

Inculcating Godliness in Children

The book of Proverbs has very relevant and helpful counsels for parents concerning inculcating good discipline in their children. In fact, many passages in Proverbs are written in the form of fatherly or motherly admonition for children. They constitute a vast array of wise counsels for diverse situations that parents would face in the bringing up of their children. All Christian parents do well to take heed of these biblical counsels for the proper upbringing of their children, including inculcating godly discipline in their children.

Parental Responsibility

The actual responsibility of inculcating good virtues in our children lies with the parents. Sadly, though many parents know this truth, they have been pushing this immense responsibility to others so that they can pursue their own ambitions for luxurious living. The book of Proverbs has this grave warning for parents who forsake their God-given responsibility to provide appropriate instruction and discipline when it matters the most – “but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (Proverbs 29:15b). So, it advises every parent to “Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give

delight unto thy soul” (Proverbs 29:17). Moreover, Proverbs 13:24 says “he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.” In other words, parents must be prompt in instructing and correcting their children. Missing out on administering relevant instruction and correction, whenever the need or situation arises, is a sure recipe for much sorrow and trouble!

Forms of Discipline

The word “discipline” in Hebrew (*musar*) implies both instruction and chastisement. In other words, discipline has to be administered through teaching, rebuke and correction – even the rod of correction. In Proverbs 29:15, we are unambiguously told that “The rod and reproof give wisdom”. If a child disobeys the parents after being instructed in proper attitude and conduct, steps must be taken to reinforce proper discipline in him through corrective measures, such as rebuke and the use of the rod (cf. Proverbs 4:2, 12; 15:32; 13:24; 22:15). Hence, “Withhold not correction from the child” (Proverbs 23:13).

Areas of Discipline

The wisdom that God provides in Proverbs calls out to every parent to

Godly Discipline

“Train up a child in the way he should go” (Proverbs 22:6). Biblical, godly nurturing of our children means not only do we first of all know the right path that our children should go, but also that we be committed to pointing them to the right way and training them to “travel” (i.e. stay on course) in it. Proverbs has much to say about what the right “path” entails. The following counsels cover some pertinent areas of discipline that parents should inculcate in their children.

1. Teach children to fear the Lord

First things first, “My son, fear thou the LORD ...” (Proverbs 24:21a). Everything hinges on this – “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7). We must impress on our children the absolute necessity to have reverence for the infinite, eternal and unchangeable thrice-holy God!

2. Teach children to honour the Lord in worship

Against the setting of fatherly instruction, Proverbs admonishes us to “Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine” (Proverbs 3:9-10). We must exhort our children to give glory to God for all His blessings, just as He has prescribed in the Bible.

He that spareth his
rod hateth his son:
but he that loveth
him chasteneth
him betimes.
(Proverbs 13:24)



3. Teach children to obey parents

“My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother” (Proverbs 1:8). It must always be insisted that parents’ instructions are to be followed. Hence, it is very important that parents make sure their instructions are biblical.

4. Teach children to respect authorities

“My son, fear thou the LORD and the king; and meddle not with them that are given to change” (Proverbs 24:21). Our children should be instructed on how to show respect for rulers of the land, government officials, teachers, etc.

5. Teach children to love neighbours

“Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee. Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee” (Proverbs 3:27-29). Clearly, the biblical application to be drawn here is the need to instil in our children love and respect for neighbours, especially for those who are needy.

6. Teach children how to select friends

Proverbs 1:10 gravely warns: “My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.” Undeniably, the company one keeps will bring with it peer pressure. “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed” (Proverbs 13:20). The friendships that our children develop would either help them in the right way or seduce them into moral and social evils. So, it is important that we guide them with much diligence regarding who they should choose as their friends.

7. Teach children to guard their minds

“My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings ... Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:20-23). Teach them not to say or do anything without proper evaluation as to whether a particular thing or activity or experience pleases God. Exhort them to regard divine counsels above their own ideas, imaginations and likes. To do that, their minds should regularly think on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report; of virtue, and of praise (cf. Philippians 4:8).

8. Teach children to control lust of the flesh

“And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? For the ways of man are before the

eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings. His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins. He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray” (Proverbs 5:20-23; cf. 5:1-11; 6:20-28). Teenagers and youths must be warned against the allurements of sexual sins and immoral persons. Say “No” to watching movies which are sensual in content or reading salacious novels with sexually explicit content. Such entertainment will fan the flame of lust in our children!

9. Teach children to hate gluttony, drunkenness and debauchery

“Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: for the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags” (Proverbs 23:19-21; cf. 31:1-6). Parents must warn their children against such pleasure-seeking habits and lifestyles, which are not only destructive to their bodies but also to their relationships and testimony for Christ.

10. Teach children to watch their words

“Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee” (Proverbs 4:24). Parents must demand pure language from their children. Honourable and gracious speech is a grand peculiarity of godly children.

11. Teach children to work diligently

“Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest” (Proverbs 6:6-8; cf. 10:5). We must not allow laziness and procrastination in our children. Insist on diligence and instil an industrious spirit in them.

12. Teach children to choose a good spouse

“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil” (Proverbs 31:10-11). These words are from a mother to her son. Parents’ mutual love and commitment, together with their instruction, must aid children to choose godly life-partners with whom they can raise a godly generation.

Though the above is not an exhaustive list, it nevertheless demonstrates that the book of Proverbs is indeed a treasury of wisdom on child-rearing instructions. May Christian parents, with all their getting, get wisdom and understanding (cf. Proverbs 4:7) from the timeless Proverbs in guiding their children in the path of righteousness and godly discipline.

