

Why Adults and Children Must Be Disciplined

Rich Nathan

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Next Gen

Hebrews 12:4-11

I want to begin today with a sad story. A woman named Breanna swerved off the road one night in front of a home owned by the Boyles family. The reason she swerved off the road is because a tire blew on her car. Breanna worked nights as a chef. Three members of the Boyles family went out to help Breanna.

A youth pastor named Brian Jennings happened by and offered to help Breanna as well. Breanna called her mom and told her that she would be delayed, but not to worry. There were some very nice people helping her. While Breanna was on the phone, a red Ford F350 going more than 70 miles per hour came out of the darkness and slammed into Breanna and three of the folks helping her, killing them all.

The driver of the truck was a 16-year-old boy named Ethan Couch. His blood alcohol level was three times the legal limit for an adult. He also had Valium and marijuana in his system. Ethan pled guilty to four counts of manslaughter, but his lawyer argued during sentencing that Ethan was a victim of poor parenting in which he never received discipline for any bad behavior. He said he was a victim of “affluenza” – affluent parents who never discipline their kids. Of course, affluenza is not a recognized psychiatric disorder, but the judge bought it. After three days of testimony, the young man who drove a pick up truck while drunk and high on drugs and killed four people was sentenced not to prison, but to a cushy California rehab center and then he was put on probation.

Ethan had been previously picked up at 14 for being drunk, but his parents imposed no consequences for his behavior. When his mom was asked whether she ever disciplined Ethan for anything, she testified that she thinks she sometimes took away little things from him, but she couldn't remember.

Have you ever been around a totally spoiled, undisciplined child? It's not uncommon to see preschoolers ages four and five running wild in their home or a store or a restaurant grabbing things, breaking things, screaming and yelling, while Mom and Dad sit by helplessly. I'm not talking about a two-year-old who is wandering around a home, touching everything. I'm talking about children who are old enough to be able to control themselves. It's not unusual to hear parents make excuses for their children's bad behavior.

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Excuses for not disciplining

- Well, he's a really active child.
- Boys will be boys.
- She didn't get enough sleep last night.

It's not uncommon to hear elementary or middle school kids speaking really disrespectfully to their parents in public while mom and dad just sit there while their kids mouth off to them.

- I'll talk to her when we go home.
- I'm not always going to be the bad guy.
- My spouse needs to step up and deal with this.
- We haven't spent a lot of time together recently. I think they're acting out as a result.

I know there are a lot of teenagers and kids listening to me right now doing a talk about why parents need to discipline kids is not exactly what you wanted to come to church to hear. It's certainly not what you wanted your parents listening to today. You're probably sitting there wondering why the pastor doesn't do a talk with one of these titles:

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Why Children must get Everything They Ask For and More

Or

Slide

Why Children's phones must be Upgraded every Year

Or

Slide

Best Sports Cars to buy for Your Teens

Why should we ever listen to a talk titled:

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Why Adults and Children Must Be Disciplined

Let me give you two basic rules today. This isn't just for parents or grandparents, but teachers, principals, coaches, it's for anyone who is involved in raising a child. Here are the two basic rules as I begin today.

The first rule:

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A child who has not been disciplined with love by his or her little world will be disciplined without love, by the big world.

The big world, the world of employers and bill collectors and police and prosecutors and judges and the criminal justice system, will impose discipline whenever a child's little world has failed to discipline that child with love. In other words, we're going to get disciplined somewhere. Discipline is either going to come in your home with kindness from people who love you and are for you or it's going to come without kindness and with a sledgehammer from people who don't care about you at all.

Rule number one is a child who has not be disciplined with love by his or her little world will be disciplined without love, by the big world.

Here's rule number two. Parents, you can write these down.

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A parent who refuses to bring short-term pain into a child's life through discipline is guaranteeing their child will experience long-term pain later on.

Long-term pain by way of broken relationships, a failure to get and hold a job. Long-term pain in terms of addiction and financial problems.

The reason we're doing this series called "Next Gen" and the reason you hear the Vineyard from time to time recruiting volunteers to teach in children's ministry, the reason why we invested so much in hosting a Student Night every Sunday night of the year is because

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Vineyard Columbus is a church that really values kids

We want to talk today about disciplining children. But in the text that we're looking at today it's not just children that need to be disciplined. God also disciplines adults. That's why I called today's talk "Why Adults and Children Must Be Disciplined". Let's pray.

