

# The Training Corral

by J. Hampton Keathley III

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of balancing dedication, love, teaching, example, and discipline in parenting to effectively train children according to God's ways.*

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 6:7, Proverbs 13:24, Proverbs 22:6, Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21, 1 Timothy 4:11, Hebrews 13:7

**Topics:** "Parenting Skills", "Christian Discipline"

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## Description

J. Hampton Keathley III preaches about the importance of balance in parenting, focusing on the five key areas of dedication, love, teaching, example, and discipline. He emphasizes the need for a balanced combination of these elements to effectively train up a child according to God's ways. Keathley discusses how an imbalance in any of these areas can lead to negative outcomes in children, such as spoiled behavior, discouragement, rebellion, bitterness, and insecurity. The sermon highlights the significance of parental dedication to the Lord, the context of love in training, the example of our heavenly Parent, the content of teaching from God's Word, and the constraint of discipline in guiding children towards spiritual responsibility and faith.

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## Transcript

The Training Corral

(The Five Avenues God Uses)

The Need of Balance

God's training corral consists of five important areas that, when brought together, will result in a parent's ability to train up a child according to his or her way. These are dedication, love, teaching, example, and discipline. Sometimes obedience plus happiness in a child is not seen because one side of the corral is missing or because one side is emphasized to such a degree that the other sides become distorted or lost.

Some parents emphasize love to the point they become so emotional and sentimental they fail to discipline. Their attitude is, "My little girl is so sweet and cuddly I just couldn't bear to spank her." But this is self love and a failure to do that which God says is truly best for the child as we are told in Proverbs 13:24, "He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently." Failing to discipline amounts to elevating our opinion or feelings above the clear statements of Scripture.

Others push discipline to the point they regard any show of love and affection as weakness or unnecessary. By over discipline, parents may exasperate and discourage their children as Paul warns us in Ephesians 6:4, "And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; . . ." and in Colossians 3:21, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart."

Then there are those who think if they set a good example and tell their child what is right, they won't need to discipline. As will be discussed below, example is tremendously vital, but because of the nature of mankind example alone is simply not enough. Scripture presents us with the picture of balance and teaches all five sides of the corral are needed in a balanced combination. Note the results when any of these five ingredients are unbalanced or one or more is missing:

(1) Love without discipline produces spoiled children. In fact, love without discipline is not really love, it is simply permissiveness (see Prov. 23:13; 22:15; 13:24; 29:15).

(2) Discipline without love produces discouragement and rebellion and other personality problems. Among the results are a poor self-image, guilt feelings, anger, resentment, fear, feelings of 'I can't,' etc. As we saw in Ephesians 6:4, fathers are warned against discipline outside the context of love because it will result not in happy obedience but in resentment. "Provoke to anger" is the Greek *parorgizw* and means "to provoke to anger, to bring one into a deep-seated anger and resentment." Colossians 3:21 warns against the wrong kind of discipline and says, "do not exasperate your children that they may not lose heart." The Greek word for "exasperate" is *ereqizw*, "to stir up, irritate, embitter." "Lose heart" is *aqumew*, "to be without courage, to loose heart, to become spiritless, moody and sullen."

(3) Teaching and discipline without example produces bitterness, resentment, unbelief, and rebellion. Any form of leadership, to be effective, must provide an example that demonstrates reality. For a classic illustration of parents who failed with their children in this way, compare Judges 2:11-12. Note that the Lord had been "the God of their fathers," but the fathers failed to communicate the reality of God to their children who lived unrestrained lives doing that which was right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25). For the importance of example, compare also 1 Timothy 4:12 and Hebrews 13:7. More will be said on this below.

(4) Example without teaching produces vagueness, destroys authority, can create an attitude that everything is relative, and causes instability and insecurity. If children are not taught they lack in understanding and belief in the absolutes of the Word of God. It is crucial for children to understand that God is real and that He has spoken (see Deut. 6:7; Prov. 2:1ff; 3:1f; 4:1-9; 2 Tim. 3:13f). Children not only need to know what they believe, but why.

(5) Without dedication, parents inevitably neglect their stewardship and responsibility. Without personal commitment and willingness to sacrifice, none of the other sides of the corral will be effectively in place. Other things that have usurped this priority will take over and the child will be neglected.

All five sides are necessary to accomplish the goal, which is to move the child from external controls or parental conformity, to internal controls, spiritual responsibility through inward convictions, faith, and fellowship with God.

Let's take a look at the five avenues God uses:

Dedication: The Catalyst

As previously pointed out, the word "train" in Proverbs 22:6 is the Hebrew *chanak*, which could also mean "to dedicate." In fact, in all the places where this word is found in the Old Testament, this is its meaning. In each occurrence the primary idea is to inaugurate something through a service of dedication that usually involved, please note, sacrifice (Deut. 20:5 [twice], 1 Kings 8:63; and 2 Chron. 7:5). In light of this fundamental idea that lies at the root of this word, we need to recognize that while this is not the primary meaning in Proverbs 22:6, the concept of dedication in the training process cannot be overlooked without serious consequences. Because the idea of sacrifice often accompanied the use of this word, training our children surely includes parents' sacrificial commitment to their children's training and dedication to the Lord. In a society where mothers and fathers are so committed to their own self-fulfillment or reaching their so-called potential, sacrifices for their children's sake often take a back seat.

By the way, as this word was used in relation to dedication, it sometimes included a community commitment as in the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:63). Training children is primarily the responsibility of the parent, but certainly, parents need the aid of the community, especially, the community of God's people dedicated to training children according to God's standards and truth as it is found in the Bible. One of the reasons for the mess in our country is its commitment to the principles of secular humanism rather than to Scripture. We are failing as a community.

Children are gifts (a heritage) from the Lord (Ps. 127:3). As stewardships from God, children are trusts to be raised for Him and His sovereign purposes. As "the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it" (cf. Ps. 24:1 with Deut. 10:14), so our children really belong to Him as do we. Believers have been purchased from the slave block of sin by the redemptive work of Christ. We now belong to Him as His blood-bought possession. So, it is imperative for God's people to recognize this truth and dedicate both themselves and their children to the Lord. Without that recognition and commitment, parents will fail in their responsibilities in their own lives and in their role as faithful stewards of their children.

