

RAISING CHILDREN

When God gives us children, we take on an awesome responsibility. For reasons of His own, God entrusts these precious lives into our care. When this happens, we become responsible before Him for how we carry out this responsibility. Therefore, as parents we should carefully and prayerfully seek to fulfill this task in the best possible way. We must raise our children following the guidance and wisdom of the Lord.

Perhaps the first thing we should acknowledge is that since God made human beings, He is the One who knows best how to deal with every situation. The Maker of the product always knows best how to care for what He has made. We must not rely on our own wisdom, ideas and opinions. Also, we cannot be guided by the standards of the world around us or those of our relatives and friends. We must be led by God in this all-important task.

LOVE

One of the most important ingredients we must have in raising children is love. These new, tiny, precious human beings need love – lots and lots of love. The more, the better. In their first years, the most essential things they must have (besides food of course) is love, care, and nurturing. Nothing can substitute for this love.

A loved infant will become a well-adjusted adult. A loved baby will become someone who is secure, someone who also knows how to love, and someone who feels comfortable loving others and receiving love themselves.

The absolute best and most essential source of this love is the baby's parents. No one else will ever love an infant like its own father and mother. There is just no substitute for this love. You cannot hire anyone

who will love your children in the same way that you would love them. And this love takes much time, focus, and attention.

Before having children, perhaps it would be good for couples to stop and ask themselves a few questions. Are they really ready for this? Are they willing to make the commitment of time and attention that having a child will require? Are they willing to make this new life a priority or are there other things which are commanding their attention? When you have children, are you just thinking of yourselves and your own desires for children, or are you also taking into account the well-being of the tiny life which God will entrust to your care?

Many couples think that their making money and having a “successful” life will be the best for their children. They want to “provide for the child” by piling up money for their children’s future, be it for schooling, housing, inheritances, etc. Yet, are these folks really thinking about the child or about themselves and using the child as a pretext to pursue what they want?

Very many parents, using “making money for their children” as an excuse, absent themselves from the home and from the lives of their babies in the pursuit of money.

Yet, young children don’t need money. They need love and care. They need nurturing, time, and attention. They need their parents to be with them. They need to feel secure in the arms of their mother and father. As long as they have enough to eat, “money” is not an issue with them.

You cannot hire others to love your children for you. Nothing you can buy can compensate for your absence from your home and the lives of your young infants. Nannies, babysitters, grandparents, or other relatives cannot fill this void. Their efforts can never equal that of a parent. What your children need, especially in their first formative years, is you and your constant attention, care, and love.

Parents have a few short years to instill within their children a profound sense of security: of being loved and cared for. Nothing can ever substitute for this. No amount of money, later education, physical comfort, or inheritance can ever compensate for the lack of love in the early formative years of a child.

Please don't make providing for your children's future your highest priority. Provide for their present need for love! Stay home and love them today! The future is in God's hands and He will take care of it for you as you obey Him in raising your children.

If you sacrifice your children's present emotional needs by "trying to make their future secure" you will create future problems that nothing but the miraculous hand of God will resolve. No future financial "security" can ever compensate for a lack of abundant, paternal love today.

How many of today's youth are desperately seeking to fill their lives with something, be it drugs, sex, attention from others, or any number of other vain pursuits, because they don't feel loved and secure. They were not raised in a home which abounded with love and so they constantly seek to compensate for this lack.

In many cases, they don't even realize what it is that they are seeking for, but they only sense a desperate need for something that they don't have. They have a constant, undefined "itch" which they are seeking to scratch.

Many of those I have met who call themselves "homosexuals" grew up in love-deficient homes. Many men of this persuasion did not feel loved by their fathers. Their fathers were distant and unaffectionate. But every young boy needs a father's love. In fact, he craves it.

Not a few "macho men" think that by hugging, kissing, and loving their sons, it will turn them into wimps, etc. But exactly the opposite is true.

A loved son will turn out to be a self-secure, masculine man. Some who are not loved will later seek this love from other men.

The same is true for women. I know a woman, for example, whose mother never once picked her up or held her in a warm, loving embrace. This person had a very difficult time trusting in or receiving love, yet she craved love like nothing else.

But because of her complicated emotional distrust, she had enormous problems receiving love when it was given. The lack of love in infancy generates tremendous emotional problems and complications in the lives of such people in later life.

