

Principle Twelve

SENSITIVE, LOVING DISCIPLINE PROMOTES RESPONSIVE OBEDIENCE

As I passed Mary's room I saw her stuffing her soiled pajama bottoms into her drawer. "When will she ever learn?" I groaned to myself in anger and frustration. "She is already two-and-a-half!"

I stomped into her room and demanded, "Haven't I told you over and over not to put your wet clothes into the drawer with the clean clothes? Oh, Mary, when will you ever learn?"

I snatched her wet clothes from the drawer and took them to the sink to rinse them. When I returned, Mary was crouched in the corner of the closet, sobbing. I picked her up, covered her bare legs with a blanket, and whispered into her ear, "Oh, Mary, Mommy loves you, but I don't want you to put your wet clothes in with the clean ones. Do you understand?"

Her body was tight and rigid. She covered her face with her arms and grunted, as if to say, "You hurt me, Mommy. I don't want to listen to you. I don't even want to look at you."

I knew I had crossed the sensitive line between loving direction and harsh, insensitive punishment. I realized, too, that it was not merely what I said that caused her to break, but what was unsaid--my accusing feelings, the anger, and lack of faith.

"When will I ever learn?" I thought to myself as I cuddled her in the rocking chair and looked out at the misty, cold January morning. Shadows from the past flooded my memory, and I saw the mother that I had been with my firstborn.

It was not easy to look back. There were days I would like to forget--filled with anger, discouragement, and at times even rage as I fought to gain control of that strong-willed little boy. The starkness of the winter day, the chill, and the gray sky combined to resemble the monochromatic mother I had once been--there would be one way--mine.

In my determination to break his will, I finally broke my own. We clashed; we argued; we cried; we ended in a stalemate. In time, we both lost in the power struggle that went on for years.

Mary, tender and fragile, was now calm in my arms. She looked up at me and smiled as I began to sing, "I love my Mary, yes, I do. I love my Mary, indeed, I do."

It had taken a half hour for me to undo the harsh discipline that a simple directive could have achieved: "Mary, do not put wet things in your drawer."

I knew the mistake I had made; a few years ago, I would not have. Disciplining can be a time for hatred or a time for love. Loving discipline can make all the difference.

Children come into the world richly endowed with love, tenderness, empathy, sensitivity, compassion, and understanding. While they are tiny, this love is focused on their parents, brothers and sisters. Consequently, they are extremely sensitive to the feelings of their loved ones. They sense anxiety, nervousness, fear and anger. Therefore, anxious parents produce anxious babies; nervous parents create nervous babies; insecure parents contribute to fearful and insecure children. As a consequence of their love they are extremely sensitive to parental disapproval--it says, not only, "You have *made* a mistake," but, "You *are* the mistake." Harsh discipline can leave them in horror--their security, and love-foundation crumbles.

Children who are disciplined harshly will often react with negative frustration and confusion that only multiplies the problem. In effect, they say, "Oh, no, now you hate me! I need your love so much, and now you hate me! I can't bear it! My world is falling apart! I'm falling apart!" Their little bodies and faces contort into agony; and they may pile on one offense after another in total despair.

Harsh forms of discipline are unwise and unnecessary when a simple expression of displeasure will do. Never speak harshly when a calm voice is all that is needed. Little ones require only an ever-so-slight correction, with an energetic hug that says, "It's O.K. I still love you; we will always be friends!" Overstating the case--using aggressive anger and force--can also cause the child to become defensive, protective, and insensitive, thus contributing to the hardening of the heart--the opposite of true discipline! In time, the hardened heart will require more harsh forms of discipline, causing the downward cycle to begin.

In training a horse, if one over-reins--using too much pressure on the bit--the horse will develop what is called a "hard mouth"--a condition in which the horse becomes insensitive to direction. On the other hand, if the rider uses as little touch and direction on the reins as required, the horse develops a sensitive mouth and is quick to anticipate and respond.