There is a passage that is particularly pertinent here. Ezekiel 16 is a parable about an adulterous woman (a picture of Israel) who became, by God's abundant mercy, the wife of Yahweh. But this wife, in spite of all God's mercies, became unfaithful through idolatrous relationships. Included in this was the sacrifice of her sons and daughters to the heathen god, Molech (Ezek. 16:20-21). But note how God refers to the children in this passage. He refers to them as "the sons and daughters whom you had borne to Me and sacrificed them to idols . . ." and "You slaughtered My children and offered them up to idols . . ." (emphasis mine). As the nation belonged to the Lord so did her children. Instead of offering their children to idols, they should have first dedicated themselves to God as a faithful wife and then their children to the Lord as well.

There is an obvious parallel in this for us today. Parents most certainly need to dedicate themselves to God (Rom. 12:1-2), and in the context and motivation of that commitment, also bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Without that, parents will inevitably, by default at least, offer their children up to the gods of materialism, secular humanism, or to the cults or the occult.

Love: The Context

Proverbs 13:24 He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.

This well-known, but often neglected proverb teaches us love provides the vital context for the training process regardless of which side of the corral is in view. It demands that everything parents do in the

training of their children must be done in an atmosphere of love. All the ingredients of the training corral need to flow from an interpersonal and intimate relationship of biblical love and caring.

The fundamental concept is this: Truth is the seed (the content for training) and Love is the soil (the context in which the training must occur).

Of all the ingredients of the training process, love is the most essential. Love is the source from which all the other aspects of training must flow. Love provides the proper atmosphere in which dedication, discipline, instruction, and example must operate. Why? Because if genuine and biblical love is present, the others will also be properly present. If they are not, then love is not really present--at least not a biblical kind of love. Because of the messed up ideas about love in our society, it is imperative that we understand the headwaters from which the river of love must flow. The fountainhead for love must be the absolutes of the Word of God and not our feelings or ideas about love, otherwise love becomes no more than soft sentimentality or permissiveness. Without a knowledge and application of the Scripture, love will lack the stamina, the direction, and character it needs to love in truth and effectively.

### The Example of our Heavenly Parent

Ephesians 5:1-2 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Our heavenly Parent provides the perfect pattern for us as earthly parents. As God loved and loves us, so we should express our love to our children as well as to one another. But how is this done? God has expressed His love by:

- (1) Salvation--He gave us His beloved Son as the sacrifice for our sin that we might have life and life abundant (John 3:16).
- (2) Instruction--He has given us the Living Word (His Son) and His written Word (the Bible) to deliver and guide our lives.
- (3) Personal Provision--As a loving Father, He watches after us, He knows our real needs even before we ask and He intimately cares for us (Matt. 6:8, 32; 7:7-11; Phil. 4:19; 1 Pet. 5:7).
- (4) Example--God expresses His love by the example of His own holy life which we are to imitate as it is revealed in Scripture (Eph. 5:1-2; 1 Pet. 1:14-15).
- (5) Discipline--God expresses His love by His loving discipline to aid in our spiritual growth and change that we might experience His goodness and righteousness (Heb. 12:5f).
- (6) Patience--As a Father who knows His children, He understands our nature and treats us accordingly in grace and mercy (Ps. 103:9-14).
- (7) Rewards--He rewards His children for faithful service in heaven (Matt. 6:1).

Let's note some lessons we can learn regarding God's example for us as our Father:

Psalms 103:8-14

8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. 9 He will not always strive with us; Nor will He keep His anger forever. 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. 13 Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. 14 For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.

(1) Though God disciplines as a Father, He is always compassionate and forgiving (verses 8-9). As God does not continue to strive with us, so fathers must learn to forgive and let it go. After parents discipline a child, they must not continue to bring up the child's failures.

(2) God doesn't treat us according to what we deserve, but in grace He deals with us according to our needs (verse 10). This doesn't mean God ignores our sin, but He disciplines us according to the purposes spelled out in Hebrews 12:5f and Proverbs 3:11, the partaking of His holiness.

(3) God's lovingkindness (steadfast love) is measured not by our behavior, but by His character (verse 11). So parents need to discipline their children from the source of godly character, i.e., out of an abiding walk with the Lord.

(4) As God treats us in grace, forgives us our sin, and is free to do so because of His work in Christ, so fathers must forgive their children because God has forgiven them in Christ (verse 12). Discipline should never be done to make a child pay for his sin for only Christ can truly pay for our sin. While discipline does teach the truth that sin has consequences (we reap what we sow), the goal in view is godliness, change from the inside out.

(5) God's understanding and patience toward us is like a father who is ever mindful of a child's humanity. He is aware of the battle His children are going through with personal temptations and weaknesses (verses 13-14).

All these acts flow from the steadfast love and concern of God. They are the product of His intimate involvement with our lives. They are personal acts of God's love as our heavenly Father. So likewise, to imitate our heavenly Parent, parents must walk in love, in mercy, in patience, and in understanding as they seek to train and nurture their children by instruction, provision, example, and discipline.

1 Peter 1:13-23

13 Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." 17 And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21 who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

22 Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, 23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.

These verses draw our attention to the source and orientation that produces pure and true love, i.e., a life lived as a sojourner with a view to the eternal realities and treasures of God. One of the reasons parents fail to care for their children lovingly and diligently is materialism. Parents can so easily become hooked, obsessed, and caught up in the day-to-day pursuit of making a living that parental responsibilities take a back seat. Because of our society's obsession with climbing the ladder of success or reaching an individual's potential, children are viewed as hindrances to our fun or ambitions. This often leads to a lack of patience and uncaring actions because, like Martha, people become harried, bitter, and distracted by the details of life (Luke 10:38).

