

THEME: Family – Rod: How should our children respond to Discipline

What is God's expectation for our children's response to discipline and instruction?

Currently, how does my child respond to discipline?

What actions steps must I take to insure my child responds correctly to discipline?

How will this prepare him better for the future in his relationship with God and life?

These are the questions which this devotional series will bring to the forefront of our parenting and then address from a purely Biblical standpoint.

We live in an age when not only children but people of all ages resent any form of discipline. The statement of David as inspired by God the Holy Spirit in Psalms 141:5 has virtually no meaning. Most, if given the task of writing a personal application would be very slow to do so. Almost all, if asked when was the last time you responded with thankfulness and appreciation to correction, criticism, discipline would be at a loss, ***“Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; It is oil upon the head ; Do not let my head refuse it...”*** Think a minute. When was the last time you received a correction, rebuke or personal criticism? What was your response? If no one has done this in a long time do you think that reflects your sanctified lifestyle or signals you put out concerning your receptiveness?

If we ourselves cannot receive discipline, rebuke, correction or criticism then how do we expect our children to learn to do this? It is often said that more is taught than caught. It is very important that our children learn to receive discipline in a godly manner. Even worse, if we ourselves do not receive discipline, rebuke, correction or criticism then perhaps this is not an area of concern in our relationship with our children.

God the Holy Spirit does not leave us to our own devices in this area. He clearly teaches us His expectations in terms of our children and how they are to respond to discipline with the rod. It is my conviction that many parents withhold the rod from discipline not because of an extensive doctrinal study of the subject but rather because their children have trained them by their antisocial behavior that the rod will simply not be tolerated. This of course could not be further from the truth. The ages of spanking with the rod are nine months to age twelve or puberty whichever comes first. The parent is instructed by God the Holy Spirit not only to use the rod liberally during this period but also the serious consequences in the life of a child who refuses to accept the rod of discipline. For more lectures, Bible studies and Daily Devotionals on the rod, discipline, training, etc., go to our website at [www//gciweb.org](http://www.gciweb.org) and follow the links.

I remember a coach commenting on my son. He said that the reason my son had been chosen for the All Star Baseball team was that he was the easiest kid to coach he had ever had on a team. He said it was a pleasure to work with him because nothing phased him and as a result he could learn almost anything. I remember when this same son came home from his officers training course in the Air Force. He mentioned to me that in his opinion most men were their own worst enemies. If they would just stand there and take it and learn what they could they would be a lot better off. These were gifts I gave my son before he was even two years old. To respond correctly to discipline, no matter how imperfect and to learn all that he could from it. This has put him in good stead as an athlete, as a student, as a Air Force Officer and as an supervisor in a large oil service company.

It is my hope, that after doing these mediations you will have the Biblical convictions and the skills to give your children this same gift – to respond correctly and Biblically to discipline no matter how imperfect.

Rev. John S. Mahon

Director: Grace Community International

July 2011 - Yaoundé, Cameroon

THEME: Family – Rod: How should our children respond to Discipline

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Proverbs 13:1

What is God’s expectation for our children’s response to discipline and instruction?

Currently, how does my child respond to discipline?

What actions steps must I take to insure my child responds correctly to discipline?

How will this prepare him better for the future in his relationship with God and life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Proverbs 12:1; 6:23

What is God’s expectation for our children’s response to discipline and instruction?

Currently, how does my child respond to discipline?

What actions steps must I take to insure my child responds correctly to discipline?

How will this prepare him better for the future in his relationship with God and life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Proverbs 3:11 & 12; Psalm 50:16 & 17

What is God’s expectation for our children’s response to discipline and instruction?

Currently, how does my child respond to discipline?

What actions steps must I take to insure my child responds correctly to discipline?

How will this prepare him better for the future in his relationship with God and life?

THEME: Family – Rod: How should our children respond to Discipline

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Proverbs 15:5

What is God's expectation for our children's response to discipline and instruction?

Currently, how does my child respond to discipline?

What actions steps must I take to insure my child responds correctly to discipline?

How will this prepare him better for the future in his relationship with God and life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Proverbs 13:18

What is God's expectation for our children's response to discipline and instruction?

Currently, how does my child respond to discipline?

What actions steps must I take to insure my child responds correctly to discipline?

How will this prepare him better for the future in his relationship with God and life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Proverbs 15:32

What is God's expectation for our children's response to discipline and instruction?

Currently, how does my child respond to discipline?

What actions steps must I take to insure my child responds correctly to discipline?

How will this prepare him better for the future in his relationship with God and life?

THEME: Family – Rod: How should our children respond to Discipline

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Proverbs 23:12 - 14

What is God's expectation for our children's response to discipline and instruction?

Currently, how does my child respond to discipline?

What actions steps must I take to insure my child responds correctly to discipline?

How will this prepare him better for the future in his relationship with God and life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Proverbs 19:18 & 27

What is God's expectation for our children's response to discipline and instruction?

Currently, how does my child respond to discipline?

What actions steps must I take to insure my child responds correctly to discipline?

How will this prepare him better for the future in his relationship with God and life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Proverbs 22:15

What is God's expectation for our children's response to discipline and instruction?

Currently, how does my child respond to discipline?

What actions steps must I take to insure my child responds correctly to discipline?

How will this prepare him better for the future in his relationship with God and life?

THEME: Family – Rod: How should our children respond to Discipline

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Romans 1:28 – 32 (30); 2 Timothy 3:1 – 5 (2)

What is God’s expectation for our children’s response to discipline and instruction?

Currently, how does my child respond to discipline?

What actions steps must I take to insure my child responds correctly to discipline?

How will this prepare him better for the future in his relationship with God and life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Ephesians 6:1 – 4

What is God’s expectation for our children’s response to discipline and instruction?

Currently, how does my child respond to discipline?

What actions steps must I take to insure my child responds correctly to discipline?

How will this prepare him better for the future in his relationship with God and life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Hebrews 12:5 - 11

What is God’s expectation for our children’s response to discipline and instruction?

Currently, how does my child respond to discipline?

What actions steps must I take to insure my child responds correctly to discipline?

How will this prepare him better for the future in his relationship with God and life?

Taken from the Family Discipleship Workbook Chapter Three

For this workbook and more resources on Christian Principles of child raising go to [www//gciweb.org](http://www.gciweb.org)

I am sorry that in cut and pasting the following pages from the workbook a certain amount of distortion occurred. I think though that you will be able to look past this and still receive benefit from the teaching.

Chapter Three

The Training Process: An Explanation of Discipline—Lecture

The president of the company walks into your office. With him is a young man bearing a strong resemblance to the president. Looking you right in the eye he says, in a presidential voice that only these celestial beings can muster up in times such as these, “Henderson, I have been looking over the responses to my request and I have decided on you. This is my son, B.B. Jr.. He will someday be the president of this company. In fact, he is to take over in a very short time. Your job is to get him ready. Do a good job and your future is assured. Fail me on this one and you're ruined. Here he is, get to work.”

A few weeks later, I bump in to you in the hall. “Hey, Henderson, how’s it going with the new assignment?”

“Assignment?” you reply, giving me that fish-eyed look usually found in teens being asked about their homework.

“Yes, ‘assignment’. The boss's son, B.B., Jr.. ‘The future of the company.’ The soul entrusted to your care. Yes, the assignment. How goes it?”

You shrug, “O.K., I guess. Not much going on. Seems rather nice, just taking it from day to day. We’ll see how it goes. Hope it works out.” and you wander down the hall.

I don’t think so! I can guarantee you that you would have a plan ready the next day. By the week's end, you would have checked it out with B.B. Sr. and be working on the revision. Three weeks later, you would have been able to show me a flow sheet broken down into increments with a success chart following this on the other wall. It would have been mission control on the career training of B.B. Jr. Your career is on the line, your future with the company, and you are not going to louse it up.

God comes strolling into your life one day. He says to you, in that still small voice that only the Holy Spirit can muster up in times like this, Henderson, your wife is pregnant, your prayers are answered, you're going to have a baby. I've got important plans for this child. I have had this child in my mind since before the foundation of the world. I have gifts, callings and works that this child will walk in, and I am giving this child to you as a gift to prepare for my personal service. You have eighteen years and then the child comes into my personal service to accomplish my will which is hidden in the counsels of God.”

Remember, this is God speaking, so you are a little goggle-eyed, and generally in times like this people have a habit of falling prostrate on the ground and babbling about their sins, hell and whatnot.

“Oh yes, and by the way Henderson, don’t blow it. Handle this right and the glory is yours, blow it and you can forget about the assignment I’ve given you or any others in the near future,” and off He goes.

