as there must be consequences for violation, there should also be praise, encouragement, and admiration when a child does something right. When disobedience leads to pain and obedience leads to affirmation, a child is doubly motivated to obey. The parental relationship must be supportive, not stifling. The limits prescribed by rules should be reasonable so that children will have opportunities to express themselves in legitimate rather than illegitimate ways. Safeguards and restraints are necessary to protect them from negative influences, and parents should monitor the people and things that affect their children, including what they watch on television, the books they read, the movies they see, what they do after school, and the friends they make (Prov. 13:20).

LOVE AND DISCIPLINE

Love

Family rules are important, but they have meaning only within the context of relationships. The parent-child relationship is best characterized by a love which acts in the best interests of the child. This is the kind of love which sometimes must

hurt in order to heal, even when a child does not understand. Just as the Lord disciplines those whom He loves (Prov. 3:12; Heb. 12:6), so parents who really love their children will discipline and instruct them with firmness. "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (Heb. 12:11). When punishment becomes necessary, it is important to explain the reason for it and to reaffirm your love in the process so that your child will realize that you rejected his behavior, not him. You may not like what your child did, but you want him to realize your unconditional love for who he is. Sometimes your best opportunities to communicate this love to your child occur immediately after punishment. As James Dobson observed, "It is the ultimate paradox of childhood that a youngster wants to be controlled, but he insists that his parents earn the right to control him."

Discipline and love are both necessary; either discipline without love or love without discipline will ruin the parent-child relationship. Ross Campbell's How to Really Love Your Child and James Dobson's Dare to Discipline, The Strong-Willed Child, and Preparing for Adolescence are recommended books which present the needed balance.

Scripture exhorts us to let our minds dwell on that which is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent, and worthy of praise (Phil. 4:8). Love places an emphasis on the positive. How often do you look for actions, attitudes, and words on the part of your children that you can praise? A report

from the American Institute of Family Relations states that parents make ten negative comments for every positive remark to their children. Yet we accomplish far more by loving affirmation than we do by berating. Sadly, parents are often more sensitive to bad behavior than they are to good. It is not surprising, then, that children sometimes act disobediently just to be noticed. The antidote to this disorder is parental love and companionship. Just as we want others to be sensitive to our feelings, we need to be sensitive to times when children are tired, hungry, anxious, or ill.

We teach children to love by displaying love. Children derive as much security from the assurance that their parents love each other as they do from the assurance that their parents love them. Nothing is more threatening to a child than to see his parents fighting and yelling at each other. As the Search booklet on marriage emphasizes, it is disastrous to a marriage when parents devote themselves entirely to their children and fail to grow in their relationship with each other. It is far healthier for everyone in the family when children are exposed to parents who demonstrate their deep love for each other. Love is to be a way of life which surrounds every relationship in the home.

Another way of displaying love to children is by consistent times of focused attention. Focused attention requires eye contact, physical contact, and expressions of affection. How often do you hold your child, look directly at him, and tell him that you love him? Children need to be hugged and held not only by

the mother but also by the father. Each parent should also make an effort to have a special period of time alone with each child on at least a weekly basis. Focused attention requires time and effort, but there is no better way to raise a child's self-esteem. It is all too easy to steal time from our children to accomplish other things. But no business or material success can compensate for the heartbreak of a young person who goes in the wrong direction. Cold, rigid, unloving fathers often produce children with severe emotional disorders. But children who grow up with warm, affectionate fathers rarely experience severe emotional disability or homosexuality later in life. The years we have with our children move swiftly, and we will never regret the individual and undistracted time we spend with them.

Discipline

The Biblical Balance

The Word instructs believers to maintain orderly households and keep their children under control (1 Tim. 3:4). As we have just seen, this control must be balanced by a context of love. Discipline is easier and more effective when children enjoy the security produced by focused attention. Love without discipline leads to a selfish, spoiled child; discipline without love leads to resentment and hostility. Wisdom steers a course between the extremes of oppression and indulgence. Both overdiscipline and underdiscipline provoke children to anger and lead to insecurity.