As with men, so too with women who feel the lack of a mother's love in early life, some may be impelled to fill such lack with relationships with other women. The human need for love is strong. It is an extremely powerful factor which works, even if unconsciously, in the lives of every human being on this planet. Much of human behavior can be explained by what people do to try to satisfy this natural, normal need. Those who are raised in a warm, loving home will be much more well-adjusted members of society.

What our children need is our love. If, for some reason, we find ourselves without love, then we need to turn to God for His supply. And He has an unlimited supply. In fact, He is Love (1 Jn 4:8). Perhaps we find our children irritating and difficult, possibly we have physical suffering, maybe our marriage is not satisfactory... there are many things which might challenge our love supply for our children. Yet God is sufficient for all these things. He can and will give us an unlimited love for the young lives which He puts in our care.

DISCIPLINE

Another important aspect of raising children is discipline. Our children must be disciplined in a correct, biblical way. If they are not, then they and we will suffer the consequences.

Every human being, to a greater or lesser degree, has born within them the tendency to rebel. This might be called “independence,” self-will, stubbornness, being strong-willed, or any number of other things. But no matter what we call it, it is the tendency to disobey. This must be corrected if our children are to grow up to be well adjusted, mature adults.

According to God – who made man – the thing which corrects this problem is called pain, pain caused by discipline. This pain, according to the scriptures is created by the parents upon the offending child through the use of something called a “rod.” It may seem archaic for many parents to think that pain is the thing which will achieve the necessary results, but, according to the Maker, it is what works. In fact, it is the only thing that works to correct rebellion.

In Proverbs 20:30 we read: “Blows and wounds cleanse away evil, and beatings purge the inmost being” (NIV). Here is what God says. This is what “works.” Although it may sound cruel or crude, it is what our Maker teaches us about the creature He made.

This is not a hard concept to understand. Pain, rightly applied, corrects rebellion. Although many may rebel against this thought, it is the only thing which works. All other human substitutes will only hide or aggravate the problem.

Reasoning will not touch rebellion. Small punishments such as deprivation of watching TV or not getting to do something fun will not reach deeply enough inside the child to work. It won't reach their heart. Also, creative thinking of ways to distract the child or finding other things for them to do will just prolong or hide the problem of rebellion.

Obviously, there are many times when a child is doing something potentially dangerous, irritating, inappropriate, foolish, or wrong when we can direct or redirect them to avoid potential trouble. There are many situations where they are not expressing rebellion and, therefore,

do not need discipline. Every little thing in a child's daily life does not warrant discipline. But when rebellion is present, only the rod of pain will work.

You may think that you know better than God, but you don't. You may imagine that reasoning with the child, prayer for them, little "time outs," other less severe corrections, various restrictions placed upon them, etc. will correct the problem. Although these things certainly do have their place and are important, only the application of the rod, causing pain, will drive rebellion from the heart of a child.

Maybe for some of you readers it is difficult to imagine that something so crude as physical pain could be the answer to so many human problems. But it is! God says so in His book. We read: "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him" (Pr 22:15 NKJV). We are also taught: "Blows that hurt cleanse away evil, as do stripes [from beating with a rod or whip] the inner depths of the heart" (Pr 20:30 NKJV). This is how God made man. This is what "works." Don't be deceived into thinking that you know better than He does.

However, this rod which causes pain must be applied correctly. If not, then it will not help and possibly only make things worse. Therefore, I would like to take some time here and discuss several aspects of how parents should apply this rod.

Firstly and perhaps most importantly, this application of the rod must hurt. It must be applied until the rebellion for which it is being used is broken. This "breaking" of the willful rebellion of the child will usually be noticed in the way they cry.

If our using of the rod does not cause enough pain or does not continue until the rebellion is broken, it will only make the child harder. They will learn that they can "survive" this discipline and it will not work.

This kind of “discipline” only hardens the heart of the child and is worse than useless.

Often, parents want to avoid pain. Unfortunately, the pain they want to avoid is usually their own. It is hard and even painful to them to cause their children pain. So they don’t use the rod to cause pain or don’t use it effectively. Thus they spare themselves and their children pain for the moment and store up for themselves and their children a huge storehouse of pain when they become older and this untreated rebellion begins to come to full bloom.