On the contrary, the 'reining process' can be so slight that the child is unaware of the direction being given. Once, while attending a luncheon, the small daughter of a friend kept leaving the nursery to come to our table. Although her interruptions were disturbing the mother would not show her displeasure. Instead she maintained a sticky-sweet voice that said over and over, "Now, Sweetheart, you're suppose to stay in the nursery, aren't you? Now walk back to the nursery for Mommy. O.K.?" Yet while she was directing the child to return to the nursery, she held the child in a loving hug. While her words were telling her to return to the nursery, her actions conveyed an invitation to stay. The child returned to the table several times that hour. This level of discipline would be a minus one--noneffective!

Never Underestimate the Power of Love

One time I sat through a lecture behind a woman and her four children. The first hour, her tiny toddler sat on her lap. The second hour, her older child sat on her lap and smoothed her hair. Much to my amazement, during the last hour, her young adolescent son sat

on her lap and loved her. All this affection seemed strange to me, in our society older children are not usually openly affectionate with their mothers, and mothers are not commonly affectionate with older children.

Later I approached her and asked, "Your children seem to have a lot of love for you. Are they always this affectionate?"

She answered, "Yes, they like to love their Mommy. The only hold we have over our children is that they love us. If they don't love us, they won't care what we want for them."

They Should Love Me Because I'm Their Mother!

I found her comment disturbing; I had always thought that my children should love me simply because I'm their mother, simply because I do so much for them, simply just because.

Another incident helped me to more fully catch the vision. On occasion my husband and I would hire Linnell, a teenage girl, to watch the children while we were away for the evening. She was bright, vivacious and warm. The children loved her! In fact, they loved her so much that every time she came over the children would jump up and down for joy! They eagerly did what she asked of them!

I became jealous, "Sure they like her! They don't see her as much as they do me. She doesn't have any of the responsibilities that I have. All she does is play with them, while I'm stuck with all the work."

However, my rationalizations were not convincing! I finally had to admit, she was winning the hearts of my children in a way that I was incapable of. I determined to learn from her.

She was happy, friendly, playful, and funny. She would enter their world and become one of them. She would sit on the side of their bed and just listen. To the children's astonishment she would stick her whole fist in her mouth!

Then in my mind's eye, I envisioned myself--the dutiful mother, aloof and about the business of the household obligations. I seldom smiled--rarely laughed. I was playing out a role--a role I had seen so

many mothers play before me, expecting my children to love and respect me because of my servitude. While the babysitter listened and talked with the children, I was too busy for listening, too busy for talking. While she entered their world; I hoped that they would enter mine, and assist with the chores. She romped and played like a child; while I had long forgotten the child within. She shared her heart with them; while I shared my energy--my work. In time it all came into focus. I was giving the least--and withholding the best. I had time for cleaning, but no time to enjoy the companionship of those I was cleaning for! I rarely conveyed love, personality, sense of humor, or insight. I was cheating myself in two respects--their love for me and my love for them. All the good that can be done by cleaning, cooking, washing and ironing is nothing compared to the good that can be done by simply loving, befriending, holding, sharing. I came to understand: A parent's first right is to enjoy the companionship of his or her children.

Courting Our Children

What causes one to love certain individuals more than others? If the binding love between parent and child, and child and parent, is not automatic, how is it generated? We seldom fall in love with someone merely because we are indebted to them. I asked myself, "What characteristics in personality have enamored me?" The answers came: genuine personality, a sense of humor, and a love of life, sensitivity, humility, honesty, compassion, and understanding.

I determined that these would be the tools to win the hearts of my children; I began to court each child; to spend time listening; to communicate their language; to enter their world. In the beginning it was not easy to converse; I was used to only giving directions and disciplining misbehavior, but as I revealed myself to them; they revealed themselves to me. I found the key that breaks down all barriers between the generations--it is to reach back and remember. I recalled what it was like to be four-years-old--to be ever so enthralled with life and its every detail--flowers, ladybugs, newborn babies, ice cream cones. I remembered what it was like to be nine-years-old--the

thrill of tetherball, building tree forts, catching pollywogs in the pond. I reminisced my teen years--the craving for adventure, my first crush on the handsomest guy in school, the agony of the first day of junior high, the zit that surfaced on prom night. The key: reach back.