Another important balance is found in Ephesians 6:1-4, the key New Testament passage on child rearing:

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 that you may live long on the earth. And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

While fathers have the primary responsibility for family discipline, this passage also applies to mothers. The words "discipline and instruction" ("nurture and admonition" in the KJV) refer to corrective and preventive discipline. Biblical discipline involves not merely the negative activity of punishing children for disobedience, but also the positive activity of teaching children the way they should go. Preventive teaching should be backed up with corrective measures, and correction should be bolstered by teaching.

Perspectives from Proverbs

The wisdom literature of the Old Testament consistently teaches that children are not naturally good. "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him" (Prov. 22:15; cf. Ps. 51:5; Prov. 23:13-14). Children are essentially self-centered; they understand love in terms of receiving, but not in terms of giving themselves to others. A wise parent recognizes these truths but also realizes that children can be trained. "Discipline your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death" (Prov. 19:18; cf. 22:6). He therefore instills wisdom in his child by motivating him not only to live and learn (correction: the rod), but especially to learn and live (prevention: the word). "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother"

(Prov. 29:15). "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently" (Prov. 13:24). He focuses on moral issues, knowing that this discipline is in his own best interest as well as his child's. "A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother" (Prov. 10:1). "Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; he will also delight your soul" (Prov. 29:17).

Discipline Without Exasperation

"Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart" (Col. 3:20-21). To exasperate means to provoke, embitter, inflame, harass, or anger. Discipline is crucial, but the wrong kind of discipline can lead to rebellion and resentment. The following practices produce psychological scars and are all too common:

1. Humiliation. Ridicule, sarcasm, and scorn can devastate a child's self-image, especially when these are targeted to areas of weakness.
2. Perfectionism. Parents who expect perfection impose an impossible standard on their children. Even when they succeed, they are frustrated to find that the bar has been raised another notch.
3. Withdrawal. When a parent threatens to withdraw affection, children believe that they are loved on a performance basis and lose any sense of security.
4. Comparison. The practice of comparing one child with another reduces self-worth and produces alienation and rivalry.

5. Nagging. Incessant crabbing and criticizing creates a negative atmosphere and leads only to strife and hostility.

6. Bribing. Rewards are good, but become bribes when misused.

7. Anger. When parents discipline out of anger, they display a lack of self-control that defeats the purpose of discipline. Fair and equitable treatment of disobedience or defiance requires a calm, clear head. We cannot be reasonable and lose our temper at the same time. The anger of a parent out of control can capture a child's attention more than the offense that caused it.

Galatians 5:23 lists self-control as part of the fruit of the Spirit in the believer's life. Similarly, 2 Timothy 1:7 says that "God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline." The competence, love, patience, and control that we need as parents all come from walking in the Spirit (see the Search booklet on the spiritual life). When we react in the flesh, we say and do things that we later regret, like hitting a child on the head because it's the closest thing. Child brutality is not limited to non-Christian homes.

God has given us the needed grace, but we must form the habit of walking in it, especially when we are tempted to lash out, "for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (Jas. 1:20). "But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth" (Col. 3:8; cf. Eph. 4:31). The secret of a disciplined child is a disciplined parent.

Firm Limits

Children need the assurance of knowing that there are firm and consistent limits. Just to be sure, they will frequently test the walls to make sure they are solid. It is frustrating if the walls keep moving or if they can walk right through them.

The following suggestions for setting firm limits may be of help:

1. Don't be excessively negative in the limits you set. Keep them to a minimum, or you will become a watchdog who must constantly bark "No!". On the other hand, do not be afraid to say "no" when you must.

2. Make family rules reflect the things that are important. Set them where you, not your children, think they should be, and do not waver.

3. From time to time, reevaluate the limits you have fixed to keep them relevant and realistic.

4. Clearly communicate your rules and limits so that children know what they are and realize the consequences of violation.

