Discipleship Groups — Level 8
WEEK 3
Wisdom for Living: Child-Raising

In this session, I have sought to undertake a lesson that could take many weeks to teach, but I will attempt it in a matter of about 45 minutes. There is so much to say, and so much more that I will not be able to get to. However, I will endeavor to take you through the Proverbs on parenting—we will see what it says—and I will give some practical wisdom along the way.

One of the most common things I get asked about is disciplining a child, which is what we will be covering now, but this session will deal with only younger children. If it is difficult to deal with the topic of discipline in a short session, then how much more difficult would it be to deal with such a vast age-range and all the different nuances of children at different times in their lives all in the same session!

Now, I realize that this does not apply equally to every person listening to this session. There are many people in our congregation who have younger children and still more people who have no children or older children and this stage of their life has long passed them by. However, this is part of the world view that we have as believers, and part of the revealed wisdom of God. Whether or not you have small children in the home, whether or not you have children at all, every one of us can still understand and adopt and transmit the values that God's wisdom gives us. A single Sunday school teacher, a grandmother, a father of older children, a youth worker—all of us need to understand the value and the mentality of discipline. We all have conversations with people from different stages of life. You never know when these principles will be especially handy to talk about! So, even if you may not be in this stage of life, you can still gain much from the things we're talking about right now.

All of us, regardless of our vocation or calling—for those of us who follow Jesus—we all have the same job, which is the Great Commission: Our job is to make disciples. When we hear these words of Jesus to " Go and make disciples of all the nations," very few people apply this to the job of parenting. Parenting our children—and even our grandchildren—is not about becoming friends with them, nor is it about simply making them productive adults. All people belong to God, and God has given us these people, not to be ours, but to be His. We are given the opportunity to steward them for the few years they are in our houses. Ultimately, they will grow up, leave our houses, and raise children of their own—meanwhile, our job is to help them know Jesus and follow Him for their whole lives.

This is no easy task, as **Proverbs 22:15** says that, "foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child." Our children are, as we were, born into sin with a heart that tends toward foolishness that will lead them to destruction. Our job is to drive foolishness from them and lead them down a path of life. Our job is to lead them to Jesus—who is the way and the truth and the life, because they need Him as their Lord and Savior just as much as

you and I do. The first thing to do in raising children, is to lead them to Jesus; to give them the Gospel Message—all the time!

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 says, “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” In other words, we talk about God all the time. Perhaps not in forced ways that make the conversation awkward, but in the midst of everyday life. For instance, years ago, my wife and I, along with our children, were watching a show that we enjoyed very much. One episode had unexpectedly taken a turn toward homosexuality. When the show was over, my wife and I spoke with our children about the theme and we opened up conversation with them. We never shied away from difficult or uncomfortable topics, even when our children were little—and, of course, we spoke to them in age-appropriate language and concepts. We never avoided these conversations because if we don’t teach them the correct way to think about things, then the devil will teach them the perverted way to think about them. These children were given to me and my wife to steward for God; they do not belong to the devil. Therefore, I will not give the devil an opportunity to twist and distort my children. So, I will speak about these things!

Proverbs 4:1-4 gives similar instructions to us saying, “*My children, listen when your father corrects you. Pay attention and learn good judgment, for I am giving you good guidance. Don’t turn away from my instructions. For I, too, was once my father’s son, tenderly loved as my mother’s only child. My father taught me, “Take my words to heart. Follow my commands, and you will live.”*

In this passage in Proverbs, Solomon, the father, is telling his children that he, too, was once young and had to listen to his father—it is the passing of God’s way of living from generation to generation. There are teaching moments—moments when we sit and instruct, and there are also moments that teach—the moments where discipline and confrontation are necessary to drive foolishness out of the heart of a child for the sake of his soul. **Proverbs 22:6** instructs us to “*raise a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”*

Discipline Brings Honor

Let’s begin by looking at some of the realities of child-discipline. There are three ultimate realities for you and your family when discipline happens in the home: First, it is godly to discipline and it brings blessing. Second, the child becomes honorable, and third, you will be honored.

Proverbs 20:7 says, *“The godly walk with integrity; blessed are their children who follow them.”* This verse does not explicitly talk about child raising, but it does speak about integrity. Integrity carries the concept of “wholeness”; something that is complete and not fractured or compartmentalized—everything is integrated and working together. In other words, our church life is not different than our home life, and the things we say we profess as followers of Jesus are the very things we live out at home.

I wonder if sometimes there is a disconnect between mom and dad following Jesus verses children that walk away from the Lord. I understand that this is highly nuanced and there are many factors that are involved. At the end of the day, people will make their own choices for good or for bad. But part of the way we can most influence those choices is by living with integrity at home and putting into practice the things that we profess as believers. In this way, children see a consistent life of integrity that is not fractured and giving off different signals. This integrity affects the blessings of the children who follow them!

