

Task #3 - Discipline
The 12 Tasks of an Effective Father

One of the values of the coalition is racial and ethnic diversity, and so we have a wonderful net of color involved in the coalition. We got talking about our favorite sports. One of the black brothers who on the Steering Committee was talking about how he enjoyed golf. One of the other African American brothers on the Steering Committee said golf was not a black man's game. He said, "Tiger Woods, notwithstanding, golf is not a black man's game. Bowling, that's a black man's game because where else can you take a big, black ball and knock down ten white pins with red necks and do it over and over and over again."

Somehow I needed an entrance into the message of the day. We're doing a series on the 12 Tasks of an Effective Father. We have done Affirmation and Moral Development, and this morning we are going to do the task of Discipline. I just hope the bowling pin is not one of the instruments that you would use in discipline. But I have some other symbols that you may have seen in your growing up days, several of them actually. How many of you recognize this? (Slap) I recognize that. Actually, I recognize all of the instruments of brutality that I am about to introduce to you. At least that's what I thought they were.

How many of you recognize this gesture? (Gesture & laughter) Remember that one? I've had that one many, many times. I became more refined though and, of course, today, if you leave a mark on your kid you go to jail, so I became more refined in my own discipline of my children, and I used the famous brush. How many of you have used the famous brush or have had it used on you? Oh, yes! These are just a few instruments of discipline.

This morning I want to talk about the answer to two questions. Why do we need to discipline our children, and how can we effectively discipline our children?

You should be at Proverbs, Chapter 29, Verse 15. The first question is, why do we need to discipline our children? What do we really mean by discipline? Discipline, if you look it up in the dictionary, has a much broader concept than just punishment - teaching, correcting and punishing. In Proverbs 29, Verse 15, is the following text. "The rod of correction, in part, wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother."

Perhaps the most vivid and well-known symbol of a child disgracing his mother and his father is the Columbine shooting incident in which Eric Harrison and Dillon Clebold (sp) created such a spectacle of chaos and violence. Those two boys built a bomb in the room of Eric Harrison's. It is reported that the father of Harrison was asked, "How can you not know that they were building a bomb in his room." He said, "I've never been in the room." That's what this text is all about, "The rod of correction, in part, wisdom, but a child left to himself will disgrace his mother."

Just for fun, drop back to Verse 12, which says, "If a ruler listens to lies, all of his officials become wicked." I think we could all see that these are aphorisms, and what is an aphorism? An aphorism is something that is generally true, not always true, but something that is generally true. It is a general principle, not true in all cases, but it usually is. But, I think we can paraphrase that to say also that if a father listens to lies, all of his children will become wicked. You see the importance the Scripture has put on disciplining our kids?

Now turn to Chapter 22, Verse 15, and this is the verse we opened the series with. If you see someone around you who does not have a Bible, please let him look on with you. It says, "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child." We said that this was the mega problem that we're really trying to solve in the series. It says, "But the rod of discipline will drive this far from him."

Now turn back to Chapter 13, Verse 24. We're asking the question, why do we need to discipline our children? It says, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him." Remember we said that the rule of the Task of Affirmation was to let our children know, yes, I love you, and no, you can't have your own way. Here we have a confirmation of that principle that to discipline your children is actually an expression of no, you can't have your way, but yes, I love you, too. Look at it again, "...But he who loves him is careful to discipline him."

Let's go back to Chapter 23, Verse 13, just in case any of you think, or have been led to believe, that the rod of discipline is some sort of a metaphor, some sort of allegorical representation, some sort of a euphemistic way of saying to your children, "Don't do this, don't do that."

Look at Chapter 23, Verses 13 and 14. "Do not withhold discipline from a child. If you punish him with a rod, he will not die. Punish him with a rod to save his soul from death." And, for those of you who carry around a King James Bible, what does it say? "If you beat him with a rod," it says. Okay, that's really something for 21st Century talk. It does not say do not spank your child or you will damage his little self-esteem. You can either correct him on the front end or punish him on the back end. The idea here is that there is a need for discipline of a child, biblically, and we won't look at Hebrews 12. You will look at that in your question time. "But every child who is disciplined by his father respects his father," it says in Hebrews 12. It's an expression of our love. Now we know there are many abuses that take place in discipline, so I am going to give you some practical guidelines for that as well.

