

CHAPTER TWO

COACHING 101

Years ago we had a young man in our church graduate from high school and then go on to college. He had been a star football player (American version) whose dream was to teach and coach at a high school. Once he got to college he took some coaching courses in preparation for his future challenge. Trent knew football well enough, yet, these classes helped him understand how to coach the players and pass along his knowledge. Now he has had many successful football seasons in which he has had the opportunity to train young men to play the game well.

Moms and dads, we learned in the first chapter that we are a lot like Trent when it comes to training our children. We have to realize we are the head coaches who must also play the game; we have to know how to help our children become part of the team and reach our objective of glorifying God; and we have to know how to coach them. We ended the chapter by giving three very important pieces of equipment which will help us coach our players: Be a model before them; pray for them; and teach them the scriptures. In this chapter we want to enroll you in a coaching class--Coaching 101. We want to share with you some more specifics the Bible teaches about the methods we are to employ when training our children.

Formal And Informal Teaching

In Deut. 4:9-10; 6:6-7a; Proverbs 22:6; and Ephesians 6:4 parents are commanded to teach their children. Though these passages do not specify in detail whether formal (planned) or informal (spontaneous) teaching is the main focus, in all likelihood some formal teaching was implied. This is especially true in Deut. 4:9-10 and 6:6-7a where very specific content is included in the command. One of the most beneficial ways of teaching children formally is having family devotions. By devotions what I mean is "the formalized, structured times of ongoing teaching and communication--a time when parents and children can count on group

sharing, learning, and worship."¹ This may take different forms in different families. In our family we have family devotions in the morning before we start eating breakfast. The whole time lasts anywhere from 10-15 minutes. We usually have Bible reading, sometimes a story to help get across the meaning of the scripture, prayer, work on verse or catechism memorization, and sometimes singing.

Such formal teaching enables a parent to teach the basics to their children and give them a well-rounded spiritual diet. This is true because moms and dads can incorporate into these times subjects they have thought about ahead of time that they need to discuss and it enables parents to get materials which will be age-appropriate and which will give a rich, balanced biblical diet.

These times demonstrate to your children two very important truths: (1) Your relationship with God is very important to you and you desire for their relationship with God to be important to them. (2) The Bible is important to you and its teachings provide the foundation for all you do as a family. These formal times also provide the opportunity for you to lay the groundwork for shaping how your children view the world, how they assimilate what they are taught in school, and also for further learning in more informal times. In Chapter 3 we will look more specifically at some of the main lessons children need to learn.

The Bible also calls us to teach our children informally. Such is implied when we are exhorted to teach God's commandments to them "when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deut. 6:7b). In other words, God's Word is to permeate your whole family life. For this to happen there must not only be devotions with the family, there also must be the modeling of Christian character by parents and the taking of opportunities to teach spontaneously. Part 2 of this book can give you help in formal teaching times with your children. Yet, to teach informally or spontaneously requires you to give attention to your own walk with the Lord, to learn the scriptures, and to apply them in all you do (Deut. 4:9; 6:6).

¹Mary White, Growing Together, 4th ed. (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1985), 13.

In the past few years my wife and I have seen our oldest daughter, Melissa, go away to college and then get married. By God's grace she has lived out lessons she has learned from us. The first is the importance of having a daily practice of reading her Bible and praying. The second is being actively involved in ministry through her local church. And the third is a desire to follow her husband, David, as the spiritual leader in her home. All of these lessons were not just taught while she grew up in her home, they were caught by her. Certainly these subjects were taught formally, but even more, they were caught. Such is the power of the informal teaching that takes place as a result of parents internalizing and following the scriptures.

Another example of informal teaching comes from a seven year old professing Christian girl. While she and her mom were shopping, she placed a bottle of fingernail polish in her pocket without paying for it. After her mom found it at home the girl was required to return it and tell the store employees what she did. After a store security guard talked to her about the seriousness of what she did and how much trouble her parents could have faced, her dad also talked to her. He took the opportunity to teach her why it was wrong in God's eyes to take what isn't ours. He did not simply want her to refrain from stealing because she might get in trouble. He wanted her to refrain from stealing because she wants to please God and she must be aware that He sees all she does (Exodus 20:15; Psalm 139:1-5, 23-24). The whole experience did much more to drive home the need for honesty and to avoid stealing than any formal teaching time. Yet, this family's formal training times set the foundation for such learning.

Being Discipleship-Minded

In the world in which the New Testament Church was born, much training and teaching were done in what I might call discipler-disciple relationships. In other words, an adult would not only impart knowledge, they would seek to impart values and to demonstrate how to do certain tasks through a close intentional teaching-oriented relationship with the pupil.

Discipleship involves the disciple not only learning from the discipler, but also imitating their

conduct.² Within its Christian version this means conformity to the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:18) through the lens of following a teacher in so far as his life models Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1). When most of the first-century readers of the New Testament read the command to bring their children up in the "training and instruction of and about the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4), they would, in all likelihood, think not only of imparting knowledge, but also training through the method of discipling.³

This method was central to New Testament training. It was how Jesus trained the disciples and it is part of his Great Commission given to the Church (Matthew 28:19-20: "While going, make disciples...."). It is also the best training method today's parents can use with their children.

