

Principle Eleven

TRUE DISCIPLINE PROMOTES INDEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM OF THE SOUL

In the true sense of the word, discipline is a vital ingredient in all growth; without it, we find ourselves in bondage. Slavery, of the worst kind, occurs when one's life is ruled by the passions of the body. When the nobler spirit in man gives way to allow greed, pride, or uncontrollable bodily passions, hell is in the making! We have all heard the demands within that whimper like a spoiled brat: "I never get to. . . . But I love chocolate chip cookies; why can't I eat all I want? . . . But I don't want to get up: I don't like mornings. . . . Exercise! Ugh!" However, there can be no enjoyment in food, when food has become the enemy. There can be no delight in sexual passion, when desire has been allowed to burn perversely. There can be no exhilaration and enlightenment in conversation, when the mouth is allowed to ramble without the benefit of mind or heart. There can be no pleasure in possessions, when greed has become insatiable. All sources of pleasure become sources of pain when undisciplined.

Consequently, true freedom and true happiness come only with discipline. There can be no self-confidence without self-control.

Liberty in law! Contrary to being instruments of confinement, the counsels of God are principles of spiritual prosperity. Freedom is not being without restraint, but in restraining oneself. The laws of health set one free to enjoy radiant life; the laws of social interaction (thou shalt not, lie, steal, bear false witness, lust after, envy) set one at peace with one's fellow man.

Having a clear conscience, individuals are at peace with themselves and with others. Having a heart of goodwill toward all men, they become free--free of regret; free from fear of being found out, free from deception. Happiness, then, is the harvest of one who lives with a clear conscience; and a clear conscience is the result of being true to the best in oneself.

Our Father in Heaven is loving and merciful, but He is also a God of justice and judgment. One wise man taught that there are basically six main characteristics of God: Love, Knowledge, Wisdom, Power, Judgment and Justice.

Love must be tempered by the qualities of wisdom, justice and judgment. As children of God, we too, have the natural ability to love; yet that love is tempered by a sense of fairness and justice. In other words, as children of God, we have an inherent ability and inclination to seek law, order and justice. We love, yet also withhold love; we forgive, but also seek fairness; we have mercy and tolerance, but also require retribution and justification.

When there is love and concern for the well-being and welfare of another, there is also a desire to be fair, equal and just. Justice is love made manifest through law. Where there is no love, there is no motive for fairness. Governments of this kind are dictatorial--the objective is not to establish justice and secure the rights of the people, but to maintain power and control over the people. Good governments, of a nation or a home, are established to maintain the rights of its members in the spirit of fairness, and to establish an environment in which growth and happiness are possible. Principles of justice bring order to the family, but only principles of love--compassion, understanding, gentleness, affection, kindness, etc.--bring true happiness!

All these qualities are the innate character traits of God, and of the children of God. Love, mercy, judgment and justice go hand in hand in governing a universe, nation or home. All are indispensable. Love creates warmth, and justice creates security. Love creates acceptance, and justice creates boundaries. Love creates happiness, and justice creates stability.

Discipline, the task of correcting errant behavior, is not the antithesis of love; it is love, and perhaps love in its most courageous form. The discipline to stop destruction saves property rights; the discipline to stop emotional abuse saves self-esteem; the discipline to stop sloppiness establishes the value of private property. Permissiveness is not patience; permissiveness is apathy.

Some of us have the idea that the only really important quality of effective parenting is love; consequently we feel shy or timid in imposing rules or restrictions. We have the idea that to be strict, to impose discipline, is to be tight, stern, unyielding, and domineering.

And yet, discipline is right; it is good and desperately necessary to anyone who would live abundantly, in respect for oneself and others.

Discipline, a Definition

When we think on the word discipline, we realize that its root word is disciple, which means “a person who follows the teachings of another whom he accepts as a leader.” The actual word discipline means, “training that produces obedience, self-control, or a particular skill.” However, a third definition for this word states, “punishment given to correct a person or enforce obedience.”

The approaches or methods of disciplining, however, differ according to tradition, culture, and parent. One common practice involves two steps: first, to call attention to the error; and second, to impose punishment, or penalty.

The call-attention step may range from a simple corrective sentence, such as “Don’t jump on the bed,” to a long, drawn-out lecture, preaching, or a bawling out. The punishment step may range from a physical penalty (spanking) to the restriction of one’s person, or activities for a time. This form of discipline takes on a flavor of imposing suffering on the erring child in order to bring about compliance to a standard of behavior.

