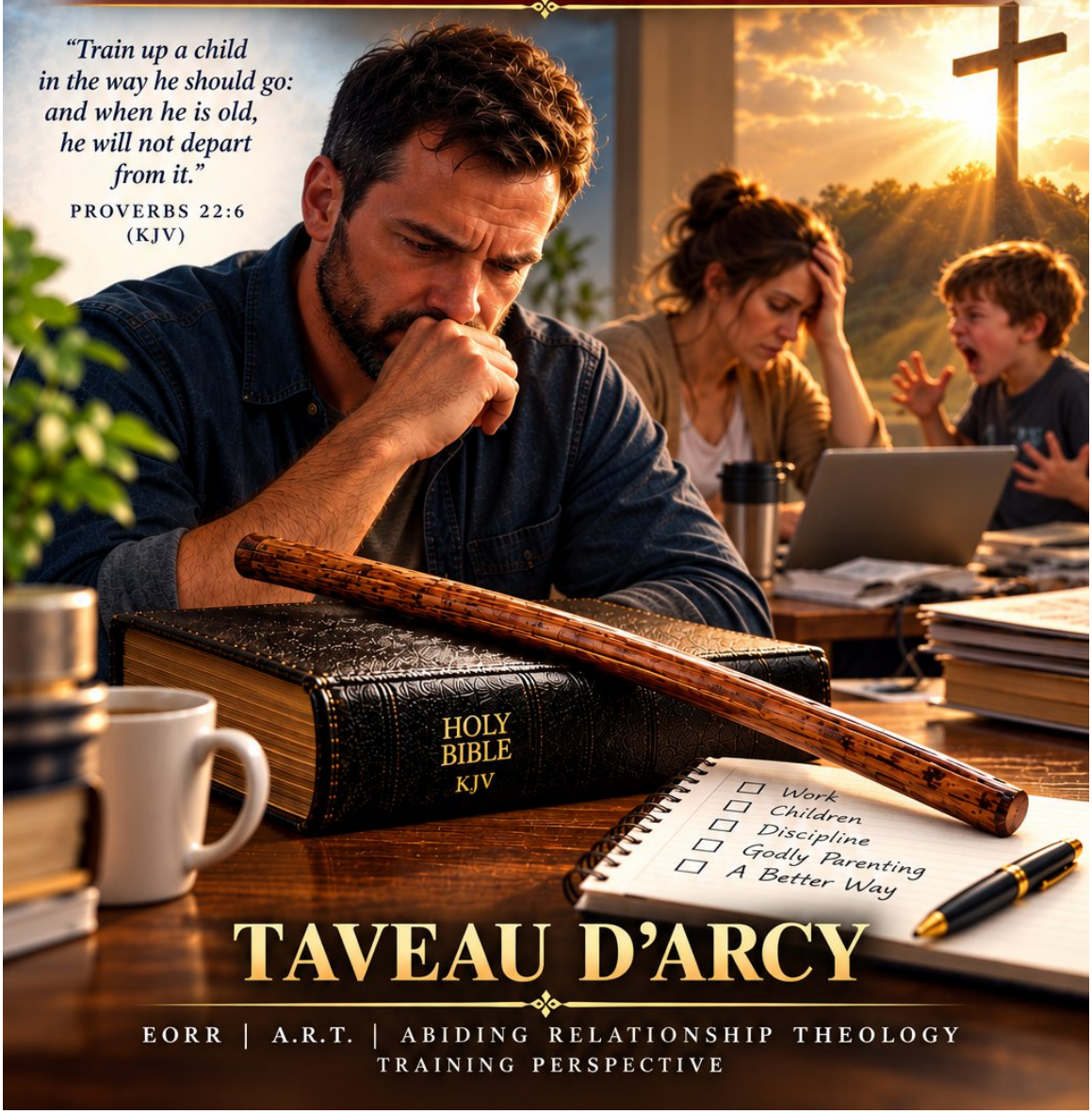
The BIBLE ROD, The ANGRY CHILD and The CONFUSED PARENT

CHRISTIAN PARENTING:
What Is Godly? What Is Permissive? What Is Abuse?



TAVEAU D'ARCY

EORR | A.R.T. | ABIDING RELATIONSHIP THEOLOGY TRAINING PERSPECTIVE

THE BIBLE ROD, THE ANGRY CHILD, AND THE CONFUSED PARENT

Christian Parenting:

What Is Godly? What Is Permissive?

