

# If Only They Came With Instructions

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It's not easy to bring up children. Wouldn't it be great if they came with an instruction manual? Well, the good news is that they do. In the Bible God tells us what we need to know if we want to make a stable home for our children and bring them up well.

## The Right Attitude

The first thing to get right is our attitude to our children. There's a tendency today to see having children as a burden and a nuisance, or at least as something to be put in second place to furthering a career or piling up wealth. God sets us right on that one when he tells us that children are a blessing from the Lord.<sup>1</sup> In His scheme of things, children are important. To be entrusted with their care is a privilege and they must take priority over wealth, comfort or social position. If our thinking is in line with God's Word we will delight in our children, we will praise Him for them and their welfare will come very high on our list of priorities.

## The Maker's Manual

In the passage we have been studying from Ephesians chapters 5 and 6 there are four verses which are very important for parents...

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour your father and mother" — which is the first commandment with a promise — "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

## It's Not Easy

Children are to be obedient, because that is right and good — God says so — and all would be well for us parents if our children just did that, but it doesn't work that way. It doesn't work that way because, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child."<sup>3</sup> It does not come naturally for them to do what is right and good. They need to be trained.

## Dad Carries The Can

It may surprise you to realise that God always addresses his instructions on child rearing to fathers. There are at least three good reasons for this.

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1 Psalm 127:3

2 Ephesians 6:1-4

3 Proverbs 22:15

- God says the father is to be the head of the home.
- Every father is accountable to God for the discharge of his responsibilities in bringing up his children.<sup>4</sup>
- In the Bible we are taught to address God as Father. Human fathers, therefore, have the additional responsibility of providing for their children an understanding of fatherhood which will help them to come to know and understand God.

Of course mothers have a part to play. Many of the duties of parenting will be delegated to them, but the important thing that needs to be emphasised is that the father carries the can at the end of the day.

### **Don't Provoke Them**

The first instruction for fathers in Ephesians 6 is that they should not provoke their children to anger, resentment or exasperation. "Don't take the heart out of the child," is another way we could put it.

Here are some things which tend to do just that — avoid them!

- Hypocrisy.
- Inconsistency. This includes things like failure to follow through on threats, going soft at times out of guilt over past excessive harshness, divided authority in the home and reacting in frustration rather than having a consistent approach to wrong-doing.
- Favouritism.
- Ill-Thought-Out Rules And Punishments. An example of this would be the imposition of rules which are only made known after the crime, or the use of unfair rules and punishments.
- Excessive Demands — we can cripple our children by demanding too much of them, so that they see themselves as failures and become driven by a desire to be approved of and to be successful.
- Over Restriction. Remember, sometimes the best way to learn is to have freedom to make mistakes.
- Improper Use Of Authority. Just as Christian husbands rule over their wives with self-sacrificial love, so too Christian parents exercise their God-given authority for the good of their children: not to further their own desires, or release their frustrations.
- Too Many Rules. When discipline is a constant issue in the home there is little fun. Quite apart from that, it is impossible to police too many rules. Remember the Lord gave only ten, and in Eden there was only one. Let me suggest three simple rules which should cover most situations.

#### **Rules Of This House**

Always obey mummy and daddy cheerfully.

Always tell the truth.

Always show respect to others.

- Excessive Negativity. There must be reward to encourage good behaviour as well as punishment for wrong.

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<sup>4</sup> Read Eli's story in 1 Samuel 2:27–4:18 and see the dreadful consequences of his neglect of his responsibility to his sons.

### Give Them Dignity

Although it is not said in so many words, the overall thrust of Ephesians 6 is to imply that we are to treat our children with respect and maintain their dignity. In practice that means:

- We must be careful about how we reprimand them.
- We must speak to them with courtesy.
- We must give explanations for what we demand of them.
- We must be concerned with their concerns and take them seriously.
- We must be approachable; listening, not jumping to conclusions, respecting their opinions and, when we must reject those opinions, explaining why.
- We must express and show love, building up happy memories and teaching the importance of physical affection.

### Train Them

The second instruction in Ephesians 6 is that fathers should bring up their children in the training, or discipline, of the Lord. "The discipline of the Lord" is discipline the way God disciplines us; discipline the way God says it should be done and according to God's standards; discipline which is always consistent, well thought out, dignified, controlled, administered out of love<sup>5</sup> and suited to the child<sup>6</sup> The Bible even teaches us the method we should use to correct misbehaviour.<sup>7</sup>

### Teach Them

A father's role does not stop at discipline. He must also see to it that his children are instructed in the teaching of the Lord. Discipline has to do with outward restraints but instruction has to do with building inner standards. It includes:

- Teaching Christian values.
- Teaching Christian conduct.
- Teaching Christian beliefs.
- The Right Environment

If you want to obey these instructions from God's Word, your home will have to be the kind of place where they can be followed. It will have to be a place where mum and dad take time to discuss their children's needs, plan for them, agree their approach to discipline and pray for their children. It will have to be a place where there are opportunities to talk to the children and listen to them and where there is an atmosphere that will encourage them to talk openly and freely. There will have to be time set aside for their instruction, by word and example, and it will have to be a place where they feel secure and find shelter from the pressures of living in a sinful world.

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5 Proverbs 3:12, Hebrews 12:5-13

6 Proverbs 22:6

7 Proverbs 13:24

## The Goal

Lastly, the implication of all these things is that our goal in bringing up our children is not just to make them into good citizens or prepare them for a good position in life. The most important thing we can do for them is to bring them up to know and serve the Lord.

## Some Things For You To Do

Read the following passages with your family over the next week. Talk about what you read together, make sure you have all understood it and think about what it might mean for your family.

Psalm 127            Why do you think the psalmist says children are like arrows in the hands of a warrior?

1 Samuel 2:27-4:18    To what extent are parents responsible for the behaviour of their children?

Romans 1:18-32        What does this passage say about the reasons for the decline of social values in today's world?

Malachi 4             What do you think Malachi means when he prophesies that Jesus will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children?

Matthew 18:1-9        How might we cause our children to sin (verse 6)?



*What are the rules that must be obeyed in your home and what happens when they are broken?*



*What guidelines do you use to distinguish between the issues on which you must tell your children what to do and issues on which you can give them freedom to make their own choices?*



*Make a list of the values you would like to teach your children. What practical steps are you taking to make sure that each one is taught to them?*

**Just For Children**



Make a list of as many things as you can think of that you could do in order to be more obedient to God's command to obey your parents. Don't show the list to anyone else but keep it, work through it and do as many of those things as you can. This time next year look back at your list and see how much you have changed.