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STUDY

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6. Foundation Six: Raising Godly Children In Marriage

How do we raise godly children in marriage? One of the reasons God brings two people together in marriage is for the purpose of raising godly children, children who look like him. [Malachi 2:15](#) says:

Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was *seeking godly offspring*. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

But how is this accomplished? Obviously, the only perfect model of parenting is God the Father, and therefore, as we look at him and his Word, we can discern principles about raising godly children.

In Order to Raise Godly Children, Parents Must Model Godliness

In order to raise godly children, by necessity, parents must model godliness. Children often model the



children and to live a life of love. As a parent, God is loving, righteous, holy, etc., and therefore, his children will in some ways reflect his character.

Similarly, parents must be people of character if they are going to raise godly children. Children raised in a loving home, by parents with character, typically mimic the virtues demonstrated by their parents. In contrast, parents who are not around, who lack self-control in their speech or with their anger, etc., produce the same character in their children. They won't be able to cultivate righteousness in them. In fact, the hypocrisy will only lead them to rebel.

Consider how Paul challenged Timothy, the pastor of the church of Ephesus: "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" ([1 Timothy 4:16](#)). Paul told Timothy to be careful about his doctrine (what he taught) and his life (how he lived), because if he did, he would save those who listened to him. Essentially, it could be said this way, "Timothy, if what you say doesn't match your actions, you will destroy those who follow you." And it is the same for parents. Many parents destroy their children because they have a speech that doesn't match their actions. They tell their daughter, "Stop cursing" as expletives fly out of their mouth. They tell their son, "Control your anger!" as they scream at the top of their lungs. The dad tells the kids, "Stop fighting at school," though he fights with mom at home all the time. In the same way, when parents teach their children to evangelize, serve the church, or care for the poor, but never practice these, then the children likewise will not practice them as well.

Parents who don't model godliness will not be able to cultivate it in their children. And sadly for Christian parents, the consequences can be disastrous; many children fall away from God all together because of the hypocrisy seen in their homes. In order to raise godly children, parents must model godly character.

In Order to Raise Godly Children, Parents Must Train Their Children in God's Word

In order for parents to raise godly children, they must not only demonstrate godly character but also teach them Scripture. This is how God the Father develops godliness in us. [Ephesians 5:26](#) describes how Christ washes the church with the water of the Word to make her blameless and holy. Parents must do the same with their children.

Consider what the father, presumably Solomon, said to his son in [Proverbs 2:1-13](#):



from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways...

The father told his son to turn his ear to wisdom, to call out for it, to cry aloud for it, to look for it as silver and hidden treasure, and if he did, he would understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. This wisdom would enter his heart and be pleasant to him. It would protect him, guard him, and save him.

When the father calls for the son to seek after wisdom, this primarily refers to knowing and obeying God, as revealed through his Word. Fearing the Lord is called the beginning of wisdom ([Prov 9:10](#)).

Throughout the Proverbs, this father sits with his son and teaches him the importance of wisdom. He trumpets the benefits of it and seeks to train his son in its ways, so he can be protected and guarded. This is how it should be with every parent. The way they train their children in wisdom (godliness) is by emphasizing the importance of Scripture, teaching their children to memorize it, to apply it, to know and to love God. This must be the daily endeavor of every parent as they aim to raise godly children. The Word of God must be the lifeline of the home.

This is exactly what Moses commanded Israel's parents in [Deuteronomy 6:6-9](#). He said:

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Parents were called to impress the Word of God upon the hearts of their children by talking about it at home, when they went walking, when they went to bed, and when they got up. They were to tie Scriptures on their hands and their heads and to write it on the doorframes of their homes and the gates.

Parents can apply these principles very literally. They should have times of morning and nightly devotions with their kids where they read the Word of God, discuss it, and pray. They should talk about God's Word when considering their child's behavior (or other children). They should talk about God's



do this or that, parents should encourage them to pray to God and seek his wisdom. Parents who are trying to raise godly children must saturate their home with the Bible, as well as practice the truths in it.

Some may call this sheltering, but it isn't. These kids are still called to be salt and light in the world—to be a blessing to it. However, they are not called to be part of the world. They should think differently because they have a different purpose, and this all starts with a home that is saturated with God's Word.

Are you willing to saturate your home with the Word of God? It is the Word of God that trains children and equips them for all righteousness ([2 Tim 3:16-17](#)).

