

Finding Wisdom in the Woodshed

The Quest for Hidden Treasure – Part VIII

Selected Proverbs

Introduction

When you decide to study through the book of Proverbs, sooner or later you are confronted with the subject of parental authority and, more specifically, the disciplining of your children. Talk about a controversial subject, this is one of them.

There are numerous proverbs in Solomon's collection that most people we live around or work with today would consider out of date and out of touch.

For example, Proverbs like,

He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently. (Proverbs 13:24)

Another one says,

Foolishness [or folly] is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him. (Proverbs 22:15)

Most people today would say, "No wonder that stuff is in the Old Testament – that's where it belongs – in ancient history."

This is an interesting Proverb that says,

The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother. (Proverbs 29:15)

No matter how conservative or liberal, church-ed or "unchurched," converted to Christ or atheistic, everyone knows that a child who gets his way is going to bring shame on his mother and father.

No Mom has ever bragged at the PTA meeting, "Yeah, my Suzy dropped out of tenth grade this year

and is working two jobs to support her drug habit. We're so proud of her." Or, "Our son refused our help and our advice. He has since left home and lives at the Rescue Mission. He panhandles in the parking lot of the mall and at the corner of a nearby highway. We're so thrilled at what he's doing with his life."

No. Every parent, whether they think the word of God should be relegated to ancient history or not, knows intuitively that their child is better off when they walk in the ways of the wisdom of God's word.

See for yourself this Proverb again. Turn to Proverbs 29:15. Let me read again these words that might come as a surprise to you.

The rod and reproof give wisdom . . . (Proverbs 29:15a)

According to Solomon, if we as the parent are not only going to hunt for the hidden treasures of wisdom, but help our child discover the hidden treasure as well, the rod literally serves as part of the treasure map to lead the way to wisdom.

Imagine that – wisdom is found in the woodshed.

Now, we will balance this out as we go, but you should know that the Hebrew word for "rod," or "yah-saar," can be translated literally, a "club".

This is serious business.

My mom did not know this – she thought it meant a "switch". She would send me out to the tree that was just outside the kitchen screen door to select the switch that would be used to communicate wisdom and drive folly from my heart. She believed this verse.

I am just glad she did not know any Hebrew. She would have taken it literally, being the good dispensationalist that she is.

The truth is that today, the average parent will do anything but spank their child. They might say that spanking a child will teach them to hit other children. Trust me, our children know how to hit other children whether we spank them or not. In fact, with all the spankings I received, I never once challenged the kid I did not like in the fifth grade to a spanking. I never told him, “Hey, meet me out in the playground after school ’cause I’m gonna give you a spanking.” It never crossed my mind to do to that kid – I did not like what my parents did to me.

Or perhaps, parents refuse to admit their child needs correction. So, they will argue with the teacher, the principle, the youth leader, and later on, the policeman. Perhaps it is nothing more than pride – unwilling to face the humiliation of a child in need of correction.

We all want our children to be at the head of the class – not sent to the corner of the class or even expelled from class.

Maybe you have struggled with these Proverbs because you came from a home where discipline was nothing more than physical abuse; where hate and anger spilled over and spankings became beatings. There is a vast difference between a beating and a spanking.

I have a few books that I want to recommend to every parent with a son or daughter still living at home. One is entitled, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, by Tedd Tripp.ⁱ

For moms who want to read additional material, Ginger Plowman wrote similar counsel geared toward younger children. Her book is entitled, *Don’t Make Me Count to Three*. Perhaps you can identify with making that threat.ⁱⁱ

I have enjoyed reading these books this week in preparation for our study. In fact, the reason I am recommending them is because they will offer much more extensive, biblical advice on the subject of discipline that we will touch on today.

While I am at it, another excellent work is called *Family Life*, by Chuck Swindoll, and covers a variety of issues. My copy at home is dog eared and has been marked up over the years.ⁱⁱⁱ

Swindoll, in his work, quotes Dr. Albert Siegel who wrote in the *Stanford Observer*,

When it comes to rearing children, every society is only twenty years away from total

[anarchy]. Twenty years is all we have to accomplish the task of civilizing the infants who are born into our midst each year. These savages know nothing of our language, our culture, our religion, our values and interpersonal relationships. The infant is totally ignorant of democracy, respect, decency, honesty, customs, conventions, and manners. The barbarian must be tamed if civilization is to survive.^{iv}

Obviously, this falls short of true and full reformation since we *can* have educated, self-controlled people destroying society just as easily as barbarians.