If you would like to have peace, less emotional pain, and a good relationship with your children when they grow up, then apply the rod of correction when they are young. God teaches us: “Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul” (Pr 29:17 NKJV).

We also read: “The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left *to himself* brings shame to his mother” (Pr 29:15 NKJV). How many parents are suffering today because they did not discipline their children! They thought they were avoiding pain for themselves and their child by not correctly using the rod, but instead they were just storing much more painful situations in the future.

Many may imagine that causing their child pain is a form of hate or lack of love. Yet just the opposite is true. When we do not discipline we are doing our child the greatest disservice.

We are taught: “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly (Pr 13:24 NKJV). This “hate” is because when we don’t discipline them correctly, according to the scriptures, we are setting our children up for unimaginable suffering in the future. This “hate” is a lack of love for the child. It is love of “self” on the part of the parents.

Parents have just a few years to treat the rebellion in their children. Until about the age of six a child's character can be molded. Even many psychologists agree that a person's character is well-defined and formed by that age. After that, discipline will not change their character very much.

Through the years I have seen many, many families with disobedient children who were not correctly disciplined. In many cases, after the age of six, this rebellious attitude seems to disappear, especially with young girls. The parents breathed a sigh of relief. Finally those "difficult days" were over. But they weren't. Instead, when these children became teenagers, rebellion blossomed with full force.

This flowering of rebellion which is left untreated usually comes in the teenage years and will manifest itself in many, many different ways. These ways include, but are not limited to: unholy sexual activities with boyfriends, girlfriends etc., involvement in drugs, mental illness, disrespect for authority (especially yours), lack of integrity, etc. All this will yield the fruit of years of horrible mental anguish and emotional pain for everyone involved, especially the parents.

I have seen children "raised in Christian homes" who, after they became teens, became addicted to drugs, became pregnant outside of marriage, became sexually promiscuous, were been sent to prison, and many other such things. These were children who were never correctly disciplined.

The application of the rod of pain should be applied to the backside of the child. If this discipline is very frequent, then it is being done incorrectly. When well applied, this discipline should not need to be done more than about 10 to 15 times in the life of a child. Of course, this "10 to 15" is a random number, but the truth behind it remains the same.

If we are disciplining frequently, if we are applying the rod much more than this, then what we are doing is not being done correctly. If we

apply the rod correctly, then just the mention of discipline should bring the required results in later circumstances.

Applying the rod must be done with enough force and for enough time to break the rebellion which the parent is treating. This needs to be emphasized! Anything less than this will not do the job. If we stop short of this, we will only make the poor child worse. Discipline which breaks the rebellious attitude brings respect for the parent and his or her authority and a healthy “fear” of stepping out of line again.

The rod should be applied because of rebellion. This must not be a punishment for clumsiness, accidents, lack of intelligence, ignorance, trivial errors and other such minor offenses. In general, the rod must be used when the parents detect rebellion in the child. This could be catching the child lying, disobeying what they have been told, or even attitudes such as temper tantrums.

A good, well-applied spanking on the bottom will cure the child of such behavior. It will put an end to it. There is no need for parents to suffer with such rebellion on the part of their children. It is sad but true. The human being learns well through pain. If the attitudes of rebellion and disobedience continue, then the discipline has not been adequately applied.

Some Bible teachers insist that you should not discipline your child when you are angry. I beg to disagree. Of course we should not have an uncontrolled rage so that our discipline passes the needed point and becomes abuse.

Yet, if you let your anger pass, you may never carry out the needed discipline. Or, you may not have the necessary impetus to inflict the required pain to break the rebellious attitude of the child. All anger is not wrong, but all anger must be under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Someone has even suggested that if we don't discipline our children, our anger will build up and result in disaffection for them. Having

children who are constantly acting badly is irritating and tiresome. When our children constantly cause us difficulty we tend to withdraw emotionally.

If we don't correct them, we run the risk of alienating ourselves from them through the accumulation of unexpressed anger and frustration. As time goes on, we can become distant and unresponsive to them because we do not discipline them. This is not love.

On the other hand, disciplining your children with the rod is an act of love. Proper discipline is one of the most loving things you can do for your child.

