

A Primer for Parents to Discipline Their Children With Gospel-Grace

Bringing the hope of the Gospel to your child's heart

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Proverbs 22:15 — Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.

Proverbs 23:13-14 — Do not hold back discipline from the child, Although you strike him with the rod, he will not die. You shall strike him with the rod and rescue his soul from Sheol.

So your child has sinned. They have disobeyed God, defied you, transgressed God's Word, and you've now taken your child into the discipline room. Then what? What do you do? What do you say? How do you discipline & point to Christ? How can you be firm with truth & tender with compassion?

1. Gather the facts. — Ask questions of the child (as much as you're able with the younger ones) such as: "what happened?" or "tell me what's going on." This way you seek to understand the situation (even if you saw it) and you're allowing them to speak and give their account of the event.

2. Reach the heart. — Then, whatever happened to them, you ask "how did you respond?" or "how did that make you feel?" "what did you choose to do in that moment when it happened?" Then you can ask: "Why?" All of these questions intentionally target the heart. We want to reach the heart.

3. Expose the sin. — At this point, regardless of what's happened, it's vital to specify the sin. Perhaps the child manifested a heart of selfishness, a desire for control, an outburst of anger, not considering others as more important than themselves, etc. The goal is to clearly expose the sin.

4. Prove it biblically. — Ideally, we as Christian parents should have an open Bible and show the child where in the Scriptures they have sinned against God. This is crucial so the child knows he didn't ultimately sin against mom or dad but first and foremost against God. This is where godly parents need to constantly study the Word and hide it in our hearts so that we can bring biblical truth to the child's heart regularly & specifically.

5. Give the discipline. — The sin has been committed. The facts have been gathered. The heart has been exposed (as much as possible). The sin has been clearly stated and biblically proven. The child is guilty and has disobeyed God. Now the parent must use the rod. The goal is to bring enough pain for the child to see the error in what he's done but, of course, the discipline is not to bring harm or bruising to the child. Using the rod must be done in a private location and it must be firm. Whether it's one swat or two or three on the rear-end (an area that's not exposed but easily covered up), the parent must choose to obey God and use the rod when the child has sinned. Parents must choose to obey God rather than follow culture on spanking. Culture calls it "harming/abusing the child." God calls it: "saving your child's soul from death!" Choose to follow God! Use the rod.

6. Express tender love. — Immediately when the discipline has occurred and the child is saddened by the pain, hold the child, hug the child, affectionately place the child on your lap, and verbally tell them: "I love you!" This tender love and physical and verbal reassurance is important.

7. Give the gospel. — Now is the glorious opportunity to say: "do you know why I did this? You've sinned. And our God is holy. You're a sinner, just like daddy (mommy)..." The Law has exposed the sin. The child has received a discipline for the offense. Now bring the balm of the gospel and the hope of Christ. The glorious benefit of this consists in parents having many opportunities (even daily, at times!) to present the gospel to their children who have sinned. Yes, our God hates sin and sees our sinful hearts! But God sent His Son to take the "eternal discipline" that we deserve. Compel your children to trust in Jesus! Sinners are saved by faith — childlike faith — in Jesus as Lord & Savior! Show them Christ's glory, worth, work, and hope! Never underestimate the power of a faithful father who disciplines when he's home and able and a faithful mother who disciplines in the home and how many gospel occasions this presents with the child. O may God use Christian homes to save children at young ages for His glory and renown.

8. Pray with them. — When all has been done and said, don't forget to pray for them and with them. Still keeping the child on your lap and embracing him in your arms, pray for God to save them. Then, move on tenderly, lovingly, caringly, affectionately, and prayerfully.