One day Micah, our eleven-year-old, came into the kitchen and said, "Mom, I'm trying to build a fort, but I don't know how to do it. We don't have enough wood." I answered, "Build a fort? Now that's something I'd love to do. When I was your age I used to build awesome forts--forts out of wood, forts out of straw, forts out of old Christmas trees. My sister and I built forts on the ground, under the ground, and in the trees. The one under the ground was the best. We made it so that no big people could tell where it was. We put a board over the opening, then covered it with dirt and grass."

His eyes lit up, "Under the ground? Hey, I could do that. Would you come out and help me?" Putting the dishes aside and grabbing the shovels from the garage, we escaped together to the world of make-believe to create the greatest secret underground fort the world has ever known. There will always be dishes to wash, but little boys grow up.

Love in the Home Creates a Heaven on Earth

The family is held together by love and genuine friendship. Love is the force that binds; love is the key--the sunshine of the home. If there is any glory in our lives, it is the glory to be found in a home where man and woman delight in each other--in body, mind and spirit. Where children radiate the glow of the rich life--rich in life--sharing, becoming, discovering, creating, etc.

Love can turn a black and white existence into Technicolor. It can create a climate for growth. It can create a heaven on earth, a haven from the outside grays of despair and loneliness. It can make honeymoons last forever and give joy to the simple, everyday tasks of cleaning, laundry, and planting flowers.

Love, born in the hearts of a man and woman, is like a seed that germinates, grows and blooms forever to bless the lives of thousands and millions--both within and without the family. This is why the

intimacy between a man and woman, truly in love, is wholesome, clean, right--the most virtuous act of all. Like the concentric waves a rock makes when thrown into water, the warmth of love radiates outward to affect the lives of children, children's children, friends, and acquaintances.

This then is the difference between moral and immoral--the moral relationship reaches outward; the immoral relationship turns inward--secret, selfish, sensual.

John said of the Savior, Jesus Christ, "We love him because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). In this same way, our children love us because we first loved them. More accurately, it is only through the home that children learn how to love. They learn from those who hold tightly, share freely, and have the patience to wait out the growing, maturing process. They learn from those who are slow to anger, and quick to understand. They learn from those who vicariously live through the scraped knee, the lost tooth, and the first date.

Love, understanding, compassion, empathy, warmth are only meaningless words unless they are given life. We learn their meaning not by definition, but by observation in other's examples. The family is not a group of individuals held together by location, but a society of individuals held together by love. It is love that initiates the spark of romance; it is love that springs the children into existence. Principles of justice bring order to the family, but principles of love--compassion, understanding, gentleness, affection, and kindness--bring true happiness to the family.

Love, not obligation, is the binding force between parent and child. If I expect my child to listen to me, I must listen to him. If I expect my wishes to be valuable in my child's decision-making process, I must gain his respect and love. Love and mutual respect are keys in effective discipline.

Disciplining With Love

We see within ourselves, and in others, the potential to lead and to be led by either the heart or the mind. Some of us allow the mind to choke out the directions of the heart; others are inclined to disregard

the reasoning of the mind, and give their emotions full rein. Good leadership skills require a balance of the two. Parents who allow only their hearts to govern may become indulgent and permissive; they may become weak and impotent in the face of the whims and complaints of their children. They are likely to be timid in exercising their right to teach and guide their children. On the other hand, those who rule and reign in the home in a cold, analytical manner are likely to generate bitterness and resentment in a child--who desperately needs affection and parental companionship. Therefore, discipline needs to be of both the heart and the mind using love and justice.

In the past, I was prone to govern by a mind-only approach. I met all conflicts with an angry, well-presented, intellectual argument. After formally debating political issues on radio and television, I admit that I began to enjoy the friendly art of debate. I suppose it is the same thrill that accompanies one in a sporting event--the challenge, the excitement, and the gallant glory. There is a certain pride when one's opponent opens his mouth to counter and has nothing to say; a soaring-with-the-eagles feeling when one walks away convinced that truth has prevailed!