Proverbs 10:12; 17:9; James 5:20; 1 Peter 4:8

Proverbs 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all transgressions.

Proverbs 17:9 He who covers a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.

James 5:20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.

1 Peter 4:8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.

How does love cover transgressions? By dealing with the transgressor in a loving way, a way that seeks always to do what is best for the transgressor according to God's standards rather than man's. But what does this mean?

Negatively, it cannot mean we ignore the transgression because that is not love. It is never an act of love to allow a child to pursue his own way to his or her own destruction spiritually or physically (Prov. 28:13; 27:5-6; 3:24).

Positively, it means (a) love faces the transgressor with the transgression. For children, this means instruction, rebuke and discipline (Prov. 13:24). (b) Love does not repeat the matter (Prov. 17:9). This primarily refers to spreading it to others, but it is in a context that encourages dealing with people so that sin is covered (17:9a). It can certainly include harping on a matter such as constantly reminding a child, "you are the one who always spills the milk." (c) Love forgives and forgets. Love receives and enfolds. If the sin is repeated, it is dealt with again as a new sin. If it becomes a pattern, then parents should take firm action while seeking causes and solutions, but parents should never nag a child to the point of irritation. The child may be sick and feel bad, or he may be bothered about something that needs the parent's attention, or he might simply be trying to get needed attention and love.

In this way, parents cover or remove the sin and the possibility of many more that will follow from an undisciplined life.

Proverbs 15:17; 17:1

Proverbs 15:17 Better is a dish of vegetables where love is Than a fattened ox and hatred with it.

Proverbs 17:1 Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it Than a house full of feasting with strife.

The warnings in these two verses against harsh answers and strife point us to a very important truth of Scripture. What families and children need is love and not a house full of material things. Happiness does not consist in the abundance of the things we possess. Our children and family members need our love as expressed not in gifts, but in the gift of our personal attention and care.

But just how is a parent to love? What exactly is love and just what does this mean? Let me suggest the following.

### Types of Love

In New Testament times, in addition to the term for physical love, eros, there were three key Greek words which expressed love--filos, storgh (or filostorgos), and agaph. In the family, with children in particular, all three types of love are needed.

### Storgh

The first type of love is family affection. In 2 Timothy 3:3, Paul warns that in the last days people will be characterized by a lack of family affection, astorgos (the a negative of storgh). In Romans 1, Paul lists sins which describe the moral degeneration that occurs when a society rejects the knowledge of God. One of the sins mentioned is "unloving," but this is astorgos, the absence of "family affection." In Romans 12:10, the apostle exhorts the body of Christ to show a family kind of loving care for one another. To do this Paul uses both filadelfia, "brotherly love," and filostorgos, "family affection."

We are talking here about the natural love of parents, about that which is almost instinctive, at least until a society degenerates. This week the news featured two cases of parental abuse in which one child was severely injured and another died because the fathers shook the babies so violently. Because of the spiritual and morally degenerate state of our nation today, violence like this is an everyday occurrence, but it is neither natural nor normal.

Family affection is the kind of love that says "I welcome and accept my child into my family." It is the kind of love a child deserves from the beginning. Even while the child is being formed within the mother's womb, this spontaneous and natural love should be expressed as a couple happily looks forward to the coming of this trust from God.

Unfortunately, there are some parents who do not have this early experience of love for their yet unborn child because of selfishness. They do not want to be bothered with caring for a child or they are concerned about how it will affect their career. Some think a child will interrupt their plans and ambitions and tie them down. Some look upon parenthood as a burden and responsibility that they cannot accept. As a result, these children are treated as intruders and are either resented or rejected. Feelings such as these can't be hidden. If parents have such feelings, they desperately need to be confessed and exchanged for God's perspective or viewpoint (Rom. 12:2; Ps. 127:3-5).

A child needs to be loved and welcomed by his parents at its very conception because that is the moment God loves and welcomes a child. In fact, for God, it even begins before conception because of His foreknowledge. David, in Psalm 139, describes God's deep and intimate involvement with children even before their birth (Ps. 139:13-16; cf. Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1:15), and God is our model of the kind of parenting He expects from us. Since God doesn't wait until a child is born before He becomes involved, so in the same

way, parental love according to Scripture is a love that says, "Yes! I accept you; yes, I will nurture and provide for you; yes, Lord, I welcome this child as a trust from You and dedicate myself to training this little one to know, love, and serve You." Parental love receives a child with joy and thankfulness, and acknowledges that young life as God's gift and as a stewardship from God.

## Filos

A second kind of love is philos which can be described as a rapport love. This is the kind of love that comes from obedience and good behavior which delights a parent's heart and causes a response to the child--a natural response because of the obedience and character of the child (Prov. 10:1; 15:20; 29:3, 15; 17:25).

Proverbs 10:1 A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish son is a grief to his mother.

Proverbs 17:25 A foolish son is a grief to his father, And bitterness to her who bore him.

Filos expresses our response to what we like in our children, their personalities, abilities, talents, and their personal uniqueness along with good behavior.

Of course, we are responsible to help produce such character. As we do, it produces a natural rapport or affinity and love for what we see in the child--a positive response to their abilities and to the good a child does, not as measured by others, but in accord with their level of competency. This rapport love (ϕilos), plus the family-type love (storgh), helps to promote a tripod of emotional stability-- ACCEPTANCE, BELONGINGNESS and COMPETENCE--the ABCs which children (and all of us) need. While an adult needs to get this from the truth of Scripture and his new life in Christ, children begin to develop this from their parents. In a parent's response for good behavior, a child senses approval which is essential for his mental well being and feelings of security, significance, satisfaction. The child knows and senses he is doing okay. However, one of the big responsibilities of parents is that of teaching their children how to transfer the source and sense of their Acceptance, Belongingness and Competence to God.

These two kinds of love, in themselves, are not enough, however. Children will not always be obedient, so what then? Parents need divine love, the agaph love of the New Testament which has its source in the spiritual character of the parent as produced by the Word and the Spirit. Natural, rapport-kind of love may express a parent's best interests for the child, but agaph expresses God's best interests and gives parents the capacity to love their children even when they are not so lovable, even when they are down right irritating or exasperating.

