

Godly Parenting

Training Children in the Ways of God

Duncan and Vasanti Watkinson

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By Duncan and Vasanti Watkinson

This booklet has been written to help fulfil the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations. We believe that you will benefit from studying this book by yourself, but that you will be blessed even more if you work through it with your spouse or alongwith another couple.

In the process of writing this book, we have drawn from a wide cross section of God's church. We are extremely grateful for the many insights we have received from different sources.

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1. God's passion for children

"Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him."
(**Psalm 127:3**)

God is a Father and delights in all his children, regardless of their age. His Father heart of love reaches out to all people – young and old, rich and poor, male and female. Out of this love, he enjoys blessing a husband and wife with offspring so that, as parents, they can have the privilege of demonstrating his Father heart to their children.

If a husband and wife want to reflect God's heart, both need to personally know the Father heart of God and to experience his love day by day. This will only happen when we believe in Jesus Christ because only through him is it possible to know God as our Father. (See **John 14:6**).

This is the foundation of 'godly parenting'. In addition to knowing God as our Father, we also need to learn how to "father" in the broad sense of the word. This requires a radical change of heart for most people, and it is something which only God can do. Both **Malachi 4:6** and **Luke 1:17** promise that God will *turn* the hearts of fathers towards their children. The biggest obstacle to well brought up children is parents whose hearts have not been "turned" by God.

A. God's heart for children

The Lord gives children far greater significance than most of his disciples do. Different verses in **Matthew 18** and **19** show his heart for children and how he wants us to treat them:

- 18:4** We must recognise that children start off in a better place spiritually than adults. Children already have certain Kingdom qualities like humility, simplicity and ability to forgive quickly.
- 18:5** Children should be welcomed. Don't regard them as a nuisance or intrusion. Jesus makes them equal with himself.
- 18:6** Children are easily stumbled and our words or actions can cause a child to sin. The adult's punishment is more severe so parents must be careful that they do not model or teach sinful ways.
- 18:10** Children are fully human and we should value them and treat them with respect. Explain things intelligently. Remember their angels are telling God how you're doing.
- 18:14** Share the Lord with them in a natural, relational way. God does not want any of them to be lost. Pray much for them.
- 19:14** Give time to children - don't be too busy for them

These verses are a challenge to all adults - especially parents. God’s plan is that godly marriages will produce godly children. **Malachi 2:15** says: *Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and in spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring.*

B. The importance of parenting

If they think of parenting at all, most parents are concerned about its short term consequences and whether their children are a nuisance to them or make them look bad in front of others. This was the attitude of King Hezekiah (See **2 Kings 20:12-19**) who was only looking for *peace and security in (his) lifetime.*

Perhaps the best gift parents can give their children is a secure and loving marriage. Statistics from around the world show that children brought up in a stable, two-parent home are far more likely to become mature, responsible adults.

The effect of godly parenting is felt through the generations as this example shows:

a) Max Jukes and Jonathan Edwards

This table compares the family trees of two men who lived at the same time (18th century) in the same part of America:

<i>Name:</i>	<i>Max Jukes</i>	<i>Jonathan Edwards</i>
<i>Belief:</i>	Irreligious	Christian (preacher)
<i>Married to:</i>	An ungodly girl	A godly girl
<i>Descendants</i>	1200	1400
<i>analysed:</i>		
<i>Descendants:</i>	310 died as paupers	13 college presidents
	130 criminals	100 college professors
	7 murderers	3 US senators & 1 Vice-President
	50 openly immoral women	30 judges & 100 lawyers;
		60 doctors
		75 army & navy officers
		100 preachers & missionaries
		60 authors & editors

		80 public officials
<i>Cost to state:</i>	\$ 1.25 million	Nil

Exodus 20:5 warns us that God will punish *the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation*. The effect of sin being passed down through a family is seen clearly in Max Jukes' descendants.

