



Keys to Happy Family Living

Christian Living Series

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Lesson 9 – Training in Love

"Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6, NASB)

The material in this section has to do with the nature of parenthood. We have stressed thus far the fact that successful parenthood will be the reward of parents who are (1) at peace with themselves; and (2) happy, congenial partners. This section, like the first two sections, will draw upon the Bible for the path to follow.

Making Disciples

Parenthood is the process of making disciples of your children. As Jesus walked this earth, He selected a dozen men, saying, "Follow me" (Matthew 10:1; compare 4:19). Before He went to the cross, He prayed:

"...for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me. ... As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world" (John 17:8, 18).

As you study the Gospels, you realize that each of the disciples was an individual. Yet each one was given the same holy standard for daily living--the standard of the Lord Jesus.

In writing to the Philippians, Paul says: "...but one thing I do: ... I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14). He goes on to say: "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:9). Thus he takes upon himself the responsibility of being a living example.

Parents, too, should live as Paul did--striving for the same high calling. Fortunate is the child whose parents give him such a living example that he can safely follow in their footsteps. Fortunate is the child who has parents each of whom can say to him, "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

The realization that your children could turn out to be the kind of persons that you are ought to be a satisfying one. (Study Luke 6:40 and 1 Corinthians 11:1).

Parents should teach their children by example and by words as the Lord Jesus did and as Paul did. Parents ought to be living models for their children. As someone has said, "The best way to teach character is to have it around the house."

Such parents can then go on to practice the directive in the Bible which says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

When you go to school and study under a certain teacher, you follow him as your guide. He sets the way that you should go; and you become, in lesser or greater measure, his disciple. You learn from his information and absorb his basic philosophy. You may even acquire his physical mannerisms. Likewise, as parents, you should realize that your big job is to help your children go in the right direction.

It is obvious that before you can help a child go where he should go, you must know where he should go. You must be convinced that what you ask your children to do is worth doing. If you are not sure in your own mind that the thing you ask your child to do is worthwhile, you had better not ask him to do it. Somehow your children can sense insincerity and uncertainty in your eye or your gesture if they are there. It is easy to tell your son to be kind to your daughter if you are kind to your partner. You need to be practicing what you want your children to practice.

Training

The making of a disciple requires discipline. According to the dictionary, discipline involves training and correction that produce proper conduct or action. (See the dictionary for a complete definition.)

Loving care

God's Word instructs us to love one another earnestly from the heart (1 Peter 1:22). If this verse applies at all, it surely applies to parents in their relations with their children. Parents who aspire to be the kind of persons described in the first two sections of this course will surely want to give their children tender, loving, sacrificial care. It is a simple matter to deal with children of any age if they are obedient and cooperative. The test comes when the parent must deal with stubbornness, defiance, rebellion, screaming, tantrums, resistance, and similar reactions. How is tender, loving care applied under such circumstances?

Is it a mark of love for your child when you insist that he do something he doesn't want to do? Or do you think you demonstrate your love by giving in? How do you show your love for your children? Many people equate discipline, saying "no," and

punishment with a lack of love. They say that you are not loving when you punish your child. On the other hand, they say that you are loving when you let your children have their own way, when you indulge them.

Consider this verse:

*"My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD
Or loathe His reproof,
For whom the LORD loves He reproves,
Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights."*

(Proverbs 3:11-12)

It is also commonly held that love is always hugs and kisses. Some people feel that if they scoop their children up in their arms and give them a kiss and a hug, this always illustrates their love. Does it? Some people can be very annoyed with their children and still hold them in their arms.

What is love? Love is described in 1 Corinthians 13. (Note especially 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.)

You chasten your child, not because you lose your temper, but for the good of the child, for his own personal development. You take a long look at his life and discipline him so that in the end he will be a wholesome person (Proverbs 29:17).

What about spanking and other discipline?

"What do you think about spanking?" is a very common question anxiously asked by many parents. Spanking is often thought of as an unloving act. Inflicting physical pain is commonly considered cruelty.

The pre-school children of one father taught him the answer to this question. A nightly ritual with him was to lie on his back, get one of his children up on his feet, boost him through the air, to land on the couch. Once he put a child up on his feet and boosted him through the air, but the child missed the couch. He came crashing down on the floor. To the father's surprise, the boy jumped up, eyes shining, and said, "Do it again, Daddy!" The other children added, "Do it to me, too."

That father experimented a little that night. He deliberately threw the children on the floor. He said, "Hold out your hands," and playfully spanked them. They enjoyed the physical pain and wanted more. A few days later, however, one of the children did something wrong. The father took that child's hand and spanked it with less force than he had at playtime. The child cried as if his heart would break.

What was the difference between the two incidents? It was the emotional climate. A few nights before both father and child were in a good mood and they were having a good time. Now the mood was different. Physical pain does not necessarily mean punishment. Has your child ever come home proud of a black eye? "I got it playing football," he explained, his chin up, his tone triumphant.

Some people think that if they never lay a hand on their child, they never punish him. However, we all know about the pain of sharp words. You wouldn't throw a brick at anyone, but you might take aim with a well-chosen sentence and let it fly. Sometimes a mother can hurt a child as much with a certain tone of voice as she would if she struck him. You may have experienced the punishment of silence, sometimes called "the freeze." All is quiet in the home, as though you were walking on eggs. You can almost hear them crackle. There is no physical violence. Such silence can be more painful than if you struck your child.