Negative, Destructive Discipline

Though the disciplining process is necessary, it can turn into a sour, negative, stressful, and contentious experience for both parent and child. Some parents use the right to discipline as an opportunity to vent hostility, and rage. Every day we hear of children who are taken to the hospital with bruises, broken bones, scalded or burned bodies--all in the name of discipline. Negative discipline is generated by destructive rather than constructive anger, hostility rather than hope, vengeance rather than loving vigilance, and a dark disposition rather than one that is light and faithful.

It is important to be aware of the danger signs of destructive or negative discipline.

1. There is a natural tendency for children and adults to react rather than respond to negative attacks: anger with anger, aggression with aggression, and hardness with hardness. Negative discipline can often do more harm than good by provoking the child to anger, hardness, stubbornness, and retaliation. It may cause an otherwise submissive and tenderhearted child to rebel.

2. Negative discipline may drive a wedge in the parent and child relationship. Recently, one of our little ones said, "Mommy, when you get mad at me, I think you don't like me anymore, and I want to run away from home." If the child is emotionally pushed away from the parent when he has erred, he will likely follow that same pattern in later years. Then during the times of crises, he will not have the benefit of a loving parent.

3. Usually such discipline is unnecessary, and also emotionally taxing, for both parent and child, especially if the behavior was not evil and premeditated, but just mischievous play!

4. If the fury of condemnation does promote the desired behavior, the reason may be merely outward compliance rather than internal control. Remember, the objective is that the child decides for himself, and that he ultimately governs himself.

5. Constant overly harsh discipline can lessen the impact when it is really required. It seems only logical to reserve the greater response for the greater offense. (If we consider the levels of aggressiveness in a scale of one to ten, where one would be low

energy, suggestion, no punishment; and ten would be the greatest response--firm words, high energy voice, commands, imposition of punishment--we can realize that to use level ten all the time would lessen its impact and give the impression to the child that all offenses are equal.)

I recently observed an example of this type of overly aggressive and negative discipline on a television show. The father of a ten-year-old boy flew into a rage--shouting, using negative, destructive name-calling, etc., to call attention to the wet towel on the bathroom floor. While the father did not physically punish the child, his violent words left the child trembling in fear. The child anxiously picked up the towel, and while his father continued to shout at him, he said, "Gosh, Dad, you don't have to get that upset. I usually pick my things up. I just forgot this time."

When a parent overreacts consistently, he can drive a wedge in the parent-child relationship, lose credibility, and dilute the impact of the discipline process.

Positive Discipline; Protecting the Right of Conscience

Discipline is the process of: one, establishing justice--determining what is right and fair, based on the rights and responsibilities of each family member; two, making a judgment on the action to be taken; and, three, imposing a program of correction. The objective is to correct behavior, or to guide the child back on a proper course, with the hope that eventually the child will become autonomous--or governed by his own conscience. Of course there is an assumption that the parent is on the right course and is therefore able to judge when the child is off course.

Realizing that the grand objective of discipline is to correct misbehavior and to motivate positive behavior, there is another way--a way which not only preserves the parent and child relationship, but strengthens it, which promotes internal control, rather than merely external compliance, which reflects the true feelings of parental love; which is less taxing on both parent and child, and which allows for parental passion--constructive anger.

Freedom of the Soul

The discussion of discipline involves, first of all, an understanding of all the principles that relate to the nature of the child:

(1) The child is an eternal being-- a child of God.

(2) While having the potential for divinity, he is away from God and in a spiritually weakened condition and prone to the influence of the powers of darkness.

(3) The child has been endowed with the gift of freewill and has the power within him to make choices.

(4) The child can draw upon a divine source of strength.

God obviously does not want robots. His desire is to see his children develop to the full potential of their divine nature, with unique individuality, gifts and talents. The means then are as important as the end. And an end, which requires the right of conscience and the freedom of the soul, is an end of no merit. Why? Because the goal is not, and never has been, obedience to law, but to life. Again I emphasize that the individual who merely follows a list of commandments is akin to the athlete who runs through an outlined training process, but never progresses to the game. And while the training process might temporarily satisfy a selfish sense of accomplishment, the saving of souls requires the full faculties of heart, might, mind, strength, strategy, personality, and talents--all fruits of one who has "freedom of the soul."

In this same way, a parent, through force or coercion, may win outward compliance, but the inner spirit--and attitude--of the child cannot be controlled or forced. Therefore, discipline needs to be both effective within and without.

The child's strength of will can lift him to heights of courage, determination and perseverance. He can say to the world: "I set my face like flint." There is no other way. Stubborn--yes; strong-willed--yes; courageous--yes!

