

A Daddy and Mommy's Challenge Or Raising Children

Introduction:

Dennis Rainey, in his book, **The Tribute**, has some pretty interesting stories about family life.

This one was printed in the Associated Press from Grand Rapids, Michigan:

At age 2, Robin Hawkins already is a home wrecker.

Her father reported that when she gets old enough to ask for an allowance, he's going to show her a bill for almost \$2,300 worth of family belongings she has destroyed in a two-month rampage.

It all started when Alice the Cat went down the drain.

Her father said, "I heard her saying, "Bye-bye, fluff-fluff, bye-bye."

Dad ran into the bathroom just in time to see Alice the Cat go down the toilet. Cost: \$2.50 for the stuffed animal – some of you thought it was a live cat – didn't you – but it cost \$62.75 for a plumber.

One week later, Teddy Bear was put in the dishwasher – on top of the heating element. Cost \$8 for

Teddy Bear, \$25 for smoke damage done to the kitchen and \$375 to repair the dishwasher.

When the family returned from a weekend trip away, they opened the refrigerator and everything inside was warm.

The repairman found little magnetic letters in the vents. Cost: \$3.50 for the magnetic letters, \$120 for the food and \$310 for the refrigerator.

That even when the family sat down to watch TV, everything on the screen was green, Dad said, "Robin had twisted the fine tune switch so far that it broke inside. Cost to repair was \$115.

The next day, Robin's mom went to pick up her husband at work. Robin was sleeping in her safety seat, so she decided to leave her while she ran in to get her husband.

She put the keys in her purse and left the purse in the car. Robin drove the car about 400 feet before running into a tree. Cost: \$1,029.52 to repair the car.

Robin has also lifted \$620 out of a cash register at a supermarket, drilled 50 holes in the walls of a rental property owned by her parents and painted walls with nail polish and crayons.

The story is not done yet - When the parents returned from grocery shopping one afternoon, they parked the car

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halfway in the garage and decided to keep Robin strapped in her safety seat while they unloaded the groceries – (you would think the parents would learn by now – wouldn't you?)

Then they heard this loud, grinding noise.

Robin had locked herself in the car and was pushing the control button to the electric garage door and bouncing it off the hood of the car.

LET ME ASK YOU – DOES THIS LITTLE GIRL SOUND LIKE ANY TWO-YEAR-OLD YOU KNOW?

Needless to say – this morning I want to focus this sermon on the duty of Daddies and Mommies and their disciplining their children.

You say – Pastor – that's private – that's personal – Well – let me take you to the Word of God and read to you some Scripture and try to help you as parents today.

Hebrews 12:4-11

4After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin.

5And have you entirely forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you, his children? He said, "My child, don't ignore it when the Lord disciplines you, and don't be discouraged when he corrects you.

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6 For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes those he accepts as his children."¹

7As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Whoever heard of a child who was never disciplined? 8If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children after all. 9Since we respect our earthly fathers who disciplined us, should we not all the more cheerfully submit to the discipline of our heavenly Father and live forever?

10For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always right and good for us because it means we will share in his holiness. 11No discipline is enjoyable while it is

happening--it is painful! But afterward there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.

Ephesians 6:1-4

1Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. 2"Honor your father and mother." This is the first of the Ten Commandments that ends with a promise. 3And this is the promise: If you honor your father and mother, "you will live a long life, full of blessing." 4And now a word to you fathers. Don't make your children angry by the

way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction approved by the Lord.

Proverbs 3:11-12 (New Living Translation)

11My child, don't ignore it when the LORD disciplines you, and don't be discouraged when he corrects you.

12For the LORD corrects those he loves, just as a father corrects a child^[a] in whom he delights.

Proverbs 22:6 (New Living Translation)

6Teach your children to choose the right path, and when they are older, they will remain upon it.

This morning I want to focus on parents raising children in our society today.

I. We have a nation of children at risk

The Headlines scream that truth to us daily.

- Demographer Dr. Harold Hodginson gives some pretty good insights to us of what is happening in communities all across the United States:
- Almost 1/4th 23% of all preschool children live in poverty in our nation today.
- Annually 350,000 children are born to women who are addicted to cocaine. The first of these children are now in Middle school in our public schools

and it will have cost our schools \$40,000 + to educate each one of them.