However, our discipline should deal not only with behavior, but attitude, heart, and spirit. We understand the greater issue is the corruption of the heart and sin-fallen creatures that need redemption and spiritual growth.

This is the reason Solomon writes in Proverbs 29:15 that it is not just the rod that is needed, but it is reproof – verbal correction that reaches for the heart.

The Lord said in Luke 6:45,

The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil, for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

This is a way of reminding every parent of the heart of the matter.

A child’s misbehavior reflects his heart. So often we get so sidetracked with behavior that we overlook belief. They really believe that lying is acceptable; that obedience is optional; that cheating is permissible. It is easy to think that if we can just get them to stop doing those things, we have succeeded.^v

This was the point of Christ’s warning to the Pharisees – who kept all the rules and never missed church. They lived clean lives and spoke of God with their respectful lips which had nothing to do with hearts (Matthew 15).

A change in behavior that does not stem from a change in heart is not commended by Christ; it is actually condemned as hypocrisy of the highest order.^{vi}

Whether we want to admit it or not, Solomon was telling the truth. Look again at Proverbs 22:15a,

Foolishness [or folly] is bound up in the heart of a child . . .

In other words, children were born with the ability to lie, cheat, disobey, and declare their own will. And very early in age, they demand to know, “Who around here is big enough to take me on? Who is in charge?”

Several years ago the Minnesota Crime Commission released an interesting report on the untamed child. I was born in Minnesota, so it makes me wonder if my birth prompted this report.

Actually, I cannot imagine this kind of report being released in the twenty-first century, but it was released in the early 1980s. Let me give a direct quote.

Every baby starts life as a little savage. [For all the new moms at our church, we know that your baby is a little angel – this is not about you.] He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he want when he wants it; his bottle, his mother’s attention, his playmate’s toy, his uncle’s watch. Deny these and he seethes with rage which would be murderous were he not so helpless. This means that all children, not just certain children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centered world of infancy, given free rein to his impulsive actions, every child will grow into some form of criminal.^{vii}

Frankly put, Mom and Dad, you are dealing with a little sinner, who came into the world with a fallen, depraved heart. He is capable of committing anything under the sun, given the time, experience, availability, resources, and strength.

Solomon writes,

Foolishness [or folly] is bound up in the heart of a child . . .

The Hebrew word for “folly” literally refers to, “moral corruption; moral deficiencies; inability to make good judgment and reason”.

So, we never have to teach children how to lie – we have to discipline them to be honest.

We never have to teach children to be selfish – we have to discipline them to share.

We never have to teach children to assert themselves – we have to teach them to submit to authority.

Long before children can speak, they test our authority.

Tell the seven month old, “Honey, don’t touch that,” and what does little honey do? She looks us square in the face, never blinking an eye, and reaches

her hand out to touch it again. She is effectively saying, “I’m the head of this household. Didn’t you get the memo?”

Long before they can articulate rebellion and challenge our authority, children can act it out.

What are we going to do in response?

Solomon gives parents hope. The end of this Proverb reads,

. . . discipline will remove it far from him. (Proverbs 22:15b)

This will not happen quickly – just as Christ has not driven from us our assertions and rebellions and pride. He has committed Himself to daily discipline those whom He loves (Hebrews 12:5-6).

We are actually initiating a godly process that God will take over one day in the lives of our children. And if we have taught them to listen to us, they will be prepared to listen to Him.

I want to speak as practically and clearly about this subject as I can. In fact, as I thought about it, it struck me (no pun intended) that I have never before taught on the subject of when and how to deliver corporal punishment – in twenty-one years. All the young people are saying, “Don’t change now!”

Actually, it is about time.

Biblical Discipline

Now, let us lay down some ground rules for biblical discipline – the use of the rod, which we can simply call, spanking our children.