## Agaph

(1) Agaph is a Spirit-produced, Word-produced mental attitude kind of love (cf. Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22; Col. 3:14, 16, 21; Phil. 1:9f; Col. 1:9f; 1 Thess 4:9). Agaph is the capacity given by God to love the unlovable, to love when the object loved doesn't deserve it. Agaph is expressed in John 3:16 in the gift of God's Son. Even though we are sinners and deserve death, God proved His love by sending His Son to die for us (Rom. 5:8). In this we see the sacrificial and caring nature of God's love and how it reaches out to those who in no way deserve it.

From the standpoint of believers, those who, by faith, have been born into the family of God, agaph expresses how God loves us and accepts us in Jesus Christ in spite of what we are. His acceptance and commitment to deal with us as His children is never based on our performance, but on His essential

character and His freedom to love us because of the finished work of Jesus Christ. As such, when we are indifferent and grow carnal, He does not shun us or disown us, though our intimate fellowship with Him is broken. He hates our sin and rebellion, but rather than ignore or disown us, He disciplines us in love as a father his son (Heb. 12:5f). So likewise, parents need this divine character and love operating through them as an expression of God's love extended to their children.

(2) Agaph love does not accept bad behavior; it does not rejoice in unrighteousness, though it accepts the person (1 Cor. 13:6). Though the bad behavior may hinder the joy of fellowship, agaph love constantly seeks to correct the bad behavior and to replace it with God's character. Note God's commitment to this in Hebrews 12:5-11, especially verses 10-11.

God never overlooks our sin. Our sin cost Him the gift of His Son on the cross. But because we are His children and because of the finished work of Christ, He continues to show us love by seeking to conform us to His Son, i.e., to change us through His discipline, instruction, the Holy Spirit, and the human instruments He uses such as parents and fellow believers. Therefore, though parents must continue to accept a child, they must never accept his bad behavior, but seek to lovingly correct him according to the principles of the Word.

(3) Agaph stems from right thinking. It is a love that wants what is best for the child according to Scripture. Because God is love He desires the highest and best for all of His creation. God commanded Israel to love Him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. He did not give this commandment out of selfishness; He gave this commandment out of love. Looking through all creation, He knew that there is nothing higher or better to be known than Himself. To love anything or someone more than God is to settle for second best or much, much worse.

Parents who love their children with God's love will hold to this same standard. They will recognize that a child's personal relationship with God and the formation of God's character within them is the best and highest goal they can have as parents.

(4) Agaph is divine love expressed through parents that will place maximum attention and concern upon a child's spiritual needs. Even when temporal needs are involved, because love desires the best, this love enables them to be discriminating. In other words, it means to desire the best and to recognize and reject some things that are less than best. Divine love is not indiscriminate or sentimental, it is tough when it needs to be. God keeps His people from some things in order to give them other things that are better. Note this thrust regarding the things that excel over just what is good in Philippians 1:6-11.

Like our heavenly example, a loving parent will keep a child away from some things (or some things away from a child) because the parent wants the best. So it must be remembered that love has two sides. It desires the best, but to desire the best it must reject what is less than best. Love says "no" as well as "yes." And the criterion must be the absolutes of the Word of God and not our personal opinions which may be clouded by a degenerate society.

(5) Agaph is a love from the will. It is a willed mental attitude. Note the obvious application to parents and fellow believers.

God loves us because He IS love. Love is not something God only has or feels, He is love (1 John 4:16).

God's love means He wills or chooses the best and highest good for His children.

God's love is constant and unchanging because it is based on His unchanging character and wisdom. The extension of this love to mankind is not controlled by any selfish emotion or mood. God does not love us only if we function properly. The Bible tells us, "we love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). While we were yet in our sins, God loved us. But, God's love reaches out and seeks to correct and restore, even if in rebellion a person rejects that love and continues to walk away from His love.

God's love expressed through parents should touch children in the same way. Divine love in parents should flow from a changed character, from a mind and will filled with and controlled by His Word, thereby keeping a parent from being ruled by selfish emotions or moods.

God's love in a parent will provide proper motivation so parents desire only the highest good and the best for their children.

God's love will also keep parents from manifesting an attitude of rejection toward their children if they falter or rebel. Though love may show displeasure and even anger, still it will always seek ways to correct and restore. Love produced by the Spirit and the mind of Christ, never gives up, though it will show displeasure with wrong behavior and pleasure toward right behavior as God does with us (Heb. 3:10-11; 1 Cor. 11:29-32).

(6) Agaph is a sacrificial love. "For God so loved the world, that he gave . . ." (John 3:16). As divine love is a giving, sacrificing love, so agaph expressed in parents is also a giving and sacrificing love. A love that seeks only personal benefits is not divine love. Sacrificial love has many, many expressions in parenting. To be a parent is to be "a giver." One way parents give and express love to their children is by the words they speak. The great Christian writer, Andrew Murray, said:

Let father and mother lead a life marked by love to God and man; this is the atmosphere in which loving children can be trained. Let all the dealings with children be in holy love. Cross words, sharp reproof, impatient answers, are infectious. Love demands, and fears not. Self-sacrifice, time, thoughtful attention, and patient perseverance are needed to train our children aright. Let our children hear us speak of others, friends or enemies, always in a way that will show the love of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

How convicting and how important! Children learn from their parents so much about what is good, bad, helpful or degrading. The words we use with our children should be uplifting even when in rebuke.

Sacrificial love expresses itself also in time and attention. Many parents never hear what their children say because they do not take the time to listen. The same parents later wonder why their children don't listen to them. To listen to a child takes time and real attention; and giving attention and taking time often requires a sacrifice.

