

## The Question of Discipline

Genesis 37:3-4

**Today I want to talk to you about one of the more difficult decisions for parents to make is *when* and *how* to discipline their children.** With child abuse on the rise and our government trying to establish what guidelines that must be followed to protect children, when and how to discipline our children is a lot like walking a “tight rope.”

**There is no child alive who will not, at one time or other, try to manipulate his parents.** Children are born with a bent to disobedience, and every child in his or her own way eventually demonstrates a defiant self-centeredness willing to challenge any and all authority. We saw in our last study that Jacob was a passive father who abdicated much of his responsibility as a parent. When this happens children, not their parents, become the controlling influence in the home, often with devastating results.

**Jacob fell prey to some of parenthood's most common traps.** He was absent as the authority figure in his own home. He allowed himself to show favoritism to one child over the others. And with that kind of thinking, it is obvious that discipline was very much out of kilter in their family.

**If discipline is a key factor in successful parenting, how do we establish it in our homes?** I believe we do it by dealing with our children in the same way that our Heavenly Father deals with us. God's pattern throughout the ages has been to approach man with a holy blend of *law* and *grace*, or in simple terms, *limits* and *love*. **The law tells us what God is like.** It defines for us His morality and His expectations. The *law* is an *external* set of parameters that we are to live within in our dealings with a holy God. **Grace is a supernatural mixture of *patience*, *help*, *forgiveness*, and *sympathy*, and it is the**

internal expression of what our God is like. One cannot be separated from the other - His *law* requires what His *grace* provides.

This combination of law and grace as tools of discipline is beautifully illustrated in Psalm 23 by the shepherd David when he speaks of the comfort inherent in God's *rod* and *staff*. The *rod* was a disciplinary instrument, one that enforced the "law" of the shepherd and was used to bring a wandering sheep back into the fold. The *staff* was also an instrument of guidance and deliverance, and used in conjunction with the rod, it kept the flock safe and secure. Both were necessary, but their functions were different.

The good parent, like the good shepherd, knows when to use each of these tools in his relationship with his children. In times of rebellion or stubborn self-will, we may need the "rod" to discipline. In times of danger we may use the *staff* to guide or rescue, but we can employ both knowing that they will be a continuing source of comfort to our children. Whichever instrument of discipline we employ, our children need to know that *their needs*, not our own, are of primary significance.

If you withhold discipline from your child, you may regret your choice when he hits his preteen years and decides he just doesn't want to listen to you anymore. When there are *no painful consequences to disobedience*, children find it much easier to tune out their parents.

Therefore, the first step of discipline as a parent is to provide a child with the parameters or guidelines that will encourage right living. Every parent wonders how to mold the will of a child without breaking his spirit - and the spirit of a child is a fragile thing. Each of us can think back to our childhood and recall incidents of correction that were especially painful. This is universal. I wonder whether there is a single person alive who has not dealt at some time with feelings of inferiority, insecurity, or inadequacy as a result of their past. But

just as God the Father has done with us, we need to draw lines of correct behavior, and then help our children to meet the standards these lines define.

**Where do we start?** We start with guidelines established in love. As parents we must draw a *consistent* line, and then clearly communicate to our children where that line is. **When a child chooses to cross the line we have established, he should know that there will be consequences associated with his choice.** Every child is born with a *will* of absolute steel and with a desire to test the limits of his environment.

I want so share some ideas that will help when it comes to disciplining your children.

**First of all, when it comes to discipline, remember that disobedience is the exception and *not* the rule.** What does that statement actually mean? It simply means that, as unlikely as it may seem, children obey most of the time. **Although *misbehavior* stands out in our minds simply because it is the *exception*, thankfully *obedience* is the *norm*.** Let me give you a little eye opener. On any given day, look at your clock and notice your child's periods of disobedience; then compare that to the time that he is not misbehaving. You may be surprised! **What this means is that we as parents have ample opportunity to praise our children for doing the right thing, something we don't take advantage of nearly enough.** Psychologists call this positive reinforcement. In other words, *don't spend all of your time trying to correct what is wrong – spend some of your time praising your child for what he is doing right.*

I promise you, it is far easier to reward the good than to punish the bad. (Not to mention that it's a whole lot more fun!)