In Order to Raise Godly Children, Parents Must Discipline Their Children

In order to raise godly children, parents must discipline them. The word “discipline” tends to have a negative connotation but it shouldn't. It is a rich word. It means: “training to act in accordance with rules”, “activity, exercise, or regimen that develops or improves a skill”, or “punishment inflicted by way of correction or training.”¹

Since God is the ultimate Father, we must consider how God disciplines us in order to discern how we should discipline our children. [Hebrews 12:5-11](#) says this about God's discipline:

And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: ‘My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.’ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Hebrews says that every father disciplines his children (v. 7). It is mentioned as an expectation. God disciplines his children and so should every parent. God disciplines through trials and various hardships he allows Christians to go through. Their purpose is holiness (v. 10). In the same way, good parenting



as discipline, God is treating you as sons” (v. 7). The writer sees God in control of all hardship, whether that be hardship as a consequence of sin (punitive) or as a consequence of living in a world full of sin (non-punitive). Regardless, the sovereign God uses all hardship as discipline to train his children in holiness and to make them into the image of his Son (cf. [Rom 8:28-29](#)).

Non-Punitive Disciplines

Similarly, parents must initiate various non-punitive disciplines that will encourage holiness in their children. For example, my parents made me participate in sports when I was young, not only to gain broad experiences, but to develop character traits such as patience, team work, humility, etc. At other times, my mom would tell me I could not go outside until I had read a book for an hour. This discipline was implemented in order to help me learn to enjoy reading. In addition, I was given chores to learn how to work hard, to manage time, and to learn the value of a dollar, as I was given allowance. On other occasions, I would have to finish an endeavor I started, but did not like, simply to teach me endurance—to not quit when things were difficult.

In the same way, God brings (or allows) non-punitive disciplines in our lives not because we’re in sin but for training, in order to make us holier. Sometimes, he puts us in waiting seasons to develop patience. Sometimes, he brings us through hardship, like Job, to develop perseverance and to know God in a more intimate way. The hardship isn’t necessarily a consequence of sin; it is allowed in order to foster faith in God and godly character traits. Similarly, as parents, we must stretch our children through various disciplines to help them grow.

Parents should wisely introduce various forms of discipline to their children for the sake of character development. These may include disciplines like learning to play an instrument, playing a sport, completing chores, working a job, reading, etc. It should include disciplines such as limited time playing video games, being on the Internet, watching TV and movies, staying up late, and even eating healthy. As a pastor working with college students, I have watched students fail out of school because they played video games all day or watched movies all night. Discipline in these areas of life starts in the home. Parents who do not implement these types of disciplines may raise children with no discipline at all, which will eventually result in negative consequences in their lives.

Punitive Disciplines

As far as punitive discipline, the writer of Hebrews shares two techniques that God uses in [Hebrews 12:6](#). These techniques are more clearly seen in the KJV. It says, “My son, despise not thou the chastening of



right. If rebuke does not work, God then brings punishment. He scourges believers, which refers to a whipping. A believer who is in sin will experience many difficulties brought for the purpose of correction. For example, when Jonah rebelled against God's words, the Lord brought a storm into his life that almost killed him. In [1 Corinthians 11](#), the members of the Corinthian church experienced sickness, weariness, and even death for taking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner (v. 29-31).

Similarly, parents must develop a system of discipline that increases in severity, which includes corrective communication and punishment, to foster holiness in the life of their child. Scripture teaches that "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him" ([Prov 22:15](#)). Foolishness in the Bible refers to disobedience to God and his Word. [Psalm 14:1](#) says, "The fool says in his heart there is no God." Parents must understand that foolishness is bound up in the hearts of their children. Children are intrinsically wired to disobey God and his established authorities—they want their own way. If not disciplined, children will live a life of rebellion against God and all authority.

[Proverbs 23:14](#) says this about disciplining a child: "Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death." What type of death is the Proverb talking about? No doubt, this refers to a potential early physical death, but it also refers to spiritual death—separation from God (cf. [Rom 6:23](#)). Disciplining our children prepares them to live a long life (cf. [Ex 20:12](#)) and to know and follow God, as they eventually accept the gospel and submit to Christ's Lordship. An undisciplined child will be prone to continue in foolishness and never follow Christ. Discipline is not only important for a child's earthly life but for his eternal destiny.