This is a quality of nature we desperately need in this age of moral flabbiness! We who would want our children to have the

courage of convictions must preserve this determination in our children at all costs, so that when needed they will be able to set their faces like flint and say, “No, I don’t do drugs. . . . No, I won’t cheat on my homework. . . . No, I won’t do that.”

There was the time when I would suppress my child’s right to express opposition. After all, it was a sign that my authority was being challenged! But a child who is free to challenge parental authority with a well presented argument--not merely sassiness--will be free to challenge improper authority in such situations as molestation, peer pressure, and high-powered teachers who are proselyting for atheism, agnosticism, or pessimism. The task is not easy: to encourage self-control while nurturing self-expression; to work with the will, rather than against it; to enhance the right of conscience rather than suppress it. But we must respect the agency of our children just as the Father respects ours, and at the same time teach them the proper use of that agency. For while physical growth automatically takes place, spiritual advancement requires the agency of choice. Without this agency, there is no advancement. A wise parent nourishes the ability to make correct decisions.

The Big Picture: Life, Love, Joy and Freedom

In the disciplinary process, we ought to keep the ultimate goal in mind. But just exactly what is that goal? I have asked several parents what they considered it to be. Some have answered, “I want my children to be responsible, hard-working, and reliable.” Others have answered, “I want my children to grow up to be warm, hearted human beings--caring, and sensitive to the needs of others.” Still others have commented, “I want my children to grow up to be successful, to be real contributors in the community.” Then there are those who say, “I’m not sure. I guess I want them to be good members of the church.”

Earlier, the idea was developed that the four virtues of life, love, joy and freedom, represent the high mark of parenting--shadowing the motives spoken of by the Savior, “I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly. . . . Love one

another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another . . . by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. . . . These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full.” (John 10:10, 13:34,35, and 15:11) The four characteristics are like puzzle pieces that make up a person of integrity--or wholeness, without deception or guile.

Of course, the opposite of these characteristics are lifelessness, hatred or indifference, depression or despair, and bondage. All we hope for in ourselves and our children is related to these four goals. We hope that they will be responsible, get high grades, graduate from college, and attain financial independence (freedom) and the quality of life that will follow. Love is a source of great fulfillment in our lives, and is the highest virtue in the Christian faith; consequently, we hope that our children will manifest qualities of love, understanding, empathy, and compassion. All that is good and right is related in some way to these four goals; and, all that is bad and demeaning is related to their opposites. Let’s look at the contrast:

Life--bright, ambitious, anxious to do, to live, to learn, to love
Lifeless--despairing, bored, without ambition, creativity, spontaneity

Love--loving, patient, understanding, compassionate, warm, caring, gentle, serving
Loveless--thoughtless, self-centered, indifferent, hateful, arrogant, impatient, unkind

Joy--happy, excited about life, eager for opportunities, ambitions, possessing a wholesome sense of humor
Joyless--unhappy, depressed, listless, humorless

Freedom--spontaneous, discovering, exploring, becoming, growing, independent, emotionally confident, capable, unhampered, etc.
Bondage--slavery, dependent, repressed, hopeless

The Heart, Fountain of Virtue

The disciplinary process then ought to promote these goals--to bring greater life, love, joy and freedom. And since the heart--love--is the very key from which springs forth all virtues--love, understanding, thoughtfulness, sensitivity, warmth, friendliness, and cheerfulness, it is vital this quality be preserved at all costs! It becomes nonproductive to contribute to the hardening of the heart through insensitive discipline. Likewise, since the free spirit and initiative of the child are the source of all progression and incentive, it becomes disastrous to trample on the free will of a child, thus contributing to the hardening process.

A heart that is sweet produces like fruit: kindness, love, sharing, compassion, understanding, empathy. Likewise, a heart that is sour will produce sour actions or feelings: jealousy, anger, criticism, stinginess, hatred or indifference.

The Savior taught, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts" (Matthew 15:19). While his emphasis was on an inner cleansing, around him were those who cared only for an appropriate appearance. They were zealous for the law, but they had forgotten the manifestations of an abundant heart. He chided, "Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but within are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (St Matthew 23:27,28). In other words, while they may have appeared to be the children of God, in all reality, they stunk.

Some parents clamor only for the outward signs of successful children: grades, scholarships, beauty, sports, popularity, but have little regard for signs of successful living: warm, loving human beings, caring, compassionate, thoughtful, wise, understanding, sensitive. Parents who long for a retake of the ol' high school days, may crave for their children to be popular, voted best dressed, or become student body president in order to "to gratify . . . pride, . . . vain ambitions." True happiness, however, is not achieved by outdoing the pack, but by doing for the pack.

