

Parenting God's Way

By Jenny Rose Curtis



Nowadays, all you have to do is walk into a bookstore and a slew of parenting self-help books jump out at you. From all sides they tell you the "four steps to having confident kids," the "key to raising a successful child," and the "reason your child is the way he is." While most of these authors are truly trying to help parents, most of them are writing books filled with lies and misconceptions. Many popular ideas such as not spanking your child have been sweeping through the nation for the last 70 years or so. Yet with all of these new ideas, children are growing up more rebellious and "unsuccessful" than ever! So where does a Christian parent find a reliable source to train their children up by? The most reliable source in the whole world is the Bible, the perfect Word of God given to those who believe in Jesus to prepare and transform them. Parents should never look at another book on child-training until they've looked and meditated on all that the Bible has to say on raising your children, which is quite a lot. Yet additional parenting books are helpful and encouraging, often opening parents' eyes to something they hadn't noticed before or applying the Word in ways the parents hadn't thought of. Parents must be careful though because it's very easy for authors to steer away from what the Bible says and include their own theories and ideas that, although they may sometimes be helpful, need to instead be built on the foundation of God's Word.

As an assignment for my current character class, *Motherhood*, I have read quite a few books on parenting. Most were written by Christian authors who did amazing jobs at relaying their own stories and encouraging parents with Biblical teaching, although there were a few of them that were not written by Christians and included unbiblical ideas. It takes discernment to weed out the truth from the lies in these books. I write this now to share with you my three favorite parenting books that I feel are very trustworthy and why. There are many things that these books have in common, but, most important, is that they all base every idea and teaching on the solid foundation of the Bible.

The most controversial question among parents these days is, "Should I discipline my child?" A loud resounding YES comes clear from the Bible in numerous places. Proverbs mentions it numerous times, and many examples are given of parents that did discipline, which brought rewards, and parents that didn't, which brought grief. That brings us to the next most famous question, "How should I discipline my child?" In *To Train Up a Child*, the authors, Michael and Debi Pearl, explain that discipline shouldn't start when the child begins to show patterns of disobedience, but rather before. Disciplining your child from infancy isn't abuse, it is training. Neither I nor the authors of this book condone abuse, and, believe me, there is a big difference between discipline and abuse. Many parents are afraid to spank their children for fear that they will hurt them. They say they love their children too much to spank them. Yet those same parents renounce any and all responsibility for their child's rebellion later on. Parents should love their children enough to spank them. The Bible also provides parents with a balance. Proverbs says not to spare the rod from your child and Ephesians commands the parent not to exasperate their children or provoke them to anger. This means training your child to obey your commands to the letter immediately and teaching them that there are always consequences when they disobey. Michael Pearl gives the example of a child touching something that is off limits. The parent in return says "no" and slaps their hand. The child reaches again and is confronted with a "no" from the parent and another slap on the hand. It may take a while for the child to catch on that touching the forbidden item brings pain and discipline, but they will learn. Nipping rebellion in the bud from the beginning is not something that parents regret later on, especially when those children reach their teenage years. I believe that discipline is a subject that *To Train Up a Child* teaches on reliably well.

In addition to spanking and correction, love, acceptance, and encouragement should be used in discipline. Discipline and love shouldn't be considered two separate things a parent gives, but rather one continuous action. Your child sins for a reason. Children are not perfect any more than adults are not perfect. Children are sinful too and their hearts need a Savior just as we do. In *Shepherding Your Child's Heart*, the author talks about guiding your child in the way he should go. This is why parents need to get to the heart issue of a child's behavior, instead of spanking for just the action of disobedience itself. If a little boy hits his younger sister, you should definitely spank him for hitting, but make sure he understands the sin in his heart as well. Ask him why he hit her and then proceed to explain why that attitude is wrong and hurtful. Never berate him or demean him, but work it out until his heart is right with the Lord, you, and whoever else he may have hurt. This means that you have to be right with the Lord yourself. James says that man's anger doesn't bring about the righteous life that God desires and it assuredly doesn't bring about the righteous life in your child either. Disciplining while you're angry is not a good idea. This relays to your kid that when he does something wrong, you will punish him out of your desire to make him pay and your anger with him and not out of the desire to bring him to repentance.

Discipline should be a bond between the parent and child; a time of correction, not "paying them their due." *Shepherding Your Child's Heart* talks about discipline being the time that you restore them to joy and rightness with you and with the Lord. It gives the example of a father and child going into the bathroom for a spanking and coming out with smiles on both of their faces. The grandfather, witnessing this, was appalled because the young boy wasn't angry at his dad or crying out of frustration. This grandfather had a big misconception of discipline. Don't fall into that same trap.

One of the things I love about Barbara Cook, the author of *How to Raise Good Kids*, is that she is so passionate about the Lord and the power of His Holy Spirit. She encourages both parents and children to walk in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and is excited to see every believer walk in the calling that God has for them. She points out that we live in a fallen world (what a shocker!), and yet encourages parents that their kids don't have to turn out the way the world wants them to. Our children do NOT have to conform to the patterns of this world, according to Romans 12. We can train them in righteousness and spiritual fervor for the Lord! Parents can't afford to take for granted that our children are being raised in a godly household. Show them truth every chance you get! Children need to understand that while the world says one thing, the Bible says another and the Bible is ALWAYS right! How can you do this? By being a part of your children's lives. So often parents are afraid to be their child's friend and instead let them do whatever they want in order to get on their good side. Parents have been given the gift of a human being; they have been appointed to take care of a spiritual being with a soul that can either choose the world and death or Jesus and life.

Because of this, parents cannot afford to waste the time they have with their children. That time is the most critical and life-changing for the child. There are a couple ways to shape your children for the best. Firstly, teach them the Word of God. Don't think that they'll just know what to do on their own. Christians need the Bible. No Christian will ever be mature enough to not need the Word of God daily. But don't just expose them, rather, teach them, explain it to them, and pray about it with them. Secondly, be willing to be a godly example of one who follows the Word of God. Children need to see the Bible in action, especially in their parents. Hypocrisy is one of the main reasons that people that went to church as kids grew up apart from Jesus. But contrary to popular thinking, hypocrisy is not the absence of sin, instead, it's the absence of a prideful spirit that thinks they have and know it all, while their life shows otherwise. Don't be that person. Be humble with your kids and don't confuse them.

These three books, *To Train Up a Child*, *Shepherding Your Child's Heart*, and *How to Raise Good Kids*, all have one thing in common, godly views of child-training that are directly based on the Bible. These children that God has given you, human beings with God-searching souls, have been put in your care temporarily. They're a gift that God has given you, along with the responsibility to train them and point them to Jesus. The moment parents lose sight of their responsibility, they lose sight of God's plan for their lives. Your children need you. Their being so vulnerable, you are the greatest source of truth that they have. This may scare you, but I'd be worried if it didn't! Yet the Bible says that parents can trust the Lord to lead their children if they do all they can to use the Word of God correctly and obey it. Jesus is the ultimate Parent. He can take care of everything that you and your child need. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." God gave you the Word to use for every good work, including raising your children. Use it.