While harsh, destructive debate may be a valuable tool in a court of law, in the home it produces only losers. Parents may win the debate, but in the consequence, lose the relationship. The child may in effect respond, "O.K. You win. You're right, but I don't care anymore." The objective of discipline then is not to present a well-documented case to establish the crimes, but to assist the child to a point of remorse. Harsh discipline that comes from a cold, analytical mind-only approach will likely produce a cold, analytical, and mind-only response. One must keep in mind that the family is held together by love, not by mandate. The Savior could have used intellectual manipulation to get compliance; he could have used behavioral conditioning; he could have forced obedience and compliance by the power he had as the Son of God, but, for the most part, he chose only methods of love, reason, knowledge and persuasion. He realized that while momentary compliance may be achieved by forceful techniques, the way of lasting influence--in light of the free agency of man--is to convert the mind and touch the heart.

He Needs a Hug; Hold Him

A friend told me of an experience she once had while traveling down the freeway. Her two-year-old deaf son, in a car seat behind her, began screaming and thrashing about. She signaled to him over and over again to quiet down. Finally, she pulled to the side of the road with the intention of giving him a vigorous spanking. Then an impression came into her mind: “He needs love; hold him.”

After stopping the car, she reached to the back seat, drew him to her, and cuddled him, calming his frantic heart. Within a few minutes, he was happy and smiling again; she continued her drive, grateful for discernment beyond her mortal impulse to react with anger.

Looking back, I can now see how I fell into the trap of mortal impulse again and again. Somewhere, I am sure, under all the displays of destructive temper were the good intentions of a bewildered parent, but I am quite certain that any order and discipline obtained were in spite of these displays, rather than because of them. If children obey in fear it will be only a temporary adjustment since ultimately, when fear is no longer a factor, obedience will no longer be necessary. This is why the objective must be to enlighten the conscience, not to dull it! The least should not be at the mercy of the best; a conscience-controlled child is best.

Loving Discipline Begins With Oneself

Often in our disciplining process we mirror back and amplify the same behavior we attempt to correct. We meet anger with anger, temper with temper, and hatred with hatred. In our attempt to build character, we display none at all; in our attempt to call attention to misbehavior, we can in fact, demonstrate it. We have all read the anguish cries of parents, “I didn’t mean to hurt him; I just lost my temper.”

Thus, the first step in disciplining is to discipline oneself, and to determine the motives and attitudes that underlie one’s position. These questions help me evaluate my motives:

1. Do I see his negative behavior as a reflection on me? (Pride, selfishness)
2. Do I expect behavior from this child that I do not require of myself? (Hypocrisy, dishonesty)
3. Am I prompted by hate, contention, and hostility? (Without love--beware of disciplining while under the influence of a dark and destructive spirit)
4. Do I want this person to conform to a set of standards merely for the sake of outward appearance? (Hypocrisy, pride)
5. Do I feel at this time that this child is a lost cause? (Without faith)
6. Do I see innate qualities in this child that are impossible to change? (Without hope)
7. Do I think that I have no need of change? (Self-righteousness)
8. Is my objective to correct the misbehavior, or to prove that I am right and he is wrong? (Pride, self-righteousness)
9. Am I insensitive to the child's right of conscience?
10. Do I interpret mischievousness as a personal assault? (Pride,

On the other hand, the following questions indicate a solid foundation for loving correction:

1. Is my objective to edify--build up--yet correct misbehavior? (Faith)
2. Do I see the mistake apart from the child? (Faith and love)
3. Is my passion--compassionate passion--motivated by love?
4. Do I use discipline as an opportunity to remind the child of my love?
5. Are my comments direct and to the point, without laboring the negative? (Without hostility)
6. Do I refrain from using accusations and put-downs?
7. Are my words cloaked in trust and faith?
8. Do I end the discussion with an expression of hope and love?
9. Am I sensitive to the child's right of conscience?

Reviving Spiritual Strength

For some, the questions bring introspection and a humbling awareness of a depleted love supply--when one finds himself stranded in a valley of bleak depression and cold indifference. There is no need to become discouraged, but there is a need to take courage in the awareness that God lives and by his Spirit hearts can be revitalized. Paul taught the fruits of the Spirit are "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22).