The importance of discipling our children is seen not only in scripture, but it also makes sense that this practical hands-on approach is what will teach children how to do things and not just what to do. Let's take the example of having a regular quiet time (daily Bible intake and prayer). When our children see us regularly read and study the Bible, we read and study it together, we refer to it in family decisions, we put resources into their hands to help them know what to do, and we also regularly sit down together to talk about how things are going along with offering encouragement and guidance,⁴ this is what we mean by being discipleship-minded. In other words, we intentionally strive and pray toward the goal of helping our children become like Jesus Christ to the glory of God.⁵

² Michael J. Wilkins, "Unique Discipleship To A Unique Master: Discipleship In The Gospel According To Mark," Southern Baptist Journal Of Theology, 8, 3 (Fall 2004): 50.

³ Tom Barnes, "Teaching Parents In The Spiritual Training Of Their Children," (D.Min. Thesis. Bethel Theological Seminary, 1997), 86-95.

⁴ I advocate having regular times (twice a month or once a week) during which we sit down and talk to our children about how to study the Bible, whether or not they are doing it, and what they are learning. If we supplement such times with family devotions where we are modeling how to understand and apply the Bible, we will most likely take our children well down the path of lifelong regular Bible intake and growth.

⁵ In Chapter Three we will discuss resources to utilize in discipling our sons and daughters regardless of age.

Discipleship of children will often require helping to motivate them to practice certain spiritual disciplines. I want to offer an example of how we have sought to do this. One of the ways that we have helped to motivate our children early on to have a quiet time is to give them some more concrete incentive. Through the elementary and junior high school years our children have had a chart we keep on the refrigerator for chores they must do. Some chores they must simply do because they are part of the family and for some they earn money. We do the latter so that they can begin to learn how to save money and how to take out tithes and offerings. In addition to chores we also have rewarded our children in various ways for having regular quiet times and for doing extra reading in good books that help them in their walk with Christ. Certainly if they would never get beyond doing these things for the sake of material rewards, as Jesus says in Matthew 6, it would be problematic. Yet, as children, to learn in a more concrete manner that there are great benefits from regular spiritual disciplines and then to have this transfer beyond the more immediate material rewards as they mature is not only helpful, it also mirrors the progress of revelation by which God has worked with His people. In other words, He taught under the Old Covenant the blessings which come from faith and obedience in more concrete ways (e.g. Deuteronomy 28:1-14) which prepared His people to look forward to the more ultimate and eternal blessings (Hebrews 11:13-16).

In order to disciple our sons and daughters in a holistic manner I advocate having in mind a grid for what a mature disciple looks like. In other words, there must be a goal in mind for the kinds of spiritual truth and character you desire to see in your children as they grow. In Chapter Three I will share with you the grid we follow with our children.

No amount of classes or training outside the home could ever surpass the impact we can have on shaping the hearts and behaviors of our children if we would understand that they are not just our sons and daughters. They are also the most important disciples which our Lord and Savior has given to us. Don't short-change your parenting of them by simply thinking that food on the table, academic knowledge in the mind, and some Bible content in the ears are enough. Put as much effort into discipling them as you would other adults in a Sunday school class or

small group you lead, or as much effort as you would a convert you lead to Christ!

How effective is this approach? Consider the answer given in an account in his own words from Leroy Eims which relates his visit years ago with a missionary.

He told me a story that still haunts me. He had gone overseas some 15 years before we met and began the usual programs. About the time he arrived, he met a young man named Johnny, who was involved in something quite different.

Johnny was a committed disciple of Jesus Christ, but he was going about his ministry in all the wrong ways according to the “book.” In contrast to the typical missionary approach, Johnny was spending the bulk of his time meeting with a few young men in that country. The veteran missionary tried to get Johnny straightened out, but the young man kept on with his “different” approach. The years passed, and the veteran missionary had to leave the country due to new visa restrictions.

He told me, “Leroy, I’ve got little to show for my time here. Oh, there is a group of people who meet in our assembly, but I wonder what will happen to them when I leave. They are not disciples. They have been faithful in listening to my sermons, but they do not witness. Few of them know how to lead another person to Christ. They know nothing about discipling others. And now that I’m leaving, I can see I’ve all but wasted my time here.

“Then I look at what has come out of Johnny’s life. One of the men he worked with is now a professor at the university. This man is mightily used of God to reach and train scores of university students. Another is leading a witnessing and discipling team of about 40 young men and women. Another is in a nearby city with a group of 35 growing disciples around him. Three have gone to other countries as missionaries and are now leading teams who are multiplying disciples.