What Is Abuse?

by

Taveau D'Arcy

EORR / A.R.T.
Abiding Relationship Theology Training Perspective

EORR Cross Body Unity International
Taveau Creative Leadership

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The Bible Rod, the Angry Child, and the Confused Parent

Christian Parenting: What Is Godly? What Is Permissive? What Is Abuse?

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Educational and Pastoral Disclaimer

This publication presents Christian biblical teaching, ministry experience, personal observations, and educational discussion concerning parenting, discipline, authority, family relationships, and prayer.

The author is not a licensed physician, psychologist, therapist, or professional counselor. This book does not replace qualified medical, mental health, legal, educational, or child-protection services.

Parents and caregivers remain responsible for making appropriate decisions and obtaining qualified assistance when needed, particularly when a child's physical or emotional safety is at risk.

AI-Assisted Editorial Disclosure

This book reflects Taveau D'Arcy's original teaching perspective, approximately fifty years of biblical study, ministry experience, personal observations, and firsthand involvement in Christian leadership and relationships.

Artificial intelligence has been used as a research, organizational, drafting, and editorial assistance tool. The author reviews, edits, and approves the final material for publication. AI assistance does not replace her personal experiences, theological convictions, or responsibility for the content.

Respectful, Scripture-based corrections are welcome in the spirit of James 3:17.

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SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION

Proverbs 22:6 (KJV)

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

Ephesians 6:4 (KJV)

"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Colossians 3:21 (KJV)

"Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged."

James 3:17 (KJV)

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

DEDICATION

To fathers who were raised under angry, harsh, confusing, or authoritarian forms of correction and now desire to understand how to exercise biblical authority wisely with their own children.

To working mothers, single parents, grandparents, and caregivers who carry the daily responsibilities of raising children, often while facing exhaustion, financial pressure, and limited assistance.

And to the children who deserve both appropriate guidance and the dignity of being treated as valuable human beings.

May we become willing to examine our own hearts, learn from Scripture, and allow the wisdom of Jesus Christ to reach our family relationships.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

WHY THIS BOOK?

I have observed that many Christian parents are confused about what the Bible actually teaches concerning the rod, correction, discipline, and parental authority.

Some adults grew up under harsh and angry methods of punishment that were presented to them as biblical. Others experienced little correction and entered adulthood without learning appropriate boundaries or personal responsibility.

Now they have children of their own.

A father who was raised under strict or authoritarian discipline may genuinely love his children while remaining uncertain about how to correct them. He may remember being shouted at, threatened, humiliated, or punished without being given an opportunity to explain.

He may have promised himself that he would never treat his children that way, yet discover that under pressure he begins repeating familiar reactions.

Another father may move in the opposite direction, avoiding necessary correction because he fears becoming like the adults who raised him.

Working mothers face their own difficulties. Some are balancing employment, household responsibilities, school matters, financial pressure, and the daily needs of their children with very little assistance.

Exhaustion can influence the way an adult responds to disobedience, conflict, or emotional distress.

I believe these matters deserve careful biblical examination.

The Scriptures address the responsibilities of children, but they also speak directly to the conduct of fathers and other adults exercising authority.

The biblical rod must be examined in its scriptural context. We should also consider the difference between legitimate correction, permissiveness, neglect, and the misuse of parental power.

I especially want parents to examine what happens within themselves when a child becomes angry, resistant, or difficult to manage.

Does the adult respond with wisdom? Is there unresolved resentment, fear, favoritism, or an excessive need to control? Has the parent learned personal self-government?

These questions belong within Christian parenting.

My EORR / A.R.T. Abiding Relationship Theology perspective emphasizes allowing the teachings of Jesus Christ to reach our everyday relationships.

I believe Christian maturity should become evident in how we treat people, including the children entrusted to our care.

My purpose is to encourage thoughtful biblical study, personal examination, responsible correction, and the development of healthy family relationships.

I invite you to read, consider the Scriptures, examine your own experiences, and prayerfully evaluate the way authority is exercised in your home.

Taveau D'Arcy

UNDERSTANDING THE EORR / A.R.T. PERSPECTIVE

ABIDING RELATIONSHIP THEOLOGY

A.R.T. stands for **Abiding Relationship Theology**.