5. Keep the rules you make, but be as positive as possible. When you find younger children doing something they shouldn't do, try to redirect their attention by giving something they can do.

Consistency

Inconsistent discipline creates insecurity, frustration, and anger.

Consistency is crucial, but it is impossible without clear-cut limits and parental unity. Together, Christian parents must sit down and hammer out a biblical

philosophy of child discipline so that they agree in advance how to respond to various forms of disobedience. It is also wise to analyze and constructively criticize specific disciplinary situations so that you both improve in the way you handle them in the future. Children get mixed signals when parents present a divided front and disagree about discipline in their presence. When this happens, they undermine their own authority and tempt children to play one against the other.

Even as infants, children know whether they can manipulate their parents, and if they can, they will. Parents who waver back and forth and fail to follow through actually train their children to disobey. Threats that are not followed by action are worthless; they produce an attitude of indifference and a lack of respect. Children quickly learn that their parents' bark is worse than their bite, and that they do not have to face the consequences of their actions. This can cripple them in dealing with authority throughout their lives.

Many parents fall into the trap of yelling at their children to get them to respond. As someone has observed, "shouting to make your children obey is like steering your car with the horn." You should not yell at a child unless you need to get his attention when he is far away. Otherwise, he will learn to wait until your voice is sufficiently loud to warrant obedience.

Children must learn that their actions lead to consistent consequences. Discipline should be administered promptly when it is necessary. "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons

of men among them are given fully to do evil" (Eccles. 8:11). A number of parents have found this three-step process helpful: First, give a child a chance to obey voluntarily by making a request rather than an order. Second, if he fails to respond, give him an order, but don't tell him to do something that is beyond his capability. Third, if he does not comply, this is defiance; the child is, in effect, asking for a confrontation. Don't disappoint him--he needs to know that the boundaries are still there. Children often take the risk of bumping the boundaries just to be sure that they haven't changed. A lack of discipline at this point conveys a lack of concern. God expects us to deal firmly with rebellion and defiance by using appropriate corrective measures. The more consistently this is done, the more a child will respect his parents' authority. Respect for ordained authority is a lesson that must be learned early in life. If it is learned later, it will be at greater cost and pain.

Expectations

It is important to convey the expectancy of obedience; if disobedience is viewed as an option, a child will exercise it. A child's self-image and confidence level is bolstered by high expectations. He thrives in an environment of positive support rather than criticism and carping. When he disobeys, it is most effective when a parent helps him evaluate the problem so that he can handle it better the next time. Disappointment due to high expectations will motivate a child to improve his behavior more than faultfinding due to low expectations, because it

shows that his parents believe in him. This kind of affirmative belief challenges him to stop living below his capability.

Expectations should be positive but also reasonable. Children are immature, and we need to allow them the luxury of some mistakes in order to grow. Try to keep this perspective: discipline is a long-range process which should culminate in inner conviction, not mere outward conformity.

Punishments

Firm rules must be consistently supported by firm discipline. The boundaries need to be clear enough for a child to know when he is overstepping them. When he does, parents should take punitive measures quickly to nip disobedience at the bud. However, these measures are counterproductive when they are harsh, vacillating, or not tempered with love.

If you want to be just in your judgment, get all the facts and don't jump to hasty conclusions. When there is any doubt, let the child communicate his own reasons and feelings about what he did. You may discover that his actions, while wrong, were prompted by the right motives. Correct interpretation of meaning behind behavior is essential to fair treatment. There is a great deal of difference between rebellion and childishness, though both may produce the same act. Is this action a matter of immaturity or of defiance? The punishment should fit the crime. A careless mistake is one thing; a direct challenge of parental authority is another. Similarly, punishment should reflect the difference between moral issues and

maintenance issues--lying and stealing are far more serious than tracking in mud or dropping a glass.