- 15,000 children are being raised by single mothers.
- 20% of America's preschool children have not been vaccinated for polio.
- Child protection agencies report a tripling of child abuse cases in the several years.
- In 1990, close to 5 million children were living with mothers who had never been married – this is up 700% since 1970.

In short there are so many children brought into this world we live with so many odds against them.

The greatest challenge our nation faces today in the time we live is not Iraq – it's not Mexico and illegal aliens – but what do we do with the alienated children and youth within our borders.

II. Even within our families, raising children is a huge challenge.

Would you agree with me?

You are probably familiar with the comic strip, “For Better or For Worse.”

It's about a family life, a mother and a dad and two children.

In one episode, the first three segments show the mother tossing and turning in her bed, worrying about her ten-year-old son, Michael.

She says, “Are we too tough on Michael? Are we not tough enough? Do we give in too often? Too Seldom? Do we listen? Do we understand? Maybe I nag too much. Am I good parent? Where are the answers? How does one know what to do?”

In the last box we see Michael lying awake in his bed saying, “Trouble with grownups is they think they know everything.”

Well, Dad and Mom, we probably would agree with this – but we don't know everything – particularly about raising families.

Children are a challenge today!

Children keep parents on their toes, don't they?

You've probably heard about the guy who wrote a paper titled, "A Definitive Study for Successful Child Rearing."

The guy was single!

When the same man got married he gave a new title to his paper: "Maxims and Principles for Family Life".

When they had their first child he renamed the paper, "Some Thoughts on Bringing up Children".

When his first child was five he changed the title again, "Why Children?"

And when his children were teenagers he added a new chapter to his book paper, "Help Me! I'm Falling Apart".

It's always the people who have not had children that seem to have the most advice on raising children.

Yet, all of us feel we could use some help in this all important area of life.

So, where DO we turn for solid advice?

The best place to turn is the Word of God.

God understands the dynamics of the family and the needs of young people better than any human being.

His wisdom is timeless and to the point.

I. A NEGATIVE WARNING

We need to understand that when Paul wrote these words they were revolutionary.

William Barclay gives us some important background information,

“In the ancient world children were very much under the domination of their parents. The supreme example was the Roman Patria Potestas, the law of the father's power. Under it a parent could do anything he liked with his child. He could sell him into slavery; he could make him work like a laborer on his farm; he had even the right to condemn his child to death and to carry out the execution. All the privileges and rights belonged to the parent and all the duties to the child.” (DSB Colossians p. 161)

In these words Paul changes the status of children.

Where before they were treated as objects and possessions, now they were to be treated with honor and respect.

Paul warns that parents are in danger of "embittering" their children.

The Greek word indicates that we are to be careful that we do not provoke our children to a "settled" anger.

Now, this command is not saying we should never make our children mad.

There will be times when that is inevitable.

However, the idea here is that we must guard against provoking an anger that is constant and seething, like a smoldering fire.

Why is this important?

It's because our actions can DIS-courage our child rather than EN-courage our child.

Rather than spur them on we may actually drag them down or hold them back.

Again, Barclay helps clarify the issue,

"There is always a problem in the relationship of parent and child. If the parent is too easy-going, the child will grow up undisciplined and unfit to face life. But there is a contrary danger. The more conscientious a parent is, the more he is likely always to be correcting and rebuking the child. Simply because he wishes the child to do well, he is always on his case.

A woman named Mary Lamb, asked "Why is it that I never seem to be able to do anything to please my mother?" John Newton, the writer of "Amazing Grace" wrote, "I know that my father loved me - but he did not seem to wish me to see it." There is a certain kind of constant criticism which is the product of misguided love.

