

# Letters to Parents. No. 4.

by Charles Finney

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*Parents should prioritize their children's moral and spiritual development by keeping them at home, providing amusement and employment, and cultivating a taste for reading and learning.*

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 6:6, Proverbs 22:6, Ephesians 6:4

**Topics:** "Parental Guidance", "Child Development"

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## Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the critical role of parental involvement in the upbringing of children, urging parents to keep their children close and under their supervision to protect them from negative influences in the neighborhood. He argues that children benefit more from adult companionship than from mingling with peers, and stresses the importance of providing a safe and engaging home environment for their amusement and education. Finney also highlights the necessity of cultivating a taste for reading and encouraging children to confide in their parents, fostering a relationship built on trust and open communication. He warns against the dangers of neglecting these responsibilities, as it can lead children to seek companionship and guidance from harmful influences outside the home.

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## Transcript

DEAR BRETHREN AND SISTERS:--

In continuing my remarks upon the subject of training children, let me say--

14. Keep them, as much as possible, with yourself, and under your own eye. Be yourself, as far as possible, the companion of your own children. There is perhaps no greater error among parents, than to suffer the children of a neighborhood to mingle with each other, without restraint, find their own sports, and employ themselves as they please. There is scarcely no neighborhood in which there are not more or less children, who have heard more or less filthy conversation, vulgar, hateful, polluting, immoral, and perhaps profane and blasphemous things; and whose minds have become deeply imbued, perhaps, with the spirit of the pit, or some other abomination, that, if left without restraint, will corrupt all the children in the neighborhood. Thus, one wicked child, if left to mingle freely with the whole neighborhood of playful, confiding, and unsuspecting children, will defile and ruin them all. Therefore, beloved, keep your children at home. Suffer no children of your neighbors to come within your yard, or upon their play ground, without your consent. And be careful not to give your consent, unless you or some responsible adult member of your family can be with them. Be sure that you do not confide in the purity of a neighbor's children, because their parents are good people, and suppose that the minister's or the deacon's children, may

safely be left to mingle with yours of course. You should remember, that the best of parents may have their children corrupted by contact with other wicked children; and you cannot be sure that they have not been. Therefore, be on your guard, or perhaps, from the children of pious parents, an influence may flow in upon your family, that will deeply corrupt and finally destroy your children.

Objection. But most parents are apt to say, we cannot give up our time to our children. We are obliged to attend to other matters. To this I reply:

That this very seldom need to be so. If parents would satisfy themselves with a competency of this world's goods, and abandon their fastidious and fashionable ways of living, they would, in almost all cases, have abundant time for companionship with their children.

Obj. 2. But again it is objected, that children need the society of each other--that the children of a neighborhood are benefitted by contact with each other--that without this contact, they are apt to be selfish, and proud, and to lack interest in others besides themselves. To this I answer:

That to be sure, children need society. They need contact with other minds. They need to be so associated with human beings, as to take an interest in them, to witness the developments of character, and to develop their own characters. But it is believed, at least by me, that children are vastly more benefitted by contact with adult minds, than with the minds of children. I mean of course, those adults whose spirit, and conversation, and conduct, are what they ought to be. And, to be sure, it ought to be contact with those who take an interest in them. The example of adults has more influence with children, than that of children with each other. And I honestly say, I would not care to have my children ever see any other children, could they be favored with the right kind of adult contact.

15. Provide means for their amusement at home. Children must have amusement. They must and will be employed. They must have a room and ground to play in. They must have means and things with which to amuse themselves. And parents can never make a more just and appropriate use of their money, than providing with it the means of amusing, employing, and educating their children. It is a vast mistake in parents, to suppose that money thrown away, or misapplied, that is expended in the purchase of hobby-horses, little carts, wagons, sleds, dolls, sets of furniture for their play houses, needles, thimbles, scissors, boards, hammers, saws, augers, and tools with which to amuse themselves, and with which to imitate the various specimens of architecture which they see around them.