A few weeks later I bump into you in Church, “Hey Henderson, how’s it going with the new assignment?”

“Assignment?” you reply giving me that fish-eyed look usually found in teens being asked about their homework.

“Yes, assignment. God’s creation. God’s child. The gift to you. The future of the church. The next generation and all that. The soul entrusted to your care. Heard your wife is pregnant,, how goes it?”

You shrug, “O.K., I guess. Not much going on. Seems rather nice, just taking it from day to day. We’ll see how it goes. Hope it works out.” Then, you wander down the hall.

I don’t think so! I can guarantee that you would have a plan ready the next day, and by the week's end you would have checked it out with God and be working on the revision. By the time the baby was born, you would have been able to show me a flow sheet broken down into increments, with a success chart following this on the other wall. It would have been mission control on the career-training of Henderson, Jr. Your career is on the line, your future in the ministry, and you are not going to louse it up.

I. Introduction:

When attempting any great endeavor, the most important things to ask yourself are where am I going, and how am I going to get there? I mean, besides feeding, clothing, and educating your children, what are your goals? Besides your children not getting on drugs, not renouncing the faith, not getting pregnant and not turning out bad, what are your goals? Being a good Christian? O.K. Marrying a Christian? O.K. Getting into the college of your choice? O.K. Those are all good. Now, how are you going to get there?

One of the exciting results of this ministry is to see parents empowered by God to make decisions concerning their own children. Everybody wants to tell you that you are not in control; your children are in control. That you can't expect this... you can't require that. Nothing could be further from the truth. *You* are responsible before God, and *you* make the rules. It is usually at this stage in the seminar that someone raises their hand and asks, "You mean, I can..." and the answer is most certainly, "Yes!" The days of tyrannical rule by your little prima donna are over. The atmosphere of the home and family will now be set by you, under the guidance and authority of the Word of God.

A. THREE BASIC GOALS OF DISCIPLINE FOR YOUR PRAYERFUL CONSIDERATION.

1. SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY

In Rom 13:1, the Word of God says, "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." Ultimately, all of our children will function under various institutional authorities, beginning with schools and then going on to government and career and family. By learning submission to parents, the child will be able to fulfill this responsibility elsewhere. The Word of God speaks specifically of :

- a. Secular Responsibilities (Eph 6:5,9) such as school and work.
- b. Governmental Laws and Authority (Rom 13:1,2) such as laws, taxes and ordinances.
- c. The Home (Eph 5:22–24) where wives are subject to their husbands.

Wives should take note here. Children learn best by example. I am always surprised to find a wife who is in constant struggle with her husband, who works around his will, sneaks behind his back, pays lip service to his authority and then does whatever she wants, speaks against him before the children and friends, and in general undermines his authority in the home, and then is surprised that her own children do not give her the respect and honor she feels like she deserves. Moms: do not be so foolish as to expect genuine submission, cooperation and respect from your children when you do not model this before them in your relationship with your husband. They are not dumb. They know what is going on. They know how things should be and they will apply the same rules of the relationship to you that you do to him. Whatever your rational is, don't worry. They will pick it up, and I can guarantee you that it will work just as well for them as it does for you.

The same Bible that says in Eph 6:1 "Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." also says in Eph 5:22, "Wives be subject to your own husband as to the Lord." Unfortunately for the Body of Christ, when faced with the second verse many wives would rather surrender their children to disobedience, thus negating both verses in their home, rather than assume their proper role in the home and assure themselves the moral high ground from which to demand their children's obedience to the Word of God as well.

Husbands: take note as well. Authority and leadership in the home is earned and cannot be exerted by force beyond the early childhood years. Do not expect to bad mouth all the authorities your life— your boss, your government, the traffic laws, your in-laws, your parents, the pastor, the deacon, the Bible teachers— and then expect your wife and children to submit to you. If you model rebellion and anger before your family and rationalize away these passages, be assured that they can learn rebellion from you and rationalize away the Word as it pertains to your authority just as easily. If your priorities are not built around the home, do not expect your children to take you seriously. It is always surprising to me that a man who is not committed to any authority, or to his home, is surprised when his kids develop those same values, and at an early age.

The same Bible that says in Eph 6:1 "Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right." Also says in Rom 13:1 "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is not authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." Unfortunately for the Body of Christ, when faced with the second verse many husbands would rather surrender their children to disobedience, thus negating both verses, than assume their proper role in society and assure themselves the moral high ground from which to demand their children's obedience to the Word of God as well.

For parents, when training children to submit to authority, modeling acceptable behavior and discipline must go hand in hand.

In Gal 5:22, 23, the Word of God says, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is... self-control...*” This will be one of the key factors in your child’s success in life. Self-control assures:

Social Success— If a child is disciplined, he can decide what is best for him. I looked on with pride as my children made wise decisions in this area. The moral and character strength that comes from disciplining a child while he is young, while there is hope, is of great value in this area. The same principles of self-control that a child must exert in a home where obedience is expected, are then called upon by the child to exert self-control in the complicated moral and social decisions he makes outside the home. When you provide your children with a loving home with committed parents, a home with a strong family that is committed to the mutual care and support of its members, and add to this the proper discipline and training in the area of self-control, you will provide your children with the tools needed to function outside the home.

While most kids take what they can get, in a desperate grasp towards popularity and acceptance, irrespective of the quality of the peer group offering them entrance, your children, exhibiting self-control, will be deciding wisely who they will run with and what they will do. Each has to make hard decisions as to what they will do in the areas of the popular crowd, parties, who to date, drinking, smoking and sexual activity. A home which fulfills their need for love and acceptance, coupled with training in the area of self-control, will prepare a child to make the right decisions in this area. I praise God for the fruit of the spirit of self-control that my children exhibited as they fell back on the skills given to them by their parents.

Scholastic Success— The ability as a small child to control urges, to sit still, to control the tongue, to pay attention, to obey quickly the first time, to follow instructions, equips our children for scholastic success. It wasn’t just that they made the grade— many a child does that and still hates school, but that the school experience was fun. They liked their teachers and were liked by teachers and administrators. They enjoyed school and they were successful.

Early in life we taught our children to look us in the eye when we were talking to them. I can remember tapping the corner of my eye with my forefinger and saying, “Look me in the eye.” Later, all I had to do was touch the corner of my eye to get their attention when their eyes would wander. Soon, they were in the habit of looking me and others in the eye when they were talking. When I taught my children to look me in the eye when I was talking to them, I did not have staring down a teacher in mind, but the self-control that you train a child in will put him in good stead throughout his life in terms of his relationship with authority. I know more than one gifted and talented Christian business man who can’t hold a job, stay on top of his finances, or serve effectively in the church because he lacks this one valuable skill.

Personal Purity— Girls who can’t keep their eyes or their hands to themselves. Young men helplessly caught in the grips of masturbation and pornography. Young women who cannot control their tongue and what they say. Young men who do not seem to be able to say “no” to the crowd. I hear these complaints all the time. Not just from parents, but from the high school and

“You know, Dad, I really appreciate you teaching me to concentrate and look people in the eyes no matter who they are; it can be really cool.” “

What do you mean, son?” I replied, I was not quite getting the drift of where he was headed.

“Well it’s kind of cool Dad. Some of my teachers are really undisciplined and so, when they are talking to me I look right at them, right in their eyes, just sort of stare right into them, and you know... it kind of unnerves them. They are not used to kids being able to do this. It is really kind of cool. Thanks, Dad, you really have helped me and I appreciate it.”

Matt was sitting in my office in tears. His wife was threatening to leave him. It was disclosed that Matt had been hopelessly involved in pornography since he was a young boy and his wife had found out. Matt had doting parents and little discipline around the house. Self-control was not a watchword in his home and now, unless he came up with some, his marriage was over. I reassured Matt that self-control is a fruit of the spirit, and with training and skill, anyone can manifest it. I also warned him that it will be very, very hard to start at his age. Matt was committed and so was I. His marriage is saved. He has an excellent testimony, and ministers now to men with the same problem. How much better though for Matt’s Mom and Dad to have trained him in this while he was young so that he could learn to exhibit this fruit in small incremental steps along the way and never have to face the sorrow its absence caused him.

