

11. Child Discipline

Right at the very beginning this Fathering in 15™ lesson makes a very important point. That is, that we must know the difference between discipline and punishment. Depending on how you were raised this distinction might be difficult for you to figure out, and may require you to “relearn” some things. Let’s see if the Bible can teach us something about this.



As I thought about this I was struck with how much we can learn about this just by looking at our Heavenly Father and how he loves and disciplines us. By looking closely at how our heavenly Father treats us as his children, we can learn much about how we as fathers should treat our children, and vice versa. The following verses from chapter 12 of the book of Hebrews in the Bible have much to teach us:

Our human fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order 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.

And why does God discipline us? Because of his immense love for us! Just as we love our children and want what is best for them, God knows and wants what is best for us and will give of himself to guide us in that direction. So that tells us where our starting point must be, we need to examine ourselves to determine if our discipline of our children is motivated by our love for them or by something else. That’s right, good discipline is an act of love toward our children, even if they may not see it that way. In contrast, punishment simply causes pain and does not come from an attitude of true love for your child. Instead of just punishing, review the suggestions given in the “Learn More” section of the main lesson for some very practical ways of disciplining and training your children. Also, don’t hesitate to ask others to help you learn better ways to discipline.

Another important biblical principle to keep in mind when disciplining your children is that there is a distinction between who your child is, versus what they do. As we’ve read in some of the earlier lessons, every person is created in the image of God (see Genesis 1:27 in the Bible) and that fact alone tells us that each and every one of our children has God-given value, and that value doesn’t depend on how they behave, how smart they are, how athletic they are, or many of the other ideas we incorrectly use to measure a person’s worth. However, every one of us sometimes chooses to do things that are not pleasing to our heavenly Father or to our human father. In Romans 3:23 it says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. But even though we all fall short God continues to love us unconditionally, guides us in right directions, and forgives us when we turn back to him. That tells us as human fathers that we also must put great value on each of our children, love them equally and unconditionally, train them in the way they should go, and forgive them as God has forgiven us.

Remember, as human fathers in many ways we represent God to our children. If they see us as loving fathers then they will begin to see God as a loving father as well, but if they instead see us as a source of pain then they will probably see God the same way and won’t want to have anything to do with him.

We see this illustrated well in the very words of Jesus, who said:

Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Matthew 7:9-12

Questions for thought and discussion:

- a. Think back to some recent times when you had to discipline one of your children. Were your actions teaching and guiding them, or was it simply causing them pain? Could you have handled the situation in a better way?
- b. The lesson said that "good discipline is an act of love toward our children". Is that your mindset? Do you need to rethink how you discipline your children?
- c. Do you see the God-given value of each of your children, regardless of how they behave?
- d. Do you sometimes disobey your heavenly Father? And when you do, does He lovingly discipline you? Do you realize that God is using those times to teach and guide you as you grow in your relationship to Him?