

The Summer Garden (PART 5)

The Role of Corrective Discipline in Preparing Your Child's Heart to Receive the Gospel

By Daryl Wingerd

So far, in Parts 1-4, we have covered most of the “Why?” and “When?” questions concerning corrective discipline. Now we need to discuss the “How?” question. How should you as a parent apply corrective discipline?

Before we discuss modes of discipline, remember that there is no reason for you to approach correcting your child as though it were an unpleasant duty or a burden. It is a great privilege! Corrective discipline is a positive and helpful part of parenting, one that will only benefit your child in the long run. Children who are consistently corrected through discipline are generally happier than children who are left to themselves. Their demeanor is more pleasant, they are easier to supervise and care for, and they tend to be better listeners and learners. They even tend to build and maintain better relationships with other people. Most importantly, they are more likely to follow their believing parents in becoming followers of Jesus!



Understanding your privilege, you must also understand your responsibility. Discipline must be firm, consistent, and effective if it is to have its “proverbial” effect on your child’s heart and life. Ineffective or inconsistent discipline is like stopping halfway through a course of prescribed antibiotics; you may cause the sinful attitude or habit to retreat temporarily, but it will regroup and come back even stronger. Ineffective discipline—especially *repeated* ineffective discipline—may be worse than *no* discipline. It gives the parent false confidence that the child’s sin has been dealt with, it minimizes the seriousness of the sin, and it does little to dissuade the child from repeating the sin. Whatever means of discipline you apply, be sure it is unpleasant enough to motivate the child to never want to repeat the experience.

The Rod of Correction

The Bible affirms spanking as an effective form of corrective discipline. Parents should not neglect this mode, see it is “old fashioned,” or always opt for other modes. It is not the only option, but it is also not presented as something that may be altogether avoided if other methods are preferred. It is actually the primary mode of discipline referenced in passages of Scripture concerning the discipline of children. Its frequent mention in the book of Proverbs, along with the reference in Hebrews 12 in the illustration of “painful” discipline, tells us that it is a necessary mode of discipline for all children.

When the rod is used, it must be used in a way that is measured and controlled—*never as an outworking of parental anger or frustration*. It also must be applied in a way that causes sufficient discomfort (without causing injury, of course) to create in the child a strong desire to *never* experience that sort of discipline again.

Verbal Correction

As the proverb says, “The rod and reproof give wisdom” (29:15). In the parent-child context, reproof (translated “rebuke” in some Bible versions) is a direct, serious, stern verbal correction or reprimand of a child, designed to drive home the point that the behavior being addressed is utterly unacceptable. The message to the child should include a clear understanding of the type of sin or foolish behavior being addressed, reasons why it is unacceptable, and clear assurances of what kind of discipline will happen if it is repeated.

Reproof, though serious and stern, should be measured and calm, never delivered as an outburst of anger or frustration. You know when your anger is out of control, and you should avoid reproving your child when that is your frame of mind. Take some time to sort yourself out first. “Measured and calm,” however, doesn’t mean timid or passive. For a reproof to actually *be* a reproof, it must be delivered with seriousness, an authoritative presence, and a tone of voice that indicates strong displeasure. Reproving your child involves more than just words. Otherwise, why not just write him a note or send a text? Reproof is also not a discussion or a debate. The child who won’t be quiet and listen respectfully to your reproof needs further correction.

Creative Correction

Sometimes it is appropriate and effective to respond creatively to the child’s offense in a way that will drive home the corrective point you are making. For example, the child who exhibits ungratefulness may be disciplined by withholding whatever he has been taking for granted. The child who will not stop playing too roughly or loudly, is being selfish or unkind, or just can’t seem to manage to play well with others, can sit quietly next to a parent (*without* giving him a substitute activity) while the other children continue playing. The child who interrupts when a parent is talking on the phone or to another adult can stand quietly until the parent finishes the conversation or reaches a point at which a break is appropriate (Consider a word of wisdom here: don’t permit your interrupting child to simply go back to playing rather than waiting for your attention. Your objective is to train him to wait rather than interrupting in the first place, so allowing him run off rather than waiting accomplishes nothing).