James was sitting in my office, sobbing. His marriage was a shambles. He had no close friends and his well-paying professional job was in jeopardy. The problem was anger. James could not control his tongue or his anger. He tried and tried, but it was out of control. James was simply carrying on a legacy left to him by his parents. Self-control was no big thing to them, especially in a good fight. In fact, they all fought against control. Self-control was viewed by them as a weakness. What they wanted was total freedom. But James did not have freedom, he was a slave to his anger and it was destroying his life. How much better for James had his parents taught him to control himself. They should have forbidden temper tantrums, fighting among the children, screaming when you don’t get your way, throwing toys and fits. But they did not, and James did not learn self-control. Now he was paying the price.

university students themselves. You do your child a great service if you teach him to control his body when he is very young. Your toddler does not have to scream. He does not have to wander off. He does not have to be messy. He does not have to wiggle. He does not have to be in constant movement. He does not have to smear food all over the place. He does not have to bang his head or his feet. He can control himself. If he learns to do this when he is small, he will stay out of trouble when he starts school. If he applies this when he starts school, he will be well trained in self-control when he reaches high school and college.

Marriage Success— Some wives just can't control their tongue. They decide well before their husbands come home that they are going to be nice, but they just can't pull it off. Others just never seem to get the act together in the home. The house is always messy, the children are out of control, and the budget is always over the limit. They can't seem to submit to any type of schedule. These women just have no self-control. What a gift to give to your daughters, the gift of training in self-control! Some husbands just can't seem to pull it together, either. They decide they are going to quit yelling, but then they blow up again. They are going to sit down, do a budget, set up their savings and never can stick to it. They don't want to watch that stuff on TV, but there they are. They don't want to call up that junk on their computer, but there they are. They know they should lose that weight, start exercising, get into shape, but never seem to be able to get it together. These men just have no self-control. What a gift to give to your son, the gift of training in self-control!

The Word of God says, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city." (Prv 16:32) and again in Prv 25:28, "Like a city that is broken into and without walls Is a man who has no control over his spirit." Remember the biblical injunction to discipline your son while there is hope, do not desire his death. Get on top of self-control with your children. Do not trivialize or romanticize the evidences of a lack of self-control in their lives. Give them this great gift and they will thank you for it all of their lives.

3. WISDOM

Prv 1:1-3 "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding, To receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity..."

Training a child in the recognition and acquisition of Wisdom is a great gift. To have been disciplined and trained so that you know wisdom when you see it is a great gift. To know instruction, to have experience in being instructed so that you can receive it and make use of it without rebellion is a great gift. To be able to discern between right and wrong—to have a discerning mind, is a great gift. To have grown up receiving instruction in wise behavior, to have been made to act correctly, this is a great gift. To have been instructed in righteousness, justice and equity is a great gift. These are the gifts that we want to give our children through discipline and training.

As we continue on, this section will give us general guidelines of disciplining children. It will emphasize the do's and don'ts. You will learn specifically how to discipline the child, as well as the suggested levels of discipline—both for rod and non-rod infractions.

It is important to remember that for physical discipline (spanking), the crucial years are approximately six months to four years. Beginning with age five there should be a diminishing need for physical discipline. By age ten or puberty, (which ever comes first), it

Thomas was out of patience with his teenage boy. Thomas had been a devoted family man early in his parenting experience, but work troubles and a growing lay ministry had taken him further and further from the home. The years can go by quickly. When a man is on this treadmill—a job-related move, getting a new business started, immersion in a lay ministry, considering a call to full-time ministry, growing speaking opportunities at home and across the state—it can become a trap. Before he realized what was happening and began to pull back, his two oldest children were already teens. The oldest boy and he were already poles apart personality-wise and now, with his son drinking and partying, Thomas had had "it up to here." What that boy needed was a good spanking.

Thomas remembered how, as a boy of six or seven, his son would change radically in his behavior when given a good spanking. When his son came in late from a night of partying with his friends, Thomas was waiting with a length of wood for his paddle. He confronted his son in front of his friend. Shouting ensued, and his son stormed off. He was not going to be paddled by his Dad and treated like a child. When I talked with Thomas, he had not seen his son in five days. His wife had left and taken the other two young children to go live with her sister. It was bad enough that Thomas was gone so much, but now he had run her oldest boy off. She would come back, she said, when he came to his senses. Even as I tried to reason with Thomas, he was still trying to justify his actions.

What right did society have in taking away his use of the paddle? What right did his friends' families have in putting his son up as he shuffled from house to house to escape the rod? Why weren't the police more help? And why was he like Job (so he thought) abandoned by his wife?

Thomas just didn't get it: his son was a young man now. He would no more submit to paddling as a form of discipline from his father, than Thomas would from the church elders or his employer. Thomas needed to realize that he, not his son, had missed this window of opportunity to "discipline your son while there is hope." His son was always there. If Thomas missed it, he had to go on. With child raising, you cannot go back, not for birthdays, not for ball games, not for recitals, not for picnics and not for discipline. Time once past is lost forever. You cannot go back.

is completely counter-productive. We are stuck with our culture. By age 10, in America, a child has begun to be treated as a young person and not a child. By age 13, he is a teen, young adult, or youth. By 17, he can leave home and join the army. To continue to treat a young person as a child when society recognizes the transition invites bitterness, resentment and turmoil in the home. It is humiliating to the young person both personally and socially. The age for physical discipline, spanking, is 9 months to 10 years or puberty, whichever comes first. For those who received Christ late or did not become involved in disciplining the children until after this time it is important to remember that **you cannot go back**. You will have to pick up on the post-spanking training and discipline skills. God will start with you where you are and will bless you and your children.

Expecting good behavior is not the same as making your child grow up too fast. It is as if rebellion and poor manners are the expected norm of behavior for children. It is as if making children obey, making them behave, expecting them to be polite, well mannered and under control is somehow "cheating them out of their childhood." In the Word of God, obedience, behavior which is under control, respectful and polite is the expected norm for children, and not the exclusive domain of adults. In the Word of God, obedience is not an imposition on, but an expectation of the child.

him like a child. But most importantly, those who reject physical discipline and keeping one's children under control, appeal to every authority under the sun except for one—the Word of God. In this one area they are strangely silent. Chapter and verse, please.

Ask yourself a serious question: In the modern child-

raising philosophies rampant in the evangelical communities, are the alternatives to spanking being put forward as a result of in-depth Bible studies and new breakthroughs in the understanding of Scripture, or as a result of a desire on the part of Christian child care advocates not to seem out of step with the times? Does the concept that spanking should not be emphasized, or in some cases, not be used at all, spring from the Word of God or from the non-Christian community?

"I can't believe how you are cheating your son out of his childhood" the young staff wife chided me. "How do you expect him to grow, to develop his own personality, his own bent when you discipline him and are so rigid in your behavioral expectations?" She continued on eloquently, "For Pete's sake, let him throw his food every once in a while, let him blow up now and then. We all need that, don't we? He is only a kid. How do you expect him to know what to do? Reason with him, don't hit him."

Actually some people's children are so poorly behaved that I just wonder what type of belief system they are using to filter their perceptions of life. Unfortunately, this was the case with this staff wife. Since when does poor behavior equal a happy childhood? Since when is rebellion and disobedience the way to store up happy childhood memories? By whose value system is obedience and discipline a vice which, when employed, robs the child of his best years? And, above all, since when is reasoning with a child at an adult's intellectual and emotional level the way to treat a child like a child? It is, in fact, asking the child to behave as an adult when you use reason without physical discipline. Save reasoning alone for when he is a teen, after foolishness has been driven out and wisdom is in place. When he is a child, treat I had only been in the home of the staff couple a short time when dinner preparations began. First the table was set, but only for three with no place for the high chair. "Has the Timmy already been fed?" I queried. I love children and I had been looking forward to Timmy joining us. Perhaps the high chair could be next to me. I missed my children... being gone for the weekend speaking at this college ministry, and the company of their young child would be fun. "No" the mother replied gaily, "He eats over here with Trooper. It is much too messy to eat on the new carpet." Then, pattering along as if nothing was out of the norm, Mommy first fixed the dog food in the dog dish, placed the newspaper down on the linoleum kitchen floor and then called the young Lab to dinner. Next she fixed Timmy's bowl and cup, placed the plastic mat on the floor next to Trooper, placed the high chair on the mat and Timmy in it.

We went to the dining room and ate while the child and the animal ate in the kitchen. "No need to ask Timmy to eat like an adult when he is just a child," the mother said with a smile. How sad that they have bought into a belief system where they have lowered the expectations of their child to that of a dog. How much better to take the time to discipline and train Timmy to eat with Mommy and Daddy. How sad that they do not understand the values they are communicating to their young child. Perhaps they do. Perhaps it is only in public that they realize that their child is so unruly that he has to eat with the dog. In any case, they have cheated Timmy. They have cheated him out of a skill, out of learning early to accept discipline and instruction. They have cheated him out of the warmth of the dinner time companionship. They have cheated him out of the social and intellectual growth that takes place those early years around the table. They have cheated him out of being around the dinner guests and being loved and praised by them. They have also cheated themselves out of high expectations for their child, out of enjoyable dinner times together, out of the praise and admiration they would receive as good parents of an obedient and well mannered child, and out of the laughter and love of a family mealtime with a small child.