Slide Hebrews 12:4-11

⁴In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,

⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”

⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! ¹⁰ They 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. ¹¹ 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.

The word discipline shows up 10 times in this text. And it applies to adults and children, not just children. Let me give you the context for this emphasis on discipline.

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The context of discipline

The writer of the book of Hebrews paints a picture of the Christian life that is completely different than the picture of the Christian life that most of us have in the 21st century here in America. The writer describes the Christian life in Hebrews 11 as a journey of adventure. To live the Christian life is to venture out into the wilderness, not knowing where God is going to lead you. That’s what the patriarchs did – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They traveled out like the Lewis and Clark Expedition. They didn’t know what was around the next bend, over the next mountain. We don’t know what we’re going to encounter as we follow the leadership of God’s Spirit. The Christian life is meant to be this incredible journey of adventure. We’re always discovering something new, something unexpected.

The writer goes on and says not only is the Christian life like a journey of adventure, but the Christian life is also like a strenuous conflict. The Christian is not simply playing a game at a summer camp. Being a Christian is not described as a round of golf at the Muirfield Country Club. There are real casualties, real grief, real suffering. The Christian life is a journey of adventure. The Christian life is a life of real conflict, real challenges.

And then at the beginning of chapter 12, the author describes the Christian life as being like a marathon, running a race. Here’s what we read in verse 1:

Slide Hebrews 12:1

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,

And finally, in verse 4, the writer describes the Christian life as being like a wrestling match in the ancient Olympic games.

Slide Hebrews 12:4

⁴ In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Do you see how different the biblical description is of the Christian life compared to the messages that churches today in trying to get people to come to our churches. What church in America says, “Come join the church and be part of the most exciting adventure you will ever have in your life. You will journey into the unknown as you learn to follow God’s Spirit.”? “You’ll be facing fierce opposition as we train for a marathon together. This wrestling match called the Christian life is going to take everything you’ve got, but you’ll never find anything more satisfying, more fulfilling, more exhilarating than following Christ.” That’s not what we say.

We say, “Come join us. You’ll hear music that you’re really going to enjoy. We have the best coffee in town. Our chairs are so soft – your bottom is going to feel great! We promise to not keep you for more than an hour because we know you have more important things to do than come to church. By the way, we have valet parking so you don’t even need to walk across our parking lot.”

Who needs discipline with the low bar that most churches set? We can step over that bar and still have time to binge watch our favorite television shows on Netflix.

Following Jesus is really hard. Following Jesus demands everything you’ve got. Putting your life under the lordship of Jesus Christ is like hand-to-hand combat or running a marathon. Following Jesus is really demanding which Jesus said it is. We need discipline to prepare for this thing called the Christian life.

But how do we discipline our kids? And how are we as adults disciplined? This text gives us a model for discipline.

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The model of discipline

11 times in the text, God the Father is held up as the model for us for discipline. We need this model because part of the challenge of disciplining children as parents is there is so much conflicting parenting advice. So many different opinions about how we should raise our kids. Last year, there were over 3,500 books published in the US on parenting, offering advice, much of which is utterly conflicted and contradictory. Mothers, should you be a Tiger Mom, a Soccer Mom, a stay-at-home Mom, a working Mom? Should you engage in slow parenting? Helicopter parenting? Free-range parenting? Attachment parenting? Nurturing parenting? Strict parenting? Ethical

parenting? Indulgent parenting? Authoritative parenting? Authoritarian parenting? Do you spank? Do you not spank? Do you reward? Do you scold? Do you offer tough love?

When you read the history of parenting advice over the course of the last century and some of it is hilarious! The doctor who wrote back in the early 1900's who was very anti-banana. He insisted that no child should ever eat a banana. He claimed that giving your child a banana was inhuman and stupid.

One doctor said in 1919, speaking at the convention of the American Medical Association, "I have used red wine as a tonic for weak children with amazing results. However, I instructed the parents not to let the children know that I was giving them wine, but to call it red tonic." This doctor also advocated for the use of whiskey in the sick room. Kids raised on wine and whiskey were probably walking around the house loopy all the time! That's why they were so calm!

Another bit of parenting advice said that a child's feet should be washed every day in ice cold water and should have shoes so thin that they leak and let in water to produce healthy, vigorous children. Cold feet is apparently good character building for your children.