Although it may not seem to be loving at the moment, it is. In fact, it is an act of self-sacrifice on the part of the parent. They are denying themselves by not taking the easy way out and avoiding emotional pain. They are applying the rod with the best interests of their child in mind. They are truly doing what is the best for the child, not leaving him to grow up without discipline which will cause him or her much difficulty in later life.

After we discipline our child and their rebellion is broken, it is good to hold them and love them. Once the willfulness and stubbornness is broken then we should hold them tightly and show them our tenderest love.

This is a wonderful sign to them that they have done the right thing in submitting to correction. It is proof to them that we have disciplined them out of love and not hate. It shows them that our inflicting pain was necessary for them and our feelings for them are in no way diminished.

Disciplining children is not the same thing as physical beatings. I know of a man whose father beat him frequently. When this father came home from work frustrated or angry, he would find an excuse to begin beating his son with his fists or any other thing which he found at hand.

He used his son as a punching bag to vent his frustrations. At one point, he even broke his son's jaw.

This is not discipline. This is not what the Bible is teaching us. It is just plain, physical abuse. Discipline is not the same thing as punishment. One definition of "discipline" is: "to train, drill, teach, school, coach; regiment." A definition of "punishment" which I found is: "a battering, a thrashing, a beating, a drubbing." These are not the same thing.

The goal of discipline is to break the rebellious attitudes which manifest themselves in our children. It is not to punish them. The duration of the discipline should not be related to "how bad" the rebellion was. Discipline should be applied only until the rebellion is broken and not continue beyond this point. If we go beyond the moment where the child's rebellion is broken, we run the risk of alienating them.

In true discipline the skin should not be broken. There should be no blood. Discipline is for the good of the children. It is not the opportunity for the parent to vent their frustrations or anger on the child. Some parents beat their children unmercifully for small infractions, wounding them unnecessarily. This is merely abuse. It is evidence that the parents themselves have emotional issues which need treating.

SAYING "NO"

Parents should be very careful with the word "no." If and when they say it, they must mean it. It must be about something important. Furthermore, defiance or rebellion against it must bring discipline. Our "no" must mean "no." Therefore, we must be very careful and wise when saying "no."

Many parents say "no" about every little thing. They are constantly saying or even screaming "no" at their children. This does not help them and only teaches them to ignore your words. If your "no" is not enforced it becomes meaningless.

Therefore, when we say “no” it must be about something consequential enough to warrant our involvement and the eventual discipline which must be applied if our word is not obeyed. If we are not prepared to carry our word through to the end, including the discipline which may be required if our child does not obey, then it is better not to say it. When we just say “no” and then let the child do what they want anyway, this is worse than useless. It is teaching the child that “no” means nothing, or even “yes.”

An extreme example of the terrible results of such training would be when your son, after he grows up, is forcing himself on or even raping a young woman. She is screaming “no” but he pays no attention or even hears “yes.” Who taught him such behavior? You did, through your erratic, thoughtless use of the word “no”!

“No” without the corresponding discipline when your word is disobeyed generates rebellion and complete lack of discipline.

Although, after the first five or six years of life, your children may appear to become more obedient, when they become teenagers, this rebellion will reappear with force. At that time, there will be no effective way to deal with it. You will just have to live with the consequences you have created.

When you say “no” it is often good to explain to the child *why* you are saying “no.” You might say: “Don’t touch that stove because it is hot and will burn you.” You might teach them: “Don’t walk in the street without looking carefully because you might be hit by a car.”

Even very young children can understand explanations. They can reason a little bit. So, a thoughtful explanation helps them understand why you are prohibiting something. If you can’t think of a good explanation perhaps you should not be saying “no.”

Another situation which one encounters frequently is that some (especially mothers), because of their own fears and insecurities, say

“no” to almost everything their child wants to do. They “protect” them too much and from everything. They create an impracticable world for the child to live in where they can do almost nothing.

Later on, this will become impossible for the parent to enforce and can lead to children who are not well-adjusted mentally. They become neurotic, becoming full of fears or impulsivity. They may do things suddenly without thinking or cower in fear of seemingly normal situations because of so many previous restrictions.