It concerns the Christian's abiding relationship with Jesus Christ and the practical expression of that relationship in everyday conduct toward other people.

I believe our knowledge of Scripture, spiritual experiences, religious positions, and years of Christian service should eventually produce recognizable maturity in our relationships.

This includes the home.

A person may know many Bible verses and still struggle with anger, partiality, intimidation, harshness, or the desire to control others.

A parent may emphasize a child's duty to obey while overlooking biblical instructions concerning the conduct of adults.

A.R.T. encourages us to examine these matters honestly.

EORR means Equal Opportunity REAL Respect. Its guiding motto is:

"It's not about the look, the form, or the loot—It's about bearing Jesus Christ fruit."

In the family, this means recognizing that children are valuable human beings even while they remain under appropriate parental authority.

Children need correction, boundaries, instruction, and accountability. They should also be treated with dignity and protected from cruelty, humiliation, and uncontrolled adult anger.

The parent is responsible for exercising authority with wisdom and personal self-government.

A.R.T. encourages thoughtful biblical reasoning, respect for others, and the fruit of Christian maturity.

Our continuing emphasis:

Allowing revival to reach the relationships.

INTRODUCTION

THE BIBLE ROD, THE ANGRY CHILD, AND THE CONFUSED PARENT

What Is Godly? What Is Permissive? What Is Abuse?

The title of this book raises questions that many Christian parents have considered, sometimes privately and with considerable uncertainty.

What does the Bible mean when it speaks about the rod? How should a parent respond to an angry or defiant child? When does appropriate correction become unreasonable or abusive? Can a parent become so afraid of harshness that necessary discipline is neglected?

And what happens when the adult responsible for correction has never learned to govern personal anger?

I believe these questions are especially important for men who were raised under strict, angry, or authoritarian forms of discipline.

A father may have grown up believing that immediate obedience was the primary evidence of successful parenting. He may have been punished for questioning an adult, expressing disagreement, or failing to understand an instruction.

Years later, that same man may become a father and discover that the methods he inherited are producing fear, resentment, or conflict within his own family.

He may sincerely desire to follow God while remaining confused about the difference between biblical authority and the misuse of authority.

The working mother may face different pressures. She may be responsible for employment, household management, school matters, transportation, meals, and the daily supervision of children.

When she is exhausted, even an ordinary disagreement may become difficult to manage.

The challenges of parenting deserve more than religious slogans or simplistic instructions.

The Bible contains passages concerning correction, obedience, parental responsibility, and the conduct of adults toward children. These passages should be considered carefully, including their historical setting and the distinction between Old Testament language and New Testament teaching.

We should also examine the adult applying those Scriptures.

A parent may have memorized verses about discipline while remaining unaware of personal resentment, jealousy, unresolved childhood experiences, or habits of anger that influence the manner of correction.

Another adult may be so concerned about avoiding the harshness experienced during childhood that necessary boundaries are repeatedly abandoned.

Both situations can create serious difficulties.

The question is whether our methods of parenting are consistent with biblical wisdom and the responsibilities entrusted to us.

I believe this requires an honest examination of the parent's heart, the child's actual conduct, and the circumstances surrounding each situation.

A child's anger does not automatically prove that the parent has failed. Neither does a parent's frustration justify whatever punishment the adult chooses to administer.

Authority must be exercised responsibly.

Ephesians 6:4 (KJV)

"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Colossians 3:21 (KJV)

"Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged."

These instructions deserve serious consideration alongside the passages concerning correction.

The adult's responsibility extends beyond obtaining outward compliance. Parents are entrusted with raising developing human beings who must eventually learn to make responsible decisions without constant supervision.

This book examines harsh authority, permissiveness, the parent's personal history, favoritism, the power of words, emotional exhaustion, prayer, and the importance of seeking help when family difficulties exceed ordinary parental understanding.

I also consider the difference between a child's need for correction and the adult's temptation to react from personal anger.

My desire is to encourage Christian parents to examine their methods in the light of Scripture and the wisdom described in James 3:17.

The home is one of the most important places where our Christian convictions are tested in everyday relationships.

May we be willing to examine how we behave toward our children while teaching them how to behave responsibly toward others.

Taveau D'Arcy
Cross Body Unity International
EORR / A.R.T. Abiding Relationship Theology

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Reader's Note: Each chapter concludes with *Vocabulary, Clarifications, and Points to Ponder*, designed for personal reflection, parent training, and group discussion.