We need to discipline our children to bring foolish, self-centered, little children to turn to Jesus Christ. That's why we need discipline. What is the most effective way to discipline your children? I want to give you a principle, two errors, and several suggestions.

The question that every parent, or father, asks, "Do I spank my children? Should I spank or not? If I am too strict what will happen? What does it mean to be too strict? If I am too permissive, what will happen? What does it mean to be not strict enough?" These are all very valid questions that fathers are asking particularly today with the gender blender, the confusion of genders taking place and the demasculinization. Whew, that's a big word? Of the masculinization, ???if you will, of men. It has been a certain unintended consequence of the whole feminine movement that took place in the 70's. I didn't mean to say all that -- forget all that -- but, anyway.

Here's the big idea for this morning. This is the principle, and then I'll give you two errors and several suggestions. The principle is this. This is the big idea. Are you writing this down?

Do not allow what God prohibits, and do not prohibit what God allows. This is huge. Is it all right to say in a Christian group, a mantra? Probably not, but anyway, that's the idea. This is a huge umbrella concept that you can put over all of your thoughts about disciplining by teaching, correcting or punishing your children. That is simply to not allow what God prohibits, and do not prohibit what God allows.

Now, there are two errors we'd be making here. The first one is to allow what God prohibits. It's the problem of too little structure with our kids. When we have too little structure, we allow them to get involved in different kinds of disrespectful behavior. It's very hard to turn that ship around once it starts in that direction. The problem is, like in the exaggerated case of the Columbine shooters, a tremendous disrespect that children have for their parents when they allow things that should be prohibited.

The second error one can make is to prohibit what God will allow. This is the problem of too much structure. One is too much grace (?), overgrace (?), if you will, not enough structure. The other problem is too much structure, too much law, a legalistic environment in which kids end up hating their fathers because their fathers are overly strict and will never let them enjoy being a kid.

I ran through that pretty quickly because I want to spend some time giving you several practical suggestions to effectively discipline your children. This thing of being too legalistic has been called by Rod Cooper, one of our faculty members, a family therapist with a PH.D in counseling, a closed system. Listen to how Rod describes a closed system. He says it is performance based. The kids are kept on edge. Appearances are more important than substance. A closed system kills off communication. Children learn they need to keep secrets from their parents and be less than honest, because they know if they share, they're going to get in trouble. Their father shuts them down when they try to communicate, and they feel like they have to conform to a role rather than be their own true self.

So, the first suggestion for effectively disciplining your children is to develop in your home an open system. Rod defines an open system this way. He says, "Establish clear boundaries and rules, but then allow freedom within those rules." Here we've mentioned a couple of times that most people if they've been around any Christian teachings for any number of years has heard the famous illustration that Dr. Dobson popularized about some children playing in a playground. Some psychologists thought that having the fences around the school play yard were inhibiting the children, so the fences were removed. Do you remember what the children did? They huddled in a little mass in the center of the playground because they didn't know what the boundaries, the fences, were.

I was thinking about that this week, and I remembered being up on top of Whiteside Mountain, I was actually in your mountain home in Highlands, North Carolina. It's a beautiful hike up this mountain. You can do it with your wife and children, and everyone doesn't get too testy. Come to think of it, they got pretty testy on the way down, but, anyway, it's a nice hike up the mountain, but everyone was getting tired. If you hike across the top of this mountain, there are places where they have railings, and you can walk right up to the edge of a sheer cliff that's about 1,000 feet down to the floor of the canyon below. You can literally lean against the fence and out over the cliff and look down 1,000 feet. We did not let our kids lean out over, but we did let them walk up to the edge of the railing and look over. You can hike a bit further down Whiteside Mountain, and there is kind of a rocky formation that goes about 100 yards and tapers out, and you can't see the disappearing end of the mountain. You can go out on this and have picnics. So that's what we have done a number of times is take picnic lunches up there, and we'll picnic out there on the open rock. But now, we would not let our kids within 200 feet of where the rock formation disappears over the edge because there is no railing there. And so, this idea of boundaries for the children is good, but it's also good for the parents because of this. If you don't set clear boundaries for the children, you will not let them go as far as they can go. You will not allow them to develop as far as they could develop. Not only do the children need clear boundaries, the father needs to establish clear boundaries, because your children will only go as far as you let them. If you do not know where the boundary is, you won't let them go as far as they could. Does this make sense?