Discipline is not the same thing as domination. Some parents dominate their children, trying to control every aspect of their lives. This domineering, overbearing, controlling practice will generate rebellion in the hearts of your children. Such activity is not “forming their character,” it is deforming it. It is trying to conform your child to an image you have in your own mind. It is manipulative and harmful to the child.

God doesn't want you to conform your child to your image but to His image. He created each person, including children, to contain and express Himself. As part of this plan, He gave each person freedom to choose and freedom to be what He made them to be.

As parents, we too must responsibly give our children freedom to develop into who they are, into the person God made them to be. Don't try to manipulate your children to be like yourself. Don't dominate them as a means of trying to control them. Instead, let them be free but discipline them when rebellion is present.

SELF-DISCIPLINE

Correct discipline of a child, including the use of the rod of pain, creates self-discipline. This works in the following way. When rebellion on the part of the child results in painful discipline which breaks the willful rebellion, then the child will think twice before rebelling again.

Due to the dislike for the pain and the fear of experiencing it again, the child learns to control himself. They may think about doing something wrong, or be tempted to do it, but the memory of pain inhibits them. In this way, they learn to discipline themselves. They become self-disciplined people.

Children who are not disciplined usually have no self-discipline. They have never learned how to say “no” to themselves. If they want to do something or feel like doing it, they just go ahead and do it. They have no fear of the consequences and no experience in restraining themselves.

These people without the ability to control themselves and without the experience of doing so become totally self-centered and self-interested. They do whatever they feel like doing without regard to others around them or the consequences of such actions for themselves and others.

I recently heard of a man who was an example of this problem. He was happily married. He loved his wife. But he “fell in love” with another woman too. He didn’t want to leave his wife, but he felt he needed to indulge all of his impulses and have both of them because he “loved” both of them. Since he was never disciplined, he had no experience in denying himself anything. He felt he must carry out what his desires led him to do. He had no regard for the consequences on the life of his wife or family. He felt that his natural, unrestrained impulses needed to be followed and gratified since that “was what he felt.”

Our world today is full of people who do not have self-control. They are without discipline. This results in a dysfunctional society of selfish, self-centered, self-indulgent people who have very little, if any regard for the others around them. Such people are constantly trampling on others without regard to their feelings, time, needs, personal space, privacy, etc.

How many young people today are on drugs, in prison, homeless, drunken, divorced and many other such things because they were not properly disciplined! Therefore, they just followed their unrestrained lusts and ended up in a pit of their own making. They stole from others. They used others for their own benefit and pleasure without regard to how this impacted them. They indulged their lusts without regard for other people. They did not control their own impulses.

Therefore, they are reaping the fruit of their lack of discipline. There is no doubt that parents bear a large part of the responsibility for where their children end up.

Is it possible that, while disciplining our children we might err? Could it be that we will make mistakes by yelling at them angrily, applying discipline erroneously, or other such things? Without a doubt, this will happen. None of us is perfect.

Therefore, we must not be afraid to apologize to our children. It is not wrong to admit our mistakes. It is much better for them if we admit being wrong if we have erred and ask for their forgiveness. This will train them to be able to humble themselves and ask for forgiveness later in life when they err and need to be forgiven by others also.

NURTURE AND ADMONITION

In Ephesians 6:4 we read: “And you fathers, don’t provoke your children to anger but nurture them in the discipline and counsel of the Lord” (FLNT). Here we find that besides discipline, children need nurture and counsel. They also need training. We are told: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Pr 22:6 NKJV).

The nurturing part of raising children no doubt has to do with the loving care and attention about which we have spoken already. This is the most important basis to establish in the lives of our children. They must know at the deepest level that they are loved. Any discipline and/

or training without this most necessary basis of love will not be very effective.

Of course every child needs training in the basic aspects of life: They need to know how to keep themselves clean. They must be taught how to act and behave in our specific society. This may include, but is not limited to: being taught how to respect older people, how to be polite to others, and what kind of behavior is acceptable in our particular social context. They must be instructed about which things in our world are dangerous and should be avoided and/or handled carefully, such as hot stoves, electrical outlets, crossing the street, noisy, angry mobs, etc.

Possibly where we live has special dangers such as poisonous snakes or plants, dangerous people, places which have wild animals, and other things which the adults have learned over time and need to pass on to their children. Obviously, there are many such things which children need to be taught.

