

UNDERSTANDING DISCIPLINE

May, 2011

This month's newsletter is a continuation of the April 2011 Newsletter. April's Newsletter is archived on my website in case you missed it. The April Newsletter discussed that children need a Godly family. A Godly family provides the secure base that influences children's behavior. All parents want their children to be obedient. Scriptures support this: Children, do what your parents tell you. This is only right. "Honor your father and mother" is the first commandment that has a promise attached to, namely, "so you will live well and have a long life." Fathers, don't exasperate your children by coming down hard on them. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master - Ephesians 6:1-4 (Message). Scriptures also say: Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. Colossians 3:20-2. My experience with families is that what is expected of children is identified and talked about. What is left out is the parents' responsibility in that process. When parents don't do their part there is too much responsibility placed on and expected from children. Parents need to carry the bulk of the work.

Our parenting model comes from God. God carries the bulk of the work for us as parents. God expects us to be obedient also. I don't know about you, but there are many times that I fight against being obedient. None of us just come into obedience. I'm going to examine how I believe God influences us to become obedient. God first loved us. No matter how rebellious or disobedient we were, he always loved us. His love for us drew us into relationship with him. His love attracted us into wanting a relationship with him. Once we were in relationship with him, we came under his influence. God did not make us be in relationship with him. God does not control our behavior. Relationship is always available to us through his love. My contention is that his loving relationship then influenced us into obedience. We work toward and remain in obedience because we do not want to lose relationship with God. Even when we are not obedient relationship is still there for us. God never withdraws his love. This is how God teaches us to have and be in relationship through mind, body, and spirit regulation. Applying this model may take a significant paradigm shift for most parents. Stress model principles can help us apply this model. The stress model gives us practical applications and strategies.

All parents expect obedience from the children. My experience indicates that obedience is just expected. All too often it is demanded. All too often it comes from fear, not love. As human parents I believe we get it backwards. We insist on obedience. Then, when our child is obedient, we connect in relationship. "Go to time out and then I'll spend time with you. " "Do your chores and then I'll buy you ice cream." Ever done or heard of this as a parenting plan? Our children need our love and to be connected in relationship with us. When that happens, we become a strong influence for them to be obedient. When we remain in a consistent, loving relationship, children will be obedient. Unfortunately all too often we expect perfection. There is little or no margin for error. I would ask you to be very honest with yourself and look at how many times you slip out of obedience with God during each day. God affords us mercy and grace in all situations. He does not use fear to get us back into obedience. When a child is not obedient it can immediately trigger the parents' fear. I'm sure the fears are endless. How will he

make it through school? How will she hold the job? How will he stay out of jail? During the May 17th Inner Circle call Bryan Post said you can “influence the future from your present state”. This is very profound because parents’ fear of the future takes them out of a loving relationship with their child in the present. When fears take parents out of relationship and they lose their ability to influence a child.

There many references in the Bible to disciplining your child. “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” - Hebrews 12:11. By definition, discipline means to teach, training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character, i.e. - to develop internal controls. “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” Proverbs 22:16. Train means to form by instruction, to teach so as to make fit, qualified, or proficient. This is why the stress model is effective. Parents teach internal controls to the children through emotional regulation and safety. Isn’t that what God does for us? When we’re stressed he is there for us. The Holy Spirit helps us become regulated. We can then hear from God, learn and make responsible decisions. God doesn’t put us in time out until we get regulated. He keeps us in relationship so he can help us become regulated and then learn (i.e. be disciplined or trained).

Here’s the definition of punishment. a: suffering, pain, or loss that serves as retribution; b: a penalty inflicted on an offender through judicial procedure; c: severe, rough, or disastrous treatment as a consequence it does not act as a reinforcer unless a person is working from their cognitive memory. The Biblical definition of punishment from Easton’s 1897 Bible Dictionary. The New Testament lays down the general principles of good government, but contains no code of laws for the punishment of offenders. Punishment proceeds on the principle that there is an eternal distinction between right and wrong, and that this distinction must be maintained for its own sake. It is ***not*** primarily intended for the reformation of criminals, nor for the purpose of ***detering*** others from sin. These results ***may*** be gained, but crime in itself demands punishment.

Unfortunately there has been a blurring of definitions and lack of understanding of expectations. Punishment is used and we expect to get the results of discipline. Isn’t it more sociably acceptable to say that you’re “disciplining” your child rather than punishing him. If we’re going to use the scriptures then we need to know what the words mean. I have found that most parents believe punishment and discipline are synonymous. That’s why they don’t get positive results. Isn’t it much easier to punish than discipline? Think about it. Discipline takes thought, effort, emotional regulation, relationship, and investment of time. Discipline is not about inflicting harm for harm’s sake. That’s punishment. Discipline is about healing a broken relationship and helping a child grow in character. Punishment takes very little effort. What’s incredible about this is that punishment is not designed or meant to change behavior. Now if you need to punish your child and feel it’s necessary then do so. But please don’t call it discipline or consequences. Be honest, call it what it is and have the correct expectation. I am still looking for the scripture that tells us we’re supposed to punish our children. A consequence is a conclusion denied through logic; something produced by a cause or necessarily following from a set of conditions. When we facilitate a consequence, it is no longer a consequence because we have interfered in the logical process. A true natural consequence can be very scary to a parent.

Why? Because they do nothing. They give up total control. All they need to do is love their child and let things happen. How scary is that for parents? Remember - "Love never fails . . ." 1 Corinthians 13:8; "There is no fear in love . . ." 1 John 4:18.

The most asked question that I get is related to Proverbs 13:24. This is what I usually get from parents. "But doesn't the Bible say spare the rod and spoil the child?" First of all, I haven't found "spoil the child" in scripture yet. Second of all, it's taken out of context. Here's what I've researched about the "rod". The rod is the shepherd's weapon of power and defense for the sheep. It is used as a continuous comfort to the sheep. The rod is used for the welfare of the sheep, namely discipline. The rod was intended as an instrument of protection for both the shepherd and the sheep. It is emblematic of the word of God. From Psalm 23 - "Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." In rare instances the rod or possibly the staff was used forcefully to keep a sheep from danger. Sometimes a sheep's leg would be broken. When this happened, that sheep was then carried and nurtured by the shepherd. It was given special attention until it healed. The injured sheep was loved and nurtured and became a model of a loving relationship for the herd. So if you need scriptural justification to spank your child, you can probably find it here. I hope it makes you feel better. If you do spank your child, do you quadruple your efforts to love and nurture the child like the shepherd did the sheep? If you're going to use the scriptures, don't pick out a few words to justify what you do. And then only do part of what is expected by God.

Don't accept what I say at face value. Do your own research. Pray that God will enlighten you from the scriptures. Think about your behavior and how that affects your child. The second commandment says to honor your father and mother. Honor means to esteem and give value due to. Does your behavior warrant being honored by your child? If you're angry and fearful all the time then that's what your child is expected to honor. It is difficult to give esteem to an angry, fearful person. Honor - give value due to. For me to give honor to anger and fear would be to run away from for safety's sake. Just to think about.

Our parenting journey is difficult and is never ending. Do your best, accept God's grace and mercy when you fail. Be sure to pass that mercy and grace on to your child when he or she fails.

In Christ,

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