Thankfully the opposite is also true as the next example shows:

b) George McCluskey

You've probably never heard of George McCluskey. To my knowledge, no biographies have been written about his life. McCluskey was a man who wanted to make a shrewd investment. As he married and started a family, he decided to invest one hour in prayer. He was concerned that his kids might follow Christ and establish their own homes where Christ was honoured. After a time, he decided to expand his prayers to include not only his children, but their children and the children after them. Every day between 11am and noon, he would pray for the next three generations.

As the years went by, his two daughters committed their lives to Christ and married men who went into full time ministry. The two couples produced four girls and one boy. Each of the girls married a minister and the boy became a pastor. The first two children born to this generation were both boys. Upon graduation from high school, the two cousins chose the same college and became roommates. During their sophomore year, one of the boys decided to go into ministry as well. The other one didn't. He knew the family history and undoubtedly felt some pressure to continue the family legacy by going onto the ministry himself, but he chose not to. In a manner of speaking, this young man became the black sheep of the family. He was the first one in four generations not to go into full time Christian ministry.

He decided to pursue his interest in psychology and over the years met with success. After earning his doctorate, he wrote a book that became a best seller. He then wrote another and another, all best sellers. Eventually he started a radio program that is now heard on more than a 1000 stations each day. The black sheep's name? James Dobson - without a doubt the most influential and significant leader of the pro-family movement in America. His ministry is the direct result of the prayers of a man who lived four generations ago.

C. The competition for our children

Our children do not grow up in a neutral environment. The world is competing for their souls and we need to be alert to how much they are

influenced by TV, friends, books, relatives. The world's (ungodly) values include:

- ❖ win at all costs
- ❖ if it feels right, it must be right - no absolute moral values
- ❖ personal convenience (selfishness) is the only real basis for decisions. This leads to easy acceptance of abortion, divorce etc
- ❖ sexual immorality is acceptable and desirable
- ❖ happiness and approval are found in material things violence and revenge are acceptable
- ❖ there's an exciting escape in cigarettes, drink, drugs
- ❖ do your own thing - authority stops you being fulfilled, so ignore it or mock it

D. Loving children

Parents are God's way of bringing children into this world and of raising children who will become his instruments as they live on this earth. The parents' most powerful tool for influencing their children is love. It is God's unconditional love for us that impacts and changes our lives. It is parents' unconditional love for their children which will have most effect on them. Some of the ways we can show love:

- ❖ Spend time with them. Be available to play, talk and laugh. If necessary, schedule the time so that it actually happens.
- ❖ Be available to them when they ask for you. Be quick to respond to their calls.
- ❖ Fulfil your promises to them. If you have said you will do something with them, do not put it off because you do not feel like it. If you promise a gift, make sure you give it.
- ❖ Plan surprises for them. Arrange special parties, outings, fun things to do together.
- ❖ Treat them as very special gifts from God. Remember that your children are really God's and that you have a responsibility from him to care for them in the best possible way so that they become all that he has planned.

The following song warns parents of the dangers of not giving time to our children. Decide to demonstrate your love to them now!

E. Cat's in the Cradle

My child arrived just the other day.
 He came to the world in the usual way.
 But there were planes to catch and bills to pay.
 He learned to walk while I was away.
 And he was talkin' 'fore I knew it and as he grew he'd say,
 "I'm gonna be like you, Dad, You know I'm gonna be like you."

*And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon.
 Little boy blue and the man on the moon.
 "When you comin' home, Dad?"
 "I don't know when, but we'll get together then.
 You know we'll have a good time then."*

My son turned ten just the other day.
 He said "Thanks for the ball, Dad, come on, lets play,
 Can you teach me to throw?" I said, "Not today
 I got a lot to do." He said, "That's O.K."
 And he walked away, but his smile never dimmed. And said,
 "I'm gonna be like him, yeah, You know I'm gonna be like him."

*And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon.
 Little boy blue and the man on the moon.
 "When you comin' home, Dad?"
 "I don't know when, but we'll get together then. You know we'll
 have a good time then."*

Well he came home from college just the other day
 So much like a man I just had to say
 "Son, I'm proud of you; can't you sit for a while?"
 He shook his head and said with a smile
 "What I'd really like, Dad, is to borrow the car keys.
 See you later. Can I have them please?"