When children know the rules and the consequences of disobedience, threats should become unnecessary. Consistent action builds authority, but empty threats undermine it. Nagging, shouting, arguing, and swatting can actually increase rebellion and anger. To avoid this problem with younger children, James Dobson suggests the practice of squeezing the trapezius muscle between the neck and shoulder to control behavior. The advantage of this is that it can be done calmly and instantly, and it generally produces the desired results.

Spankings should be reserved for the times when a child directly defies his parent's authority. At these moments, do not hesitate to spank (Prov. 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15), but try to make the spanking a meaningful event. Do it as soon as possible after the offense, but wait if necessary, to be sure you don't spank in anger. (A mother should never tell her child that Dad will do it when he comes home. The child will fear the father's arrival and forget the reason for the spanking.)

Be sure your child knows why he is getting spanked. Spare him the embarrassment of spanking him in the presence of anyone else. Use a rod, a switch, or another neutral object to inflict pain, but be careful not to abuse or in any way injure the child. You are not trying to break his will, but to channel it. Leave him alone while he cries, but when he stops, give him all the love you can. These can be tender moments of affirmation, affection, and teaching, because his heart has been

made sensitive and attentive. He needs to grow in his understanding that it is because his parents love him that they will not allow him to do certain things. This can be a stepping stone to teaching him that God works the same way with his parents.

Tantrums can be handled adequately without spanking. Since they are usually devices to get noticed, don't reinforce them by giving them attention. Instead, isolate the child until he is through; he will come out when he is ready. The same principle applies to whining. It is all too easy to reinforce whining inadvertently by noticing it.

By the time children reach adolescence, it is no longer appropriate to spank them for disobedience. With teenagers, alternative punishments like lost privileges, grounding, and financial deprivation are more suitable and effective.

Forgiveness

Regardless of what method of punishment you use, remember that the goal of discipline is forgiveness and reconciliation. Disobedience to parental authority is sin, and children must learn to confess their sins to God and thank Him for His forgiveness. When your child repents, it is imperative that you immediately forgive him. Forgiveness involves restoration of fellowship and forgetting the offense by not bringing it up again. Don't prolong the punishment by nursing a grudge or withholding affection. By making New Testament forgiveness a habit in

the home, you model the love and forgiveness of God (1 John 1:9). Discipline focuses on outward behavior, but forgiveness deals with the inner life.

Similarly, we should also be ready to admit our own mistakes and ask our children to forgive us when we wrong them. Lashing out in anger, misjudging the situation, acting with harshness, disciplining the wrong child, and other forms of unfair treatment need to be acknowledged. A proud refusal to admit our blunders or an attempt to cover them up will erode our children's respect. They do not expect us to be perfect, but they do expect us to be honest about the mistakes we make.

Rewards

We have already seen that negative discipline, while important, is not enough. We should punish disobedient behavior, but it is even more crucial that we positively reinforce desirable behavior so that it will be more likely to recur. Some parents who are good disciplinarians overlook the value of rewards. They rarely use these priceless motivators and relationship builders.

Rewards are not the same as bribes or bargains. They provide incentive for responsible effort and accomplish much more than complaining and criticizing. It is far better to be motivated by desire than by fear (consider the rewards in New Testament passages like Matt. 25:21; Rom. 8:18; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; 5:5-10; Phil. 1:21-23; 3:10-14,20-21; 1 John 3:21-22; Rev. 21:3-4). Rewards can be material, like working for money or for a specific item, but they can also be related to privileges. Anything that a child considers desirable can be used creatively by

parents as a positive reinforcer of good behavior. What beneficial incentives are you currently using with your children? Would you characterize your parental style as leaning toward the negative or toward the positive?

The most significant reward is verbal affirmation, encouragement, and praise. This is a powerful behavioral motivator, and it should be woven into the fabric of the parent-child relationship.

COMMUNICATION

It has been said that children spell love T-I-M-E. The quality of the time we spend with them is essential, but we are deceiving ourselves if we make this a substitute for quantity. There is a dangerous tendency in our culture to use material possessions as a surrogate for building intimate relationships with children. They are not so easily bought off. Overindulgence with presents will not make up for a failure to express love by spending time with them.

