

## 1-24 What Kids Need From Parents II Prov. 6:20-23; 22:6

Parenting requires a new lexicon. For instance, you learn that **grandparent** is a person who thinks your children are wonderful even if you're not raising them right. **Independent** is how we want our children to be as long as they do when we say. And **sterilize** is what you do to your first baby's pacifier by boiling it in water, and what you do to your second child's pacifier by blowing on it. Let's turn to the lexicon of Scripture to get a better look at discipline.

Last week, we considered God's parenting as our best model and that God gives us safety and security as well as discipline. The challenge, of course, is not if but HOW we should discipline our children.

Before we can get our hands around methods of discipline, we must first get clear about the **goal** of discipline. What does God want to accomplish when we receive divine discipline? Where will our discipline lead our children?

Last Sunday I mentioned my across the street neighbor growing up and how he was beaten and yelled at by his father. Maybe that dad thought he was making his kid tough so he could live in a tough world. But no matter what that father thought he was doing, his actions had a life of their own. Was the son made stronger by the whippings or was his spirit broken? Did he learn to trust and respect his father or was he taught that he could never do anything to please his father. This has repercussions beyond childhood.

Social scientists have said for years that our views of God are shaped most of all by our parents in the first years of our lives. St. Francis Xavier once said, ***Give me the children until they are seven and anyone may have them afterward.*** Did Mike learn from his earthly father that he was a cherished child of God, or did he learn from his father that God is punitive, arbitrary, angry and vindictive?

James Baldwin wrote, ***Children have never been very good at listening to their parents, but they have never failed to imitate them.*** Every time you discipline your child, they will learn how to discipline their children.

Let's get some biblical clarity about the **Goals for Discipline**. We go first to the word itself

1. **Discipline and discipleship** come from the same root word. That root does not mean to punish. It means to become a **learner**. The disciples of Jesus were those devoted to learning from their Master so they could live as he taught them. Discipline is the primary way we instruct our children so they will become learners, especially learning what it means to live by faith.

There is a repetitive phrase in the Old Testament after God instructs his people. The phrase is ***Teach them to your children and to their children after them.*** Parents are responsible for faith development in their children and grandchildren. Discipline is not only giving good answers to our children but teaching them to be life-long disciples.

Jesus said in Matt. 11, ***Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Take my yoke and LEARN from me.*** This word "learn" is the root word for discipline and this passage gives us a sense of the spirit of discipline. Jesus is not conveying a drill sergeant approach to discipline.

Jesus told adults that they had to become like children to enter the kingdom of God. Children are not set in their ways. They want to learn. They are trusting rather than cynical. They are open rather than closed. They are eager and hopeful. Parents will disciple their children more effectively if we are child-like in our own relationship to God.

We are considering the goals of discipline because effective discipline aims higher than addressing the behavior of the moment, which is usually about “don’t do that” or “stop that” or “just wait till your father gets home.” The goal of discipline is always positive. We are instilling in our children valued patterns of living and being that will serve them well as followers of Jesus.

2. Another goal of discipline is **steering our kids through the complex maze in which they live**; a world more dangerous, tempting and distracting than the world we grew up in.

**Prov. 22:6** is familiar to most of us. *Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.* We have better manuscripts and better translations of this passage. That first Hebrew term does not mean *train*. It means “**dedicate**” or “**start off**.”

This is Young’s translation: *Give instruction to a youth about his way, Even when he is old he will not turn from it.* The translation called the Message says it this way: *Point your kids in the right direction— when they’re old they won’t be lost.* This is closer to the meaning. Parents have the responsibility to start their kids down a good road, but eventually our kids have to test this. They will take detours. They will depart from it. And this may grieve their parents. But the biblical promise is that they will never be beyond the road we started them on. They will always remember where it is and what it is.

I remember letting my children sit in my lap while I was driving. I tried to do this on I35 where there are lots of trucks going 80 mph because it’s a dog eat dog world. Actually, I only let them drive when we were on some isolated road so they could steer the car. Not recommending this; just using it to make a point. As 4 or 5 year olds, the girls held tightly to the wheel, not realizing that it needed to be moved to keep the car on the road. So we always drifted to the side of the road and I would correct.