*And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon.
 Little boy blue and the man on the moon.
 "When you comin' home, Dad?"
 "I don't know when, but we'll get together then.
 You know we'll have a good time then."*

I've long since retired. My son's moved away.
 I called him up just the other day.
 I said, "I'd like to see you if you don't mind."
 He said, "I'd love to, Dad, if I can find the time."

You see my new job's a hassle and the kids have the flu.
But it's sure nice talking to you, Dad. It's been sure nice talking to you."

And as I hung up the phone it occurred to me-
He'd grown up just like me. ***My boy was just like me.***
And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon.
Little boy blue and the man on the moon.
"When you comin' home, Dad?"
"I don't know when, but we'll get together then.
You know we'll have a good time then."

From the song *Cat's in the Cradle* by Sandy and Harry Chapin, copyright 1974 Story Songs Ltd (ASCAP), quoted by Gordon Macdonald, *The Effective Father* pp 134-5 (Tyndale House, Wheaton, Illinois, USA)

2. God's aim for children

This chapter contains a lot of information as to what to aim for with your child in different areas and at different ages. It may seem overwhelming at first but it should be used in instalments, 'one bite at a time'. You could take some of the topics mentioned and study one whenever you sit with your family to pray and discuss God's word.

The Bible gives only one specific instruction to children.

Colossians 3:20 - "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord." See also **Ephesians 6:1, 1 Timothy 3:4, 12, Titus 1:6**

An obedient child is one who obeys his parents and other trustworthy adults:

- ❖ doing exactly what he's told to do
- ❖ doing it immediately when told to do it
- ❖ doing it without any resistance or tantrums
- ❖ doing it whether a parent is there or not

The aim is 100% first-time obedience. The three "R's" in God's teaching programme are:

- ❖ **R**esponsiveness
- ❖ **R**espectfulness
- ❖ **R**esponsibility

We now look at each of these to understand what God is aiming for.

A. *Responsiveness*

A person's character consists of the stable, distinctive qualities and attitudes he holds. The following assessment is designed to help evaluate your child's character as this is the starting point for developing a strategy for character development. It is easiest to see where our children are really at by evaluating them on specific attitudes and behaviour patterns. By assessing the frequency of the following target behaviours, parents can readily identify areas in which to focus training. Against each of the following statements, both father and mother should rate their child as to how frequently he or she exhibits the behaviour mentioned, where:

A – always
B – usually
C - quite often
D – sometimes

E - every so often
F – occasionally
G – never

Name: _____	Date: _____	Behaviour	Rate
1. Properly returns a greeting.			
2. Approaches people in conversation and waits to be recognised before speaking.			
3. Waits for a pause in a conversation before speaking.			
4. Speaks when it is appropriate to speak			
5. Uses tone and voice volume appropriate for the situation.			
6. Walks around individuals who are talking.			
7. Steps aside to let someone pass.			
8. Notices and acts on obvious ways of helping others: carrying things, opening or holding a door, etc.			
9. Uses “please” and “thank you” appropriately			
10. Properly asks for something rather than stating “I need” or “I want”.			
11. Says, “excuse me” when it is appropriate.			
12. Moves through an indoor environment quietly and at a reasonable pace.			
13. Moves through an environment without disturbing objects and other people.			
14. Returns borrowed items, undamaged and without a fuss.			
15. Maintains eye contact with a person speaking to them.			
16. Properly responds when being spoken to; acknowledges that they have heard you.			
17. Complies with the request of an adult without moaning or talking back.			
18. Apologises for unintentionally hurting or bothering someone.			
19. Asks for forgiveness when appropriate without being prompted.			
20. Willingly receives correction and responds with a thankful heart.			

B. Respectfulness

1. Attitudes and behaviour

The following should be started early in the child's life - even before they fully understand - because it takes a long time to break any wrong habit which has already been established.

a. Politeness

- ❖ Saying "please," "thank you," "May I...?" "excuse me," etc. (Should begin as soon as language starts)
- ❖ "No thank you" or "No Mummy" rather than just "No!" "No" should be used only when a choice has been given (eg "Would you like some juice?") and never in response to a directive. (eg "Please bring me the toy.")
- ❖ Telephone usage. Being warm and helpful ("May I take a message?") Exercising self-control and making requests properly.