Integris child raising will also bring honor to the parents. **Proverbs 27:11** says, *"Be wise, my child, and make my heart glad. Then I will be able to answer my critics."* I understand that we ultimately raise our children for their sakes so that they can know Jesus and be productive and responsible adults with families of their own, But when children are required to live with understanding, and are required to be respectful, obedient, and truthful, people notice and it reflects on the parents.

In contrast to this, **Proverbs 29:15** says, "*To discipline a child produces wisdom, but a mother is disgraced by an undisciplined child."* Also, doing the difficult work of disciplining a child, which, frankly, is not pleasant to do, is a short-term difficulty that will bring long term joy. **Proverbs 29:17** says, *"Discipline your children, and they will give you peace of mind and will make your heart glad."*

The Mentality of Discipline

Disciplining a child has nothing to do with getting angry at something they've done and then they feel the wrath of your retribution. Running after a child with a sandal waving in the air, screaming at the top of your lungs, and then grabbing the child, depending on what is done, can be borderline abusive, but it is also foolish and unhelpful to form the child in the way they need to bring them understanding and wisdom. The children need us. They need our life experiences, our wisdom, our love, our understanding, and our presence much more than they need our stuff or our anger. **Proverbs 20:15**, says that *"Wise words are more valuable than much gold and many rubies."* This is the treasure that we give our children!

To properly discipline a child in order to raise them to be a follower of Jesus requires a different mentality than just thinking "I am their parent and they need to do as I say!" It requires a different mentality than simply getting angry when things go wrong and then bringing instant correction out of anger. The other extreme is Not disciplining them at all because either you believe they're so smart (which they're not smarter than you!) or you're afraid of what the child may think or what other people may think, or there's fear of repeating past hurtful patterns.

There needs to be a mentality that sees your job as a parent not out of fear or anger, but of love and compassion, which both require a firm hand of discipline from a level headed and even-tempered person. Here are some Proverbs that help distinguish the mentality of a parent in child-raising:

Proverbs 29:25, says, *"Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but trusting the Lord means safety."* We cannot live in fear of our children, but we live with them in understanding. We seek to understand them, and they certainly need to be heard and not thrown aside, but we do not ever fear their reaction to whatever correction needs to happen. This requires lots of persistence, strength of will call mom character, and a heart of love that tells the child through your actions that you love them enough to not let them ruin their lives by behavior they don't fully understand or understand the consequences of. There's no doubt, this is a tough job, and none of us does it perfectly. However, **Proverbs 19:18** says, *"Discipline your children while there is hope. Otherwise, you will ruin their lives."*

Part of the mentality of raising a child in the way of the Lord, especially when they are very young, is to not just let things slide without confronting—It is a mentality of consistency. If a lie is bad once, it's bad every time. If I am to be obeyed today, then I am to be obeyed tomorrow. **Proverbs 20:12** says, "ears to hear and eyes to see, both are gifts from the Lord!" I believe that God gives parents a special grace to see things in their kids lives and to not just let it go without confrontation. As parents, we know our children. We know their tendencies, and oftentimes we see the motives with which they do things. God has given us special mom and dad eyes that see and mom and dad ears that hear. This is a grace to see what's going on in the life of our child and help them understand and process what is going on. Oftentimes that processing will need specific disciplinary actions. Because God has given us the grace of eyes that see and ears that hear, we as parents also need to pray diligently for our children!

My mom told me the story of when I was about four years old that I was doing things that were a cause for concern. They weren't blatantly wicked, nor had I done anything that required disciplinary action, but it was just off enough that they were concerned about it. My parents began to pray for me, and they prayed that God would give them a moment where they could legitimately call my attention to specific behaviors that needed correction. God is so faithful! It wasn't long after that, that God gave them the opportunity to correct something inside of my heart, and it wasn't long after that, that I accepted Jesus into my heart as my Lord and savior.

The "Heart" of Discipline

Praying for our children and living in understanding of them, and not ignoring the things that are going on in front of us, leads us from a mentality of discipline to the heart of discipline. For Teresa and me, discipline was rarely about the action that was being done, but about the heart behind why something was done. If the action is simply corrected, but there's no understanding given, then the heart doesn't have a chance to grow. It is only a mind that learns to do things differently for reasons it doesn't fully comprehend. Correcting actions alone is like tearing leaves off of a tree hoping that the tree will wither up. You can tear leaves off of a tree, but they will just come back next season. In order to get the tree out, the root needs to be dug up. Actions are simply the outward expressions of what's going on inside of a child's heart.