But how about spiritual things? How can we train our children in the ways of the Lord? Should we have daily Bible studies and family prayers? Must we take them to “Sunday School” every Sunday?

The most important ingredient here is our own lives. Our children must see us living out Jesus Christ in an authentic, visible way. No one else can ever substitute for this. If we love Jesus and are following Him, this will be obvious to our children. If they see His reality in our lives, it will be attractive to them.

Children are good observers. They see everything which goes on in the home. If the parents are loving with each other, if they treat each other and others with respect, if they have the presence of the Lord with them and around them, children will notice this and desire it for themselves.

But if we are crabby, unloving, unforgiving, self-centered, obnoxious people, it doesn't matter what we say about God to them. If we quarrel with our spouse, are rude with others, impatient, dishonest,

complaining, and disagreeable people, then what we say to our children about Jesus or the Bible is nullified.

In such cases, family Bible studies, taking them to “Sunday School” or “church services” is not going to compensate for our deficiencies. Religious activity will not speak louder than what they see in our lives.

If it is not working for us, why should our children want it? If our Christianity is just words but isn’t radically changing our lives, why should our children think it would work for them? How we live in front of our children is essential. If our relationship with Jesus is not genuine enough to change us to be like Him, whatever else we say or do will have little effect.

Another essential ingredient in instructing our children concerning the things of the Lord is that we must never force it on them. This is an absolute principle. I repeat, we must never “force feed” our children spiritual things.

We must never violate their will when it comes to the things of the Lord. Not only does this not work, it violates the absolute principle of free will which God established. In applying earthly discipline, involving the treating of rebellion and other such things about which we have been speaking, we need to violate their will, *but never concerning the things of the Lord!*

If our children don’t want to hear, don’t speak. If their ears and hearts are closed don’t force them to listen. If you insist on pushing Jesus on your children, they will reject Him and it will turn them another way. Although you might not notice this, it will happen secretly in their hearts. It is so easy for a parent to dominate a child and force them concerning spiritual things, but it is a damaging, ungodly thing. It will not produce good fruit.

Parents must learn to walk in the Spirit when instructing their children about God. Wait for openings. Look for times when they are interested and hungry.

Children are naturally curious. They will ask questions. If and when they see us living something genuine and attractive, they will want to know more about it and will ask. When they do, then you can share with them. But, even then, tell them only as much as they want to hear, nothing more.

I call this the “baby bird” principle. When my sister and I were children, we would occasionally find a baby bird which had fallen out of its nest. Since we couldn’t return the baby to the nest, we would try to take care for it. We dug up worms and found little bugs to feed it.

In this effort, I learned one thing. When the oversized beaks of these baby birds were open, you could feed them. When they were shut, nothing could persuade them to eat. It did no good to try to force them or to try to pry open their beaks. We had to respect the willingness of these baby birds.

It is the same way with children. When they are open to the things of the Lord and hungry, feed them as much as they can take. But when the beak shuts, don’t force them. Then it is time to stop, wait and pray.

Think about it. God never, ever forces us to want Him or to do His will. He always respects our will, never violating it. Although He may work in our lives to correct us when we are closed to Him, He never forces us or pushes us to do His will. Can we do to our children what God would never do to us? Can we, acting in His name, force our children concerning spiritual things in a way in which God would never act? I think not.

Do you remember Eve? There she was in the Garden of Eden with the forbidden fruit in her hand. She had her mouth open and was about to take a bite. With this one bite, she was going to destroy God’s whole

creation. With this one morsel, death would begin and all sorts of sin would be initiated.

Murder, rape, disease, war, theft, lying, cheating, hating, and all the evil things of which this world is full, would flourish. Even nature would be changed so that weeds would grow, animals would begin to kill and eat each other, some of them would be poisonous, insect pests would proliferate, and many other such things.

In spite of all these evils, God didn't stop her. He didn't even whisper saying, "Eve, psssst, Eve. What are you doing? Don't you remember what I said? Put that down!"

Instead, He respected her free will and allowed her to destroy His newly created earth. Can we then as His representatives act in a different way with our children? We must respect their free will concerning spiritual things.

How then are they going to become hungry for God and want spiritual things? It is through our living and our prayers. We must pray for them and we must live Christ in front of them in a way that is real and attractive. In this way they will open up to receive all that we can minister to them.