A. DO'S

1. SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Make sure all rules are clearly understood, with specific guidelines for discipline for specific infractions. Discipline is heavy stuff for children, and should not be capricious or arbitrary. The child needs to be able to concentrate on the lesson to be learned, and not what Mom or Dad may or may not do, depending on the mood and circumstances of the moment.

We all know how frustrating it is to have a teacher or supervisor who has no set standards of evaluation and is completely subjective in decision-making. The same work or quality gets completely different grades with no seeming consistency. When my son played high school baseball, it was not the umpire with the widest strike zone that was hated by the pitchers, but the one with the inconsistent strike zone. It was not the umpire with the narrowest strike zone that was hated by the batters but the one with the inconsistent strike zone. It is not the hardest teacher who is hated, but the inconsistent and arbitrary teacher. It is not the hard-nosed inspector who is resented, but the inconsistent one. And, it is not the parent who disciplines who is resented, but the arbitrary and inconsistent one.

2. ENFORCE THE PRINCIPLE

Make sure the principle is enforced, and not merely the literal interpretation. Be sure and discipline all gray areas. Kids are masters of twisting the law to their own purposes. They don't pay bills, they don't balance budgets, they don't run businesses, do the shopping, keep the cars and home in running order, vote or battle issues in the church and society. After taking care of their necessities, they really do have a lot of

discretionary time left over for playing mind games with Mom and Dad, trying to figure out how to get away with things in their sphere of life. This is great indoor sport for a youngster. You, on the other hand, don't have this luxury, so don't play the game. Discipline in all gray areas.

"Mom and I are having a Bible Study downstairs, so we don't want to hear any running or shouting from you kids, okay?"

"Yes, daddy" they replied in their angelic voices. Fifteen minutes later, I could hear a crashing of cymbals that I am sure woke the neighbor's cat. Up I went to find the kids banging on pots and pans as loud as they could. "You didn't say don't bang on pots and pans! We weren't shouting and running. We obeyed!"

There was no way this argument was going to work, and I disciplined them all. An aspect of wisdom is to be able to reason through on a request, not just live by the letter of the law. I was not about to put myself in the position of covering every conceivable variable when I made a request. Don't let your children set the rules. **You set the rules** and then discipline all gray areas. After a little while, it won't be an issue because they will stay away from gray areas, which will put them in good stead in the teen years when they begin to make

moral decisions.
"Now, Becca, don't touch the pizza before dinner!" Mommy warned.

Eleanor was setting out dinner on the coffee table in the den in front of the TV. As is our custom, we were going to watch Wonderful World of Disney for our Sunday night dinner together. As usual, we were having pizza. The pizza was out and cooling, the coffee table being set, and I was positioning our little TV when out of the corner of my eye I saw Becca walk straight over and touch the pizza. Caught in the act, she got her spank. Then again, almost immediately she looked me in the eye and touched the crust, and again a spank. Then she touched the foil on the pizza pan—a spank. Then she touched the coffee table the pizza was on—a spank. Then, with the tip of her nose, she gently touched the edge of the coffee table—a spank.

Then it was over and off to play. The lesson was learned, and would be learned again as we disciplined and trained our daughter to stay away from the gray areas. As a teen, it would be a crucial conviction in the areas of moral purity which she held dear, to God's glory, to ours and to hers. Give your children the valuable gift of discipline and training in wisdom to stay away from the gray areas of life's moral issues.

I had just gotten home from work, and was upstairs in the playroom finding the evening news on the TV. Sam and his little friend were playing with their army men on the playroom floor. From the frantic barking of Lucky, our Brittany Spaniel, I knew someone was at the door.

Pretty soon, I heard a familiar voice calmly calling, "Peter, come down, it's time to go." Pete's Mom was picking him up and it was dinner time. Peter didn't even flinch.

"Peter, I know you can hear me. Come down, I don't have time for this, it's late!" Peter, contentedly played as Sam looked at him quizzically. "PETER!" his mother shouted.

Sam asks, "Don't you think you should go?"

"Nah" the wiser Peter replied, "Not 'til she starts to come for me." In a little bit, I hear the footsteps on the stairs.

Peter was up like a bolt and down the stairs and out the door with his Mom. You see, Peter's Mom had trained him in a form of wisdom. It is moral brinkmanship. He had learned just exactly when he had to obey, and that's what he did. He was a very wise boy, only it was the world's wisdom and not God's. How this moral brinkmanship will play out when it comes to cheating, shoplifting, drinking, and sex, only time and opportunity will tell. Teach your children from the very, very beginning, "I will obey Mommy quickly the first time."

Make your goal immediate obedience on the first command. “I will obey Mommy quickly, the first time.” Remember, you are disciplining and training your child, not vice versa. You cannot be frustrated with your child if he obeys on the third request as per your training. Your child will ultimately respond to you on the basis of the training you give him. If you do not require your child to respond until the third request, then why on earth would your child do otherwise? If you do not require your child to respond until you raise your voice, then you can look forward to spending the next 18 years shouting at your children. If you do not require your child to volitionally obey but rather to be physically carried, then again, look forward to spending your parenting years lugging the little darlings around. What seems bearable with one child is totally overwhelming with two or more. What seems cute or a little precocious at two, is not only unbearable but a little frightening at fifteen. I always challenge the parents in my seminar, “Project this behavior into a 5’8” 160 lb. teenager, and consider how cute it is going to be then. We taught our children this phrase just as soon as they were old enough to understand it. “I will obey Mommy/Daddy quickly, the first time.”

It was an interesting scene in the Bible. Paul, a very wise man and veteran missionary, was again on trial for his beliefs. This could be really sticky and things did not look good as he was brought out into the area for the accused to stand. Surrounding him was the Sanhedrin, the Jewish law of the day. Paul noticed the garb of the Pharisees (those who believed in life after death and the resurrection of the dead) filled one part of the court, while in another the distinct garb of the Sadducees (those who believed in no after life) was in another part of the court. Both groups were now all seated together.

When queried about the charges against him, Paul had to think quickly, “I am here because of the belief in the resurrection of the dead!” he shouted out. Pandemonium ensued. Chaos broke out. Shouts began to be hurled about in the court as the two sides took up the gauntlet of their personal beliefs and animosities and completely forgot about Paul. The trial was over before it began. Divide and conquer— a great technique. No one is more skilled than a child, if his parents do not present a united front.

I could see the frustration and embarrassment in Veronica’s face. She had to get home and get dinner fixed, but how would she get the kids out of the pool? She threatened and shouted, to no avail. Finally, she grabbed her five-year-old and lifted her out of the pool. Her thirteen-year-old son continued to fluctuate between ignoring her on the one hand and presenting excuses on the other. Finally, she turned to Bill, a friend, and asked him to bring her darling home when he left and dragged the daughter off.

For some strange reason, Veronica always thought her children would grow out of their disrespectful behavior, even though life experience had told her that things are not grown out of, only entrenched. Nevertheless, she had clung to this hope and now was reaping the results. How much better to have disciplined her children beginning at nine months to “Obey Mommy quickly, the first time.” Then she would be enjoying the pleasure of her children’s respectful and cooperative company, rather than enduring their rude and disrespectful behavior. How true the Word of God is in Prv 10:1 “*The proverbs of Solomon. a wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother.*” And again in Prv 17:25 “*A foolish son is a grief to his father, And bitterness to her who bore him.*”

“Mommy can I go over to Roger’s to play?” “No dear, your daddy will be home soon. Grandma and Grandpa just called and they want us to come to their house for dinner. You need to take a bath and get dressed. We will leave just as soon as Daddy gets here.”

“Daddy,” as he comes in the front door, “can I go over to Roger’s to play?”

“Sure son, just be back for dinner. I’m bushed. Where’s Mom?” But, little Timmy is already out the door and down the block.

4. SET LONG-RANGE GOALS

Work from an agreed-upon plan with an agreed-upon, long-range result in mind. It is essential that the Mom and Dad be in agreement in these decisions, and that you work on one area at a time. Nothing is more damaging to raising children and no game is learned more quickly by the child, than that of playing one parent off against the other.

Eleanor and I decided early on to do three things:

First, always come to a mutual agreement in areas of discipline and training of the children.

Second, that when there is a dispute, we would, as a couple, defer to the more conservative of the two of us on whatever issue was at stake.