Proverbs 22:15 unequivocally says that foolishness is bound up in a child's heart, and **20:11** says *"Even children are known by the way they act, whether their conduct is pure, and whether it is right."* During all the years when our children were young, and a teacher, or a coach, or another trustworthy person in authority who is either with our children or observing them would give us a report on something they had done—we never took the side of our children, or made justifications for them saying things like, "Well, the teacher just doesn't like them," or "That other kid is always getting into trouble." We will work to ascertain the facts of the situation, and if indeed our child was at fault, then we would correct the child instead of believing that they were incapable of ever doing any wrong.

I believe this is wisdom because our job is not to be their friend. Our job as parents is to confront the foolishness that is bound up in the heart of every child. And because God's wisdom says that you can know a child by his fruits, then if there's bad fruit coming out, it does the child no good to simply shift the blame to someone else and let them go free with no confrontation, dialogue, or discipline. **Proverbs 29:21** warns us that *"A servant pampered from childhood will become a rebel."* If we make excuses and justifications; if we concede to whatever the child wants, we are making them into a rebel that will ultimately bring much pain to our hearts in later years. Once again, these are heart issues we're dealing with far beyond simply questionable actions.

As **Proverbs 27:19** says, *"As a face is reflected in water, so the heart reflects the real person."* In other words, when there is a heart issue involved, then it needs to be dealt with at a heart level. It is mortal and fatal to not confront a child in the foolishness of the heart. As **Proverbs 22:15** says, *"A youngster's heart is filled with foolishness, but physical discipline will drive it far away."* And we are once again warned in **Proverbs 21:16**, *"The person who strays from common sense will end up in the company of the dead."*

When we speak about matters of the heart, I always looked at things in our children's lives as seeds. Far too often, parents let these seeds of lying or defiance, or of hissy fits become implanted for far too long. When a seed of lying falls into a child's heart—or any sinful seed for that matter—and you first see it break the surface and begin to produce its ugly fruit, it is much easier to pluck it out of a child's heart the moment it first surfaces versus making excuses and letting it take deep root. Years later, when its bitter fruits are being tasted by everybody, it is much more difficult to uproot that plant. It is much easier to do it when they are very small and very young.

A Physical Body Trains the Soul

It becomes very tricky, in today's world, to speak of physical discipline. We live in a culture that has become skeptical and even critical of physical discipline, and not all of that is for bad reasons. There certainly is physical abuse that can happen when parents are angry and out of control. By no means am I ever advocating for this. Nor am I advocating for a lack of physical discipline. It is through the discipline of the body that the soul is formed. Take this out of child raising for just a moment and put it in the context of our own Christian walk. Fasting is a temporary physical deprivation so that

our spirit is more sensitive to God's Spirit. The spiritual disciplines are formed through bodily discipline as well. Fasting has already been mentioned, but we also discipline our soul and our spirit to pay attention to the Lord by putting our physical body in a place where it can be alone and focused away from distractions. I am not implying that God brings sickness on us for the sake of spiritual maturity, but oftentimes physical illness forces us into a new perspective of endurance and faith that we otherwise may not have had. I understand that there are parents who have an aversion to physical discipline, and I am not judging anyone for those beliefs. I would, however, submit to you, that if you can trust the word of God in all things, then you can trust it in this one as well. In child-raising, consider **Proverbs 20:30**, "*Physical punishment cleanses away evil; such discipline purifies the heart."*

It is in the same way that the physical discipline of a child also trains their soul and keeps them from destructive patterns. Let me reiterate, that physical discipline is not done out of anger, but it is an act of deliverance for the child. **Proverbs 23:13-14** says, *"Don't fail to discipline your children. The rod of punishment won't kill them. Physical discipline may well deliver his soul from hell."* There are five issues of the heart for which we would physically discipline our children, because I deemed these five things as the most destructive, and the things that would lead them on a path to hell faster than anything else. They are: manipulation (including hissy-fits), disobedience, lying, hiding, and defiance.

When my children grew up beyond the place where physical discipline was appropriate, I had a talk with each one of them telling them that, though they were no longer going to be physically disciplined by myself or their mother, the purpose was to help them learn that there were consequences to their actions, And that the older they got, the more consequential their actions would become. If they do something terrible as a child, it may incur some physical discipline, but if they do something terrible as an adult, it could very well ruin the rest of their lives and they would long for the day when the only consequence in their life was a momentary physical discipline. But if we will do the hard work when they are small, there will be much joy when they are big.

I do not say this from a theoretical standpoint. Three of my four children are now adults, and the fourth is very close. We were very diligent when the children were small, and now that they are mostly grown and entering their adult years, they have been nothing but a joy to us. They are becoming friends to us as our parenting years come to a close. We have the joy of watching them make good decisions, follow Jesus, and pursue His will for their lives.

Proverbs 21:21, "*Whoever pursues righteousness and unfailing love will find life, righteousness, and honor."*