1. First, understand the difference between physical abuse and a painful spanking.

Let us make a table with two sides and a line down the middle. At the top of one side, we will put the word “Abuse,” and at the top of the other side, we will put the word “Discipline”. There is a world of difference.

Abuse	Discipline
Unprovoked; Unexpected	Expected for certain behavior (it has already been made clear; there are no surprises)
Motivated through hatred and anger	Prompted by love and concern
Produces terror	Produces security
Leaves physical scars	Is painful, but does not leave scars
Creates resentment	Creates respect for

against authority	authority
Resolves neither behavior nor heart attitude	Resolves, forgives, and forgets

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Remember, discipline – the rod – always includes plenty of communication – reproof. These go hand in hand.

Distinguish between abuse and discipline.

2. Secondly, distinguish between immaturity and disobedience.

Maybe the child really did forget, or got sidetracked with the dog, or completely overlooked the time.

3. Thirdly, distinguish the difference between inability and defiance.

Perhaps the child really cannot fulfill the task. For them, cleaning out the shed might be something that overwhelms them and they are not sure where to start or how to do it.

If you are sure it is indeed an act of disobedience, or disrespect, or deception – these are three “D’s” that I believe require a trip to the woodshed.

Let me give these again:

- disobedience,
- disrespect,
- deception.

Five guidelines for a productive trip to the woodshed

Now, what happens when we know we are headed to the woodshed with our child? Let me give some guidelines.

1. First, tell the child what their offense is and what their punishment will be.

This eliminates the possibility of spanking the child in the heat of the moment or in anger. It allows for communication before the punishment, which allows the child to understand that the issue at hand is not their parent’s emotions but their own sinful actions.

2. Secondly, deliver the spanking.

This might be three swats or ten licks with the belt on the place God created for discipline – in fact, creating it with extra padding.

Slapping the child’s face or punching them is not the use of a rod – it will never yield the intimacy and

closeness that comes after proper discipline is administered.

Why? Because our hand does not create the painful blow, but an inanimate object creates the pain, and in the mystery of discipline, our children come to fear the leather strap or the switch or the paddle, not our hand.

3. Thirdly, after the spanking, give the child time to think and recover.

Depending on their age, we might leave the room if the child is older, and give them time to dry their tears. The younger they are, the more immediately they need the reassurance of our love.

I remember when our college-age daughter was a little girl; immediately after spanking her, she would raise her arms for me to pick her up and tell her she was loved and forgiven.

As children get older, we might leave the room for a brief period of time and then return to talk to them.

4. Fourthly, explain what God’s word says about their behavior, their attitude, their sin.

In a very personal conversation, deal with the child’s heart issue. In fact, after punishment, they are more open and ready to hear about the heart issues at stake than before. If all we were interested in was delivering pain for disobedience, we are finished. But pain in discipline merely acts as the doorway through which the heart is now tender and open to receive true wisdom.

It is not unusual for me to get my Bible or quote a passage that deals with what the enemy of their soul wanted to accomplish with that sin. It is the perfect time to let the child know that the issue is larger than a lie or a stolen object or disrespect. It may very well be a life-long or even an eternal issue.

This is the reason Solomon wrote – if you are still not convinced – this Proverb,

You shall strike him with the rod and rescue his soul from Sheol [death]. (Proverbs 23:14)

This is a general principle that normally means discipline protects our children from greater harm.

This is the reason we might spank children when they disobey and run into the street. Why? We want to associate pain with their disobedience, which very well may save them greater pain; perhaps even death.

We are also teaching, especially our older children, what one author called the “harvest

mentality”. In other words, they are learning that they will reap what they sow.

So, lead the child to pray, asking the Lord for forgiveness, because ultimately they need to recognize that they have sinned against the Lord – not just Mom or Dad. They have reaped what they sowed.

5. Finally, after prayer, hug the child and use words that clearly communicate, “I love you and I have forgiven you.”

This is the perfect resolution to biblical discipline.

I remember getting a spanking from my father and fifteen minutes later, laughing and playing basketball with him in the back yard.