A child needs the close, intimate contact of a parent. The warm, affectionate hug by father or mother can mean more to a child than hundreds of toys or gifts. Parents should not hesitate to show this kind of affection from the very first moments of infancy. Even from infancy a child experiences security, strength, and stability through a father and mother's loving embrace. When I think of that father who shook his infant to death, I experience a whole gamut of emotions from extreme anger toward the dad (a term that, for him, is a contradiction) to deep sorrow and pain for that little baby. If the child had lived, after what she went through for many weeks before she was murdered, she would undoubtedly have had emotional scars that, unless healed by a great amount of love, would have lasted for life.

A good friend of ours, who was an elementary school teacher until just a few years ago, told us how through her years of teaching she'd noticed a dramatic increase in the number of students who were starved for affection and love. Some would just cling to this teacher, and she could tell they were not receiving what they longed for at home.

(7) Agaph is grace oriented (not judgmental). God made each of us and each of us is unique. God does not judge us by comparing us with someone else. Speaking from the standpoint of our talents, abilities and capacities, God accepts us and loves us for who we are, though He ever seeks to change our behavior and spiritual character and to use what we have for His glory and to the best of the ability He has given us. We must remember when training our children that it is He who gives us and our children our talents and abilities.

God's way of loving us should be remembered when parenting children. If a parent compares one child with another, they are setting up a completely wrong standard of behavior. Comparisons indirectly condemn a child and destroy his sense of individuality and significance as God designed him. It may also cause a child to develop a spirit of competition based on man's standards of success rather than God's. In addition, it causes a child to get his eyes on others.

Parents, it can be said, are the ones who instill in their children the personal motivation for success or failure, plus the right motivation for success or failure. Parents have power to help children experience feelings of failure or inadequacy, of never being able to accomplish anything worthwhile, or just the opposite. This is a huge responsibility. To avoid error in this matter it is important that parents help a child find their Acceptance, Belongingness and Competence in the Lord, and find and fulfill that special talent or unique ability that God has given the child, "to train up a child in accordance to his (unique) way."

God measures a person's success in terms of whether or not he does what God asks him to do. "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25:21). If we limit the definition of success to mean simply the attainment of applause, trophies, man's approval, status, or certain income brackets, we fail to understand what God wants in our lives. God can bless us with these things, but they are not the proof of true success.

The success of Jesus was in His obedience to the mission of the Father--and that meant public abuse and ignominious death by crucifixion in order to make atonement for sin. Jesus said His joy came from doing the will of Him who had sent Him. According to contemporary standards of success, Jesus was a failure. He had no money. He had no political status or rank in the community. He earned no medals or trophies. He was, in fact, despised, rejected by men, and even deserted by His friends. But the Bible tells us God has exalted His Son, having raised Him from the dead and given Him all authority in heaven and on earth.

Only when these qualities of love exist, will we be effective as parents. In fact, they will have a tremendous impact upon the other aspects of our training corral. Love must form the context for the other sides of the training corral.

#### Teaching: The Content

A child may see our example, experience our love and dedication, and even experience loving discipline, but it is the knowledge of God's Word, sharper than a two-edged sword, and the knowledge of God presented on his level that cements it all together into personal conviction and faith. Like sand and water mixed together in proper proportion hardens to give a solid foundation, so it is instruction in God's truth

that cements all the other ingredients so the child is able to stand on the firm foundation of Christ as his or her foundation for life. A number of passages focus our attention on the importance of teaching God's Word to our children and instruct us on this vital need in the home and church.

2 Tim. 3:14-15

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

While the focus here includes parental instruction in the home, we dare not miss the context that leads to verses 14-15. Due to the destructive influences apostasy can have on the home and the ability of parents to train up their children in the things of Christ, 2 Timothy 3 could easily be titled, The Apostasy of the Last Days and the Perils of Parenting.

Chapter 3 verses 1-9 detail the extreme difficulties of these last days. Then chapter 3 verses 10-17 describe the defenses we need for such hard times. Verses 10-14 called Timothy's attention to the influence of the spiritual leadership and the example he had observe. This draws our attention again to the vital issue of the model parents and church leaders need to provide in order to counter the negative influences of a godless society. Note the areas of example Paul called attention to in verses 10-11: teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and suffering--all of which simply reinforced the teaching given by Paul. This will be brought out powerfully in verse 14. In contrast to a world that is plunging deeper and deeper into the cesspool of deception and darkness (vs. 13), Timothy is called upon to stand in what he had learned and become convinced of. But an important key here is found in the words, "knowing from whom you have learned them."

First, note an important distinction: what Timothy had learned points to the content, the doctrinal truth of the Word of God. Convinced of points to the issue of conviction. The difference is that what we "learn" may simply be the doctrine we hold to, while being convinced of that truth is what holds us in its grip and directs and impacts our lives!

Second, the words, "knowing from whom you have learned them," directed his attention to the proof of the pudding--two dynamic examples of the power of the Word in the transformed life of the Apostle Paul and also in the lives of Timothy's mother and grandmother (cf. 2 Tim. 1:5). So Timothy is immediately reminded of his childhood where he first learned the sacred writings, the Old Testament Scripture (vs. 15).

In the face of the ever increasing opposition (vss. 1-13) the apostle pointed Timothy (and us) to the Scriptures as the Christian's great bulwark or defense against the inroads of apostasy and a decaying society. In sharp contrast to the opposition of the world and its deceit, Timothy (and so all parents) needed to continue (literally to "abide") in the inspired Scripture.

We see the importance of a Bible-based home environment and the impact it had on Timothy, and so also on the lives of our children. Timothy's training in the Scripture began "from childhood." This is *brefos*, which means "baby, infant" and points us to the need and value of very early instruction in the Scripture. It is important to note again that as important as it is to be godly examples to our children, it is the Scripture and its truth about Christ Jesus that leads to salvation in all its aspects--past, present, and future.

A number of Old Testament passages instruct us on the parental necessity of teaching our children the truth of the Bible (cf. Deut. 4:9, 11; 6:7-9; 11:19-20; Ps. 71:17; 78:5-7). Indeed, Israel's ability to dwell in the land of promise that they might prosper and remain there generation after generation was dependent on obedience to the command to effectively teach their children the truth of God's Word. We will only focus on two of these passages, Deuteronomy 6:7-9 and Psalm 78:5-7.