Third, when a request was made we would always ask, “What did Mom/Dad say?” We would always check before answering if the other spouse had not been consulted, and we would immediately discipline if a ruling had been made and we sensed the child was trying to get one of us to contradict the other.

In terms of the first agreement, we made a short list when she was pregnant with Becca, our first child, which has served well the last 21 years together.

- 1.) We want our children to do well in school
- 2.) We want Eleanor to be able to have a ministry in the home.
- 3.) We want to be able to take our children on trips and out to places where children usually don’t get to go and have fun as a family doing this.
- 4.) We want our family to be an example to the Church and witness to the non-Christian world.

Establish a relationship based on time with the children that will weather the storm. In your relationship with the child, discipline should be the exception. The relationship should be so firmly fixed that discipline is but a blip on the screen of your overall life together. Unfortunately, for many children the only way they have of guaranteeing parental—and especially fatherly, involvement is to engage in misbehavior or anti-social behavior. For a child hungry for his father’s attention, this is a valid trade-off. The pain of conflict is exchanged for the need for his father’s attention.

“Daddy’s taking me to the mall on our date,” Becca bragged in a sweet way to the other children. “That’s O.K. My day is tomorrow, and I don’t like malls anyway,” Sam shot back from behind the stack of baseball cards he was feverishly sorting. “You can come with us instead. We are going to park,” chimed in Meagan and Liz. They took all their dates together, while Becca and Sam preferred to go solo. I always made it my goal to do something individually with each child each week. From the earliest days, as soon as they could go out safely we have done this (starting at about one month). By the nature of things, if you plan once a week, you get to it two or three times a month, or twice a month. Sometimes life’s crunch makes it once a month and it quickly become a few times a year. Friday night was family night. Saturday night is date night with El, and somewhere during the week was a “date” with the kids. Everything else lined up behind this.

Even more important were family evening meals together. This was actually as sacred, or more so, than Sunday church. We might eat at four in the afternoon or ten o’clock at night, but Sunday through Thursday the evening meal was sacred at the Mahon house. The entire family sat down together, clothed and in their right minds, eating and talking, with the phone off the hook or answering machine on. We all ate together, undisturbed, during the family meal.

After this, there was family night one night a week and a family vacation each year as crucial bonding events. Then I decided to limit my work/ministry nights to two a week maximum. This put me in the home with my children, available to help with life’s issues.

Mom: “No sweetheart, you can’t have a cookie, no between meal snacks.”

Joey: “Whyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy? (whine, whine, whine) Daddy ‘ees, Daddy ‘ees, p’ease daddy p’ease.” (crawling into daddy’s lap)

Dad: “Here, Joey, have some of mine.”

Mom: “Herb!”

Dad: “Now what? For Pete’s sake, let the child have a little. It won’t hurt him. I’ve been gone all day, I just got home. I never get to see the kid. I don’t want to deal with this. Just give him the cookie, O.K.?”

(Joey snuggles into Daddy’s lap with his cookie, and looks Mom right in the eye as he eats it.)

“How do you feel about your relationship with your kids?” is a frequently asked question.

My reply: “My college-age daughter still calls me, “Daddy,” and I get weekly phone calls and e-mail from her. My teenage son calls me his best bud and wants us to wear some of the same clothes. In fact, we freely raid each other’s closets. When he comes home, the first thing he asks is if I want to shoot some baskets with him. My teenage daughters still call me Daddy and still want to sit on my lap.”

That about sums it up, we are a loving, close family and I feel great about my relationship with my children.

6. PRAY

As in all ministries, family time must be undergirded by prayer. We pray as a family at meal time, taking turns to pray. Whether at home, as guests in another home, at relatives, in a restaurant, or even before a snack or treat, we pray and thank God. No canned or memorized prayer, from the earliest childhood days we taught our children to pray conversationally to God.

- ✠ We hold hands and pray at all meals, at home or in public.
- ✠ We pray as a family during times of crisis.
- ✠ We pray with each of our children at bed times.

- ✠ When running errands, we thank God for good parking spots.
- ✠ When driving, we pray for victims of accidents whenever we hear an ambulance siren.
- ✠ Before trips, we pray for safety and for a fun time together as a family.
- ✠ We pray with each of our children when they face a trouble or trial.
- ✠ We pray for our children, from a current prayer list with both long and short-term requests. Praying for each child, over each request, each day without fail.

My friend Paul's teenage son had been a little too smart with his tongue and, as a result, was grounded from the TV for a week. Paul and his wife were going out on a date on Saturday night and would not be home until late.

Paul thought it over and decided it would be unfair to leave his son home all night alone with the TV and the injunction not to watch it. He just did not think this kind of moral pressure was right, nor was he comfortable with locking the TV away or dismantling it so as to communicate before the fact that he did not trust Paul.

What he did was call his son to him, explain the situation and tell Paul that he could watch TV that night and he would just tack the lost night on at the end. His total of seven days of being grounded would still count; there would just be a one-day break. I thought this was a wise decision.

B. DON'TS

1. DON'T TRY TO WORK ON EVERYTHING AT ONCE

Don't try to work on everything at once. Most parents make the mistake of becoming screaming banshees when they realize that they can have a say in their children's behavior, that there is indeed an alternative to what they have been settling for. Please don't make this mistake. El and I have found that with our children, during the crawler/toddler stage they could handle about one area at a time. Then in the preschool era, two was about it. Finally, during the school years, they could handle several, but three is really the max during this time. I have got to be especially careful during conferences to stress this, as the parents get so much, so quickly, that it is really advisable to pray over these issues and adapt them to your own gifts, callings, and lifestyle.

I was presenting my seminar at an International Conference in Worthing, England. During the lunch break, I was taking my tray back to the counter when I heard in hushed voices, thickly accented with that mid-country British accent. "There he is, Tuppy. That's the one. That's him. He's the one that taught it to our parents and now your parents are going to change too!"

Looking at me, in awe, was a table of pink-cheeked, blonde-haired children about elementary age. My accuser was an older boy whose parents were already familiar with these principles. The audience was a group of four or five younger boys, all of whom had parents in my seminar.

They did not know who I was, or what strange powers I had, but the conference was just half over and already their lives were changing radically.

We had arrived at the fair, the car was parked and off we went. As we wove our way through the parked cars to the gate the children began bickering among themselves. "If you can't act right you can just stay in the car!" I threatened. El looked at me with that all knowing, "get real" look but said nothing.

After a moment, I stopped. I got down at eye-level with the children and said, "Kids, I am sorry. I should never have threatened to leave you in the car. You know I would never do it and it is not fair to you to say something like that and I want you to forgive me. Now, on another note, you know I *will* spank you. It is foolish to fight among yourselves. Y'all are best friends. Besides that, it is foolish to fight on the way to a fair. This is a fun time. But I will take you all back to the car and spank you all if you don't start acting nice to each other." and off we went for a great night together.

Don't set unenforceable rules or threaten with the obviously unenforceable discipline. Children learn all too quickly what you are willing and unwilling to do, so your threats will go unheeded. Even worse, children will begin to doubt your commitment to the whole discipline process. So, even when you are serious, your warnings will be ignored. To teach a child to ignore the warnings of authority is a very poor wisdom and poor life skill indeed.

Many times we as parents will say something in anger or set up a process of discipline in anger that we later regret. Many is the time when El has listened patiently as I meted out the sentence (or vice versa), then, back in the room, we talked it over and decided that it was really too harsh or unfair. At times like this we should realize that there is a sacrifice for a rash vow.

In Judges 11, Jephthah was given a great victory by God. In his excitement, he vowed to God to sacrifice to Him the first thing that he saw when he got back home. Unfortunately, it was his daughter. Jephthah was crushed, but being conscientious, he realized that he had made his vow to the living God and went through with it. This tragic event need never have happened if Jephthah had only been more familiar with the Word of God. Leviticus 27:1–4 makes provision for a rash vow. All Jephthah would have had to have done was take his ten shekels to the priest, confess his mistake and God would have forgiven him his vow and let him off the hook. God recognizes we all make rash vows or statements and He is ready to forgive them. If you speak rashly, confess it to God, confess it to your children, back up and start over. It is as simple as that. Do not, by stubborn pride, set or try to enforce unenforceable or overly harsh rules and discipline.

3. DON'T VARY THE RULES

Don't vary the rules of the game based on environment, or situation. Don't wait and discipline retroactively, after a period of time when you are more comfortable with the environment. Early in our family life, El became convinced (I have come to agree with her) that most parents' opposition to discipline is not philosophical but rather due to the fact that it is a royal pain.