We can share every emotion of the heart with our Father in Heaven; there is no shame in having negative emotions unless we fail to seek his help in overcoming them. I recall a time or two when, through gritted teeth, I said to Father in heaven, "Right now, I don't even like your child!" On one occasion, one of our teenage sons had driven me to the brink! He was obstinate, irrational, and arrogant! I became obstinate, irrational and twice as arrogant. The signs were all there--I was into destructive discipline! I told him to sit in his room, while I ran for help. Kneeling by my bedside, I prayed candidly about my frustrations. After awhile the rancor of my heart seemed to neutralize; I returned to him, still angry, but not out of control. In a spirit of love we discussed his behavior. He knew his behavior was unacceptable, but I needed to say it and he needed to hear it. After a few minutes we ended up in a hug; he said, "I'm sorry, Mom. Something happened at school that triggered me. I am really very sorry for the way I behaved." This never would have happened had I not taken the time to rely on a higher power. It works.

When we are physically sick, we apply a healing program. Likewise, in a spiritually weakened condition, we can apply a healing program. An exhausted parent needs time to build spiritual strength--not self-condemnation. Submitting oneself to a season of study (scripture and other uplifting literature), meditation, fasting and prayer can restore lost feelings of love. Quiet walks, great music, and uplifting movies can restore the spirit. An abundant heart comes as we put God first, not our families.

Courageous Love

There were times when the Savior was extremely calm and lenient in correcting misbehavior, while at other times he could be forceful and sharp. We can be assured that his actions were not based on his mood, but rather according to the need. To the woman taken in adultery, he simply said, "Go, and sin no more" (John 8:11), however to those who had turned the house of worship into a house of merchandise, he shouted--with whip in hand--"My house shall be called a house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Matthew 21:12-13). Insensitive hearts require a passionate response--when confronted by "hard-mouths," the Savior used hard discipline.

Obviously, there is a time for both. Times to merely remind, suggest and counsel, and times for constructive anger, sharp commands, and stern warnings. The need is based on the intent of the heart. Tender-hearted young children, anxious to do what is right, need only a gentle touch; unintended, but mischievous behavior requires only mild correction, but a hardened, rebellious teenager--in serious spiritual or physical danger--requires a courageous and valiant petition for the right! I do mean *valiant*; it takes real courage for parents to discipline in the face of balky resistance and possible rejection by those they love--their children.

The Creator has used more pointed, harsh forms of discipline throughout history to soften hearts and awaken life. On the other hand, God never shouts when a whisper will be heard, never commands when a suggestion will be heeded. In all his dealings with his children, there is woven the thread of faith, patience, and long-suffering, as well as reproving with sharpness. In this same way, a parent's passion can open eyes and hearts that have gone to sleep.

Power To Convert With The Spirit

Throughout the ages, men and women have used various tools of manipulation and coercion to maintain power over others. If they could not win voluntary compliance, they would force, threaten, torture, incarcerate, even murder. Jesus Christ, however, was able to

influence millions of lives--without deception, coercion, manipulation, or physical force. He was able to influence beyond anything or anyone who had ever before or since lived on the earth; generations have taught and re-taught his message for two thousand years. I believe he used three basic tools for creating lasting, internal conviction: LOVE--he was loving, tender hearted; KNOWLEDGE--he spent hours teaching; POWER--he had the powers of heaven to change hearts, heal souls, and even raise the dead!

The Savior is the Son of God, but parents, in their stewardship, also have access to this divine power; which can soften the hearts of their children beyond any other tool of influence and persuasion. Through the power of the Spirit, we can communicate with the authority required to change lives.

Children, who have taken upon them the darkened countenance of bitterness, hostility, and resentment, require more than words, more than reproof; they desperately need the powers of heaven. There are times when parents must battle the powers of darkness for their child--with the understanding that only the powers of light can overcome the powers of darkness. When parents reprove and teach by the Spirit, their words are conveyed through a real, discernable power. Disciplining by the Spirit--armed with powerful love--will usually bring the child to an acute awareness of his misbehavior, and to remorse of conscience--if the child is still yielding. On the other hand, discipline with a destructive, vindictive spirit will likely produce similar behavior--resentfulness, retaliation, and rebellion.