It should be remembered, however, that children love variety; that they are never satisfied long with any one thing. They should not, therefore, be provided with too many things at once. For should you purchase many things at a time, you will soon find it impossible to provide novelties for them. Generally, a single novelty at a time is sufficient to amuse them. A child will find a great many things to do with a gimblet. When he has amused himself with this until it is laid aside, add a penknife. With his gimblet and knife he can peg pieces of wood together. If to these you add, after a time, a hammer, then a little saw; and thus proceed carefully, but with due attention to just what is needed for their amusement, you will render them quiet at home without occupying much of your own time.

You will find it very important to let your children have each one some place for his tools; and let it be an invariable rule, that whenever he has done using them, they are to be put everyone in its place. Let the child be made to feel, that it is of great importance that nothing should be lost or mislaid. Thus you will cultivate a habit, that will be of vast service to him through life. If he has little carts or wagons, be sure that he never leaves them out in the rain, or dew, but has them securely housed; and the reasons why tools

should not be exposed to the weather, should be made familiar to his mind. If you have but one child, he will be lonesome, unless you take a little pains, in teaching him how to amuse himself. You must play with him, take him with you when it is convenient, go into his play room or ground, show him how to use his little blocks, his little tools, his hobby-horse, and try to give his little mind a start in the direction of inventing his own amusements.

16. If you have several children, study to make them satisfied with each other's society, without feeling a disposition, either to go abroad for companions, or to invite those from abroad to come to them. They must be restrained, and kept from doing these things or they are undone. This then must be a subject of study, of prayer, of much consideration, on your part, how you may make your children love each other, be willing to stay at home, and be satisfied with their books, play things, home, and friends, without roving abroad for amusement or employment.

17. Cultivate in them a taste for reading. To this end you must read to them yourself, or employ some judicious and excellent reader to read to them. You should yourself continue, from time to time, to search out and purchase such books as will interest and edify them, from which you can read to them from time to time, such stories and things as will interest them, and make a deep and right impression on their minds. But, beloved, be sure to be judicious in the selection of books and pieces. Read nothing to them which you have not read over yourself. Consider what your children are; and ponder well what will be the natural influence of the pieces which you purpose to read or to have read to them. And in all your selections have the moral bearings of whatever you, in any way communicate to them, strongly before your mind. Be sure to let no one at any time give your children books, tell stories, read things, or sing songs, or in any way make communications to them, the moral tendency of which is injurious.

18. Encourage them in employing themselves usefully; that is--in doing whatever may be beneficial to themselves or others; in the summer in keeping a little garden--and at all times in imitating the mechanic arts--making any pieces of machinery or tools for their own use, little tables, chairs, bedsteads, and in doing, in short, whatever can contribute to the well-being of their species.

19. Make your children your confidential friends. In other words, you be the confidential friends and companions of your children. Accustom them to confide to you all their secrets and every thing that passes in their minds. On multitudes of occasions, they have thoughts, and not unfrequently you will find manifest suggestions from Satan, which, if known to you, might enable you to do them immense good. Now, if you accustom them to throw their little minds open to you, and to feel that you, in every thing sympathize with them, that they may have the most perfect confidence in you, you will naturally come to be, as you ought to be, their confident and their counsellor. But if you will not give your time to this--if you turn them off and say, O, I cannot attend to you, or if you treat them harshly, or sarcastically--if you mortify them, and treat them with unkindness--if you manifest no sympathy with and for them, after repeated attempts to get at your heart, finding themselves baffled, they will turn sadly away, and by degrees seek sympathy and counsel from others. Thus you will lose your own influence over them, and give them over to other influences, that may ruin them. How amazingly do parents err in these respects. Father--Mother--how sadly do you err--how grievously do you injure your children--nay, how almost certainly will you ruin them, if you drive them, by your own wickedness, or leave them, to seek for confidential companionship away from home.

Your brother in the bonds of the gospel,

C.G.FINNEY

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