I was in college during the Vietnam war. Many students participated in antiwar activities on the campus. Of all the hundreds of students who I knew, only one did so out of philosophical commitment. The rest were just self-centered college students who did not want to give up their cushy life in the dorm or frat house and go off to the swamps of Vietnam. I find the same with the issue of spanking. Although paying lip service to the humanist objections to the practice, the vast majority of parents just don't want to fool with it.

In each case, whether it is the supermarket, the restaurant, or the grandparents' home, it is definitely more trouble to spank than to just let it go. But it is important to remember that we are not disciplining for our own convenience, but for the future success of the child. The atmosphere in the home and the benefits of a peaceful, well-behaved family cannot be over emphasized, but the ease and convenience of parenting is not the first and foremost of our goals. Rather, we seek the success of our children.

What we are looking at in each situation is a short-term loss and long-term gain. It is foolish for a child to make it difficult for his mother to shop and provide for the family. It is foolish for a child to resent his parents' eating out and enjoying a family outing together. It is foolish for a child to create convenient bouts of shyness when an adult is kind—especially when it is a loving family member. The child's present and future success will be greatly enhanced by dealing with these episodes of foolishness, rather than laughing at them. Teaching your child that given the right set of circumstances, they can act as foolish as they want and get away with it is a very poor wisdom and life skill to pass on.

Sylvia is in the supermarket. Little Paul continues to pull things off the shelves and run up and down the aisles. She knows the answer: Abandon her cart, load up the kids, march out to the car, discipline Paul and then return and hope her cart will still be there and she will not have to start all over.

Johnny and Claire had just settled in to a nice family dinner after church when little Michael, to express his displeasure at having to wait in a strange place for dinner, swept the crackers provided off the tray of the high chair. Some hit the floor, some the table and some hit Mommy. Mom and Dad look at each other. Wouldn't it be easier to just try again? The thought of carrying Michael out to the car crying furiously in front of all these people just didn't seem worth the trouble.

"Say Thank you to Gramps and give him a kiss" El looked at Becca our preschooler as she buried her head in El's skirt.

"Becca," El continued, "obey Mommy." Becca persisted and began to whine in opposition. El knew the scenario all too well. Grandparents who insist it is not important and a child who was not going to budge unless disciplined. She was going to be the bad guy in the whole deal if she disciplined Becca.

The grandparents, who are already a little hurt, would really be upset at the type of kiss and thank you they got after the spanking.

Don't be played off, one spouse against the other, or pawn off the responsibility of disciplining upon your spouse. The one in charge at the time of the infraction, or the one toward whom the infraction is vented, is the one who must discipline the child.

In each case, the child is done a great disservice. As a parent it is important to be committed to the process of discipline. In the Mahon home, the one in charge at the time, the one to whom disobedience is shown, is the one who administers discipline. Then, after discipline, love and affection is restored. The child is calmed down and life goes on. If the child runs to another parent for comfort or to complain, the child is sent back to the disciplining parent. That is where the relationship needs to be restored and that is where the issue needs to be dealt with.

In an age with more and more parents coming from dysfunctional families where they did not receive love and affection, the warmth of a child's love can be intoxicating and the loss of it keenly felt. Add to this, friction between the parents and you place yourself in a very vulnerable position of needing your child's approval and reversing your roles with your child. You do the child a great disservice if you allow the child to learn to punish or manipulate you as parents, with affection and emotions. Affection and emotion are great gifts from God. They are wonderful in the course of relationships. The skill of using them to get away with things, to manipulate others or to get what you want is not a skill you want to give to your child. It will hinder the child in play, in school and in relationships with others. You do not want to develop in your child the wisdom and life skill of using emotions and affection to manipulate others and to get away with things. This is a very poor skill indeed.

5. DON'T PUNISH ALL BECAUSE OF ONE

Don't discipline all children for one child's infraction. Don't cancel family trips, special outings, story time, a movie or a game for the whole family just because of the disobedience of one child. Children need to be dealt with independently. If they are not dealt with independently, they will lose sight of being personally accountable for their actions and learn to punish and blackmail their brothers and sisters by getting them in trouble.

"You just wait 'til your father gets home!" Wanda threatened. Little Timmy did respond momentarily, but he was already beginning to understand that when "Daddy gets home," one of the last things he wants to do is begin to fight with his children.

Vicki came running to her mother, "Daddy spank me. Daddy hate me. I am a bad, bad girl." Vicki burst out in tears. Mommy takes Vicki in her arms and begins to reassure her. "No, Vicki is a good girl, Mommy and Daddy love you." She then calls out, "Harry, do you have to be so hard on the child?"

Don could not believe his eyes. Iris had once again brought home a poor report card. Something had to be done and done right away. "OK everybody," he announced, "I have had enough of this! No more studying on the bed, no more radio while we study, no more cramming for tests, no more messy desks and study groups and study-on-the-phone sessions, no more pizza stains on home work... we are going to get organized! From now on, I want to see all you kids, together, at the table after dinner doing your homework in peace and quiet 'til this thing is under control."

His oldest child, Barbara could not believe her ears! She was a straight A student and one of the joys of her pressured life was the routine she had developed for studying and the friends she liked to study with. "Daddy" she screamed as she ran up the stairs to her room, "I am not going to be punished because Iris is a goof-off."

Don had accomplished several things here. First, he had cheapened Barbara's sacrifices and accomplishments. Second, he had strained Barbara's and Iris' relationship by forcing a comparison via Barbara's out burst and by putting Barbara in the position of having to point this out. Lastly he had taken the spotlight off the issue of Iris's scholastic shortcomings, and moved it to the need to resolve a family conflict.

This was just fine with Iris. She was happy to see Mom and Dad in heated argument over what should have been done and what now will be done to restore Barbara, as opposed to continued discussion of her study habits. She quietly retreated to her room as well. How much better to have dealt with Iris individually, and then have recruited Barbara to begin praying for and helping her sister.

My daughters, Megan and Liz are best buds. When they had the opportunity to have their own room, it lasted only one night. They would have none of it and moved back in together. As a result they were still roomies long past the time when physical discipline was appropriate.

During this later period, one way we have worked at preserving this closeness was to not punish them together by default. What I mean is that when children share a room together and one is "grounded from the radio" or "lights out 30 minutes early this week" or "OK, the phone comes out of the room for a week," we do not force the other to receive the fallout from these forms of discipline. It is not, therefore, appropriate to restrict use in the room of an item which would punish the other child. If we ground Megan from the radio, what about Liz? If we take the phone out of Liz's room, we are also punishing Megan. Lights out early for Liz, puts her sister Megan in a bind. To send Megan to her room to be grounded places the room off limits for all intents and purposes to Liz and her friends.

Do not fall into this trap and take something very special, the desire of sisters to be roommates and turn it into one of the childhood events which drove a wedge though a great relationship.

They will also blackmail the whole family by spoiling the time together. On more than one occasion, I have witnessed a little tyrant, or big one for that matter, cast a dark emotional pall over a meal, an outing or a family fun time through their gloom, passive resistance and steadfast refusal to have a good time. This was never allowed in the Mahon household. Our children quickly learned that we were the ones who disciplined in this house and not the children. One of the goals of a disciplined family is that the children grow up to be best friends. Teaching them they can manipulate you to punish their brothers or sisters, or that they can punish the whole family if they do not get their way is not the ground work you want to lay for achieving this goal. Learning that you can make others pay for your sins or learning that you can avoid payment if others around you know that they will have to join with you in paying for your sins is a poor wisdom and life skill to give to your child.

I think I should note here the one exception we make to this rule: fighting. When our children fight, everyone in the room is disciplined. The two who are fighting are disciplined because fighting between brothers and sisters is foolish, and as such is not allowed in our home. Who is going to be on your side, if not your brother or sister? Who are you always going to be able to depend upon, if not your brother or sister? Who will you share your life long memories with, if not your brother or sister? Who will stand at your side at your parent's funerals, if not your brothers and sisters? Who will stand at your side at your spouse's funeral, if not your brothers and sisters? Who will always be there for you, if not your brothers and sisters? It is foolish to fight and jeopardize one of the most important relationships you will have in your whole life. As for the others in the room, how can you sit and watch your brother and sister fight and do nothing? Are you so dispassionate that it means nothing to have this conflict going on? Do you have nothing to offer in terms of a solution? Thus, when it comes to fighting, everyone ends up on the couch, side by side and they all get the same discipline. Then they must all ask forgiveness of each other, hug and kiss each other. If there is still friction, then they all work on cleaning duty together, get another lecture and a round of hugs and kisses. They can spend the whole day working together or playing together, the call is theirs.