Back in 1928, a man by the name of John Watson wrote a hugely influential book titled *Psychological Care of Infant and Child*. He said this: "Never hug and kiss your child. Never let them sit in your lap. If you must, kiss them once on the forehead when they say goodnight. Shake hands with them in the morning. Give them a pat on the head if they've done an extraordinarily good job at a task." Of course, if you want to have a healthy child, you would do the exact opposite of what Dr. Watson is recommending.

There is a blizzard of differing opinions on how to raise a child. If you follow the parenting advice over the last century, the pendulum has swung from harshly authoritarian with your kid to wildly permissive and back and forth. On top of that, in a church like Vineyard Columbus, we have different cultures represented in this church. Sometimes we look at each other and the way we're raising kids, especially if they are ethnically different than us, we shake our heads and say, "That's not right. Don't you know anything about children?"

On top of the differing advice and different cultures, we all have different temperaments. Some of us are very accommodating. Some of us are very strict. Who's right? Is there any standard? Any model that all of us can appeal to whatever our cultural background, whatever our temperament, whatever time in history we're living in, whatever our child is like? The Bible says, "Yes!" God our Father is the perfect parent.

Christians, our model for parenting, just like our model for leadership, our model for pastoring, our model for teaching, our model for coaching, is God our Father. When we Christians when we're trying to come up with the ideal way to do something, what we do is not just listen to all the counsel in the world. We think about how God our father does it. How did Abba, Father do it?

In the gospels, Jesus calls God "Father" more than 200 times, over 100 times in the gospel of John alone. God is the ideal parent. Now what we know about our Father God from the Bible is that God is, as I've reminded you for decades, God is a both-and God. God is love and God is light. This is what we read in 1 John

Slide 1 John 4:8

⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Slide 1 John 1:5

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

Both-and. God is love and God is light. He is holy love and he is loving holiness. When we deny one side of God – when we so emphasize his love that we deny his holiness or we so emphasize his holiness that we deny his love – we have a sub-Christian view of God. The Bible regularly communicates this both-and nature of God. Look at what the Apostle Paul said about God our Father in Romans:

Slide Romans 11:22

²²Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

Look at what John the Apostle wrote:

Slide John 1:17-18

¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

¹⁸No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

There are two ingredients necessary for any child to flourish in this world – love on the one hand and discipline on the other. Love and discipline are the two ingredients necessary for a child to flourish. Love and discipline are the two ingredients for athletes to flourish on a team. Love and discipline are the two ingredients for students to flourish in the classroom. Love and discipline are the two ingredients for church members to flourish in a church. Love and discipline are necessary for all of us as adults.

Good parenting is going to hit this both-and sweet spot. Without being prescriptive about the way you need to raise your child, given your child's temperament and your disposition, your culture, the broad boundaries are love and discipline.

If I was to compare it to a baseball field, I'd say there are two foul lines. Love is the foul line that goes out to the left field. Discipline is the foul line that goes out to right field. The field is huge and we don't all stand in the same spot. But we all, if we're going to be good parents, are going to stand on the field between the foul lines of love and discipline, grace and truth, sternness and kindness. Parents need to be warm and parents need to warn. Parents need to be affectionate, and parents need to be effective. Just like God our Father, parents need to elicit from their children with friendship and fear. The Lord calls us his friends repeatedly through the Bible. But we're also taught to fear the Lord. We're to take his commands with absolute seriousness. And likewise, parents ought to be great friends with their children. But there ought to be a measure of fear. Your child needs to know there are going to be consequences if I cross a clear boundary that my parents have set.

What's the motive of discipline?

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The motive of discipline

Let's look at verses 5-8 again.

Slide Hebrews 12:5-8

⁵ And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,

“My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,

⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”

⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.

The writer of Hebrews is encouraging us that when we are disciplined by God our Father, far from communicating that our Father hates us, God is communicating to us that he loves us and we are his children.

A loving parent says:

Slide (this can transition in as he says them or be separate slides)

- Because I love my children, I'm honest with them. I don't paint a dishonest picture of how they are doing. I speak to them lovingly, but truthfully.
- Because I love my children, I care enough to offer clear direction to them even if it's difficult or unpopular at the time.
- Because I love my children, I help them to see the long term effects of their decisions. I teach them to pay now and play later.
- Because I love my children, I provide loving discipline for them. But more than that, I teach them to discipline themselves so the world won't discipline them without love.