It was never a question of love for me. I never thought my father did not love me – I knew he loved Christ first and that he was obeying the word of God. I grew in my respect for him, not the other way around. I knew my parents were ultimately demonstrating love for Christ and then, love for me.

This is exactly what Solomon delivered in the Proverbs,

He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently (Proverbs 13:24)

Application

Let me wrap up our study with two timeless truths about this subject of biblical discipline.

1. Number one, there has never been an easy time to raise children.

Just ask Adam and Eve. Ask Eli; and later, Samuel. Ask David and Solomon. Just ask Mary and Joseph, whose entire brood of children, born after Christ, stubbornly refused to believe Him until after His resurrection.

No century or generation has been without dangers and temptations. There has never been a perfect time to be a parent because we live in a fallen world.

However, some times are more challenging than others, and we happen to be experiencing challenging times right now.

Listen to what Carle Zimmerman wrote as he talked about the American culture falling into the final stages of disintegration and disarray. Zimmerman is a sociologist and historian and, while not writing from a biblical point of view, wrote that certain common conditions became prominent in

various cultures that self-destructed. America is only the latest one to come along.

Zimmerman observed in decaying cultures, these common characteristics:

- an increased ability to divorce easily and without cause;
- the elimination of meaning in the marriage ceremony;
- pessimism concerning earlier figures in the culture that had been considered heroic;
- the breaking down of inhibitions regarding adultery;
- the revolt of the youth against parents;
- a rapid rise in juvenile delinquency;
- the common acceptance of all forms of sexual perversion.^{ix}

Now note this – Dr. Zimmerman wrote this in 1947.

In this day, every single day in America:

- 1,000 unwed teenage girls become mothers;
- 1,106 teenage girls get abortions;
- 4,219 teenagers contract sexually transmitted diseases – several of them incurable;
- 1,000 adolescents take their first drink of alcohol – most often from their own refrigerator at home;
- 135,000 kids brings guns or other weapons to school;
- 3,610 teens are assaulted and 80 are raped;
- 2,200 teenagers drop out of high school;
- 6 teenagers take their own lives.^x

If we do not provide the safeguard, the standard; if we do not set up the fence posts and protective boundaries, the world will do it for our children or they will do it for themselves. And many will be led to despair and confusion and broken hearts and broken bodies and broken dreams.

Listen to one paraphrase of Proverbs 19:18.

Discipline your children while they are young enough to learn. If you don't, you are helping them destroy themselves.

This leads me to offer a second truth. Yes, there has never been an easy time to raise children, but let me give a second truth.

2. Number two, there has never been a better time to shepherd our children.

Maybe you are tempted to think, “This will bring disruption and chaos into our home. We’re going to have a fight on our hands all the time.”

Take it by faith; get good godly counsel; in fact, do not go home tonight and tell your children that you are now going to begin following God’s word. And that what they did this afternoon deserved a spanking – Pastor Davey said so.

Take your time. Clearly communicate that these three activities – or two or four – will bring about a spanking and show them where in Proverbs you have been commanded to discipline them.

Then, watch what Solomon promised to those who will follow Christ in applying biblical discipline in their home occur,

Discipline your son, and he will give you peace . . . (Proverbs 29:17a NIV)

He will not give chaos or turmoil, but peace.

Now is the time to start. There has never been a better time to shepherd our children as a loving, authoritative parent than now.

There has never been a more critical time to start teaching the truth, holding the standard, lovingly disciplining sin than now.

My friends, may God give you courage and faith and trust in His word, enough to obey it and follow it and demonstrate it and model it and then, shepherd your children to do the same.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/10/2008 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Tedd Tripp, Shepherding a Child’s Heart (Shepherd Press, 2005 ed.).

ⁱⁱ Ginger Plowman, Don’t Make Me Count to Three (Shepherd Press, 2003).

ⁱⁱⁱ Charles R. Swindoll, Family Life (Multnomah Press, 1988).

^{iv} Ibid., p. 102.

^v Tripp, p. 4.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Swindoll, p. 113.

^{ix} Ibid., p. 33.

^x Josh McDowell, Right From Wrong (Word Publishing, 1994), p. 6.