As parents, we must cultivate communication with our children by listening to what they say and showing a genuine regard for their problems and questions. It takes time and effort to listen actively with focused interest and attachment. We can't always do this with young children, but we can set aside special times to simply observe, listen, and talk to each child.

When you listen, allow your child to express his feelings and opinions freely before you respond. Create an atmosphere of personal acceptance even when you disagree so that he will be open with you. Try not to embarrass him and don't

dash his dreams with sarcasm, scorn, or condemnation. Look straight at him when he speaks, and fight your impulse to interrupt.

When you speak, be as open and honest as you can. Let your child get to know you on more than one level by sharing your own thoughts and aspirations with him. Be transparent and real so that he will feel free to talk with you on any subject. Affirm him when he asks questions and give straight answers. Never make promises that you do not plan to keep. If you break a promise, ask his forgiveness. This kind of open communication can overcome the potential generation gap.

Here are some additional suggestions to enhance parent-child communication:

1. Try changing the environment to add new facets to your relationship with your child. Camping trips, "dates," and special activities will do wonders in bringing you closer together.
2. Work on developing mutual interests so that you will have more in common.
3. Include children in ordinary activities like errands and trips to the store.
4. Take time to play with them and do things they enjoy.
5. Read to your children and introduce them to the breadth of literature that can develop their imagination and thinking.
6. Help them with homework and school projects.

7. Institute a weekly or monthly family council to discuss family problems and decisions (e.g., vacations, work assignments, unfair treatment). This will develop mutual accountability, improve understanding, and create more of a team spirit. Encourage courtesy, emotional control, and good listening so that these meetings will help rather than hinder relationships.

FAMILY RECREATION

Purposes

"I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly" (John 10:10b). Christ liberated us from the captivity of sin to give us a new quality of life in a relationship with Him. The Christian life was not meant to be dull but dynamic, infused with the power, grace, and love of God.

This joy of life should be an integral part of the Christian home. Family recreation is a catalyst to quality living; it provides a respite from routines and responsibilities, relieves the buildup of tension, adds vitality and zest to relationships, enhances enjoyment, and brings laughter and fun into the home. Recreation means renewal and restoration. Without it, life becomes burdensome, tedious, and ritualistic. All of us need times of relaxation and refreshment. Sharing these times with other members of the household builds binding relationships and unites the family. Shared interests, pleasures, and activities remove barriers and stimulate communication.

Problems

Family activities, which in the past were more creative and participative, have in recent years become more spectator-oriented and commercial. This has largely been due to the advent of television. TV can dull creativity in children and deaden family interaction and communication. Because it is a one-way medium, it encourages passive involvement in recreation as its observers merely sit back and watch. The average person spends more than three hours a day in front of the television, or about 1,095 hours per year (a full 1.5 months out of every 12). At this rate, by the age of 65, one will have spent a solid eight years of his life (24-hour days) in front of the tube.

Unless television watching is carefully controlled, it will consume what little time a family has to spend together. In addition, it will inculcate attitudes and values that are completely opposed to the biblical world view (e.g., violence, sexual promiscuity, materialism, treachery). Here are some suggestions to help you and your family take control of this influential medium:

1. Before instituting any changes, quietly analyze and log your family's present television habits. How many hours do different family members watch, and what kind of programs do they see? Nielsen surveys indicate that Saturday and Sunday morning programs account for only 13 percent of the total TV viewing of children 6 to 11 years old. This means that most of what children watch are adult shows.

2. After you have compiled your results, discuss them in a family council meeting, and set guidelines for the quantity and quality of TV viewing.

3. One of these guidelines should be the elimination of impulsive viewing (turning on the TV and scanning the channels until you settle on something). It is better to meet at the beginning of the week with the program guide to decide what everyone will watch. Stick to the schedule you create.