Some examples:

Right	Wrong
"Please give the toy back to me"	"That's mine! Give it back!"
"May I please have some milk?"	"I want some milk"
"Sure Mummy, I'd be glad to help"	"OK" (often with whine!) or "Do I have to do it now?"

- ❖ Table manners
 - Being grateful for their food (no complaining)
 - Asking for things politely
 - Encouraging/ thanking whoever prepared the meal
 - Sitting properly and remaining seated throughout the meal
 - Asking to be excused from the table when the meal is over
- ❖ Not interrupting (waiting until they are acknowledged, being patient, saying "Excuse me")
- ❖ Greeting (cheerfulness, eye contact, boys shaking hands, hugs, acknowledging new people with "It's nice to meet you," etc.)
- ❖ Tone of voice (no pouting, whining, grumbling, harshness. Key is cheerfulness.

b. Courtesy

- ❖ “Yes, aunty,” “Yes, sir” or some other respectful response to adults
Sons allow ladies (even little girls) to go first through doors, pull out chairs for them etc
- ❖ Listening
 - Eye contact. The child looks at you when you talk.
 - Setting toys aside, turning away from TV etc when being spoken to.
 - Acknowledging each comment (“Sure, Mummy” or “I’m coming,” etc.)
- ❖ This assures you that the child has heard and understood.
- ❖ Conversational skills (includes listening, not interrupting, handling himself properly in adult situations, encouraging, using ‘feeling’ words)
- ❖ Tone of voice (towards adults and peers) Respectfulness should characterise them.
- ❖ Honouring Loyalty
 - defending siblings/ babies/ younger child around peers/ older children
 - no carrying tales (telling sibling to go tell parent what they did rather than telling tales about them)
 - not gossiping (sharing positive/ good things about others except when parents give permission)
 - maintaining standards and obeying when parents aren’t around (eg keeping outside boundaries, not manipulating babysitters)
 - resisting peer dependency

c. Thoroughness/ Neatness

- ❖ Developing diligence (putting all the toys away, maintaining neatness in their room, always putting their books away, etc.)
- ❖ No unfinished projects - finishing each picture they begin colouring, getting completely dressed in the morning i.e. shoes/ socks, combing hair, etc.
- ❖ Eating all their food. Hint – give them only what you know they want/ need and then give more when the first portion is finished.
- ❖ Following through on tasks (school work, helping replace dishes, etc.) Anything started should be finished.

- ❖ Maintaining order (toys, books, records, supplies, dressing drawers, etc.)

d. Overcoming Selfishness

- ❖ Deferring to others
 - sharing (“Here, you can have this...”)
 - letting others go first or make the first choice
 - teaching them to ask themselves “What would Jesus do?”
- ❖ Gratefulness
 - allowing them to acknowledge disappointment or another preference without being ungrateful

Right	Wrong
“Mummy, I’d prefer to have rice but I’d be grateful for some bread.”	“I want rice! I don’t want bread!”

- showing appreciation for things (verbally and by the care they give them)
- ❖ Giving to others (clothes for the poor, toys to share with friends)
 - Serving
 - Cheerfulness
 - Not resenting interruptions (i.e. helping unload groceries when they’re out playing with friends)
 - Encouragement and expressiveness from parents is so important here
- ❖ Finances
 - Tithing/ giving offering
 - Using their money for giving gifts
 - Saving
 - Not being impulsive