We talked for a moment about the motive of discipline. I do need to make a clear distinction here that maybe I should have made earlier. God our Father disciplines us his children, but he never punishes us. Christians are never punished by the Lord. The Bible is very clear on this point. Punishment involves payment for our sins. The reason we put people in prison for a crime is to punish them, to make them pay. When they get out, we say this person has paid their debt to society. But the person who looks to Jesus Christ for salvation, that person has Jesus Christ as their substitute, as their sin-bearer. Jesus was punished on the cross so that we would never be punished.

As the Apostle Paul puts it in Romans 8:1,

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God never punishes a Christian

He does, however, discipline us. How does he discipline us?

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The method of discipline

Look at verse 11 with me:

Slide Hebrews 12:11

¹¹No 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.

This word "train" is a really interesting word in the original Greek. The Greek word is a form of the word:

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Gymnazdo

It's where we get our word gymnasium. The word literally means to be stripped naked or to exercise naked. The Greeks stripped naked when they exercised.

Think about what happens when we exercise today. We go to a gym. We take off our street clothes. We put on gym shorts and a t-shirt. There are mirrors all around the gym. And we're constantly seeing all our bulges and bodily flaws exposed. That's what God's discipline does. We encounter difficulty. We encounter adversity. We encounter pain. We encounter suffering. It exposes some of our character flaws. We see how much we demand that life goes the way we want it to. When we suffer we become aware of the shallowness of our faith and the distance we are from God. God's training takes things away from us. God's training removes things we rely on. Things that prop us up. And he leaves us naked and exposed so that we will depend only on him. That's how God trains us adults.

As we consider God our Father as our model for parenting, how, parents, should we discipline our kids? If we were in the ancient world we'd use corporal discipline. Christians today differ on whether spanking is ever appropriate. But I think there's something here in this idea of *Gymnazo*, stripping naked that gives us insight regarding what discipline feels like. Discipline in the Bible is clearly way more than spanking. When we discipline a child, we take away something that they want. We deprive our kids of a certain privilege. Discipline involves deprivation. And discipline involves revelation. "Son or daughter, because of your abuse of your freedom, you don't get to do what you want to do. You're going to miss the party. I'm taking your phone for a week. I'm taking away your video game or your computer or your car keys." I'm holding up a mirror and showing you the reality of what you have done. And it doesn't look very good!

There are two great seminars coming up that will help you learn something about disciplining your children. Consider attending the Legacy Conference and a Family Talk on Discipline.

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Info about both upcoming events

What is the purpose of all of this?

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The purpose of discipline

The purpose of discipline is found in verse 10-11:

Slide Hebrews 12:10-11

¹⁰They 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. ¹¹No 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.

The purpose of discipline from God our Father very simply is so that we might look more like God's Son, Jesus, and we might in our life experience some of the fruits of salvation. Parents, if you consider yourself to be followers of Jesus Christ, then your overriding goal in parenting ought to be to disciple your children. Disciple and discipline both come from the same root word. We want our kids to grow up looking like Jesus. To think about others and not just themselves like Jesus. To be kind and not bully other children like Jesus. To not be self-centered but other-centered like Jesus. To not lie but instead tell the truth like Jesus. To be willing to serve like Jesus. To be self-controlled like Jesus. To bring peace into the world like Jesus. To be wise with their words and their relationships like Jesus. We want our kids to grow up and be just like Jesus – passionately loving God and loving other people. That's why we discipline. So our kids will become disciples!

Gospel Call

You know, there was someone who did this better than any of us. He loved and served the Lord all the way to death when everything was taken from him. The person I'm talking about, of course, is Jesus. He lost all his friends. One of his best friends betrayed him. He lost his reputation in the community. He was unjustly accused and unjustly tried and beaten. He was spit on. He was nailed to a cross. He was in excruciating pain and never stopped serving and obeying God.

There are some of you who have never made a decision to accept what Jesus has done on your behalf, to die for your sins, to offer you forgiveness. Some of you have never made a clear decision to completely surrender your life to Jesus who obeyed God to the point of death and then rose from the dead. Today, if you want to completely surrender your life to Jesus, I'm going to ask you to stand up right now.

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Hebrews 12:4-11

1. Excuses for not disciplining
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 - a. The model of discipline
 - b. The motive of discipline
 - c. The method of discipline
 - d. The purpose of discipline