Wise parents realize this and work hard to "drive" foolishness far from their children through measured discipline ([Prov 22:15](#)). Parents should discipline their children, not because they have been inconvenienced or embarrassed, but because their children have disobeyed and dishonored God. They discipline them out of love. [Proverbs 13:24](#) says, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him." This endeavor takes hard work and perseverance. Because of its importance, it deserves strategic planning and a partnership between both parents.

The two aspects of punitive discipline God uses on us, as described in Hebrews, are communication (rebuke) and punishment (scourges). The first step in punitive discipline should be consistent, corrective communication. Parents must expose what the child did wrong, why it was wrong, and warn of



The secret to discipline is a healthy balance between corrective communication and punishment. When children are young, there should be less reasoning and more punishment so that they learn obedience. As they grow older, there should be more communication and less punishment. If parents don't teach them obedience through punishment when they are young, they won't respond to communication and reasoning when they are old. There is a small window for parents to ingrain obedience in children while they are young ([Prov 22:6](#)); when they are older, it will be much harder.

What types of punishment should parents use?

In Proverbs, we continually see the word "rod" used in reference to disciplining children, as previously quoted. Let's listen to a few of these verses again.

Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.

[Proverbs 23:13-14](#)

He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.

[Proverbs 13:24](#)

The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother.

[Proverbs 29:15](#)

When the writers of Proverbs use the word "rod", it seems to primarily refer to forms of corporal punishment. There are several evidences for this. First, corporal punishment was a typical discipline in ancient societies including that of Israel (cf. [Deut 25:3](#)). Second, the fact that it is repeated so many times in the Proverbs makes it unlikely for the rod to be merely symbolic. Third, some verses clearly refer to corporal punishment. For example, [Proverbs 23:14](#) says, "If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol" (ESV).

Due to the deplorable amount of child abuse happening in societies, spankings are commonly looked down upon and even considered barbaric. However, physical abuse, or any kind of abuse for that matter, was never God's plan for training children. God teaches the rod should be an act of love (

[Prov 13:24](#)). It is loving parents seeking to save their children from death ([Prov 13:24](#)).



1. Discipline should never be given in anger.

Scripture says, “man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” ([James 1:20](#)). When parents yell at their children or spank them in anger, they are abusing them. It will not produce the righteous life that God desires in children. Parents should be calm and measured when disciplining a child.

2. Discipline should be equal to the sin.

In the Mosaic law, civil discipline had to be equal to the crime; it was to be “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” ([Ex 21:24](#)). This is also true in disciplining children. Parents must wisely consider the consequences for each infraction. If discipline is unfair, it may result in rebellion.

In addition, when deciding the punishment, parents must discern the difference between childishness and foolishness. Small children are going to spill milk; that is childishness. But when they spill the milk, were they doing it to be rebellious? Foolishness should be punished, and childishness should be corrected.

3. Discipline should be consistent.

When a parent continually tells their children, “If you do this, then I will discipline you when we get home,” and the parent does nothing, then children learn that the parent doesn’t always mean what he or she says, and therefore, they don’t always have to obey. Also, if the parent doesn’t discipline the child for turning on the TV when they should be sleeping, but then does the next time, it confuses the child. Discipline must be consistent. In addition, the giving of discipline should also be consistent between the parents. Parents must present a unified front; otherwise, it will promote manipulation from the child and cause discord within the marriage.

4. Discipline should create intimacy instead of distance.

When a child is being disobedient to his parent, distance is created in the relationship. However, when the parent disciplines the child, it shouldn’t create a greater distance—it should restore intimacy. This is how God’s discipline functions with us. Sin separates us from God, but his discipline is meant to draw us back into intimacy. This is another reason why parents shouldn’t discipline when angry or give unfair disciplines; it further alienates the child instead of drawing him closer.



temptation. When children sin, parents must consistently punish them in order to train them to honor God.

Parents must implement both punitive and non-punitive disciplines in order to promote holiness in their children. Non-punitive disciplines are as simple as reading an hour a day, learning to play an instrument, playing a sport, having limited time on electronics, eating healthy, etc. These will promote virtues like teamwork, perseverance, self-control, and moderation which will bless them for the rest of their lives.

What types of discipline will you implement in the lives of your children to promote godly character in them?