4. Be sure to evaluate the programs you see and ask your children questions to help them do the same. What moral values were communicated--what was portrayed as right and wrong? Who was the hero and what did he or she stand for? It is especially important to do this when you go to the movies, because film is the most powerful medium of all.

5. Provide positive alternatives to television in order to cut down on the number of hours your family watches.

Principles

1. While there should be spontaneity, good recreation requires planning and scheduling. The whole family should be involved in this process (this can be a part of your family council).

2. A key aspect of planning is budgeting enough money for outings, weekend retreats, and family vacations.

3. Creativity is an essential ingredient in maximizing the potential of family recreation. You need variety in activities and in the people you include

outside of the family. Even recreation can turn into a rut if you always do the same things, go to the same restaurants, and see the same people. Be on the lookout for new things to try and broaden your horizons.

4. Like anything else, there are two extremes to avoid when it comes to recreation: the first is a lack of family activities, and the second is forced togetherness. We are social creatures, but we also need time alone for personal development.

Practice

1. Whenever possible, spend your day off with your family. Plan activities for this day in advance so that you will make the best use of your time.

2. With younger children, have a daily play time.

3. Find activities that will make you participants and not always spectators.

4. Try a weekly family night and vary the activities (e.g., table games, puppet shows, reading a story aloud, working on a special project).

5. Be creative and versatile. Try things from each of these four categories:

Physical--Hiking, camping, walks, sports, biking, canoeing, rafting, tennis, bowling, touch football, archery, Frisbee throwing, kite flying, jogging, wrestling with children, skating, gardening, etc.

Social--Picnics, family projects, making desserts together, drives in the country, singing, trip to a zoo, couple's retreat, reading the Sunday comics together,

special restaurants (try new cuisines), plant tours (e.g., automobile, newspaper, bottling company), interfamily recreation, beach or mountain trip, etc.

Cultural--Plays, films, museums, concerts, art galleries, tours, historical sites and homes, antique shows, drawing and painting, family theater, etc.

Mental--Story telling, Bible trivia, hobbies, games, computers, crafts, etc.

What are you doing to insure that when your children look back on their childhood, they will inwardly smile with fondness as they remember the great times they had with their parents?

FAMILY WORSHIP

Purposes

Worship is an essential element in Christian growth. It is a personal response to God's personal revelation. Every family member should be encouraged to spend individual time with the Lord, but it is also important for families to honor God together. Family devotions can become spiritual glue that bonds parent-child and sibling relationships. In addition to developing biblical knowledge and promoting prayer and praise, they also build healthy attitudes and enhance self-expression. Like nothing else, family worship can cultivate a spirit of unity, purpose, and direction in a Christian home.

Problems

The biggest barriers to family worship are time and consistency. Everyone seems to be running in different directions, and the flurry of activities makes it hard for some families to get together at all, let alone on a regular basis. The problem here is one of priorities. It is so easy to cram our schedules with good activities that we are left with no time for the things that are best. If as a family you are unable to find time to meet together for worship, you would be well-advised to reevaluate your schedules to see what needs to be trimmed. People have an amazing ability to find time for the things they really want to do (consider again how much time most people spend watching television). Spiritual growth is not a luxury or an option; it is a biblical mandate. Personal and family devotions never seem to be convenient, but they are always worth the cost.

Principles

1. Family worship will rarely take place unless it is planned. First, determine the best time (many find that the most convenient time is immediately after dinner; even if you have to adjust the time from day to day, make it a priority to have your main meal together). Second, think through your objectives for family worship and what methods and content you will use to meet those objectives.

2. Once you have found a mutually agreeable time, stick to it.

Consistency is crucial, but be flexible--cut it short if you're rushed, but have it. Be ready to adapt the length, methods and content to interruptions and variations in

your activities. If you miss a day, don't let this become an excuse to get out of the habit.

3. To maintain attention and regularity, keep it brief and limit the passages you use to about ten verses. The smaller the children, the shorter this time should be.