The danger of all of this is that the child may become discouraged. It is one of the tragic facts of religious history that Luther's father was so stern to him that Luther all his days found it difficult to pray: "Our Father". The word "father" in his mind stood for nothing but severity. The duty of the parent is discipline, but it is also encouragement. Luther himself said, "Spare the rod and spoil the child. It is true. But beside the rod

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keep an apple to give him when he does well." [DSB - Colossians, 163]

So, the difficult balance is this: How do we discipline our children without discouraging them? How do we go about being firm without being harsh? **The answer is balance.**

II. POSITIVE PRINCIPLES FOR CHILD-REARING

If we put the passages on child-rearing together we can come up with some important principles of parenting:

Discipline is a vital part of child-rearing

Proverbs 13:24 *'He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.'*

Proverbs 19:18 *"Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death."*

Proverbs 22:15 *"Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him."*

Proverbs 23:13 *"Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die."*

The point of all these passages is simple: a loving parent disciplines their child.

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Don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I'm not suggesting that your children need a "beating" now and again.

Discipline is helping your child learn the way that is right.

It means giving them negative consequences for bad behavior and positive consequences for good behavior.

I'll never forget James Dobson's words: **"when you draw a line and say 'don't cross' this line' and your child sticks his foot over that line and looks at you they are looking for a fight. . . . And you better not disappoint them!"**

We need to help our children distinguish between right and wrong.

At the beginning it may be through a spanking.

As the child gets older it may be through other more creative ways of making a point.

But one thing is sure, misbehavior does not go away because we ignore it.

Parents, I know the prevailing opinion is that you should never discipline your child.

And I also know that some parents go too far and become abusive.

But understand, the Bible has given you the **responsibility** to discipline your children.

If you love them . . . you will turn them from the wrong way using whatever means available to you.

There are some battles that a parent has to win . . . and when those battles come, you must hang in there and "win" for the sake of your child.

YOU must rule in the home, not them.

In order to avoid excesses when you have to discipline there are some things that should always be practiced,

- make sure your own anger is under control before you discipline. If needed, send the child to their room while you gain control, then you can dispense needed punishment.
- explain why the punishment is necessary
- follow up discipline with love

Remember that your first priority is to train your child in godliness.

In the parallel passage in Ephesians we are told that we are ***"not to exasperate our children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."***

Do you see the important distinction here?

Our goal is not merely to get outward conformity to some external standard.

Our goal is to develop children who seek to glorify God in their living.

It is not enough to teach them to do good things . . . our job is to teach our children to serve God with their lives.

It is not enough to get our children to be kind to others . . . we must teach them that when we are kind to others, we are most like Jesus.

Do you see the difference?

One is getting people to conform to an external standard . . . the other is teaching them to honor God in their living.

- We should not only teach our children the habit of worship . . . we should be teaching them to love God.
- We should be teaching them not only to spend time daily in God's Word, we should teach them to love the truth, because God is truth.
- We should be teaching them not only to pray but to seek a relationship with God that touches our daily lives.
- We should be teaching them to give of their resources to the Lord's work but we should

also teach them to do so with gratitude for all God has given to us.

Our goal is not simply keeping our children out of trouble. Our goal should be to lead our children to the Lord of Life.

Avoid the things that embitter

There are a number of things that can embitter a child

- **Force Without Love.**

We embitter our children when our discipline seems more an exertion of power than love.

There are times when parents are bullies.

There are some who take out their bad days on their children.

This is wrong. The goal of punishment is to train and assist the growth of our children . . . it is not the mere exercise of force.

- **A Double Standard.**

Let's face it, there are some things that adults can do that children can't.

(For example adults can choose their own bed time) but most of the time our children will be

embittered if they are told that honesty is essential and see us lying in our work.

They are disillusioned if we tell them that worship (or Bible Reading, or prayer) is a priority but we never do these things ourselves.

They get discouraged if they are punished for being disrespectful but they see you disrespectful to your parents, spouse, employer or them.

Our children need consistency from us!

- **Criticism without encouragement.**

In our desire to help our children overcome evil we often spend all our time commenting on the negative in their lives.

We don't notice the higher grades on the report card . . . we spotlight the lower grades.

We don't acknowledge what is done . . . we harp on what is not done.

Now I know that at times we get frustrated.

Who wants to have to tell a child the same thing one hundred times a week?

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I'm not saying that we should avoid the negative things . . . I'm saying we must not overlook the positive things.

Make it a point to celebrate the victories in your child's life.

Isn't that what you would like from others?

At the end of a long day wouldn't you rather someone pat you on the back for what you accomplished rather than underscore the things you didn't get done?