In Order to Raise Godly Children, Parents Must Avoid Provoking Their Children to Anger

As we consider discipline, it is very important for parents to not discipline children in a way that provokes rebellion. [Colossians 3:21](#) says, “Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.” In this text, Paul spoke to fathers and commanded them to not embitter their children lest they become discouraged or “lose heart,” as translated in the NASB. This is not simply referring to a child getting upset, for this is inevitable. It has to do with a deep-rooted, settled anger that stays in this child and affects his character for the rest of his life. This anger will result in rebellion both towards the parents and towards God, and may keep them from ever becoming the righteous seed that God desires.

The word “father” can also be translated “parents” (cf. [Hebrews 11:23](#)). This sin is committed not only by fathers; it is also committed by mothers. It is possible for parents to embitter their children to the point where they rebel.

How do parents embitter their children? This can happen in many ways.

1. Parents embitter their children by not disciplining them.

This is one of the quickest ways to develop bitterness in children. Spoiled children are thankless and bitter. Because they get their way all the time, they are bitter whenever any authority does not give them what they want or when life becomes difficult. As mentioned, [Proverbs 22:15](#) says, “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him” ([Prov. 22:15](#)). Parents embitter



Abuse, either verbally or physically, sows seeds of anger or hatred in the hearts of children. The anger sown is hard to remove. Many times these children abuse others because of the anger in them.

However, we see this not only as a result of abuse but improper discipline as well. When a parent unwisely uses his anger, it trains his child to unwisely use his also. For example, the parent becomes angry and curses at him, criticizes him, or even harshly disciplines him. Even if the punishment is just, the improper use of anger trains the child. The child learns, "When I am angry it is OK to curse; it is OK to hit somebody; it is OK to go crazy." He never learns how to properly control his anger and, therefore, struggles with anger throughout his life.

3. Parents embitter their children by neglecting them.

Many children grow bitter because their parents are never around. Consequently, they lack love and affection causing them to grow bitter. Some parents neglect their children for work. They work long hours in order to achieve a certain amount of success, and this keeps them away from home. Ultimately, this hurts children both emotionally and spiritually.

Sadly, in our society many parents neglect their children by sending them away to extensive education or extracurricular programs. Many times these programs are meant to compensate for their lack of presence. It is not God's will for teachers, coaches, or babysitters to raise children. That is why he gave children to the parents. Certainly, these people should play a role, but it is important for parents to be the primary influence in the lives of their children. Parents must be careful not to neglect their children.

4. Parents embitter their children by never encouraging them and showing them affection.

We saw this in the story of Martin Luther. He had a father who never encouraged him or showed him love. Listen to what commentator William Barclay said:

*It is one of the tragic facts of religious history that Martin Luther's father was so stern to him that, all his life, Luther found it difficult to pray: 'Our Father.' The word father in his mind represented nothing but severity. The duty of the parent is discipline, but it is also encouragement. Luther himself said: 'Spare the rod and spoil the child. It is true. But beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he does well.'*²

Healthy parents not only discipline their children but also reward them. Parents reward their children when they do well and discipline them when they do wrong. Children start to learn fairness by this balanced approach.



against the father and also against Joseph. Later, they kidnapped and sold Joseph into slavery out of anger ([Gen 37](#)).

How often do siblings become embittered against one another because of unwise parenting? These children grow up disliking one another. “Mother always thought you were the prettiest!” “Dad always liked you because you were the smartest and the most athletic!” This happens all the time, as parents embitter their children by showing favoritism.

Training children is a delicate ministry and parents tend to lose balance. Some parents become permissive, leading them into anger and rebellion. Others become authoritarians, leading to the same. In our parenting, God has called us to not embitter our children. When we embitter them, we can't lead them to God, which was the very reason God gave them to us.

In Order to Raise Godly Children, Parents Must Know Their Children

Finally, in order to raise godly children, parents must know them. As with all the points, this is a reflection of how God develops godliness in us as his children. He knows us. Listen to what God said to Jeremiah when he called him to be a prophet to the nations: “Before I formed you in the womb *I knew you*, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” ([Jeremiah 1:5](#)). God knew Jeremiah intimately. Similarly, David spoke of how God knew him in [Psalm 139:1](#): “O LORD, you have *searched me and you know me*.” To search means to “examine thoroughly.”³ God had examined David thoroughly, he knew him.