4. Keep the sessions informal, spontaneous, innovative, and interesting. Look for creative means to solidify biblical concepts in young minds. Experiment with new things so that you don't get in a rut. Use a variety of components throughout the week.

5. Make it child-centered, not parent-oriented, and encourage maximum participation of the children. With a wide age spread, gear it to the older children but try to include everyone. As they grow, get them more involved in the planning process.

6. Be sensitive to individual needs and make it as practical and understandable as you can. Look for ways to make this a fun time and don't preach or be a phony.

7. Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of your program to find ways to change and improve it.

Practice

Be sure the children take part in all family worship activities-- the more they do, the better they will enjoy and remember the content. Choose from among

these suggested techniques and tools to find the ones that are most effective for your family:

Techniques

Stories

Bible reading

Personal sharing of joys and burdens

Bible study (book and/or doctrine)

Prayer (try using the various types of prayer--thanksgiving, praise, confession, intercession, personal requests and needs; also experiment with different themes for each day, such as family problems and needs, relatives, neighbors and non-Christians, specific missionaries, national and world needs, your church, etc.)

Puppets, pantomime, and drama (acting out Bible stories)

Art and craft projects (e.g., drawing pictures to illustrate the Proverbs)

Music (Bible choruses, old and new hymns)

Missions (maps, support, projects, letters)

Memory verses

Questions and answers

Discussions on relevant issues facing children (especially with teenagers)

Tools

Modern translations and paraphrases

Bible story books

Our Daily Bread (an excellent daily devotional)

Family Walk (a vehicle for inculcating Christian values)

Dads Only or other resource tool

Devotional books (there are books designed for all age groups; take a family trip to a Christian book store that has a good selection of this material)

Audio-visuals (records, tapes, filmstrips, movies, flannelgraph lessons, pictures, View Master slides, etc.; you may be able to borrow some of these learning aids from the Christian education department of your church)

Bible Memory Association or Navigator Topical Memory System cards
Bible games
Globe or map for missionaries

SEX EDUCATION

Purposes

Children will receive sex education--the only question is who or what will teach them. The primary responsibility for communicating healthy attitudes and accurate information about sexuality should rest in the hands of parents. The relational setting of the home is the best context for the instillation of biblical values in this important area. If parents shirk this responsibility, they are morally culpable for the fact that their children will learn by default from questionable sources.

Sex education in the home can help children anticipate the things that will happen to their bodies, the temptations they will face, and the need for self-acceptance and respect for the opposite sex.

Problems

Most parents ignore or avoid this subject, and not many churches have excellent sex education programs. The result is that children pick up distorted information and immoral values from their peers, from television and movies, from popular songs, and from magazine racks. A great deal of pornographic literature ends up in the hands of children under 18. It is growing increasingly difficult for Christian teenagers to maintain biblical morality at a time when teenage

promiscuity, pregnancies, abortions, and venereal disease are reaching epidemic proportions.

Few parents are really qualified to provide effective instruction in this area. For some, the problem is a lack of preparation; for others, it is a more serious problem of negative teaching by word and example. Some adults communicate the idea that sex is dirty and not something that boys and girls should know or think about. Others go to the opposite extreme and convey the attitude that restrictions and inhibitions are wrong. The biblical balance is a positive view of sexuality as a gift from God that is to be used within the parameters set by divine wisdom.

Principles

1. Sex is more than biology or reproduction; in a broader sense, sexuality involves functional, social, and personal elements. We need to encourage children to identify with their own sex and accept themselves as male or female according to the will of God. At the same time, they must learn a healthy respect and appreciation for the opposite sex. We should never degrade men or women as a group, even in jest.

2. While it is important that we communicate the right information, it is even more essential that we convey the right attitudes. Whether we like it or not, we are constantly on display, and our children pick up our attitudes and actions. If parents act embarrassed or unnatural when the topic of sex comes up, their children

will learn not to talk with them about this subject and they will go elsewhere for information.