e. Some aspects of respectfulness

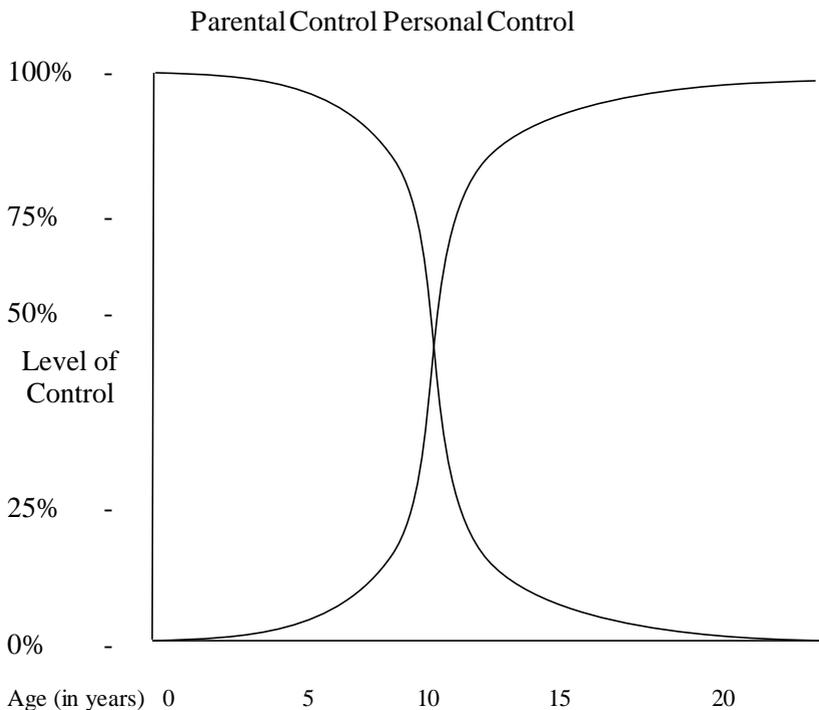
1. **Appreciation** – being thankful or showing gratitude; aware of and perceiving the good qualities of people and things.
2. **Consideration** – having regard for the needs or feelings of others; characterised by careful thought.
3. **Co-operation** – acting or operating jointly with another or others to accomplish the same end; working or labouring with mutual efforts to promote the same object.

4. **Courtesy** – Politeness of manners; especially politeness connected with kindness; civil and respectful.
5. **Deference** – respect and esteem due to a superior or an elder; courteous yielding to the opinion, wishes, or judgement of another.
6. **Esteem** – to prize; to set a high value on; to regard with reverence, respect or friendship.
7. **Flexibility** – readiness to comply; not rigid or obstinate; capability or responding or conforming to changing or new situations; able to cheerfully change plans when unexpected conditions require it.
8. **Friendliness** – having the temper and disposition of a friend; at the disposal of another to promote their good.
9. **Gentleness** – softness of manners; mildness of temper; sweetness of disposition; knowing what is appropriate to the emotional needs of others.
10. **Helpfulness** – Giving aid or assistance; providing help; useful; beneficial.
11. **Kindness** – that temper or disposition which delights in contributing to the happiness of others, which is exercised cheerfully in gratifying their wishes, supplying their wants or alleviating their distresses.
12. **Loyalty** – unswerving in allegiance; adopting as your own the wishes and goals of those you are serving; standing by those you are serving when conflicting pressures increase.
13. **Meekness** – mild of temper; not easily provoked or irritated; given to forbearance; ability to yield rights without anger.
14. **Obedience** – submissive to authority; yielding compliance with commands; performing what is required, or abstaining from what is forbidden.
15. **Observation** – quick to perceive or apprehend; alert; attentively viewing no noticing; obedient; adhering to in practice.
16. **Patience** – the capacity of suffering afflictions, pain or toil with a calm, unruffled temper; endurance without murmuring or fretfulness; bearing pains or trials calmly or without complaint.
17. **Politeness** – ease and gracefulness of manners, united with a desire to please others and a careful attention to their wants and wishes; good breeding.

18. **Respect** – willingness to show consideration or appreciation, which proceeds from esteem; valuing others because they have real worth.
19. **Reverence** – to regard with fear mingled with respect and affection. We reverence superiors for their age, their authority and their virtues.
20. **Self-control** – restraint exercised over one's impulses, emotions, or desires; control of one's emotions, desires, or actions by one's own will; quick to bring one's thoughts, words and action under control.

C. Responsibility

1. Handing over responsibility



The above chart shows that when a baby is born, parents are expected to exercise almost total control over the baby. As the years go by, they should

steadily release that control to the growing child so that, by the time the child is about 20, the parents have released the individual to make all his own decisions.