Similarly, parents must know their children if they are going to raise them in godliness and lead them into God's plan for their lives. [Proverbs 22:6](#) says, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” “In the way he should go” can also be translated as “his way” or “his bend.” The Amplified Bible translates it this way: “Train up a child in the way he should go [and in keeping with his individual gift or bent], and when he is old he will not depart from it.” The word “way” comes from a Hebrew verb used of a bow launching an arrow.⁴ When a person shoots an arrow, the tension must align with the natural bend in the bow or it will break. This is also true in raising children.

Some parents damage their children by trying to train them in a way God didn't wire them. They may do



same with children. Some will be wired towards the arts, technology, or serving ministries. It is the job of parents to get to know the way God wired them, so they can encourage them in those areas.

This can be difficult for parents, especially if their child's wiring doesn't fit their expectation or what might be considered successful in society. However, we are called to train a child according to his own way—according to his own bend ([Prov 22:6](#))—not ours' or others'. Their "way" may not appeal to us, but ultimately, we are raising children for God and to fulfill his calling on their lives. Like Jeremiah, God knew them before they were in the womb ([Jer 1:5](#)). Like David, they are fearfully and wonderfully made ([Psalm 139:14](#)) and called for a specific work ([Eph 2:10](#)). It is the parent's job to help discern this work and to help the children fulfill it.

In order to know their children and the way they are wired, parents must spend quality time with them. Just like the husband and wife must spend time together to cultivate their marriage, parents should spend quality time with each child. This can become complicated as the number of children grows. Many parents maneuver this by planning weekly or monthly dates with each child. For instance, every Wednesday night will be daddy daughter date, or once a month mom and son will go to their favorite restaurant, etc. Parents must take time to be with their children, to listen to them, to study them, and to have fun with them, ultimately for the purpose of leading them in godliness.

How will you strategically make time to get to know your children so you can more effectively lead them in God's calling for their lives?

Conclusion

When God made Adam and Eve, it was his will for them to be fruitful and multiply ([Gen 1:28](#)). However, they were not just called to give birth to children, but to raise the children to be godly and to honor God with their lives (cf. [Mal 2:15](#)). And it's the same for us as parents.

How can we raise godly children?

1. In order to raise godly children, parents must model godliness.
2. In order to raise godly children, parents must train their children in God's Word.
3. In order to raise godly children, parents must discipline their children.



Raising Godly Children in Marriage Homework

Answer the questions, then discuss together.

1. What was new or stood out to you in this session? In what ways were you challenged or encouraged? Were there any points/thoughts that you did not agree with?
2. Would you agree that the most important aspect of raising godly children is the parents' consistency in modeling godliness? Why or why not? Are there areas in your life that you believe will not be a good model for your children? What about your mate? How can you address these areas to present a better model?
3. Moses commanded parents to impress the Word of God upon their own hearts and their children's ([Deut 6:6-9](#)). How are you currently trying to impress the Word of God on your heart? How will you impress the Word of God upon your children's hearts? What type of practices will you use?
4. How were you disciplined as a child (both punitive and non-punitive)? Do you think it was effective and how so? If not, why not?
5. What are your thoughts about Scripture's call for parents to use the "rod" to correct children ([Prov 22:15](#))? What types of punitive disciplines do you plan on implementing with your children? How will you implement them?
6. What types of non-punitive disciplines do you plan on implementing with your children? Write down both the discipline and the desired character traits that should come from the discipline (i.e. by giving chores and allowance it will teach the child how to handle money, hard work, etc.). It may prove helpful to brainstorm.
7. Discuss this with your mate and come to some conclusions about types of discipline both non-punitive and punitive. Share conclusions and any anticipated areas of difficulty.
8. How have you seen or experienced children who have been provoked to wrath or rebellion by their parents? How will you protect your children from this?
9. How many children do you plan to have? How will you strategically take time to get to know each child individually?



¹ “Discipline”, accessed 2/7/15. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/discipline>.

² W. Barclay, *The New Daily Study Bible: The Letters to Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 190.

³ Keathley, J. III., *The Principle of Nature (Knowing Your Child)*, accessed 2/8/15. <https://bible.org/seriespage/principle-nature-knowing-your-child>.

⁴ Keathley, J. III. *The Principle of Nature (Knowing Your Child)*, accessed 2/8/15. <https://bible.org/seriespage/principle-nature-knowing-your-child>.

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