“God is blessing their work. I see the contrast between my life and Johnny’s, and it is tragic. I was so sure I was right. What he was doing seemed so insignificant, but now I look at the results, and they are staggering.”⁶

Too often parents can be more like the veteran missionary with all his programs. We can take a shot-gun approach to our children’s growth, which lacks the time and intentionality of treating them as our own disciples and directing them in the formation of a biblical worldview, spiritual disciplines, and a godly character—all driven home not just by our intentional instruction, but also by our ongoing example and on-the-job (or life) training. To become a discipler with our sons and daughters will, Lord willing, render similar fruitful outcomes as Johnny experienced.

⁶ David Holdaway, “Discipling Jesus-Style,” *Leadership* (Winter 2002): 77.

Reading

Another important method of discipling children is reading. We have already seen that the Bible is to be the main curriculum, so it stands to reason we should read it. Further support comes from the truth that most books of the Bible were written to be read as literary units which told a narrative(s) or presented carefully crafted poetry or theological teachings. If we want our children to understand these sections of poetry, theological teachings, narratives, and not view the Bible as a collection of magical, unrelated statements, we need to read it to them. This was the biblical practice (Deut. 31:9-13) and command (1 Timothy 4:13).

We read scripture at every family devotional time. In addition, every 2-3 days we have at least one devotional time in which we focus only on the reading of scripture. This way we work through some books of the Bible and receive a more well- rounded Bible diet than just skipping around from passage to passage.

In addition to reading scripture, we should also read good books to our children. There are several reasons why. First, it helps develop children's ability to think logically. Reading "requires sustained attention, logical analysis, and an active imagination."⁷ This is why we must not rely only upon good television shows or Christian DVD's to train our children. "Television, with its fast-moving images, encourages a short attention span, disjointed thinking, and purely emotional responses."⁸ If we want our children to have the ability to read the scriptures and understand them, think clearly about the teachings of the Bible and about God, listen to sermons and Bible teaching, and have an active imagination which is indispensable for understanding the teachings of the scriptures, we need to read to them and encourage them to read. Colonial New England Puritan Christians understood this and therefore were aggressive in the founding of schools so children could learn to read and thereby have access to the Bible.

⁷Chuck Colson, "No Graven Images," Breakpoint (August 1993): 9.

⁸Ibid.

A second reason why reading is so important is that there are many biographies of Christians which will challenge the faith of our children. Biographies are so helpful because they often tell stories which keep children's attention. Yet, they also teach many different lessons through example. Faith, the importance of missions and evangelism, the importance of holiness, and so many other topics will often arise.

A third reason for reading books is that children love stories and there are some wonderful books which can capture their attention and teach them truths in ways that they enjoy. Our children have loved The Chronicles Of Narnia by C.S. Lewis. Years ago we read a wonderful book whose main characters were talking raccoons and which taught great lessons about obeying and trusting in God, Methuselah's Gift, by Mary Elizabeth Edgren.

Finally, reading good books is helpful simply because it can aid parents with the task of teaching scriptural truths to our sons and daughters. Most of us do not have the time or ability to write stories or books which can teach our families all they need to know. Yet God has gifted some within the Body of Christ to do this very thing. One example is Let's Talk About Heaven, by Debby Anderson. This is a well-done book that teaches children about what heaven will be like.

How can we fit in book reading along with having family devotions? If your schedule is tight, you might set aside one night a week in which you turn off the television and read from a good book instead. What we do is have devotions in the morning as we are starting to eat breakfast and then read 1-2 nights a week as we are finishing up with supper. We have centered devotions and reading around the beginning or ending of meal times because it keeps us from having to carve out an additional time slot for something else to do and we have a captive audience. You might laugh at this last reason, but I believe it is very important. Hopefully, the lessons in the second part of this book (as well as other resources you use) will be enjoyable enough that they keep the attention of children. Yet, we might as well be wise and use every advantage we have. We've learned that, even with good stories and books, it is much easier to keep their attention when they are at the table and eating than when they are doing nothing.

Memorization

Psalm 119 makes it clear that a person must learn (v.11) and then practice (v. 9) God's Word in order to avoid sin and live in a manner pleasing to God. Joshua 1:8 teaches that the meditation upon, learning of, and the practice of God's Word is what brings true success and prosperity. Thus, the memorization of scripture becomes an indispensable tool in the discipling of our children.⁹

How can we help our children memorize scripture? To begin with, use your devotional time, whenever you decide that will be. If you set a realistic goal of one verse every 1-2 weeks, it will not take that much time each day. After your Bible reading and prayer time, work on your verse. Have your children say where the verse is found, say the verse, and then repeat where it is found again. Go over the verse 5-6 times and you say it with them. Each time you say the verse leave out one or two words and have them fill in those blanks. Keep doing this until they are saying the whole verse by themselves. As children get older, it is also helpful to explain to them what the verse means so that they are not just memorizing words, but learning content.¹⁰

Traditions And Special Times

In Exodus 13:1-16, which we have already examined, God gives instructions to Israel regarding the annual celebration of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread and also the regular practice of the consecration of the firstborn. We see a similar teaching in Leviticus 23:33-44 in regard to the feast of tabernacles. In both of these passages we find that believing

⁹ In Chapter Five I have supplied a list of passages and other biblical material which any maturing believer will want to know. Utilize this list and keep track of when each family member has each memorized.