3. As a married couple, you provide the model for the way a man treats a woman and the way a woman treats a man. A lack of communication, commitment, courtesy, and caring in your relationship will lead to negative learning on the part of your children. The best thing you can do to implant a wholesome outlook on sex within them is to love their father or mother. When children are exposed to parents who openly demonstrate a deep love toward one another, they learn something that no amount of words can convey.

4. The parent-child relationship is a determining factor in shaping a child's sexual identity. From their birth, children need to experience a warm (but not smothering) affection from both parents. When a father has a positive and supportive relationship with his son, and when a mother has the same with her daughter, homosexuality in later years becomes very unlikely. But when biblical roles are reversed and abused (e.g., an overpossessive and domineering mother and/or a hostile, passive, and indifferent father), distorted sexuality in children becomes a real possibility.

5. Both parents should be involved in educating their children about sexuality. Don't leave the whole job to your husband or wife.

6. Create an open atmosphere and answer questions honestly and casually as they arise.

7. Inculcate a genuine respect for God's moral and spiritual laws.

Practice

1. Avoid the twin extremes of teaching too little too late, and teaching too much too soon. Prepare children early and always tell them the truth, but not all of it at once. Sex education is a gradual process, not a one-unit course. An overzealous parent may teach a child far more than he wants to know or needs to know.

2. Let your child's requests for information guide you concerning the amount of awareness he needs at that point. This need will depend on his social and physical development. Satisfy his curiosity by answering his questions with openness and honesty, so that he will know the score. Be a confidant and do not communicate any sense of shame, embarrassment, or guilt.

3. In addition, be sure to anticipate your children's awareness needs by preparing them for things that will be happening to them (e.g., puberty, menstruation, nocturnal emissions).

4. Use accurate anatomical and sexual terminology, and look for distorted information your child may have picked up so that you can correct misunderstandings.

5. With younger children you can use nature to illustrate the reproductive process. Human births and animal breeding provide ready-made teaching

opportunities. Make use of well-illustrated books that are age-appropriate. Take advantage of humorous materials and cartoons because they relieve tension.

6. Remember that facts by themselves are insufficient. They need to be presented within the context of a Christian interpretation. Knowing Christ should make a difference in every area of our lives. Because we are believers, our bodies have become temples of the Holy Spirit. "For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:20).

7. Scripture speaks directly to the issues our children will face as adolescents. It is our responsibility to give them clear instruction concerning the problems of sexual promiscuity, venereal disease, homosexuality, pornography, etc.

8. Plan to complete your instructional program just before your child enters puberty.

REFLECTIONS

1. What are the problems caused by possessive parents and parents who live their lives through their children?

2. How would you characterize the atmosphere of your home? What specific things can you do to make it better?

3. Study Deuteronomy 6:4-9 with your spouse and look for creative ways to put the "teach-talk" and "bind-write" principles into practice.

4. What are you doing to help your children cultivate their own walk with the Lord?

5. State in your own words the principles of positive instruction, personal responsibility, and practical reinforcement.

6. Together with your husband or wife, make a list of the basic rules of your household. How clearly have you communicated them to your children, and how consistently do you enforce them? Are they in need of revision?

7. What are the three ingredients of focused attention? How often do you give your children this kind of attention?

8. Use the list of seven abuses of discipline as a diagnostic tool to determine habits you may have inadvertently slipped into.

9. Evaluate your current system of punishments and rewards in light of the principles given in this booklet.

10. How well do you communicate with each of your children? Which of the seven communication principles do you need to reinforce?

11. Set up a family council meeting to discuss your family recreation and family worship. Go through the suggestions listed in the "practice" section for each to determine the ones your family would like to implement.

12. Use the "principles" and "practice" section under sex education to evaluate your program in this area.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY CARDS

Psalm 127:3; Proverbs 13:24; 22:6; Romans 8:15-16; Galatians 5:22-23;

Ephesians 6:4; 1 Timothy 3:4; Hebrews 12:11.