When they see our love, when they observe how we treat others, when they see us as humble, loving, forgiving people, they will desire this for themselves. Then, when they are open and hungry, we can share with them what God has revealed to us about Himself.

But if the testimony of our lives is not appealing, if our lives are different from what we pretend to believe, then we make it very hard for God to work in their lives.

It will do no good to "study the Bible," have family prayers, or "go to church" if we, ourselves, are not changed into the image of Jesus.

Children are good at detecting hypocrisy. Even if they don't understand everything, they have an instinctive reaction to what is genuine.

The best thing we can do for our children is to yield our lives to God, to love Him and follow Him ourselves. It is to let Him fill us with Himself to such an extent that not only children, but all those around us will sense the sweet aroma of Jesus in our lives. This will draw our children and others to Him.

In this way, we will be able to instruct our children. Through our lives and words, they will learn about God and His ways. They will see His will through our actions and hear His word in our words. They will be drawn into a relationship with Him themselves which will lead to their salvation and transformation into His glorious image.

GOD'S WORK IN US

Now we will return to the question of discipline. God Himself also uses pain today to discipline His own children. Many people who come to the Lord come to Him as undisciplined people. When they were young they were not disciplined so, when they are converted, they come to Him with a deep-seated rebellion still within their hearts.

Therefore, when God wishes to establish His authority over them, He encounters resistance and rebellion. This then brings His discipline. We read: "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges {beats with a whip or rod} every son whom He receives" (Heb 12:6 NKJV).

Usually, His discipline is not physical beatings, yet it is still very painful and can be very long-lasting, sometimes for many, many years. This discipline by painful experiences is not a result of God's anger. It is a result of His love for us. In His infinite wisdom, He knows that it is essential for our rebellion to be subdued and removed. For this purpose

He uses our circumstances, our relationships, and other things to apply His rod of discipline to our lives.

God knows just where to apply His “rod” – where it really, really hurts. This is because He sees something in our hearts which needs treating. It needs to be broken and removed by discipline. He knows that this rebellion within us cannot be allowed to enter into His coming new creation. So, He lovingly applies the “rod” to us so that we can be fully prepared and submitted to Him when He comes.

When we discipline our children, we prepare them to receive and obey Jesus. We are taught: “Do not withhold correction from a child, for *if* you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell” (Pr 23:13,14). How is it then that such beatings “deliver his soul from hell?”

When we correctly discipline our children by helping break the rebellion within them, it prepares them for when Jesus enters their life and begins to reign over them.

Such disciplined individuals more easily accept the rulership of Christ and readily become His followers and disciples. If they have not been so prepared, Jesus must do this disciplining Himself. In some individuals, this takes many long years of pain, frustration, and difficulty, thus retarding their spiritual development.

I have seen many believers who came to Christ without discipline and with a strong, stubborn will, pass through unbelievable suffering. Some of them suffered intensely for more than 30 years. They “went through hell” figuratively speaking. Since they came to the Lord as adults, their unrestricted rebellion had become deeply entrenched and very strong.

Yet their parents could have spared them this suffering. Through properly using the rod, they could have prepared them for Divine rule.

We can be assured that no person with a rebellious heart will enter into the coming kingdom of God. So God will have to find a way to treat this rebellion. We have just spoken about how God uses suffering in the lives of His children to address this problem. Yet, some believers never respond to His discipline throughout their entire life. Therefore, God will need to find a cure for this serious condition before eternity begins. This treatment will be also severe and of long duration.

TRYING TO ESCAPE SUFFERING

Many Christians try to escape the suffering which they encounter by trying to get out of the situation which is causing them pain. Frequently, it is our relationships with other people which brings us discomfort and agony. Marriage, since it is the most intimate of all relationships, is often the hotbed of such pain.

Therefore, many imagine that a change of partners will alleviate the problem. They go from marriage to marriage, divorce to divorce trying to escape suffering. Many such people just jump from the frying pan into the fire. Subsequent marriages are not better, but only worse.

A friend of mine recently told me that of ten friends of hers who got divorced and remarried, nine of them desperately wished they were back with their first husbands.