¹⁰ However, when children are in the pre-school years or, in many cases, even in the early elementary years, don't worry that they are memorizing scripture, but not fully grasping it. God has "wired" them to memorize more easily during these years. If they hide the Word in their heart at this time, they can work on understanding later. Classically, parents and educators have understood this developmental process for they have first emphasized rote memory of the basics (in grammar school or during elementary education), then emphasized understanding, and finally emphasized how to think critically and to communicate such material in debate during the secondary education.

parents were to establish traditions and special times which helped teach children about God. Through these regular events children would be reminded in tangible ways how God works and what he had done in the past. Sons and daughters would learn why they could trust God and why they should follow him. The traditions and special times themselves would, in all likelihood, motivate the sons and daughters to ask questions and provide teaching opportunities.

When we come into the New Testament, we learn from Paul that we are not bound to keep such celebrations anymore (Colossians 2:16). Yet, the principle of having traditions and special times to help teach the true story of the scriptures and salvation to children is still helpful. The Lord's Supper is such a tool which helps all of us remember what Christ has done in our behalf (1 Corinthians 11:24).

Two pieces of discipleship equipment we can use with our children are the establishment of traditions and special times. We can make use of Easter, Christmas, birthdays, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and many other times to drive home key biblical truths. This is not only allowable by the scriptural teaching just presented, it is also wise since these days are an established part of the culture in which many of us live. Moms and Dads, it is to our advantage to make use of them. In the indices you will find a listing of the Part 2 devotional stories which cover different special days and holidays.

Creative Teaching Techniques

Throughout the Bible the Divinely-inspired writers show a tendency to present their messages and teachings in creative ways which were sensitive to how people communicated in their culture. They also demonstrate that they were concerned about more than just sharing information. They wanted to communicate in such a way that people could understand and remember. Let me give a few examples.

In Psalm 119 we find a well-crafted poetic work of art which speaks of God's Law. The 176 verses comprise an alphabetic acrostic poem with 22 strophes, each one made up of eight verses. Each strophe (group of eight verses) begins with a different letter of the Hebrew

alphabet. For example, the first eight verses all begin with the Hebrew equivalent of the letter A, the next eight each begin with the equivalent of the letter B, and so on and so forth all the way through the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This is not only quite a literary feat, but what a creative way of teaching God's people about the wonders of his Law!

In the book of Proverbs we find collections of short pithy statements designed to be easily learned and remembered. They teach the young person (or anyone for that matter) how to live a wise, spiritually skillful life.

In Amos 1:3-2:3 this layman-turned-prophet includes six pronouncements against Israel's neighbors known as *Oracles Against Foreign Nations*. Israel was used to this kind of writing in which God would denounce the sins of surrounding unbelieving nations. Often, he would then show how he was going to deliver Israel from their oppressive hands. Yet, here, Amos does something different. In these six oracles he gets Israel to agree with him that these nations are truly sinful and deserving of God's punishment. Yet, instead of deliverance, in 2:4-16 he shows how Judah and Israel are also sinful and deserving of judgment. It is as if once they agreed with him about the surrounding nations (which they would have been more than happy to do), how could they not see that they were "in the same boat"? This is a very clever method of teaching on the part of this shepherd supervisor and keeper of sycamore trees!

We not only see creative teaching techniques used by the authors of scripture, we also see the same thing on the part of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we read through the Gospels we find out that he was a creative and accomplished teacher who sought to communicate in a way that his hearers could understand. Often this comes out as he used word-pictures from everyday life: Salt and lamps (Mt. 5:13-16); moths, thieves, slavery, birds, and grass (Mt. 6:19-34); trees and foundations (Mt. 7:15-29); yoke and burden (Mt. 11:28-30); marriage (Mt. 25:1-13); farming, seeds, and soil (Mark 4:1-20); and bread (John 6:25-59), just to name a few. He also used very powerful parables which he knew would strike a chord with people (Matthew 13; Luke 12:13-21; 15:1-32).

It would behoove us to follow the example of our Lord and the biblical writers when

teaching our children. We need to teach them and use materials which use solid and creative teaching techniques that will do the best job possible of communicating biblical ideas to them.¹¹

Telling God's And Your Stories

In Psalm 44 the Psalm writer lets us know that his parents and ancestors have taught him what God has done in the lives of his people and in their lives. We read, " O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, what deeds you performed in their days, in the days of old" (v.1--ESV). This knowledge of what God has done provides an example that enables the writer to trust in and praise God in the midst of trouble (vv.4-8) and to pray to him for deliverance (v.26). We see a similar phenomenon in Psalm 78. And, in Deuteronomy 4:9-14, we have already seen how God commands mothers and fathers to teach their and God's stories to their children so that they might walk with him.