These are the steps required for all effective training:

1. Mum or Dad does the task
2. A parent does it, the child watches
3. The parent and child do it together
4. The child does it, the parent watches
5. The child does it on his own, when asked
6. The child does it on his own, consistently and without any reminders

2. Stages of responsibility

Parents frequently have unrealistic expectations of their growing children – often treating them as much less capable than they really are. The following lists give an indication of reasonable expectations for different ages. These suggestions are dependent in the early years on how quickly the child develops in verbal/motor skills. They are accumulative in that each stage progresses to the next.

a. 9-12 months

- ❖ begin to help collect and place toys in proper place.
- ❖ when first words begin, say “Please,” “Thank you,” etc., so the child will begin to hear and associate them.
- ❖ begin to feed him or herself. This may be a bit messy but the child will quickly learn how to get food into his mouth.

b. 1-2 years (after child begins walking)

- ❖ eat food on their own. Give small quantities but train the child to finish everything on the plate.
- ❖ put dirty clothes in the bucket.
- ❖ “help” with shopping (putting items in bag, handing things to Mum to put away at home)
- ❖ clean with Mum (give child a dust cloth, child size broom for “pretend” cleaning)
- ❖ water plants (with pre-measured amounts)
- ❖ begin to help make beds – (start with handing pillows to Mum etc)
get involved with garden work (helping pick up rubbish and toys, etc)
perform simple errands (“Bring the brush to Mummy, please,” etc.)

c. 2-3 years

- ❖ speak politely on a regular basis as language develops (“Yes auntie,” “No sir,” “May I please be excused,” greeting, etc.)
- ❖ hang pyjamas/night clothes on a low hook
- ❖ perform every-day activities on a regular basis (bringing in the newspaper, cleaning, shopping, etc.) It is important that you include the child in the work that is going on.
- ❖ take on more complicated errands (“Take this towel and put it in the bucket,” etc.)
- ❖ help with washing clothes (start with Mum handing him things to put in appropriate piles, hanging clothes or transferring clothes to basket, etc.)
- ❖ learn more specific neatness qualities (putting toys in proper places; letting child wipe up his own accidents when spills occur)
- ❖ take his dishes to the sink and help to clear table
- ❖ carry groceries or shopping bags (give your child one light item or a small bag)
- ❖ do general errands (carrying baby’s bag into meeting, carrying Mum’s Bible, etc.)
- ❖ make simple decisions (“Would you like juice or milk to drink?”)

d. 3-4 years

- ❖ make beds. Standards must be clear and reminders frequent keep room neat and take daily responsibility for it
- ❖ have an established morning routine (getting dressed, cleaning room before breakfast)
- ❖ make more complex decisions (“Would you like to wear the blue or green pants?”)
- ❖ become “other-oriented” (drawing pictures for someone, making encouragement notes to dictate to Mum, thank you notes for birthday gifts)
- ❖ learn to use the telephone properly
- ❖ establish regular responsibilities (bedroom, getting the post, emptying bathroom dustbins, etc.)
- ❖ help wash the scooter or car

e. 4-5 years

- ❖ take his dirty clothes to designated place sort clothes with supervision
- ❖ begin learning to fold clothes and put them away do dusting/

sweeping

- ❖ clean table after meals
- ❖ help with meal preparations (learning to measure, stir and use small appliances, like toaster)
- ❖ set knives, forks, spoons, plates etc on the table take out the rubbish
- ❖ help make decisions about meal choices, outings, time with friend, etc.

f. 5-6 years

- ❖ perform unsupervised responsibilities (making bed, washing out dustbins, placing items for school by front door etc.)
- ❖ make more complicated meal preparations (making juice, toast, scrambling eggs, cutting with blunt knife, simple baking; cleaning up is part of cooking)
- ❖ help with younger children (changing nappies, helping with bath, bottle feeding, entertaining while Mum is out of the room, feeding/dressing babies)
- ❖ do clothes washing (sorting, learning to use the washing machine if you have one, measuring detergent/ washing powder)
- ❖ clean (using cleaning supplies properly, cleaning unsupervised areas like bathtub or polishing furniture; washing combs and brushes)
- ❖ carry shopping bags and putting items away. Sons can carry “heavy” things for Mum and help with garden work
- ❖ By this time child should begin to carry out responsibilities unasked and begin to offer help in areas parents have not asked for help with.