Aaron was another story. His approach was to do this (turning wheel back and forth) because this felt like a carnival ride. I had to make quick course corrections when he was in my lap. I remember the first time I let Aaron get behind the wheel solo right out there in our parking lot. It was the first time I considered doing Hail Marys.

Every kid is different, but driving instruction always follows the same process. It starts with **I steer you watch**, then moves to **let’s steer together**, to **you steer while I watch** to **here are the keys be careful**. Discipline follows the same course. The goal of steering our kids is so they are prepared to steer their own lives with the help of God.

3. A third goal of discipline is **correction**. A brook is crooked because it takes the path of least resistance. We don’t want crooked kids. What can we learn from God’s discipline of us that will help us know the place of punishment with our kids? For a long time, I meted out punishment based upon how angry I was. God does not punish because he’s really ticked. All of God’s discipline has a reconciling purpose.

What is the core biblical teaching about corporal punishment? Is it that famous saying of previous generations, *spare the rod, spoil the child?* The phrase is not in Scripture, but is taken from several passages in Proverbs. Let’s look at just a handful.

**Prov 13:24.** *Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them.* **22:15.** *Folly is bound up in the heart of a boy, but the rod of discipline drives it far away.* One might assume that the rod is a tool for physical punishment. But then we get a text like **Ps 23**...*thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.* I don’t know anyone who would say, “my dad’s belt comforts me.”

Ps. 89 *"If they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging.* This message was to adults and for adults. And of course we know that God never used a rod to punish his people. This is a metaphor.

Prov. 10. *Wisdom is found on the lips of the discerning, but a rod is for the back of him who lacks judgment*

Prov. 14. *A fool's talk brings a rod to his back, but the lips of the wise protect them.*

While the rod may have been used as a legal punishment, it is most often used metaphorically. This is the only text I can find where the rod is an instrument of punishment for a child. Prov. 23. *Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die.* This could be a metaphor or literal, but even if literal, we don't know how the rod was actually used.

Clearly, the rod is a symbol of God's punishment or wrath upon oppressive nations or his own people who break his covenant. None of this, however, speaks to how the rod may have been used on a child to correct or punish. Were children beaten? Was the presence of the rod in the hand of a father enough to redirect the child? We simply don't know from the texts themselves.

What we can get clearer about is what the rod was actually made for. In Scripture, there were **two types of rods**: a weaver's rod which was used for **measuring**, and the shepherd's rod which was used to **protect, steer and examine** the sheep. Both provide symbols of parenting which include measuring the growth and maturity of children, protection and guidance.

The rod was a sapling dug up so the base of the trunk and rootball could be carved into a heavy round based. This allowed the rod to be throw at enemies or used as a club. But the rod was also held low by the shepherd so that as sheep entered the fold the shepherd could examine them. Had they been injured? Were there signs of distress?

When God called Moses to go to the Pharaoh of Egypt and demand that he free God's people, Moses was sent with the rod of God. Because this rod could turn into a snake, could sprout leaves, could cleanse water and draw it from the rocks, it was a **symbol of God's power and authority at work through Moses.**

Weapons, badges, uniforms and insignias worn by police and soldiers are also symbols of power and authority. Their authority is derived from others but there are visible signs that they are representing a greater power. Appropriate discipline comes from parents who recognize that power and authority is derived from God. When we discipline our children, we are doing God's work of nurture, instruction and guidance.

It seems to me that too much discipline today comes from parents who are exhausted, frustrated and over-whelmed. It is an expression of fatigue rather than instruction; a release for parents instead of redirection for the kid. This is a predictable byproduct of parenting in isolation; away from extended family.

I was in the grocery not long ago and witnessed a frazzled mom with three preschoolers trying to do what she needed to do. The kids were all over the place and eventually mom broke and all three kids were left crying. Maybe she wasn't the parent of the year, but no one should have to manage three kids in the grocery all by themselves.

My prayer is that our church works to establish a better support mechanism for young parents who don't have other family to help them. Parenting is too difficult and too important to do it all yourself. When we covenant with parents in this sanctuary, we commit ourselves to be an extended faith family. Better discipline will be the byproduct of a stronger support network. The kind we see so clearly in Scripture.