This sharing of your story and God's will prove very vital to the discipling of your children. They need to hear about how Abraham obeyed God and trusted in him (Gn. 22); how David showed great courage and faith confronting a seemingly impossible situation with the strength of God (1 Samuel 17); how God took care of his children in the wilderness (Exodus 15-24; Numbers); and how Jesus taught, healed, and loved in the Gospels. They also need to hear how God has been real in your life. Share with them how God brought you to salvation and also how he has shown himself faithful through the years. Share how sin has hurt you and the joys of living for Christ. Share with them why you have behaved certain ways to bring glory to God and how this brings great joy. By doing this you will be setting before your sons and daughters

¹¹ My advice is to make it your goal to be creative. This will come naturally to some parents. To others, it will not and you will need to look for a variety of resources to help accomplish this goal. Remember, however, not to be paralyzed by the desire to be creative. I have known parents who never got around to teaching intentionally and discipling their children because they set the bar for creativity so high and never believed they could do it. As helpful as creativity can be, remember that simply being involved in the long-term, consistent training of and modeling before your children is what will make the greatest impact.

powerful models of how they need to live and handle situations which come their way. Also, you will shape them at the level of their hearts.

Karen and I occasionally share part of our story during weekly family meetings. Once a week we meet together for a short time of sharing and family communication. These meetings not only give us an opportunity to discuss problems and plan for family events, but they are an opportune time to tell our children how God is faithful to us and how we struggle. We will discuss family meetings more in Part 2.

Love

It would be interesting to ask a large group of Christian parents, "How much space is given in the Bible to the need for you to love your children?" No doubt many would answer, "Well, I'm not sure where all the passages are, but there would have to be a lot. Surely this is one of the priorities of parenting in God's eyes." The fact of the matter is, however, that the Bible never gives a direct command to parents to love their children. Now, before you close the book and look up my address to stone me, hear me out. This doesn't mean that we are not to love our children. In fact, in the next few paragraphs I am going to show how the Bible does teach the need for us to love them and how we are to love them. Yet, it seems significant to me that this command is never given to believing parents.¹²

Now, I am not going to pretend to know why God did not include such a command or more direct teaching for parents to love their children. Yet, the effect of this lack provides a corrective for many Christian parents today. Let me explain what I mean. Many of us think that loving our children is the greatest responsibility we have toward them and that what this translates into is giving them things and making their life comfortable and providing for their futures and giving them what we didn't have and, all-in-all, revolving all we do around them. Such practices among Christian families have resulted in ignoring spiritual training, avoiding discipline, and often

¹² Remember also the grid for parenting we established in Chapter One which follows God's model for parenting, the Family Covenant Model. It clearly sets forth the need for love and grace in parenting.

creating soft, self-centered children.¹³

When we gain a clear picture from the Bible of how to raise children we do learn by implication that we are to love our children. In Hosea 11:1 and Deut. 7:7-8ff. we learn that God, who is the model parent, loves his children. This implies that the believing parent is to love her sons and daughters. Certainly we can conclude from the Great Commandment that, if we are to love our neighbor as ourselves and this means those people who are very different and even enemies (Luke 10:25-37), we should certainly love those closest to us--our family. Love of family is implied in such admonitions as, "Fathers, do not make your children [unnecessarily] angry" (Eph. 6:4) and "Fathers avoid provoking your children lest they become discouraged" (Col. 3:21).¹⁴ The primary concern of the Bible is not to tell parents to love their children. Rather, it is to tell them how to love them with a true biblical love. We can define biblical love as: A favorable disposition toward another person which seeks to meet the needs of and bring God's blessing to that person by biblical means, whatever the cost and regardless of whether or not there is any reciprocation. Such love will be honoring to God in that it is concerned about the same things which concern God (1 Cor. 13:6).

We said that God was the model parent and in Proverbs 3:11-12 we learn that God loves his children sometimes by means which they may not like. Yet, in his love he seeks to treat his children in ways that help them grow and develop. What does all this mean for us? It means that there is nothing wrong with providing for our children (we should--1 Tim. 5:8), and we must show them comfort, compassion, consolation, and warmth. Yet, we must also realize that our true love will work its way out in teaching them about God from the scriptures, praying with them, disciplining them, and requiring them to be responsible and to mature by God's standards. If you have allowed your children to control the family (including you as parents), have not

¹³ Again, think about the Family Covenant Model of parenting from Chapter One and how it balances commitment, love, and discipline.

¹⁴ Love for children is also implied in Matthew 7:7-12.

required responsibility from them, and are not training them spiritually, you are not loving them. You are setting them up for ruin (Proverbs 19:18).

Yet, the need for us to love our children with a strong Christ-like love is important (cf. Mk. 12:31). How strong must that love be? That it should be intense is illustrated in the following account from the Los Angeles Times:

A train wreck that killed eleven and injured several others near Los Angeles in January 2005 left an indelible impression on Firefighter Captain Rosario. Hours after the rescue began, using the jaws of life device, rescuers were able to extricate a man, John Phipps, from the wreckage. That's when Rosario saw the message.