g. 6-7 years

- ❖ prepare simple meals (making sandwiches for lunch, preparing drinks, getting breakfast for Mum and Dad, preparing snacks)
- ❖ have regular quiet times as part of his daily routine
- ❖ carry out totally unsupervised clothes-washing responsibilities when needed
- ❖ wash up dishes and put them away on his own
- ❖ handle increased responsibilities for babies (dressing infants/toddlers, entertaining them for longer periods by reading to them/ playing tapes, etc., helping them with their studies)
- ❖ learn the purpose and begin to use tools (audio player, hand tools, etc.) and help with home maintenance

3. God's method for parents

Being a godly parent is difficult and challenging. But it is possible to raise children who will bring glory to God if we ask the Lord to help us. As we have seen in **Malachi 4:6** and **Luke 1:17**, the hearts of fathers have to be turned, but the good news is that God is willing to turn them if we are willing to let him.

A. *God's problem with parents (especially fathers)*

The two key areas where parents' hearts have to be turned are:

1. Love

Each parent needs to love the child in a committed, unpossessive, unselfish way. Godly parents should be learning how to express love, affection and security to their children:

- ❖ through their lifestyle
- ❖ with appropriate words
- ❖ demonstrably with repeated hugs, kisses, comforting, lying together on bed etc

The parent's heart of love will show the child that he or she is valued and accepted just as he/she is.

2. Authority

Each parent must stand in the authority God has given and not use other means such as persuasion, cajoling, threatening, bribing, tantrums etc, to get the child to obey.

Authority is derived from submission, and so the parent must firstly be submitted to God, and then to the authorities appointed by him – with Government authorities, at work and in the church.

Each New Testament instruction for children to obey is followed by a warning to fathers:

Ephesians 6:4 - *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

Colossians 3:21 - *Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.*

- ❖ Parents exasperate or embitter their children by:
 - ❖ not being available
 - ❖ setting a bad example - teasing, pinching, bribing, gossip, dishonesty, hypocrisy, unforgiveness, selfishness
 - ❖ being inconsistent, showing favouritism, making comparisons
 - ❖ refusing to acknowledge their own sins and not seeking forgiveness for them from their children when appropriate disunity between parents
 - ❖ imbalance between love and discipline
 - ❖ not allowing their children to grow up. God's goal is godly offspring who make their own godly decisions. Parents should encourage their children to:
 - take responsibility
 - strive for excellence
 - embark on tasks which will stretch them
 - grow in confidence through positive parental encouragement
 - make their own decisions
 - ❖ forcing children to grow up too quickly by giving them responsibilities way beyond their years.

Remember it is God who has promised to turn our hearts - so ask him to do it, and then co-operate with him.

B. A picture of family life

Hebrews 12:5-11 shows how God treats his sons and gives us a model to follow. Note that:

- ❖ love and discipline go together (v 6)
- ❖ discipline is assumed on earth (vv 7,9,10)
- ❖ disciplined children respect their fathers (v 9) and enjoy peace and righteousness in the future (v 11)
- ❖ discipline is painful (v 11) - to both father and son
- ❖ father has the primary role (v 7). He sets the standard and takes ultimate authority and responsibility. Mother, though, will do most of the day-to-day work.
- ❖ discipline is essential for a true son (v 8). **Proverbs 22:15**

Discipline is that which makes us do the right thing - preferably at the right time and in the right way. Discipline is learned through fear of punishment and hope of reward and should be aiming to help the child develop internal

discipline. It is almost impossible to discipline others without first learning to discipline oneself.

Before looking at disciplining children, you might like to think about how disciplined you are in the following areas:

Paying debts	Keeping your word
Writing letters	Obedying the law
Praying	Reading the bible
Returning borrowed items	Passing on messages
Being punctual	Handling your emotions

1. God's tool for discipline

God says that children should be disciplined using a rod.