One time three of our sons got into a heated argument. I told them to go to their rooms. After asking for assistance from God, I gathered them together to have a talk. In no uncertain terms I told them the reasons why they should not be fighting--how destructive it is to the spirit of the home. I reminded them of their love for one another; of past times when they had been considerate of one another. With firmness and with faith in their basic natures, I instructed and scolded them. In time it began to work--tears of remorse began to fall

One of our sons had been following a course of self-defeating behavior. Although this was bringing much unhappiness into his life, he seemed unwilling or unable to change. I had tried to reason with him on several occasions, but he was unwilling to listen. One day, after spending several days in prayer and occasional fasting, I again approached him. This time my words seemed to be energized with great confidence and assurance. Before I spoke a word, I knew that I would win. I do not mean win in argument, but rather win the opportunity to positively influence. The convincing ideas came, but more significant the words seemed to carry great force for good. It seems that rather than attempting to convert, I was attempting to actually build spiritual strength--and it worked!

A Time For Justice

When the tools of mercy, forgiveness and patience will no longer influence, then, prompted by love, the principles of judgment and justice must rise to the surface. In effect, tough love rises so that mutual love may one-day bloom again.

When love and goodwill cannot be shared freely, a parent resorts to concern and caution: "I'm worried about you." When concern and caution is rejected--"I don't care if you're worried about me"--a parent turns to law and order. When law and order are rejected--"I don't care what you say. I'm going to do it anyway!"--the parent turns to indirect influence, prayer, and justice.

In severe cases, when a child lives at home in body, yet contributes to the destruction of the home in spirit, the parent must resort to the principle of justice.

A teenage daughter developed such a rage toward everyone in the family that her very presence created a hell. For months the parents explained over and over that her negative and destructive behavior would not be tolerated; they tried to help her understand that her constant put downs were painful to her brothers and sisters; they

put her on restriction, they denied family privileges-- telephone, television, but nothing seemed to work. Finally, after much prayer, they decided their daughter needed to leave home--hoping that homesickness would soften her heart. An aunt agreed to take her for three months. Upon hearing the decision, the daughter shouted to her mother, "I don't care what you do with me; I won't change. I don't love you--you're the worst mother in the world." The mother calmly but firmly replied, "I would like to have your love, but I would rather have your respect, and I know if I do what's right for you now, I'll one day have your respect and your love. I can wait."

After only a few days living away from home, her heart was softened; when she returned home--six weeks later--her whole nature had changed. She said, "I thought it wouldn't be bad living away from home, but I missed everyone so much. Aunt Barbara has a great family, and they were good to me, but they're not *my* family."

A teenage son, age seventeen, left home to move in with his friends. While not accepting the counsel and direction of parents, he still expected to use family privileges--food, tools, cars, health and automobile insurance, etc. Questions of fairness rose to the forefront: If a child is living away, without permission, does he have the right to borrow family possessions without asking? Does a child have rights to parental sanction regarding license to drive when the parents have no control? Should a child living away from home have free access to family food?

Faced with the challenge to establish fairness, the parents concluded that a child who had rejected the responsibilities of the home should not be allowed to enjoy the rights of the home--to decide to leave home is to decide to withdraw oneself from the benefits of living at home. They also concluded that when parents are not in control of the child, they should not be responsible for the child's behavior. As an example, parents who authorize a child's

driving license can be responsible for damages incurred while the child is driving.

He was, therefore, denied the use of tools, the family car, insurance, and permission to drive. (In the state of California, without parental permission, a minor cannot receive a valid driver's license.) The parents decided that their son would always be welcome to visit and to join them for dinner when invited. Thus, they applied the principles of love and justice.

After establishing justice the parent becomes confident and is free from the complexities and frustrations that mount when a child blatantly rebels. Finding a resting point of fairness, parents are free to work within the realm of whatever relationship is possible. When it cannot be a free expression of mutual concern and goodwill, it can be a friendly discussion of interests; and when even that is not possible, there can be an understanding of fair play. Of course the child may not always agree with your position of fair play, however, more importantly, you must agree with your own position. When you are in agreement with yourself, the battle within is resolved.

Summary

Tenderhearted little ones are very sensitive to discipline--their hearts are so filled with love, and they need love so desperately--they do not require harsh, pointed discipline; in reality, such discipline may begin a hardening of the heart process. Love is the most powerful force in parenting and disciplining, but there are times when the most courageous form of love is tough love--when reproofing with sharpness, and applying justice, are in the best interest of both parent and child.