While Phipps was pinned under debris from the crash and having trouble breathing, he wrote a message to his wife and children using his own blood. With whatever energy he could summon and a heartbreaking economy of words, he scrawled a farewell on the seat. "I love my kids. I love Leslie," he printed (using a heart symbol in place of verbs). The blood ink seemed to be running out as he got to the second sentence.

As Captain Rosario later related the story for TV cameras, the firefighter choked with emotion. "The fact that this guy in this situation had the amount of love he had for his family, and for him to realize 'I'm possibly going to die here,' how could any words explain it?"¹⁵

May we as parents not wait, however, to show this kind of affection when we are about to die. May we show it sacrificially on a daily basis as we do all we can, by the grace of Christ, to raise our children for his glory. This is the greatest love. After all, when Paul tells husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church, he goes on to describe such love, in part, as working for her growth in holiness. It certainly fits with the biblical testimony that a parent's love for a child should also include such a goal (cf. Eph. 6:4).

Focus On The Heart

The Bible teaches us that a true relationship with God and thus truly obeying him is not just a matter of our outward actions (Is. 1:10-17ff.). Instead, we must give attention to what is going on in the heart--the seat of our thinking, emotions, and will (Matthew 5:28). Sin begins in the

¹⁵ This January 29, 2005 Times story was retold by David Stagle in "Farewell Message Written In Blood," Leadership, 265, 3 (Summer 2005): 83.

heart (Genesis 6:5; Matthew 15:18-20) and so does true righteousness (Deuteronomy 6:6; 1 Cor. 13:1-4 [implied, the word "heart" does not appear]). Because this is true, we must make it our goal and practice to deal with both behavior and the heart of our children. In other words, do not just encourage rote learning of scripture or discipline the outward actions of your children without engaging the heart. Granted, when our children are infants, toddlers, and in the pre-school years they have a hard time grasping concepts that are not concrete. They need to learn at this stage of life that Mom and Dad love them, will take care of them, and also that Mom and Dad are in charge. If they disobey their parents, they will face a consequence that hurts. In this way, the lesson of submission to a higher authority is learned. Yet, as children grow, they must also learn why they must obey, why they are to trust in God. In other words, our ultimate goal is not simply to shape the actions of our sons and daughters. It is to shape their hearts.

Let's give an example. Let's say that your eleven year old son has been repeatedly picking on, hitting, and tormenting your eight year old daughter for the last three days. As you discipline him you want to do more than simply redirect his behavior through discipline (although you do want to do this). You want to find out why he has been agitating her or why he does not value treating her as he would want to be treated. Perhaps you find out that he was upset because, from his perspective, his sister received what she wanted for Christmas and he did not. Consequently, he is jealous and angry toward her. He not only needs to hear that his treatment of the sister is wrong, he needs to learn about contentment, gratitude, and the dangers of jealousy and anger. We need to determine the cause in the heart and provide motivation for changed behavior that is centered in the heart. The reason is that this will bring true and lasting change. It is also what is needed to please God fully. For a helpful resource on this subject get a copy of Shepherding A Child's Heart, by Tedd Tripp (listed in the Annotated Bibliography at the end of this book).

Discipline

So far the biblical teaching we have shared has shown how to steer children in the right

direction. Yet, the question arises, "What do we do when our children stray away from this path?" The answer the Bible gives is: "Discipline them."

The first passage to consider is Proverbs 3:11-12. These verses read: "My son do not reject the correction of Yahweh and do not loathe his rebuke. For whom Yahweh loves he rebukes, as a father his son in whom he delights." The purpose of the statements is found in verse 11. The wise teacher is telling us that we should be willing to accept the Lord's correcting of us when we stray off the right path. It may be painful, but it is designed to make us realize our error, learn from our sin, and return to the right way of living. Biblical examples of such painful correction of God's people by the Lord include disease and death (Numbers 25; Rev. 2:20-23); lack of rain and locusts (2 Chronicles 7:13); and captivity at the hands of enemies (Lamentations 1:5). In verse 12 the reason why we must be willing to accept the Lord's discipline is given: God exposes the sin and corrects the path of those whom he loves. In other words, it is God's love for us that motivates his correction. He does what is best even if it is painful for us at the time. The second half of verse twelve is what is the most relevant for our present purpose. God is compared to a parent. God rebukes those he loves just as a father rebukes a son in whom he delights or loves. It is taken for granted by Solomon that the good and truly loving parent is the one who is willing to expose the sin of his children and bring them back on the right path.

What are some of the ways we may need to correct our children? We may need to take away privileges such as watching television or playing with friends; have them stand in the corner; ground them; or have them face the consequences of actions such as paying for a window they break. If we are unwilling to discipline children, it is likely that they will never learn the difference between right and wrong behavior, they will never learn the difference between responsible and irresponsible behavior; and they will never learn to be disciplined, self-controlled persons which is so important to a mature Christian life (1 Timothy 4:7; 2 Peter 1:6).