#### Deuteronomy 6:7-9

. . . 7 and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8 And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The primary command here is, "you shall teach them diligently to your sons." A careful study of verses 7-9, however describe several important elements needed in this responsibility:

(1) Diligently and Incisively. In this passage, God is calling parents to be diligent, precise, and accurate in this responsibility. The verb "teach" is the Hebrew shanan, "to whet, sharpen," but in the intensive piel stem as used here it means, "to communicate or teach the words or God's truth incisively, that is, in a clear and precise way."<sup>14</sup> The objective is that God's truth may penetrate and make a solid impression on the children. But of course, parents can't be very precise and teach in a manner that is penetrating if they do not know the Word themselves. In our humanistic, man-centered world, the task becomes even more serious and requires a great deal of diligence on the part of parents to truly know the Scripture, both the what and the why.

I once heard an astounding statistic. It indicated that 80 percent of the college-bound students who profess to be Christians leave for school and return home no longer believing in Christ. One of the reasons is this: when a student sits in class and hears the professor discredit the Bible, the student doesn't have a defense and is easily deceived into believing the Bible is no longer credible. This happens too often because Christians know what they believe, but not why they believe it.

In my experience, there is no book that is criticized and attacked more than the Bible. Many intelligent scholars have written books that attempt to discredit the authority of the Bible. This is one of Satan's goals: to get man to doubt the Word of God.<sup>15</sup>

There is plenty of evidence against these attacks and both parents and churches need to do a better and more accurate job of equipping their children.

(2) Repeatedly and Naturally. That parental instruction is to be done repeatedly and in the natural everyday aspect of the home is evident in the command to talk about God's Word as the family sits in the house, walks by the way, and in the daily routines of the home, when lying down and rising up (vs. 7). This certainly includes formal times of instruction when the family is gathered to pray together and study the Word, but the focus here shows it must go beyond this. What is the home but the laboratory of life? It's the place where what we really are, where what's going on in our lives, our ups and downs, become pretty evident. So the home is a perfect place for the communication of truth in the various scenarios that occur daily in the life of a family. We can call these times opportunities for 'OJT' (on-the-job training). Such opportunities are often the best time for instruction because the issue or problem being faced at a particular moment is on the child's mind. When a child displays disrespect, or fear, or selfishness, or

worry, the parent can then introduce some aspect of God's truth as it is pertinent to the situation to give comfort, strength, conviction, or whatever is needed. The same applies for good behavior that delights not only the parent but the heart of God. Swindoll writes:

In her bestseller, *What is a Family?*, Edith Schaeffer devotes her longest chapter to the idea that a family is a perpetual relay of truth. A place where principles are hammered and honed on the anvil of everyday living. Where character traits are sculptured under the watchful eyes of moms and dads. Where steel-strong fibers are woven into the fabric of inner constitution.<sup>16</sup>

Today many families have lost the ability to communicate. They don't even eat their meals together, and when they do, there is very little conversation and rarely about spiritual things. This passage is saying, find time to sit down together as a family to read the Word, talk about the Word, and just get acquainted as a family. Parents need to make the time to discuss spiritual issues and relate life to the truth of God's Word.

(3) Personally. The commands to tie them and write them were taken literally and legalistically by some later Jewish readers. However, the commands are symbolically stressing the need for the reality of God's Word in the lives of the parents as models of God's truth, as well as the need just mentioned for continual teaching of the Law or truth of God.

Since in Exodus 13:9-16 the consecration of the firstborn is said to be "like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the LORD is to be on your lips" (Exod 13:9), it would seem that here also (vv. 8-9) the tying of these words as symbols on their hands and binding them on their foreheads and writing them on their doorframes and gateposts should be taken metaphorically or spiritually rather than physically. The symbols tied on the hands and forehead (phylacteries) and others placed on doorposts and gates drew attention to the injunctions in vv. 5-7 immediately preceding.<sup>17</sup>

Psalm 78:1-8

1 A Maskil of Asaph. Listen, O my people, to my instruction; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. 2 I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, 3 Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. 4 We will not conceal them from their children, But tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done.

5 For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should teach them to their children, 6 That the generation to come might know, [even] the children [yet] to be born, [That] they may arise and tell [them] to their children, 7 That they should put their confidence in God, And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments, 8 And not be like their fathers, A stubborn and rebellious generation, A generation that did not prepare its heart, And whose spirit was not faithful to God.

These verses naturally divide into two sections.

(1) There is the invitation or call to hear God's instruction, His revelation (vss. 1-4). In this there is (a) the mandate to arouse the attention of God's people to hear God's truth (vs. 1); (b) the method, using parables and dark sayings (vs. 2); (c) the motivation, the tradition heard and known from their fathers (vs. 3); and (d) the mission, the communication of the mighty acts of God to the generations to come (vs. 4).

(2) There is the intention or aim expressed to hear and tell of God's revelation (vss. 5-8). In this there is (a) the provision of God's testimony, His inspired revelation to His people (vs. 5a-b); (b) the procedure for

communicating this testimony, teaching by parents and grandparents (vss. 5c-6); and the purposes for communicating God's testimony to our children (vss. 7-8). The first purpose is to communicate God's truth from generation to generation (vs. 6). The second purpose is that the children might learn to put their confidence in God and never forget his mighty works. And the third purpose is that they should keep His commandments and not be like their fathers who failed to do so (vss. 7b-8).

At the heart of this entire section is the vital parental responsibility to carefully hear God's Word, and out of the reality and impact of God's truth in the parent's life to then carefully teach it to their children.

Example: The Confirmation, Proof

"Don't do what I do. Just do what I say" is obviously a colossal contradiction. Children naturally imitate their parents who are their heroes. Children follow the lead of their parents. Normally, no one spends as much time with a child, especially in the critical early years, as do the parents. As such, the parents become either a very effective or defective audio visual aid. By their very nature and because of the important role mom and dad have, children will imitate their parents. For this reason, the Apostle Paul applied this principle to believers in Ephesians 5:1 when he said, "Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children." Children will naturally do what a parent does, think like they think, and act like they act. They will mirror mom's and dad's actions and pick up on their example whether good or bad. What we are, do, and say becomes extremely important to what we wish to communicate and teach our children.

