

DISCIPLINE FOR GODLINESS

DISCIPLINE OF FATHERHOOD

FATHERHOOD'S "DO'S"

The comprehensive “**do not**” of fatherhood is followed by the explicit “**do's**” — “instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” — which, when fully understood, **requires three “do's”**: *tenderness, discipline, and instruction*.

Instruction

Last, there is “**instruction**” — verbal instruction, verbal warning. The word “**instruction**” literally means “**to place before the mind.**” Often this means to confront and thus is related to the previous topic, discipline. This is precisely where the high priest Eli was such an abysmal domestic failure in raising his sons. [First Samuel 3:11–13](#) tells us:

“And the Lord said to Samuel: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family — from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them.”

The Greek word for “**restrain**” in the Septuagint has the same root as “**instruction**” in [Ephesians 6:4](#). Eli failed to *confront* his boys. He failed to *instruct* them about their sin. And because of this, they were destroyed.

Clear, forthright instruction is necessary for a proper upbringing. Men, if we are to own up to our responsibilities, we must be:

- Involved in verbally instructing our children.
- Regularly leading them in family devotions and prayer.
- Monitoring and being responsible along with our wives for the input that enters their impressionable minds.
- Taking responsibility to help assure that church is a meaningful experience.
- Above all, we must make sure that the open book of our lives — our example — demonstrates the reality of our instruction, for in watching us they will learn the most.

Late in life Evangeline Booth, age eighty-one and then general of the Salvation Army, was asked when she had first wanted to be a part of the Salvation Army. “Very early,” she answered. “I saw my parents [founders of the Salvation Army] working for

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their people, bearing their burdens. Day and night. They did not have to say a word to me about Christianity.”

The “**do’s**” of fathering — *tenderness, discipline, and instruction* — together demand one great thing, as a certain busy doctor came to realize. He would appear at meals, pay allowances, and give advice, often without really listening to the problems of his family before he spoke. One afternoon, as he was preparing an article for a respected journal of medicine, his little son crept into the forbidden sanctuary of his father’s study. “Daddy,” he appealed. Without speaking, the doctor opened his desk drawer and handed the boy a box of candy.

A few moments later the boy again said, “Daddy,” and his father absentmindedly handed him a pencil. “Daddy,” the boy persisted. The doctor responded to this with a grunt, indicating he knew the boy was there but did not want to be bothered. “Daddy!” the boy called out again.

Angered, the busy doctor swung around in his chair and said, “What on earth is so important that you insist on interrupting me? Can’t you see I’m busy? I have given you candy and a pencil. Now what do you want?”

“Daddy, I want to be with you!”

The “**do’s**” of fatherhood cannot be lived out by proxy. You need to participate in putting your little ones to bed and praying for and with them. You need to be at their plays, speeches, recitals, and sporting events. You need to schedule *regular time alone* with each of your children. You need to take the lead in planning terrific family vacations and in celebrating and cementing family solidarity.

Now in mid-life I sometimes wistfully think, “Where did the time go between the two indelible memories of the birth of my daughter and the birth of my son?” To be honest, some of the years were long and hard. I thought we would never get through many of the stresses. But when these great events are recalled in all their color, there seems to be no time between them. That is why, whenever I have occasion to hold a baby in my arms, I often encourage the parents to savor every moment and not to rush through the experience — the child will be grown up and gone in no time. The realization that we have only a brief time to raise our children should give us huge motivation to make the most of it and should make Scriptural advice about fathering pulse with importance for us.

Men, time is the chrysalis of eternity — there is no other time but the present. I realize we all go through periods in our lives when we have little time for our families — it is part of the natural rhythm of life. But excessive “busyness” must not be by choice — as it so often is! We must beware of packing our schedules by saying “yes” to things which mean “no” to our families. *Now* is the time to take time. There is no other! Will you do it? Will I?

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Men, we must evaluate our fatherhood. What does your heart tell you as you read the questions listed below? Are you weak or strong?

- Do you criticize your children, or build them up?
- Are you overly strict, or reasonably strict — gradually granting your child greater freedom?
- Are you impatient and irritable, or patient and self-controlled, when dealing with your children?
- Are you consistent in your expectations?
- Have you kept your promises?
- Do you show favoritism?
- Are you tender with both your sons and daughters?
- Do you share in the discipline?
- Are you spending time with your children, as a family and individually?

What awesome power we have! Our children all want the “aura and armament” of their fathers. Men, their hearts are turned to us! And our Lord wants our hearts to be turned to them. We hear this truth memorably stated by the angel Gabriel when he announced that part of John the Baptist’s mission in making a people ready for the Lord was **“to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children”** ([Luke 1:17](#)). Now that Christ has come, this is a perpetual result of His saving work. When a man truly gives his heart to Christ, it is turned toward his children.

Men, submit to Christ — allow Him to turn your hearts to your children. Ask the Holy Spirit for the power to practice the discipline of fatherhood. Sweat for your children’s souls.