In Proverbs 19:18 we are told that we must discipline our children "while there is hope." In other words, however wayward a child seems to be, there is hope because the Lord can do all things; he can change hearts and lives (see Proverbs 21:1). As long as children are under our

care and we can discipline them, God can use our efforts to correct their heart and behavior. The proverb implies that there comes a time when hope is not possible. In the second part of the verse we learn that hope is gone when death comes upon the child. It reads, "and unto his death do not lift up your soul." The meaning seems to be that if a parent does not discipline his children, they may become undisciplined people who will ultimately destroy themselves. We have all known of sad situations where parents were permissive and, as a result, sons or daughters destroyed themselves through the uncontrolled living of drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, gambling, etc.

We have said nothing yet about corporal discipline (spanking children).¹⁶ What does the Bible have to say about this? Proverbs 13:24 reads, "The one who withholds his stick hates his son; but the one who loves him disciplines diligently." This proverb is the basis for "spare the rod, spoil the child." The biblical background to this proverb includes Exodus 20:12 (children are to honor parents); Exodus 21:15-17; Leviticus 20:9; and Deuteronomy 21:18-21 (children are not to hit, curse, or rebel against their parents). The first part of this proverb tells us that the one who does not use corporal discipline when children need it, hates his children. Throughout scripture "hate" is often used to communicate a lack of or lesser degree of love. This is made plain in Genesis 29:30-31. This idiomatic use of "hates" communicates that the one who withholds such discipline does not love his children as he should--implied is, with a true biblical love. Such a permissive parent is not looking toward the future to see how his parenting will ultimately hurt the child far worse than a spanking.¹⁷ The "stick" is not figurative here. It is an actual stick or club used to correct a child or servant. Our equivalent today might be a paddle,

¹⁶I prefer the phrase corporal discipline over corporal punishment because the former does a better job of communicating the idea that spanking is not merely for the purpose of causing the child to pay a price or for the parent to gain revenge or vent anger. Instead, it is for the ultimate purpose of gaining the attention of the child so as to instruct the son or daughter on how they can better live according to the ways of God. Though this goal will not be accomplished per se, for example, in pre-school children (other than learning that Mom and Dad are in charge and disobedience brings a price), it will lay a foundation for such learning as they mature.

¹⁷ He also is not following the model of parenting God sets forth which includes commitment, love, and training.

yardstick, or wooden spoon.

Does this proverb mean that parents have the right, according to God, to spank their children in any way they desire or even to abuse their children? The answer is an unqualified, "No!" In Jeremiah 10:24 the reader sees the need for God to use judgment in his discipline of us. We have also seen already how we are to love our children (Luke 10:27ff.; Eph. 6:4) and Psalm 127 teaches us that we are to view them as a gift from God. There is also the command that control was to be used in corporal discipline toward slaves (Ex.21:20). The implication would be that boundaries were to be exercised with children as well.

Though the Bible does not give us specific boundaries for corporal discipline, some good ones which seem to be in line with the tenor of scripture's teachings are as follows: A parent will want to use a neutral object, not the hand; we should administer corporal discipline to the buttocks and no where else (unless a toddler's hands are slapped for touching something dangerous); and it should not be overused. We should spank only when the child is defiant toward us (not for accidents or inappropriate behavior which the child does not know is inappropriate); and when a child is between the ages of approximately eighteen months and eight or nine years old (slapping a hand to teach a child not to touch something will need to happen from roughly twelve months on). In my estimation most use of corporal discipline should be finished by this age.¹⁸

The remaining passages which deal with corporal discipline (all in Proverbs) teach the following principles: (1) Using corporal discipline will not kill a child, but the use of it may very well save him from an early death due to foolish living (19:18; 23:13-14); (2) Corporal discipline drives moral deficiency from the child (22:15); (3) Corporal discipline often helps direct a child in such a way that he lives a godly life which ultimately brings joy to parents. Yet, the lack of it often produces a child who does his own foolish things and brings shame and pain

¹⁸ For excellent resources on this subject see James Dobson's Dare To Discipline; Tedd Tripp's Shepherding A Child's Heart; and Steve Nelson's Premeditated Parenting.

to his parents (29:15, 17).

Why is corporal discipline necessary for young children? The answer, as we will find out more fully in Chapter Four, has to do with the reality that it is very difficult for children to be reasoned with during this period. They understand very concrete situations—namely, “When I disobey Mom and Dad I will face a consequence.” If they learn that lesson, the foundation is set for them to learn that throughout all of life they must submit to authorities: Parents, teachers, government leaders, law enforcement officers, and most importantly, God Himself. What is more, a pattern for training and discipline unto godliness is also set (1 Timothy 4:7).

Preach The Gospel To Yourself Daily

Every good athletic coach knows that with himself and his team members he must both call everyone to high standards, but at the same time, help each person “shake it off,” and not remain paralyzed when mistakes are made. The same is true of the parent in the discipleship of children.