Punishment and physical pain need not be related. You can pick up your little baby, as some people do, and very kindly pat him. You mean, "I like you." You walk up to a friend and slap him on the back, meaning, "I like you." On the other hand, if you walk up to someone you don't like and give him a little push, that means something else, doesn't it?

Discipline and spanking are not necessarily related. One of the reasons so many people abhor spanking is because they are angry when they do it. *The important thing about the act of using a paddle is not the child but the person using the paddle.*

A paddle can be used in such a way that it means harm to the child (Proverbs 22:8). That same paddle, on the other hand, can be used in such a way that it means the making of the child. The spirit of the paddler makes the difference. (Study Proverbs 10:13; 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15,17.)

Should you withdraw affection?

Another question is frequently asked: "Is it effective to withdraw your affection from a child in order to keep him in line?"

A cold shoulder can be just as painful as a slap. If you are about to discipline your child, you must do it in a tender way. Can you spank a child tenderly? Compassionately? *You'd better not spank him if you can't.* The Lord disciplines and chastens you, not because He has withdrawn His affection, but because He loves you. The Christian concept of love is described in 1 Corinthians 13--kindness, gentleness, tenderness, compassion. . . . Children should feel that they cannot lose your affection. Your love for your child is independent of his behavior. Your child should also be sure that he will be chastened if he needs it.

You can say to your child, "No, you can't do that," because from the depths of a loving heart you know it is not good for the child. On the other hand, you can say, "Stop it!" because you've lost your temper. Your tone and attitude make the difference. The child knows the difference--and so do you. When you discipline your child in an attitude of

love, he will be strengthened and so will you. When you lash out at your child in a spirit of hostility and anger, you do not help the child, and you hurt yourself. This lashing out need not be in terms of physical punishment. It can be verbal or silent, yet be just as devastating in its effect on the character of the child as physical punishment administered in anger.

Get on your knees and ask God to forgive you for your anger. God disciplines us, not because we have angered Him, but because what we are doing is not good for us. When we discipline our children, we should do it because they need it, not because we have lost our temper.

It is very important that you do your disciplining in a spirit of love. If you cannot do it in a spirit of love, you are the one who needs to get into the closet. This is why spanking and other forms of discipline have been in such ill repute--the one doing the spanking is generally out of control.

Turning a cold shoulder to your child is just another way of saying, "I don't like you." At what point are you justified in withdrawing your love? How much badness will justify your anger? Where is the line? There is none. Wherever your love falls short, you need to repent. Though few can claim perfection, let us be sure that the shoe is on the right foot. If you are out of control, don't blame your child.

"These children get me down!" Such phrases are frequently heard. Who sets the tone in your family? You or your children? On occasion a mother in all seriousness will say, "If this three-year-old would behave, I'd be happy." She doesn't sense the irony in such a statement. It would be too bad if the happiness of adults depended upon the behavior of three-year-olds or children of any age!

You are on trial

There will be times when your children will not understand or appreciate your expectations of them. There will be times of steady resistance to your discipline. It may stretch over days or weeks or months. During times like these, you, the parent, are on trial. The fact that your children are disgusted with you is no reason for you to be disgusted with them. Broken fellowship? Yes, but it need not be on your part. Your responsibility is to chasten lovingly, in the best interests of your children. (Read Proverbs 3:11-12.)

Your love for your children should be as God's love for you—a constant thing. The Lord Jesus appeals to you, saying: "I stand at the door and knock" (Revelation 3:20). "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden" (Matthew 11:28). God can't give you your own selfish way and peace at the same time. He must let you suffer when you do wrong, but He is there to release you whenever you are ready. He would not be doing you a service to let you have your evil way any more than you would be doing your child a service to let him have his evil way. If at any time you desire to confess your sins, God is there, waiting for you. If the fellowship is broken, it is not on God's part. The breaking of the fellowship is on your part. Just so, you as a parent should never be the one to break fellowship with your child.

The challenge to you, as parents, is to bathe your children in a steady, consistent love that comes from God as you train them in the way that they should go.

Conclusion

This lesson has stressed the fact that the outstanding task of parents is to make disciples of their children. You should train your child in the way that he should go. You should train him in a spirit of love that is consistent, regardless of the behavior of the child. Lesson 10 will deal with the child's resistance to training.

Study Assignment for Lesson 9

1. In what way are Jesus and Paul examples to parents?
2. Compare the rearing of children to God's training of us as His children.
3. What is the value of the parent's example to his child?
4. How is love demonstrated in rearing children?
5. What are the virtues and dangers of spanking?
6. List several proper and several improper methods of discipline.

Self-Check Test 9

Check up on yourself again.

In the space provided, mark the following statements "True" or "False."

- 1. Parenthood is the process of making disciples of your children.
- 2. The realization that your children could turn out to be the same kind of person that you are ought to be a satisfying one.
- 3. Proverbs 22:6 contains a guarantee that a properly trained child will continue in the right way even when he is old.
- 4. A parent needs to be convinced that what he asks his children to do is worth doing.

- 5. Parents should give in to their children when they resist parental direction.
- 6. A parent's lost temper is an adequate reason for chastening a child.
- 7. Physical pain must necessarily be equated with punishment.
- 8. A child needs to be sure that he will be chastened if he needs it.
- 9. Children should be allowed to set the tone for the family.
- 10. The fact that a child is disgusted with his parents is adequate reason for the parent to be disgusted with the child.

Visit <http://biblicalcounselinginsights.com/keys-to-happy-family-living-series/answers/> for the answers to these questions.

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