This means a child's ideas, concepts, and feelings about God first come from his concepts, ideas, and feeling about his parents. If his parents are just, loving, kind, understanding, patient, disciplined, and controlled rather than over indulgent, undisciplined, complaining, and critical, the child will tend to be the same. Children who live with and around criticism and complaining learn to be critical and to complain. The following poem by Edgar A. Guest captures the concept nicely:

There are little eyes upon you,  
And they're watching night and day  
There are little ears that listen  
To every word you say.  
There are little hands all eager  
To do the things you do;  
And a little boy who's dreaming  
Of the day he'll be like you.  
You're the little fellow's idol,  
You're the wisest of the wise;  
In his little mind, about you  
No suspicions ever rise.

He believes in you devoutly,  
Holds that all you say and do  
He will say and do in your way  
When he's grown up just like you.  
There's a wide-eyed little fellow  
Who believes you're always right;  
And his ears are always open  
As he watches day and night.  
You are setting an example  
Every day in all you do,  
For the little boy who's waiting  
To grow up to be like you.

It is reported that Abraham Lincoln, who was known for his faith, said that for a man to train up a child in the way he/she should go, he must walk that way himself. This important truth is reinforced by the following statistics:

Several years ago the Christian Life and Faith magazine presented some unusual facts about two families. In 1677 an immoral man married a very licentious woman. Nineteen hundred descendants came from the generations begun by that union. Of these, 771 were criminals, 250 were arrested for various offenses, 60 were thieves, and 39 were convicted for murder. Forty of the women were known to have venereal disease. These people spent a combined total of 1300 years behind bars and cost the State of New York nearly 3 million dollars.

The other family was the Edwards family. The third generation included Jonathan Edwards who was the great New England revival preacher and who became president of Princeton University. Of the 1,344 descendants, many were college presidents and professors. One hundred eighty-six became ministers of the gospel, and many others were active in their churches. Eighty-six were state senators, three were Congressmen, 30 judges, and one became Vice President of the United States. No reference was made of anyone spending time in jail or in the poorhouse.

Not all children of good parents become useful citizens, nor do all the offspring of wicked people turn out bad. Yet the possibility of a child getting the right start in life is enhanced if he comes from a home where love prevails, the Bible is taught, and prayer is offered.

Father, Mother, when you live for the Lord, you provide a strong incentive for your children to choose the Christian way of life. Parental example is extremely powerful -- either for good or for evil.<sup>18</sup>

The principle of being a good example, one that backs up words with reality, is so important that we find it mentioned and repeated in several passages that deal with leadership because what a leader is (and the

same obviously applies to parents) speaks so loudly that it either supports or refutes what he says. Note the following passages and how they reinforce this important side to the training corral:

(1) To encourage young Timothy regarding his leadership responsibilities, Paul wrote, "Prescribe and teach these things. Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:11-12).

(2) To the church as a whole, Peter wrote, "For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Pet. 2:15).

(3) To elders Peter wrote, "shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock" (emphasis mine) (1 Pet. 1:2-3).

(4) To encourage the Hebrew Christians to persevere rather than return to Judaism under the pressure of persecution, the author of Hebrews wrote, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith" (Heb. 13:7).

The obvious truth is that doing what is right (right living) is usually an evidence of right thinking, believing, and being. As the proof of the pudding is in the eating, so the proof of a parent's faith or the condition of his/her faith is in the consistency of his/her walk that manifests the character of Christ.

2 Chronicles 17:3-4 And the Lord was with Jehoshaphat because he followed the example of his father David's earlier days and did not seek the Baals, 4 but sought the God of his father, followed His commandments, and did not act as Israel did.

There are two Old Testament passages where Moses drives home this truth most emphatically.

Deuteronomy 4:1-9. Verses 1-8 stress the need of Israel's obedience to the Word of God. This would not only allow the nation to possess and enjoy the blessings of the Land, but it would enable them to be a testimony, an example, to the surrounding nations of the reality of Yahweh, the God of Israel. But for this to take place, year after year, the parents must be able to communicate the reality of Yahweh to their sons and grandsons. But of course, vital to that was the reality of this in the lives of the parents. The word "only" in verse 9 is a restrictive particle which narrows the instruction to the most essential element, "Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen . . . but make them known to your sons and your grandsons." The reality of whether or not a parent will even try to teach their children, along with the success of their teaching, depends on the reality of the parent's own walk with the Lord. Once in the land, if they were not careful about their own walk with the Lord, it would be easy to become occupied with the blessings rather than the Blessor, placing material things before their Lord. In keeping with this focus, we again turn to Deuteronomy 6 and the warning of verses 1-19.

Deuteronomy 6:1-19. This passage shows us something more of what a parent must possess and guard in his or her own heart and soul in order to effectively communicate the reality of the Lord to children from generation to generation. Verses 1-3 lay stress on knowing and obeying the commandments of God in general. Verses 4-19 then point parents to a number of specific responsibilities needed to ensure the perpetuation of their faith. Fundamental to this is having a true concept of God, of knowing the Lord, the

one and only true God (vs. 4). Such knowledge of God should naturally lead to complete devotion to Him because of who the true God is (vss. 5-6). With this atmosphere as the context in which children are raised, careful and incisive teaching is to follow in the everyday affairs of the home, formally and informally (vss. 7-9). But as in Deuteronomy 4:9, this is followed by the warning for parents to watch themselves against the many temptations that they would face in the world (vss. 10-25). The central issue is the reality of God in the life of the parents--being godly examples. Godly reality, then, becomes a part of the child's life and environment in contrast to mere religious hypocrisy. This means children hear and see a proper concept of God's person in contrast to the warped ideas of the world and its various forms of idolatry. Children can then learn of God's way of salvation and sanctification, God's values and priorities, and on the list goes.