In his helpful work entitled The Discipline Of Grace: God’s Role And Our Role In The Pursuit Of Holiness, Jerry Bridges reminds Christians that the gospel is also to be applied to them and not just those who need to be saved. He exhorts, “preach the gospel to yourself.”¹⁹ This is advice that every parent needs to hear regularly in this most important of vocations God has given. On the one hand, to preach the gospel to oneself means that the Christian parent remembers that he can do all things Christ call us to in parenting through Christ who gives strength (Phil. 4:13). After all, there is no resource needed for godly parenting which is not already possessed by every Christian parent (2 Peter 1:3). As we close out two chapters of biblical teaching on parenting it must be emphasized that it is in union with Christ and in dependence upon Him that believing moms and dads carry out our calling. If this is not

¹⁹ Jerry Bridges, The Discipline Of Grace: God’s Role And Our Role In The Pursuit Of Holiness (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 45-60.

remembered, we will fall into a sense of self-reliance and, in the flesh, we will become very frustrated in our failures.²⁰ What is more, we will be unable to be the parents God desires.

One the other hand, preaching the gospel to oneself means that when we do fall short and sin, we remember that Jesus Christ, our propitiation, is our advocate and that his blood continually cleanses us from our sin (1 John 1:7; 2:1-2). It is a reality that as hard as we try to be godly parents and as much as we seek to trust in Christ toward that end, there will be times we fail. If we do not understand that God has forgiven us and that he can and will overcome our shortcomings, we will be paralyzed by guilt, fear, and hopelessness. Michael Horton gives this reminder:

“Good” fathers are not those who “have it all together.” ...In fact, one of the things we younger dads discover in conversation with more mature Christian fathers whose track record we respect is a corresponding sense of humility and weakness. Despite all the advice, they usually end up with something like this: “But you know, it’s often a mess—a mess that I’ve made of things, and God seems to have cleaned it up.” This does not mean that failures leave no lasting residue, but that God’s promise can be trusted: “I will be a God to you and to your children forever.”²¹

Please do not misunderstand at this point. I am not advocating or justifying shoddy parenting. Nor, am I suggesting that it doesn’t matter how we parent since there is no hope. The general rule-of-thumb is that when we give training to our children in such a way that we mold and direct their hearts and behavior in line with God’s word, they will not depart from this way (Prov. 22:6). We should expect that by the grace of Christ we can “win with our children”!²²

My point is this. We will not “win” with our children unless we do it in dependence upon Christ

²⁰ What is more, we will most likely put undue pressure on our children to succeed without an atmosphere of grace and we will drive them to rebellion out of a sense of our own frustration. “Uptight over whether our children will walk with the Lord, we often communicate this in all sorts of unintended ways. Eventual rebellion becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.” (Michael Horton, “Good News For Bad Dads”.)

²¹ Michael Horton, “Good News For Bad Dads”.

²² Steve Nelson, Premeditated Parenting, 48ff.

and unless we run to him for forgiveness in those times when we fall short.

So, moms and dads, parent your children with high expectations for success and raise the bar high for yourself. However, do it steeped in the gospel of Christ. Preach it to yourself daily!

Conclusion To Coaching 101

One of the most remarkable spiritual trainers/coaches I have run across is a woman by the name of Susanna. Susanna was a pastor's daughter and a pastor's wife who had ten children. Whenever the history of her family is discussed, her influence upon her children is usually included. She felt a strong desire to educate both her sons and daughters (the latter of which was a very rare practice in their 18th c. homeland of England). Yet, she not only wanted to educate them, she desired to disciple them. "She regularly spent an hour with each child in concentrated spiritual discussions, and the family prayed together before the morning and evening meals."²³

The time that Susanna put into the spiritual training of her children has been felt by multitudes of people worldwide through two of her sons. History would not have recorded her story had it not been for sons, John and Charles. Their last name? Wesley. Both of these Oxford-trained dynamic Christian men made quite an impact upon the world. John covered over 250,000 miles by horseback preaching 42,000 sermons and writing 200 books. He was instrumental in giving birth to a whole denominational movement around the world which came to be known for its methodical ways or its discipline. Charles penned over 7,000 sacred songs and poems.

Whether you have had connections with the Methodist denomination or related groups (such as Free Methodists or Wesleyans) or whether you have sung some of Charles Wesley's hymns in church, most Christians have been touched by these two men in some way. Instrumental in what the great and Sovereign Lord did in and through them was a parent who committed herself to discipling them and teaching them to glorify God.

We may never give birth to and raise a John or Charles Wesley. Yet, our sons and

²³Mary White, Growing, 15.

daughters can have just as important an influence upon their own families and surroundings and also honor God's name. It is impossible to see now what it will mean to our children and their children for us to become active player- coaches, to help our children become part of the team, and to disciple them. But moms and dads, do it, we must. Let's get involved and live the life before them and teach them about our great God. It is not an option, it is commanded by God. Their future and eternal destiny will depend upon it!

Though we now have a sense that the Bible calls us to disciple our children and we have a good idea of what that means, we still don't know what we should teach them and what should be our goal as we disciple them. So, we will turn our attention in that direction in Chapter Three.

1. List the several means mentioned whereby we disciple our children (along with the supporting scripture passages):

2. Write down some ideas about how you plan on implementing these means.