

Discipline

Deuteronomy 28:1-24; Hebrews 12:4-11

The Stepford Wives is a 2004 film starring Nicole Kidman. Joanna, played by Nicole Kidman, moves to the town of Stepford. There all the women have perfect looks, they cook perfect dinners and do everything their husbands want. It turns out that the women are controlled by their husbands. The husbands have a remote control device. The women are like robots.

I won't spoil it by telling you what happens but it is a horrifying scenario, obviously for the women, but also for the men. Who would want to live with a robot? It might sound good but it would be no real relationship.

It might sound good to have a remote control button for our children. "Get dressed." (Press) "Eat your dinner." (Press) "Go to bed." (Press and instant obedience) It would make life much easier! But we don't want robots for children, do we? We want them to develop their own identity and personality. We want them to grow to be responsible young people who can make wise decisions for themselves.

Asking, "How can I control my kids?" is the wrong question. The aim is not to control but to develop their character.

Ephesians 6:4 says *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.* Discipline is that whole process of training and instruction.

1. Love

This training must all be done in the context of love. Our example for this is God's love for us as a Heavenly Father. *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!* (1 John 3:1) God loves us as his children. He provides for us, he hears us, guides us, and protects us. He may discipline us but he is very patient and forgiving. He is a model for our love for our children.

Ross Campbell has written a book, *How to really love your child*. He says nearly all parents do love their children but sometimes children don't feel loved. How do we communicate our love for our children so that they will feel loved?

Campbell gives three ways to communicate our love:

a) Eye contact

That is looking directly into the eyes of another person. We know the power of this for discipline, we say, "Look at me!" We want them to make eye contact with us to hear us. But we need to make eye contact with them in love.

Steve Biddulph in his book *Raising Boys* says this: "A baby seeks out your attention with a gurgle or cry. You look towards him and see that he is looking at you. He is thrilled to make eye contact, and wriggles with delight." (p.14)

But it's not just babies. All ages need that eye contact. It's not just talking to them while we are busy doing something else. It is really giving them that attention that says they are important to you. We need to make regular eye contact.

b) Physical contact

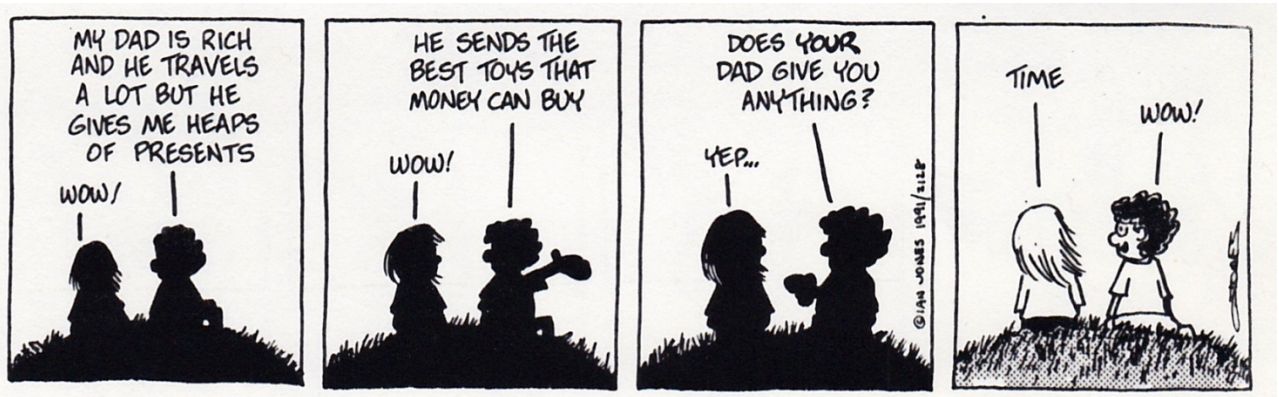
When our children are babies we are constantly touching them, carrying, dressing, feeding and bathing them. As they get older you don't have to do these things for them but they still need physical contact. The sort of physical contact may change as they get older but they still need this contact to communicate our love. It is not just hugs and kisses; it can be just a touch, or playing or wrestling together.