Rod also said, "Live by principles in an open system, let kids take risks, let them be themselves, let them have a sense of safety." In open systems, children feel they can talk about anything with mom and dad. What does that mean? It means that dad does not jump down junior's throat with five ideas or three applications or two little tips. He listens carefully, he doesn't jump down their throat by either giving unwanted advice or by correcting the child.

Kids in open systems don't feel like they have to play roles. C.S. Lewis and his brother, Warney, grew up. Their father, Albert, Christian writer C.W. Lewis, for those of you who don't know that, his father, Albert, had a very severe case of unrealistic expectations for his kids. So his kids retreated into a little fantasy world, and they would never think, they played a role for their dad, they would never think of telling their dad the truth.

Finally, Rod says, "These kids want to bring their friends home." This is a nice little litmus test for you. If your kids would never even think of bringing any kids into one's home, you then might want to ask the question, "Am I opening here with an open system or a closed system?"

So the first suggestion is build your house into an open system where your kids feel like they can share openly with you. The second suggestion is to require first time obedience from your children.

A pastor friend of mine told the story of how, and I think I've mentioned this before here, that often one of his parishioners will not bring a problem to him when it's what he calls a cute, little cuddly problem you can hold in the palm of your hand. They, for whatever reason, do not want to bother him or they think they can solve it themselves. So, what they do instead is they wait until it becomes a huge, big, gigantic eight-foot tall monster that wants to devour everything in its path. Then they can't handle it and bring the problem to the pastor. They say, "Here, pastor, here's a problem." "Why didn't you bring this to me when it was a cute, little cuddly problem, you know?" And that's the way it is with discipline, because if you require first-time obedience from your children, and they know that, what happens when we don't is that our children develop very defiant attitudes, and instead of being cute, little cuddly first-time offenses, they become eight-foot tall monsters. Some of you have had these experiences because you've been that eight-foot tall monster. I know that I was. I wish my parents would have required more first time obedience from me. I had an authority problem growing up. Did anyone here have an authority problem growing up?

I remember when I went off to the Army. The drill sergeant comes in, turns on the lights and starts shouting. I didn't roll over and say, "Serg, can I just have 15 more minutes? I'm not quite awake yet." He demanded first-time obedience. You really don't want to be a drill sergeant to your kids. It's in their best interest to require first-time obedience.

Punishment: Punish is not only the action, but is the attitude of your children. A man was telling me about his son who told a lie, (that tall) a little kid, and he told the first lie, at least, they had caught him in. And so, they gave him an appropriate punishment for the action. But dad noticed that the kid was still standing tall on the inside; but he was still defiant. He was not at all repentant or remorseful in his attitude even though he had been disciplined for the action. Wisely, this father continued to talk about this, continued to discipline, continued to require the child to have quiet time until he had become remorseful and apologize not only for the action, but to change his attitude as well.

That's real important, because I know that watching my own children in this area of discipline, you can tell when a kid is sorry or not. You can tell. Your wife can tell when you're sorry or not, right? This is not rocket science. You can tell. Just look at the face, and you can tell if the child is really sorry or not. If the child is not sorry, you should not stop the discipline at that point.

Self-control: Remember that discipline is for the child's benefit, not the parent's. A friend of mine has five daughters. One day his four-year old daughter bit, I mean really bit, her older sister. When my friend got home, he was livid about this and started ranting and raving. He said to this little four-year old girl, "You go in the corner, and you sit in that chair, and you're going to sit in that chair for a very long time." She said, "Daddy, do I have to for the rest of my life?" The problem was he was really disciplining for his own benefit, not for the child's at that point. He was letting off his own steam; he was not dealing with the issue. Self-control is an important part of discipline.

Positive Reinforcement: In your job, how long would you stay if the only time you heard from your boss is when you did something wrong? How long would you stay in a marriage? That's getting on touchy ground here, but, I'm not even going to go there! I'd better stick with the boss. It's the same way with our kids. We need to consciously develop a balance between correction, punishment and teaching, and also, positively reinforcing. When we actually have disciplined a child for a particular attitude or action, and they show improvement, it is important to say, "You know, son, the last time we had a problem in this area when you stole candy, you lied. Even though you've stolen candy again, I want you to know that you've been forthcoming on this." Think about what that sets up in the child's mind. "When I make mistakes, I don't have to keep secrets." It's an open system.