Benjamin West tells how he became a painter. One day his mother went out leaving him in charge of his little sister Sally.

In his mother's absence he discovered some bottles of ink and began to paint Sally's portrait.

In doing so he made a considerable mess of things with ink blots all over.

His mother came back. She saw the mess but said nothing.

She picked up the piece of paper and saw the drawing. "Why," she said, "it's Sally!" and she stooped and kissed him.

Ever after Benjamin West used to say; "My mother's kiss made me a painter."

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What would have happened if that was your son, or mine?

Would you have seen the ink or the art?

- **Presence Without Involvement .**

There is the oft quoted fact that parents spend very little time every day in meaningful conversation with their children.

We pat ourselves on the back because we make it a point to be at home when our children are home . . . but we spend all that time doing other things.

They may even be things FOR our children, but there is no real connection WITH our children.

Young people get frustrated and discouraged when mom and dad are close enough to touch but still not close enough to talk to.

We must make it a point to talk to our children.

We need to turn off the TV or turn away from the computer screen.

Look them in the eye and talk to them!

- **Expectations Without Understanding.**

Sometimes we are guilty of trying to live our lives through our children.

Consider the child that plays a sport, not because that's what they want to do . . . but because that's what they know their parents want them to do.

Lots of men want to re-live their "glory days" in their children.

Others are trying to find the "glory days" they never had through their children.

Some parents who weren't good students want their children to be what they never were.

What often happens is that we place expectations on our children that aren't realistic.

They aren't tailored to the unique qualities and gifts of our kids.

Sometimes our children have different interests than we do.

Sometimes they have different tastes that we do.

Our goal is to help our children develop their unique potential . . . not to make them like us.

- **Promises Without Fulfillment.**

We discourage our children when we make promises to them that we don't keep.

We tell them we are going to go someplace, do something, stop somewhere, and they look forward to that time.

When we don't show up or don't have time it can embitter our children.

Now I know that at times it is impossible to do some of the things we planned.

Emergencies do happen . . . but children understand this.

It's when our promise-breaking becomes habitual that we see our children drifting away from us.

If you are only with your children on certain times . . . this is most especially important for you to keep your promises.

CONCLUSIONS

Certainly every parent listening to these words feels that they have been inconsistent and perhaps has done things to discourage their children.

And to every parent listening to these words I want to remind you of three things:

1) There are no perfect parents.

We are all sinful creatures and that sin nature occasionally pokes out its awful head on occasion.

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You are not alone in feeling that you are not doing a very good job.

2) We can all be better parents.

The fact that there are no perfect parents should not cause us to be lackadaisical in efforts to improve.

We have an obligation to learn, to develop, to work at our parenting.

Focus on one area and get better at it. Work at being a better listener.

Work at underscoring the positive as well as pointing out the negative.

Work on being a better example or a more consistent disciplinarian.

We should be diligent in our efforts.

3) Remember we do not parent alone.

For every true follower of Christ we have the comfort that God is taking the best we have and using augmenting those efforts with His matchless grace.

If we are faithful, He will be more faithful.

And this is why the most important thing we can do for our children is to constantly lift them up before the Lord in prayer.

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One of the most important things we can do for our children is to keep our own spiritual life strong.

So, may I ask you an important parenting question?

How is your relationship with the Lord?

Is it something that you talk about in the past tense?

Does it consist only of external observances or is there an intimacy that touches every part of your life?

Let me be direct.

Have you made a true commitment to Christ?

I'm not asking if you affirm certain truths or if you've had a certain experience.

What I'm asking is: do you have a relationship with Christ?

Is He the one who has changed your life with His love?

Is He the one who energizes you with His grace and guides you by His Spirit?

Is Jesus the leader of your life or is He just a picture you hang on the wall that you dust every Sunday?

God wants you to lead your children to Him and He wants you to represent Him to your children.

You can't do that until the issue is settled in your life.

Make that first step today.

And if you have a genuine relationship with Christ, then the Savior gave me a message to share with you:

He knows you won't be a perfect parent (even though you want to be).

He wants you to know that He wants you to give it your best.

And if you doHe promises that He will fill in the gaps.