Biddulph says, "For both sons and daughters, a dad's affection is vital. A child can't understand that you work long hours, worry over tax forms ... *because that's not something he can see or touch*. Kids know they are loved through touch and eye contact and laughter and fun. Affection is reassuring - it conveys love in a way words cannot."

c) Focussed attention

You might have several kids and do things together as a family but focussed attention is giving time one on one with each child. Campbell says, "It is giving a child our undivided attention in a way that she feels without doubt that she is completely loved."

He says it isn't something to do if time permits; it is a critical need each child has. This will take time, often a lot of time.



He says children need their "emotional batteries" charged. Like a mobile phone you need to keep it charged or won't work. Eye contact, physical contact and focussed attention communicate our love so their emotional batteries are kept full; they feel that they are loved. Remember these three things.

These details are not spelled out in the Bible. I have quoted from other books but I think they spell out the love the Bible says we need to show.

2. Encouragement

The New Testament speaks about encouragement 39 times. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says,
¹¹ *Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

We should encourage each other in the congregation but we also need to encourage our children. It is easy to focus on the negative. We find ourselves telling our children what they are doing wrong. How often do we affirm them? How often do we complement them on doing something well? Do we tell them we think they are good at something? Do we make more negative comments than positive? Look for things to affirm about them.

3. Discipline

a) Authority

We need to see that parents have a God given authority over their children. *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*² *“Honour your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—*³ *“so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”* (Ephesians 6:1-3)

Children are told to obey their parents; it is part of obeying the 5th Commandment. Parents are to be honoured because they have the authority to bring their children up to trust and obey God. This must be a loving authority like God’s loving authority over us. It must not be exercised harshly or out of self-interest. It is not just to make the parent’s life easier. It must be directed to developing the child’s wellbeing.

But it is an authority. It is the parents’ responsibility to set boundaries and rules. Everything doesn’t need to be negotiated. Certainly we need to listen to our children’s concerns but in the end the parent needs to say what is required and to be obeyed.

You can also use rewards for good behaviour to encourage them.

b) Consequences

Do you find yourself yelling at kids to do what you want?

Think of this: You are driving a bit too fast. The blue light is flashing behind you and you pull over. The policeman walks up to your car. There is no yelling. He doesn’t shout at you. He just quietly says, “Show me your licence please, driver.” Now you are shaking like a jelly. Why? Because you know there are consequences.

There needs to be defined consequences for disobedience. Otherwise you end up yelling more and more.

God has consequences for disobedience. Deuteronomy 28:15 says, *However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you...* It goes on to say what will happen if they disobey.

Hebrews 12:6 quotes Proverbs, *the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.*

¹¹ *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.* (Hebrews 12:11)

There is a need for consequences particularly for defying the parent's authority.

Recognise that children will test the boundaries. This is a healthy part of developing their own will so we need to be careful not to crush their spirit but we also need to apply discipline.

Children need to learn that there are consequences in life; If you don't study you will fail exams; If you don't work hard you will be out of a job; If you break the law there are serious consequences. They need to learn that in the loving atmosphere of home. If they don't learn about consequences you set them up for problems later in life.

Proverbs says, Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away. (Proverbs 22:15)

Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them. (13:24)

Some people argue that "the rod" means physical punishment. Whether "the rod" necessarily means physical punishment or not it certainly points to consequences for disobedience.

I have copied an article from the book: *God, Marriage, and Family*. This discusses the rod but also has other helpful thoughts on discipline. Pick up a copy from the Parenting Table.

One method of consequence is to count 1, 2, 3 then send the child to time out if they do not obey. The consequence doesn't have to be harsh, just some specific consequence. Plan it out and make it clear. Parents need to be on same page with all this.

Conclusion

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Eph 6:4)

We mustn't exasperate our children. Our training and discipline must be: Fair, consistent, and above all done in the context of love. The rules and consequences need to be clear.

In this series we have looked at:

1. Our society does not follow God's values and morals. We need to prepare our children to live in a godless world.
2. Parents are given the role of teaching their children and setting a godly example for them.
3. The need to introduce our children to Bible reading and prayer is basic.
4. The need to love and discipline our children.