When we suffer intensely, we cry and complain. We pray and pray. We seek desperately for a way out. Often we find none. This is because God is using our situation for our good. He is using His rod of pain to treat some deeply imbedded rebellion in us. We are trying to find a way out of the situation which God worked to get us into. He is lovingly using it for our eternal good. We are wanting to be saved from our suffering and yet God is trying to save us *through* our suffering.

When discipline comes to us, we should understand who sent it. It was our loving heavenly Father. We read: "Pay attention to the rod and the One who ordained it {or, the One who sent it}" (Micah 6:9 HCSV).

Furthermore, we should seek Him so that He can accomplish His work in us for which our painful situation was sent. If we are yielding and cooperative, things will go better.

Of course, this is hard to see in the moments of intense difficulty and pain. It doesn't seem like love to us. Yet, the scriptures tell us that this is so. We read: "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you are encircled with various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (Js 1:2,3 FLNT).

Also Peter says: "...even though now for a short time it has been necessary for you to be distressed by various trials. *These are necessary* for the testing of your faith, which is more valuable than gold that will be destroyed *and* which is now being tested by fire *but then* will be presented as a motive for praise, glory, and honor when Jesus the Anointed One appears" (1 Pet 1:6,7 FLNT).

When then will we escape our suffering and pain? It will be when it has produced God's results. It will be when we are no longer the same as we were before. It will be when our suffering has produced fruit – the peaceable fruit of His righteousness.

We read: "And you have totally forgotten the exhortation which reasons with you as with sons saying, 'My son, don't be inattentive to the discipline of the Lord or faint when you are corrected by him. For whom the Lord loves, *he* disciplines, and he chastises with a whip every son whom he receives.'

"If you experience *such* discipline, God is dealing with you as sons, for what son is there whom *his* father doesn't discipline? But if you are without disciplinary correction in which all *sons* share, then are you illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we had natural fathers who corrected us and we gave them *our* respect. Shouldn't we much more submit ourselves to the Father of spirits and *have more of his* life?

“For they, on the one hand, disciplined us for a short time as seemed right to them, but he, *on the other hand, does it for our benefit* so that we may share in his holiness. All *such* discipline doesn’t seem to be enjoyable but painful at that moment, yet afterward it produces the peaceable fruit of *God’s* righteousness in those who have been trained by it” (Heb 12:5-11 FLNT).

God is an excellent baker. He won’t let the bread burn or become overdone. When we are ready, when the fire of our suffering has done its work and we are prepared, He will take us out of the furnace of our affliction and set us on His high places.

WHERE YOU LIVE

It may be what where you live is a country which has laws against physically disciplining your children. You may find yourself confronting some serious choices in this area. Will you obey society or God?

In such circumstances, a believer must use wisdom. It is not wise to discipline your children in front of others or in public. Sometimes discipline must wait until it can be done privately. Since God has given you children, He will help you find ways to obey Him in caring for them. Learn to hear from Him in this essential area of discipline.

CONCLUSION

No doubt there are many who will not agree that inflicting pain on the backside of their children is God’s solution. These are those who can’t stand the idea of administering this painful solution. They just don’t want to hurt their child or just don’t want to experience any emotional distress themselves. Perhaps they imagine that the rod of discipline is barbaric and a crude way to train children.

Others may think that such discipline is archaic and that “today’s people” don’t need to go to such extremes. There must be “better ways”

to train children. So they try to invent their own solutions. These may be ideas which involve more reasoning with the child and lesser sorts of smaller “punishments” or deprivations to try to control their rebellion.

Such people seem to think that they know better than God. They imagine they have a deeper, better, or more tolerant understanding of human nature and how to deal with it. This, of course, is foolish thinking. The Maker knows exactly what works and what doesn't.

What such people don't realize is that these few, relatively short doses of intense physical pain will spare their children and those with whom they have relationships in the future many, many years of intense emotional pain. Furthermore, the emotional distress you might feel by causing your children this temporary pain, can never compare with the long-lasting distress you will feel if you don't discipline them.

The results of these infrequent, yet acute sessions with the rod are far superior than the results of not using it. The application of God's type of discipline on a child will save your children and you also from the lifetime of agony which your child's untreated rebellion will cause you and them later on.

When God gives you children, obey Him in how to raise them. His way works. Yours won't. Don't imagine that you know more than God.