Old Testament and New Testament Nature

Stephen R. Covey, has illuminated our understanding of the basic nature of man with the idea that some are of an Old Testament nature, and some are of a New Testament nature. The Old Testament was geared toward a stiff-necked and hard-hearted people who resisted going toward the light and liberty of God; in their condition they required detailed law. In the New Testament, we see a new theme--away from the law--and toward the life, love and liberty that is to be found in Jesus Christ. The emphasis was simply: Love God; love your neighbor. Through obedience to the law of love one would have no need for the “thou shalt not” commandments. The heart would have no inclination to lie, steal, or cheat one’s neighbor.

This idea has serious implications in disciplining children! Children of an Old Testament nature--slow to learn, quick to forget, stubborn, proud, needful of detailed laws--require more detailed lists, laws, lectures, while those of a New Testament nature--quick to learn, and love, eager to do the right, teachable, needing minimal law or restraints, free and spontaneous--can become stifled by lists, laws and lectures. Those of a New Testament nature are so sensitive that a mere frown brings them to remorse; while, those of an Old Testament nature scoff with a “so what?” attitude. For the New Testament children, rules are seldom needed; for the Old Testament children, the rules are never enough. They always find a loophole to sneak through, “You didn’t say that I couldn’t use the change to buy candy. . . . You didn’t say that I had to wipe off the table. . . . You never told me that I couldn’t stay over night.”

The Ten Commandments are not rules of constraint, but rather clues to successful living. One who lives abundantly would not lie, steal, covet another man’s wife, etc. Detailed law becomes mandatory when goodwill towards man is lacking. To those who have the vision to live and love abundantly, the reaction to detailed law is, “Oh, of course. That’s understandable. Yes, that’s true. One who loves would serve one another, but why do I need to be told these things?”

This can be compared with one who has learned to ride a bike with ease and style having to go back to the basics, when the basics

have long been forgotten in the joy of riding the bike! The more emphasis on the law, the more focused the vision becomes on detail, specifics, and--heaven forbid!--dull responsibilities. And as a consequence, the inclination to fall into pride, arrogance and complacency with success, and discouragement and despair with failure.

The purpose of the law is to enable one to live; to keep the law without living is like a football player who continues to train, but is unwilling to play the game. We see around us those who know well how to train for life, but withdraw and refuse to live.

There are those religious parents who would hope that through obedience to law, their children will one day inherit heaven; but obedience to life will create a heaven here and hereafter. The Savior taught that the "kingdom of heaven is within you." We everyday create our own heavens or our own hells. Both are not destinations--they are the creation of our own wills.

When we observe the life of the Savior, we see a man who above all loved life--despite the constant harassment of the squint-eye critics around him. He saw the greater vision, while the critics saw merely the detailed law.

In the disciplining process, the child's sensitive, loving, functioning heart should be preserved at all costs. The more aware the child is of his mistake, the less need for parental direction; the more desire on the child's part to do the right thing, the less need for parental interference. The least should not be at the mercy of the best--a conscience-controlled child is best.

In a court of law, the judge and jury determine the degree of punishment based upon the actual crime, and the intent of the offender at the time of the crime. Parents are wise to do the same thing--to determine the intent of the heart. It would seem reasonable that those offenses, which are innocent blunders--spilt milk, misplaced book--should receive a minimal response, while intentional, premeditated offenses deserve maximum response and penalty. Children who are bright with the qualities of life and love are to be emulated. They require the soft touch, the gentle approach, and the grateful heart.

Summary

Disciplining to respect the right and conscience and freedom of the soul is not easy--it requires patience, long-suffering, insight and understanding. It requires that the big picture be kept always in mind; it is only through the application of these "just and holy principles" that we can hope to maintain relationships here and hereafter, for the family is not held together by "compulsory means," but by love.

Principle In Practice:

One-year-old Sally is pulling the electrical cord out of the socket.
Parent: No. (Child is picked up and removed from the danger.)

Two-year old is pulling books off of the library shelf.

Parent: "Johnny, you cannot do that. Let's put them back."

Small children rarely need elaborate explanations or lectures, since they do not have full reasoning abilities; they need short, and simple directives. It is more effective to use visual demonstration of desired behavior, in other words, walking them through the commands--picking up the toys together, walking them to bed, etc.

On the other hand--teenagers, with newly acquired reasoning and debating powers, often enjoy a tussle just for the fun of it. Besides, they really want to know "Why?"

Seven-year-old has been missing from home for over three hours. She is found at a friend's home playing in the backyard. Her attitude is submissive; she just lost track of the time.