We always differentiated with our children between tattling and love. Tattling is running to tell Mom or Dad every time little Susie does something wrong, in order to get her spanked. In that case, both get spanked. Love is letting us know that little Susie is about to wander out in the street, about to pull a boiling pot from the stovetop or about to make a moral or personal decision that will have severe consequences. We want our children to be as committed to each other's success as we are to theirs.

Family night was going great. Sarah, however, was losing the game and her attitude was turning sour. Suddenly she picks a fight with Jacob.

Dad has had enough, "OK, if you can't get along then we will just put the game away," he announces.

The two younger brothers look on in dismay. They were having a great time despite Sarah's bad attitude. Jacob could not believe his ears; Sarah had started it. Why spoil the whole thing just because of her? Sarah got up and stomped off to her room as Dad began picking up the pieces of the game. As she turned the corner, she made eye contact with her two brothers just to be sure they knew who was in charge of family night. "If you want family night, you better not cross me," her gaze clearly communicated.

Why, the boys asked themselves, do they always seem to pay for Sarah's sins? That is a good question. Sarah needs to learn to play. She needs to learn that the goal is the family being together not just winning. How much better to take a break, discipline Sarah, have her return to the game, apologize to all and rejoin the family fun night! How much better to teach her this important wisdom and life skill rather than to allow her to spoil the game for everyone.

"Friends are people with the same enemy."

Gen. Douglas McArthur

I could hear Sam and Megan arguing over the game and would have none of it. "You know we don't fight with each other in this family," I called as I picked up the wooden spoon and started up the stairs. Liz, playing independently, in her innocence did not know what this meant. But Becca, a seasoned veteran of the child wars, knew all too well. Quickly, she jumped up from her book, "Listen y'all, we can work this out!" I could hear her urging. When I got to the play room, all was at peace. All four looked up, "Is something wrong Daddy?" they chimed. This is great! I thought, kids on each other's side rather than looking forward to seeing who got what.

It was a pretty big blow out, and I knew that the direction Becca(17) had announced she would take would have far reaching consequences in the life of our family. I prayed quietly to myself as Becca stormed out the front door. Sam, her younger brother by two years, was out like a bolt right behind her. I could see him talking to her and reasoning with her. They were best friends and Sam was not going to sit idly by and watch as Becca made a very bad decision in the heat of the moment. Soon they were praying in the front yard together and Becca came back inside, went up to her room to calm down, and then back down to apologize. The ground work for this was laid years before when we demanded compassionate intervention on the part of the children for each other. No tattling, no policing... but love.

Don't use separation of the relationship as part of the discipline. I have never understood the value of separating a child from the rest of the family for periods of time. We have never used this method and do not recommend it. Institutions use it with great success. Institutions though are concerned with behavior modification, their own convenience, and punishment, not loving discipline for the purpose of training the child in wisdom and life skills. I guess this is why psychologists and psychiatrists, trained in the cold institutional setting are so keen on this method.

If it is a biblical principal with biblical values, then I ask a simple question, "Chapter & Verse Please." If it is a method for clinical manipulation, then I discard it as subjective, manipulative, and doing more harm in the relationship of the child with the family than good.

Cynthia had been rebellious the entire weekend and her grandparents could not wait for their daughter to return and give her an earful. Katherine could not believe her ears and when Cynthia got home she was firmly instructed and disciplined.

Katherine then called Grandma for Cynthia to apologize to her. Cynthia sobbed as she asked Grandma to please forgive her.

Grandma's reply was firm, "It hasn't been long enough yet." Grandma forgot this event, but Cynthia never did. She waited, but Grandma never picked up the phone and told Cynthia that it had been long enough.

III. Disciplining The Child

A. HOW TO DO IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME

There are some times when you are writing that people want lots of words, lots of illustrations, cute stories and explanation. They feel cheated if there are not lots and lots of words. Other times, it is best to cut to the chase and give them the goods. I feel that this is one of those times. I am sure you will overlook the abruptness of this section in exchange for the information being more easily retrieved and used.

1. ACT IMMEDIATELY AND AT ONCE WITHOUT REFERENCE TO ENVIRONMENT OR CONVENIENCE.

This is an inconvenience to the parent, but crucial in the disciplining of the child. The objective is to teach the child the wisdom of obedience early in life, as opposed to the alternative of teaching the child when disobedience will be tolerated early in life, and then trying to undo this later. Ease of child raising is a definite side benefit to biblical discipline, but it is not the immediate result. The immediate result is inconvenience. The long-term result is ease and convenience. The long-term goal is wisdom and life training for the child's success. Thus, discipline immediately, irrespective of surroundings or timing.

"I wish my parents had done that."

I looked up at Glen, a little surprised. Glen was a college student in our ministry. He was older and more confident than the other guys, having served first in the military. He was sitting at the table with me when Sam had come in to ask a question. I had Sam speak to Glen, ask a few civil questions, all the while looking him in the eye. Sam was about four at the time.

Glen went on to share that it was not until he entered the military that he gained the confidence and skill to speak directly to people, especially people in authority. He shared from his heart how he wished he had been given that skill as a young boy, instead of having to wait until he was an adult.

The only exception to this is baby-sitters. We always told our baby-sitters to let us know how things went. Like all baby-sitters, they dutifully answered, "Fine". With this nicety out of the way, we had a frank talk with them. We really liked them to baby-sit, and we really liked our date night out. If our children misbehave, they will not want to baby-sit and we will not get to go out. More important than that, as Christians, it is very important for us that our children obey authority. We do not want you to discipline them, but we do want to know and we will handle it. After this little speech, we will very often get the truth. If the children were rebellious or disobedient, we wake them up and discipline them that night, no matter how late.

2. HAVE THE CHILD LOOK YOU SQUARELY IN THE FACE.

The child must look you in the eye and concentrate upon what is being said. All of my children have, at one time or another, commented upon the response adults give them in return to their being able to look them in the eye. They are uniformly treated with more respect and taken more seriously. I can remember while disciplining them, touching my eye and saying, "Look me in the eye." as their eyes would wander.

This was great training for later in life. Judge Lewis was good at Bible study and a nice guy but he could not look you in the eye. This had affected both his career and his ministry, and reinforced my resolve to give my children this important skill.

3. COMMUNICATE CLEARLY TO THE CHILD ABOUT THE INFRACTION ON HIS LEVEL

a. Sequence for toddler:

Mommy says: “No, Heather,” pointing to plant. “No, plant is spank.” “No, Heather, spank.”

Heather hears: “No, Heather,” sees Mommy pointing to plant. “No, plant spank... No, Heather, spank.”

b. Sequence for three-year-old, or child who can handle sentences:

Mommy: “What did you do?”

Heather: “Played with plant.”

Mommy: “What did Mommy say?”

Heather: “No.” (*begins to choke back cry*)

Mommy: “What is that?”

Heather: “No.”

Mommy: “OK, then what happens when you disobey?”

Heather: “Spank.” (*Begins to cry openly.*)

Mommy: “OK, then why are you going to get a spanking?”

Heather: “Did not obey. Touched plant.”

Mommy: “Say, I will obey Mommy quickly the first time.”

Heather: “I will not touch plant.”

Mommy: “No, say, ‘I will obey Mommy quickly the first time.’”

Heather: “I will obey Mommy quickly the first time.”

Mommy: “OK, now lie on your bed and put your hands on your cheeks.” (*Then, administer the discipline in a controlled manner. The child must understand the issue and learn from it without worrying about you.*)

4. ADMINISTER DISCIPLINE QUICKLY AND SHARPLY

The only reason you should put it off is to calm down if you feel you are losing your temper. You should never wait until you are angry to discipline. If you are angry, then you are not disciplining the first time you are disobeyed. The spank should be...

a. A sharp stroke which definitely stings the child and gets his attention the first time

b. In an isolated spot

The child should not be humiliated nor should you give opportunity to social-agenda fanatics who will take it upon themselves to interrupt you or tell you off. At home, if other children are present, choose a place which will be isolated. This is not entertainment for the other children. The correct response for the other children is sorrow that their best friend is in trouble. In public, return to the car or find an empty rest room if possible.

c. In a controlled manner (both parent and child)

The child should be concentrating on the infraction and the desired change in behavior, not on what Mommy will do next. Equally true, the child should be concentrating on the infraction and change, not on ways to manipulate or punish Mommy by screaming, kicking and throwing a temper tantrum.

Connie was so disappointed in little Heather. She had mentioned more than once to the little toddler the importance of staying away from the plants. Now Heather had once again pulled over her favorite diffenbachia

Mommy says: “Heather, that really disappoints Mommy. You know I have told you not to touch the plant. You know that is wrong. Don’t do that any more. If you do it again, I am going to have to discipline you and that makes Mommy sad.”