Proverbs 22:15 it drives away folly

Proverbs 23:13-14 it brings salvation

Proverbs 29:15 it imparts wisdom

Proverbs 29:17 it causes the child to bring peace and delight to the parents

It has the following benefits:

- ❖ it gives time for parents to consider, control their anger, and explain coolly and clearly
- ❖ it leaves the hands for showing love - especially straight after punishment
- ❖ it acts as a deterrent without even being used it injures no organs when applied to the bottom
- ❖ it leaves no visible marks, which is important for the child's self-respect
- ❖ it can be delegated

We do not punish immaturity, foolishness, or genuine misunderstanding - nor do we punish in anger, embarrassment or frustration. Our motive is love. The rod is used on a child who disobeys an instruction which is:

- ❖ clear - spoken with the right tone to the child
- ❖ understood - you've made sure he knew what you meant
- ❖ reasonable - it's within his ability

Proverbs 13:24 shows what God thinks of parents who are unwilling to use the rod in an appropriate way.

2. The application

Proverbs 22:6 *Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it.*

a) *It is training*

Training is an active process. It is hard work. Some of its elements are:

- ❖ **Talking** - see **Deuteronomy 6:6-7**. Talk about God's ways, until they are impressed on the children's hearts. Eli didn't communicate and his sons suffered for this - see **1 Samuel 2:25**
- ❖ **Setting a godly example**. Eli didn't - see **1 Samuel 2:29**. We should demonstrate in our lives both our love for the Lord and our fear of God. See **Psalm 112:1-2**. More is caught than taught!
- ❖ **Restraining** - see **1 Samuel 3:13**. The long term tragedy of Eli's poor parenting is shown in **1 Samuel 8:1-3**.

b) *There is "a way" a child should go*

The way is obviously Jesus so we train our children in God's ways, based on a living relationship with him. All children are born with a sinful nature and must make their own decision to acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

c) *It is a faith process - "when he is old"*

We do not immediately see all the benefits of training our children well. It is a faith process with consequences which will only be obvious in 15-20 years time. God assures us in **Proverbs 29:17** that it's worth all the effort: *Discipline your son, and he will give you peace: he will bring delight to your soul.*

There is no greater joy than to see your children grow into mature men and women of God and embarking on their own exploits for the Lord. Truly it will bring delight to your soul. This is what the apostle John felt according to **3 John 4**: *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*

d) *It needs God's enabling*

Being a godly parent is not easy for anybody. We are aiming to raise children who will bring glory to God throughout their lives. We do not know exactly what to do, but we have a Heavenly Father who is willing to guide us at all times. As we keep asking him for grace and wisdom, he will show us what we should do and point out when we are missing the mark. He will provide his power to help us in our weakness.

4. Praying for children

Pray diligently for every aspect of your child's life - present and future, including specific character issues and spiritual needs. Paul's prayers provide a great start for interceding for our children. Insert the name of your child (ren) where the blanks are - and start praying!

a) *Ephesians 1:17-19*

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that he/she may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of 's heart may be enlightened in order that may know the hope to which He has called him/her, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.

b) *Ephesians 3:16-19*

I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen
..... with power through His Spirit in his/her inner being, so that Christ may dwell in 's heart through faith. And I pray that, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

c) *Philippians 1:9-11*

And this is my prayer: that 's love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that he/she may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.

d) *Colossians 1:9-12*

For this reason, since the day we heard about, we have not stopped praying for him/her and asking God to fill him/her with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And

we pray this in order that may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that he/she may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

e) 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

With this in mind, we constantly pray for, that our God may count him/her worthy of His calling, and that by His power He may fulfil every good purpose of 's and every act prompted by 's faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in, and in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

f) Philemon 1:4-7

I always thank my God as I remember in my prayers, because I hear about his/her faith in the Lord Jesus and his/her love for all the saints. I pray that may be active in sharing his/her faith, so that he/she will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. 's love has given me great joy and encouragement, because he/she has refreshed the hearts of the saints.