Parent: "I have been so worried about you. I love you so much and feel terrible when I don't know where you are. Did you forget to let me know where you were going?"

Child: "Yes, but I won't do it ever again."

Parent: "Oh, I'm so glad!" (Gives the child a hug.)

Too often, parents use such moments to attack the child rather than convey the real message of love. If the child repeats the problem the parent could increase firmness, and apply restriction--such as the child being confined to the family yard for a few days. Where freedom is violated, freedom is curtailed. The more aware the child is of his mistake, the less need for parental direction.

Child, nine, leaves bike out in the rain overnight.

Parent: "This is the third time you have left your bike out in the rain. It shows that you don't care about your bike."

Child: "I do. I just forgot."

Parent: "When we forget to care for our possessions, they won't last very long. Sometimes, when we've grown used to something, we don't value it as much. The bike will be locked up for a week. Maybe then you'll value it again."

The disciplining process is matter-of-factly done--teaching, but not preaching.

Teenage girl sneaks out of the house in the middle of the night to cruise around with friends. Mother finds her leaving the house. Child's attitude is submissive.

Parent: "Where are you going?"

Daughter: "I was going with friends to drive around."

Parent: "At two o'clock in the morning?"

Daughter: "Well?"

Parent: "Go tell your friends you can't go."

(Later)

Parent: "Do you realize how it would make me feel to discover you missing in the middle of the night? You mean so much to me--I know you don't realize. I literally hurt inside when I'm afraid for you. I know you wouldn't want to do that to me if you knew how much it hurt me. You can have fun without hurting me.

"I know that some kids want to hurt their parents, to get back at them for some reason, and there are some parents who can't wait to get rid of their kids. But that's not the way we feel about each other around her. We love each other: I know you love me.

"No, I know it's important for you to be with your friends, but you cannot leave the house in the middle of the night. What else could you do? Would you like to have your friends over for Friday night?"

The emphasis is direct and to the point, constructive, yet corrective--"I love you, but you cannot be allowed to . . ." Sometimes children, especially those going through the insanity of adolescence, forget they love their families. It is necessary, at times, to remind them: "I know that you love me, even though you may be angry."

Disciplining can become moments to share hearts, moments to share concerns rather than moments to attack, or to vent hostilities. This example shows forth the signs of constructive disciplining: faith, hope and charity or love.

Teenage child is badgering a younger brother, age seven.

Teenager: "You idiot, you never do anything right! How come you're so dumb?"

Parent: "No more! In our home we don't beat on one another either physically or emotionally. If you have a problem with your brother, let's talk about it and get it worked out. If you have a problem

with yourself, go for a quick walk and work it out with yourself. Don't take your frustrations out on those who love you the most."

Directive, though firm and to the point, allows for the possibility that there is a real grievance that needs attention. To deny free expression of honest concerns could aggravate the problem rather than neutralize it. Again this approach reaffirms faith: we can work this out in hope and love; we love each other.

Teenage child throws an emotional tantrum after being told to clean his room.

Child: "I was supposed to be at my friend's house ten minutes ago. Why should I have to clean up my room now? Why can't it wait until the afternoon? Why do you always have to be so picky-picky about clean rooms? Why are you so worried about what people think?"

Parent: "I know you want to get to your friend's house, and that's important to you, but having the house clean is important to me. Call me when you're finished and I'll excuse you to leave, and if you have some real concerns about me, we'll discuss it later."

There is a natural tendency to react, rather than act, in response to such situations. Remember, teens are anxious to try their verbal skills in confrontation. Just as two-year-olds may talk incessantly with the fascination of their new verbal skills, teenagers often will attempt to engage parents in an argument to try out their new reasoning skills. However, unless, the child is using mind along with the mouth, it is a useless venture for the parent.

A few years ago one of our teenage sons would pull me into senseless arguments just for the fun of it. Over and over I found myself sinking into no-win, no-reason, no-love, no-purpose debates. He would change his position every few minutes. Finally, I grew up. When a parent--who should be older and wiser--submits to an

obvious nonsensical, nonproductive, negative debate, and realizes it as such he suffers a loss of integrity.

Ten-year-old boy hurts his little sister while romping in the leaves.

Sister: "Micah hurt me! Micah hurt me!"

Mother: (realizing that the intent was not to do harm, but to have fun) "Micah, I know you didn't mean to hurt your sister, but be more careful in the future."

To assume a negative intent and impose harsh punishment might curtail free expression and love in the brother-sister relationship. Behavior that is not intentionally harmful can be very readily overlooked.