**Second, remember that *all of your children are different.*** Someone once said, "God abandoned the cookie cutter theory when he

created Adam." No two of us are alike, even when we happen to share the same parents. We would be wise to remember this truth when disciplining our children. One child may require "time out" or a spanking, while another will respond to a simple word or a look.

For example, when our boys were growing up, I wore out so many belts the price of leather went up. But when it came to our daughter, I could just scold here and she would be heart broken. After thinking back on the situation, I don't really know if she was that much better than our boys or if she was just a "con artist."

Therefore, I am convinced that sometimes, disciplinary measures fail because of fundamental errors in their application. It is possible for *twice the amount of punishment* to yield *half the results*. It depends on the *personality of the child*. A wise parent understands this and becomes a student of each child, *taking the time to discover the most effective means of discipline for each child's particular "bent."*

Third, instruct by example. There are two ways to teach: by word and by example. The best teachers do both. Jesus was a master of this two-fold method as He spoke and lived truth before a watching world. As parents we usually depend far too much on our words and far too little on the examples we continually set for our children. But we can be sure that our actions speak at least as loudly to our children as our words. *Self-discipline* is the first ingredient for effective *child discipline* and seeing a parent live out a precept always makes a stronger impression on a child than hearing it preached.

Listen to me very carefully; be real careful when you establish one standard for you and another standard for your children. Why? Because in their minds it is called "hypocrisy." Ladies and gentlemen, too many of our children have heard us teach one thing and seen us live another. And you would be amazed today at how many of those

children are no longer in church because of the hypocrisy they have seen in their parents.

**Four, never discipline a child in anger.** Listen and get this – *abuse is always possible* when we discipline out of *frustration* and/or *anger*. Parenting is an emotionally charged assignment, but *if* we can control our frustration and anger when the occasion calls for discipline, our correction will be more effective. **When I was growing up, by would never give me a whipping when he was mad.** He would tell me that he was going to give me a whipping, but he would wait until he had “**settled down.**” And, I can tell you the waiting was just about as bad as the whipping!

**A child who is routinely chastised by an angry parent may not be able to distinguish between displeasure at his actions from displeasure with him.** Acting out of anger is a *reflex*. *Calm correction is a choice*. As much as possible avoid disciplining your children in the heat of anger.

**Five, never discipline a child in a way that shames him.** *Shaming, belittling, or embarrassing* a child is never a constructive means of discipline. In fact, Christian psychiatrists Frank Minirth and Paul Meier believe that, without exception, all addictions are based on shame. **They have concluded that what in adulthood becomes an addiction to substance or activity frequently can be traced to childhood shame.** The pressure of hiding family secrets or our own perceived failures and inadequacies can be overwhelming.

**The truth of the matter is a home should be a safe haven where children feel protected and nurtured.** But in reality *it is often a place where a child's deepest fears are realized, and he is ridiculed or shamed* there more than in any other place. *Let the world inflict its scars - because it will.* Strive to make your home a place where discipline is administered with acceptance and love.

**Six, don't discipline with inconsistency.** Children have a basic need for *sameness*, for *consistency*. They don't need to wonder if they will “get a beating” this week for an offense that we as parents “ignored” just last week. **Especially in correction, children have a need for parents to maintain a standard that does not vary from day to day.** Can you imagine how confusing it is for a child to be grounded for six weeks for missing a curfew, only to have the same offense ignored the next time it occurs? Being *inconsistent* is *inconsiderate* of a child's basic make-up-and it is dangerous!

**Any child-rearing expert will reinforce the absolute necessity of setting a standard and holding to it.** Because we are people and not computers, we will fail in this area from time to time, but *consistency in discipline should be the norm that we strive for.*

**Remember, the goal in discipline is not to control or break the will of a child.** The goal is to *build within our children a wise, internal standard* that will guide them when they have to make *moral choices* on their own.

**The final word on discipline is God's final word to us: love.** When our Heavenly Father wanted to communicate with us, He went beyond the law and the prophets and sent the most perfect expression of love known to man, His only Son. The parent who seriously punishes a child without tears or sorrow, who does not return at a later time to express his love, has not yet understood Calvary. **Love and limits.** *Law and grace.* A good parent knows that the balance is everything.

If you are not saved, why not today?

Everyone please stand for prayer.

Father,

Your Word is true. Give me the courage to make right decisions when it comes to following your pattern of *love* and *limits* and *law* and *grace*. May my life be a reflection of each when dealing with others. In Jesus' name. Amen.