Heather hears due to her limited vocabulary: “Heather, blah, blah, blah, Mommy. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah plant. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, Mommy blah.”

He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.

Prv 17:9

I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

Is 43:25

d. In a predetermined and set manner

The stroke of the rod should fall on the fleshy part of the child. The best place is the buttocks. Diapers make this a poor choice unless they are removed. If not, the fleshy part of the back of the thigh is fine. In some cases, where the hand is involved, the fleshy part of the biceps will suffice. **Never, never, never strike a child in the face, on the back or on the head.** Do not discipline on the shin, or where the bone is near the skin. Do not spank the hands or feet or anywhere that little bones exist or are forming. Never discipline without warning and explanation. Never discipline in anger. This is the difference between hitting and training. This is the difference between a coach and a judge.

With our children we would say, “Go to the bed room and put your hands on your cheeks.” We would follow shortly with the wooden spoon to administer one, two or three strokes. The children always knew what to expect from us and what we expected from them. My good friend Mike would have them go to the bathroom and put their hands down on the closed toilet lid and wait. Same principle, just a different method.

e. The stroke should be hard enough to hurt and to leave a red mark.

Patty could not understand why her child would not stay in bed even though she spanked her repeatedly. My wife discussed this on the phone, and Eleanor just could not believe the child would exchange this foolish behavior for the discipline of the rod. The next time, she had Patty leave the phone off the hook in the room while she spanked. The problem was plain. A wimpier whack you have never heard. El had Patty spank herself on the arm, “Harder,” “No, still harder,” “Come on Patty, I said hard!” “Owww! Patty let out a yell.” “OK, Patty, now you have it.” Patty had the problem under control within the week.

f. After the discipline, reassure the child about the relationship

After the discipline, allow the child to calm down, repeat the lesson learned, then after kissing, hugging and reassuring the child about the relationship, **life should return to normal.** No family purgatory, no constant

“Dad, when I remember how you and Mom disciplined us, it really helps me understand how God forgives our sins.”

Sam

reminders, no stony silence, no pouting on your part or the child’s part. Life picks up as normal and the family continues on. After a particularly rough time, a shared snack or drink or a short play time or story may be helpful.

B. THE PRINCIPLES ILLUSTRATED, HEATHER AT ONE AND HALF YEARS OLD...

(Remember, physical discipline is for the ages of approximately nine months to fourth grade, with the crucial years being the first four. At fourth grade or puberty, whichever comes first, it becomes counterproductive.)

(The child is looking at the plant which she has managed to work her way over to, and you say:) “Heather, no, don’t touch, no!” (Heather reaches out, lightly brushes her hand across the leaves of the plant and then toddles off. You retrieve Heather, bring her back to the plant and communicate clearly, making eye contact. Touch the corner of your eye and then the plant, as needed to keep Heather focused.)

Mommy: What did Mommy say?

Heather: No.

Mommy: That’s right, Mommy said, “No.” Heather, what’s that? *(pointing at plant)*

Heather: No.

Mommy: That’s right, Heather and what is a “No”?

Heather: Spank. *(Heather begins to cry.)*

Mommy: That’s right, Heather, it is a spank. A “No” is two spanks. Heather, say “Obey.” *(or) “I will obey Mommy quickly the first time.” (begin this longer sentence just as soon as she is able to do so)*

Heather: Obey. *(or) I will obey Mommy quickly the first time.*

Mommy: *(At this time Heather is sent to her room to lie on her bed and put her hands on her cheeks, if there are other children present. If not, she can lie on a couch or chair.)*

Mommy: Heather, the plant is a no. Heather did not obey. That is two spanks.

(At this time apply two strokes of the rod, spaced by several seconds with a deliberate count of “One” wait and then, “Two”)

(If you did this right Heather will now, as a rule, be crying. Take Heather into your arms and hold her and let her calm down a little. Do not let her crying be a form of punishment or avoidance.)

Mommy: Heather, why did I spank you?

Heather: Touched plant.

Mommy: Yes Heather, but what should Heather do?

Heather: Obey.

Mommy: That's right Heather, say, "I will obey Mommy quickly the first time."

Heather: I will obey Mommy quickly the first time.

Mommy: *(Points to plant)* What is that?

Heather: No.

Mommy: Good girl, Heather. Heather is very smart and Mommy is very proud of Heather. Heather knows "no." Heather can obey. Heather is a good, good, girl.

(Now Mommy loves Heather, and reinforces that Heather is a good girl who obeys, holds her, calms her down, gets some juice for her and sends her back to play.)

Now, fathers, as you look at this process, you must realize that you are going to have to adjust your expectations to allow your wife to take the time to discipline and train the children while you are away at work. You cannot expect them to make bricks without straw the way Pharaoh did the children of Israel. If they have to take time to do this, then other things may not get done. Also, that means when you come home from work, you are still on duty. You have been working all day. Your wife has been working all day. You both continue to work until the kids go down. Then you rest. This is just another good reason to decide on the bedtime of the children, rather than to let them decide.

Children instinctively know when Mom is most vulnerable or preoccupied. Meal times, getting ready to pick Dad up at work, phone calls, meal preparations... all these are times when Mom is preoccupied with other things than darling little Heather. Heather senses this and for whatever reason, selfishness, insecurity, or just a dislike of change, begins to act up. The process above will break this cycle, but it will take time and have to be repeated periodically. When you come home and dinner is late, or your wife is late picking you up, or whatever, because she was disciplining the children, this needs to be a cause of praise on your part, not of complaint.

The main reason parents do not discipline becomes obvious: it's a pain. It is, however, short-term loss for a long-term gain, both for you and your child. In the long run, you will be happier and in a better mood because of the emotional reserve you will gain by having well behaved children. You will enjoy your children more because you are not always yelling at them and they are not always wearing you out. Your children will be happier and more secure knowing they can entertain themselves when Mommy is busy during certain times of the day. The children will enjoy their relationship with Mommy more knowing it is nonconfrontational, that she is in charge and the limits of behavior are clear. The children will be happier, overall, as they enjoy the fruits of wise behavior in all aspects of their lives.

C. THE DEFINITION OF ABUSE

A good friend of mine used to define abuse as "Disciplining in anger." I think I would expand this to "Disciplining in anger, or for the sake of punishment— be it emotional or physical." Punishment always carries with it the connotation of getting even, of a score to settle before the relationship can (if ever) be restored. A price is sometimes extracted in physical pain, but always in emotional pain. It is great indoor sport for those skilled in it, but never productive in child raising.

On the other hand, discipline is synonymous with training and should carry with it none of the emotional baggage of punishment. We use physical discipline, spanking, because the Bible says it works. It has no negative connotation concerning the relationship, and once administered, is over and done with. This is seen in the clear distinctions in their definitions. According to the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, punish means "*to subject someone to penalty for a crime, fault, or misbehavior,*" while discipline is "*training that is expected to produce a specific character or pattern of behavior, especially that which is to produce moral or mental improvement.*"

We do not administer the rod to the child to punish him for his behavior; e.g. to get even with him so we can begin relating to him again, but rather to train him in a way that will make him a wise and successful adult. If handled correctly, discipline is done without reference to fellowship or anger, only foolishness and wisdom are at issue.

As a result, we don't look or feel guilty about discipline, nor do we look for a way out, holding back discipline only as a last resort. We are doing our child a favor and as such we embrace discipline as a work of grace bestowed on our child by God through us, his parents. The child is being disciplined for his success and we are proud to be a part of that. Don't buy into the world's lies. Discipline is not hitting. Disciplined children do not rebel at a later time. Above all, discipline is at the heart of scriptural teachings on child raising. Listen patiently to all sides and then say quietly, "Chapter and verse, please."

IV. Summary

A. The Three Goals Of Discipline

1. Submission to Authority
2. Self Control
3. Wisdom

B. Discipline is not punishment, and there is no place for anger or guilt. The only issues are foolishness and wisdom.

C. Remember

1. Act immediately
2. Have the child look you in the eyes
3. Communicate clearly
4. Administer the discipline quickly and sharply
5. Do not allow the child to throw a temper tantrum
6. Afterwards, reinforce the lesson learned
7. Then, make sure the relationship is on good ground and the child feels loved and secure.

D. We don't look or feel guilty about discipline, nor do we look for a way out, holding back discipline only as a last result. We are doing our child a favor and, as such, we embrace discipline as a work of grace bestowed on our child by God through us, his parents. The child is being disciplined for his success, and we are proud to be a part of that.