Let's say you carefully teach your child about the essence of God, that God is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, righteous, just, good, love, grace, mercy, and veracity. You include studies on the names of God like El Shaddai, God is Almighty who supplies and nourishes; El Elyon, the One who is sovereign and in control of the affairs of life; Yahweh-Yireh, the Lord will provide; He sees our needs and is there for us in times of trouble. Then trouble comes into your family in some form and your children see you come unglued and go to pieces. They witness worry, bitterness, resentment, complaining, and questioning God's goodness. In teaching your child about God you may have even used some kind of visual aid like a flannel graph or charts to focus on the various aspect of God's essence, but by your response to the problems of life, you have become a visual aid in living color that contradicted everything you taught your child.

Perhaps you teach your child the truth of Romans 13 regarding the need to obey and respect governmental authority because government is ordained by God to promote law and order and peace. But then, you go flying down the highway way over the speed limit, or you refuse to wear your seat belt. Perhaps you are stopped by a policeman and receive a ticket. How do you respond? Do you swear under your breath after the officer is gone, or do you thank the officer for stopping you and express your appreciation for what they are doing.

What about our attitudes and behavior toward the opposite sex or toward our spouse in the home? Do we display respect and love, and do we fulfill the roles of husbands and wives as set forth in Scripture?

What about values and priorities? A parent's commitment to Bible study, prayer in the home and at church, and to the children or the family versus other pursuits like work, recreation, pleasure, possessions, and social involvement speak volumes about what is important to a parent and thus, about what should be important to a child, at least in his or her mind.

Let's face it. Parents have no choice in the training of their children. The only choice they have is in how they train and what they instill in their children's minds and hearts.

#### Discipline: The Constraint

How do parents, then, lovingly use their God given authority to bring about godly controls in their children when faced with disobedience and rebellion? The answer, of course, is discipline. But what is meant by discipline? Many think of discipline as some form of punishment, but this is an inadequate and a wrong perspective.

Discipline is the application of outside controls as a preventive measure before wrong is done and as a corrective measure after wrong is done. Discipline is two sided. One side is more positive and preventive and the other side is more negative and corrective. The preventive side includes loving and personal instruction in the basic principles of life along with the establishment of rules, regulations, and restrictions to aid and promote happy obedience. Why is this done? To control and stop bad behavior before it happens.

### Positive/Preventive Discipline

Positive preventive discipline is accomplished by words and deeds, instruction backed up by example. It involves the formal and informal communication of biblical truth concerning God, man, sin, salvation, fellowship with God, ministry, and loving others, i.e., the basics of the Word including the evidences that support the claims of Christianity. There are some wonderful tools for doing this like the Moody Science films. The goal, of course, is to enable the child to understand that family rules are not just arbitrary restrictions on having fun, but the application of biblical concepts as the direction of a loving God who has everyone's best interest at heart including the child's.

On the positive side, Psalm 100:2 tells us, "Serve the Lord with gladness." Colossians 1:11-12 teaches that Christians who are truly growing in the knowledge of God's will (verse 9) should be characterized by "joyously giving thanks." On the negative side, bad attitudes demonstrated by grumbling and complaining are sinful and need to be changed (cf. Phil. 2:14-15; 1 Cor. 10:10; 1 Pet. 4:9). Obviously, then, parents should always work on attitudes along with behavior. God wants us all to obey out of the right reasons. So ultimately, this should be our goal, not just obedience, but happy obedience.

All rules of preventative discipline should be based on biblical truth as it reflects two great commands of Scripture (Matt. 22:34-40; 7:12). Some actions may be neither good nor bad in themselves. In fact, they may at first seem amoral. They may be neither appropriate nor inappropriate depending on the time, place and people involved. So what we need are basic, general rules based on eternal truths which, when applied, make an action appropriate or inappropriate, good or bad depending on the circumstances. This is not the same as situation ethics, but the application of absolute truth from the standpoint of the principles of love, profitability, edification, and self-control (cf. Rom. 14 and 1 Cor. 3-10). Is it profitable, that is, will it edify or harm another? Does it demonstrate concern and care for another as I would like to be cared for (Matt. 7:12)? In this way, we have a minimum of rules based on the absolutes of God's Word with a maximum of application.

Think about the Ten Commandments for a moment. God gave ten, not three hundred. This gives us a precedent. It is wise to have a minimum of rules based on fundamental truths with a maximum of application. The Ten Commandments teach us how to love God and man. When asked which of the commandments was the most important, the Savior reduced them to two essentials, loving God and loving one's neighbor as one's self. Why? Because these two summarize the heart of Scripture. As a result, the rest of the Law given to Israel pointed them to how those ten were to be applied.

The essential elements, then, are not the rules, but the basics behind the rules--love for God and love for others. These fundamental principles should form the foundation for all discipline, preventive or corrective. This keeps the rules from being arbitrary, harsh, legalistic, and meaningless. If we can't demonstrate how the rule is an expression of loving and honoring God, loving and honoring others, and this includes taking care of ourselves, then the rule is probably questionable. The principles should be taught as early as

possible. Children are capable of learning a lot more and a lot earlier than we may think, though in the earlier years the principles must be reinforced with the pleasure-pain motivation.

Let's take some illustrations and add principles that might demonstrate their validity or the reasons that give understanding and can help promote happy obedience. Again, the basic principles used to reinforce the rules should communicate spiritual and moral values that express love and submission to God, concern for others (family, neighbors, etc.), personal significance as one created in God's image with purpose and meaning in life, the truth that our behavior has consequences (the laws of sowing and reaping), and other biblical truth according to the age level of the child. Remember, the rules that follow are only illustrations.

The Rule

Reason

You may play in the yard, but you cannot go into the street.

There are a lot of cars going up and down the street. The driver may not see you and could run over you. We love you and we don't want you to get run over by a car.

You may not come in the house with mud on your shoes. You must clean the

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