The final thought here for the day is Responsibility: One of the most difficult things in disciplining kids, or having an argument with your wife, for that matter, is that somehow it gets focused back on what you are doing or not doing. Do you know what I'm talking about? I hate that. One way to refocus it from what you are not doing for the child, is what you won't let the child do, "You won't let me go to my friend's house, you won't let me do a sleepover, you're making me do my chores so I can't play with my friends."

One way to overcome this is to transfer the responsibility from you to the child. For example, we had a tremendous conflict once with our daughter. She wanted to stay out later on Saturday nights. Finally, we felt she was old enough to adjust the curfew a little bit, and sure enough the next morning she couldn't get up for Sunday School. Now, this started to lead to a big conflict. We told her she couldn't go out next Saturday night because she couldn't make it to Sunday school. Now, all of a sudden it's what I'm not doing, "You're not letting me grow up, you're not letting me blah, blah, blah." What we did was instead of making it our choice, we decided to make it her choice. We said, "Okay, we'll make this into a simple rule. You can go out on Saturday nights, but you have to be up for Sunday school on Sunday morning. If you miss a particular Sunday morning, then the following Saturday night, you can't go out. Does that sound fair to you?" "Well, yeh, that does sound fair." It transferred the responsibility for choices from us to her. Do you know how many times she slept in on Sunday morning? Once. When she knew we really meant it, it never happened again.

As most teenage boys are not early risers; in fact, they don't rise at all, as you know, our son was getting into all kinds of difficulties by making the whole family late in the morning and getting tardy slips at school. If he got a certain number of tardy slips at the school where he went, he then had to stay after school and do some chores around the school for a couple of hours. So we were in this great power struggle as to who was going to win this contest. Am I literally going to drag him out? What we decided to do was to transfer the responsibility for this choice to our son and take it off our backs. We just worked it out with the school that if he were to receive six tardy slips, maybe it was three, or some number of tardy slips, he would have to stay after school for two hours and clean up trash, police the grounds, and things like that.

We said to our son, John, we are not going to argue with you anymore about getting out of bed. But, if you get up late, we're also not going to rush to get you to school on time. If you're late, you're late. It's your choice. Guess what happened? Let's just say the number of tardy slips you could get before you had two hours of detention was six. Guess how many tardy slips he had? Five! He never seemed to get that sixth one anymore. Somehow at the end of the semester, he was able to get out of bed every morning because we transferred the responsibility to him.

Men, here is why this is so important. There are many different philosophies of discipline, and there is a biblical philosophy of discipline. Within this biblical philosophy of discipline, there is a wide range of things you can do and not do. Do you spank your children? When they're young, the scriptures say, it is a good idea to spank, but when a child becomes a teenager, you know when it's time to stop spanking your children and to use other types of discipline. There are many types of discipline. There is a lot of freedom here.

The other day I heard a man give one of the most gripping, goose bump-inducing testimonies that you've all heard, stories like this of men who have gotten off the track, who have gotten involved in violence or crime, drugs, alcohol, abuse of all kinds. God has miraculously come and changed that man. When you hear that man up there giving that testimony, it sounds so exciting, so thrilling, to hear about how God has changed this sinner's life. Almost invariably you can go back in this man's life and find a father who either over or undisciplined him or wasn't there. What we need to remember, men, is that for that man to be able to stand in front of that audience, a lot of people have had to pay a very steep price. All the broken hearts, the mother's who have soaked their pillows in tears, the fathers who have had to go to the optometrist because he didn't know where the headaches were coming from, the broken children, the broken wives, so that this guy could stand up there and wow you. Just remember that. The best testimony is, "My dad loved me, and I couldn't have my own way. My father disciplined me, and I respect him. He loved me enough, he cared enough to make sure I grew into a godly man." That's the best testimony. Am I right?

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, I guess this is a tutorial on discipline this morning, but what an important task to get the effective discipline of our children down right. Lord, for those of us who have time left to be effective disciplinarians, I pray that you'd help each man sort through these thoughts. If our children are gone, and there are some regrets there, Lord, I pray you just help each of us to invest in our grandchildren and to demonstrate a changing heart and a changing spirit to our own children and that they might appreciate the changes taking place in us. I really pray that you would use these men to influence this community to raise up godly children who would be soft and light and these men themselves would be soft and light????We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen

/cjb