CHAPTER ONE

TRUE AUTHORITY AND FALSE AUTHORITY IN CHRISTIAN PARENTING

How Far Is Too Far? Where Correction Ends and Abuse, Trauma and Parental Violation, Controlling Domination Begins

THE PARENT HAS AUTHORITY, BUT WHAT KIND?

One of the most important questions Christian parents should ask is not merely whether they have authority over their children. Of course they have authority. Children need parents and responsible adults to protect them, guide them, teach them, and help them grow toward maturity. But what kind of authority is the parent exercising?

Is it responsible authority, or is it control? Is it correction, or is it retaliation? Is the parent training the child, or demanding submission to the adult's personality, preferences, fears, and unresolved problems?

These questions are especially important in Christian households where a parent believes that God has entrusted the adult with a particular position of authority. A person can occupy a legitimate position while exercising that position wrongly. A father can be a father and still behave unfairly. A mother can be a mother and still become controlling. A stepparent can possess legitimate household responsibilities without possessing unlimited authority over the child.

The same principle applies to Christian ministry. A pastor or prophet may hold a recognized leadership position while behaving in ways that contradict the character and teaching of Jesus Christ. The position itself does not automatically justify the conduct.

The Christian parent must understand that parental authority is accompanied by accountability.

TRUE AUTHORITY IS A RESPONSIBILITY, NOT PERSONAL OWNERSHIP

A parent has responsibility for a child's welfare, education, protection, guidance, and appropriate correction. The child is not the parent's personal property, nor was the child placed in the household to satisfy the adult's pride, relieve personal frustration, or compensate for disappointments in life.

True authority serves a purpose beyond the adult's immediate wishes. It seeks the child's development into a responsible human being who can eventually exercise sound judgment without constant supervision.

Ephesians 6:4 (KJV)

"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Paul acknowledges the father's responsibility to raise and instruct children while placing a restriction upon the adult's conduct. The father is not to provoke the child to wrath. The instruction requires the adult to consider how authority is being exercised, rather than assuming that every parental demand is justified because the parent occupies the higher position.

Children must be taught right from wrong. They must learn responsibility, honesty, consideration for others, and the consequences of their decisions. But the adult must also demonstrate those qualities.

A parent cannot reasonably demand self-government from a child while refusing to practice it personally.

FALSE AUTHORITY: WHEN THE PARENT MUST ALWAYS WIN

False authority often reveals itself when the adult becomes more interested in winning a confrontation than in teaching the child.

The parent may begin with a legitimate concern. Perhaps the child has lied, refused an instruction, or behaved disrespectfully. But somewhere in the confrontation, the adult's pride becomes involved, and the original issue is overshadowed by a personal contest.

The parent begins demanding submission not merely to the reasonable instruction, but to the adult's superiority. The conversation becomes a struggle over who will win.

The adult may threaten increasingly severe consequences because the child has failed to display the desired emotional reaction. Some parents insist that the child must look frightened, cry, or express immediate agreement before the confrontation can end.

At that point, the parent needs to examine what is actually being accomplished.

The purpose of correction is to teach responsibility. A child may comply outwardly while inwardly becoming resentful, frightened, or confused. Immediate compliance does not necessarily mean that the child has understood the lesson.

A parent should not mistake fear for moral understanding.

CONTROL, DOMINATION, AND ORDINARY PARENTAL GUIDANCE

Parents necessarily exercise a measure of control over children's activities. A toddler cannot safely decide whether to wander into traffic. A younger child should not have unrestricted access to dangerous objects or inappropriate media. A teenager may need reasonable limits concerning driving, internet use, school attendance, and household responsibilities.

These are ordinary aspects of responsible parenting.

Control becomes domination when the adult uses power primarily to satisfy personal demands rather than to serve a legitimate parental purpose.

Domination may involve unreasonable restrictions, intimidation, humiliation, invasion of appropriate personal boundaries, or the refusal to allow a growing child any age-appropriate independence. It may also involve demanding that children adopt every personal preference of the parent as though those preferences were commandments from God.

A parent can establish a reasonable bedtime without attempting to control every thought, opinion, interest, and harmless preference of the child. A parent can require respectful speech while recognizing that a child may disagree with an adult opinion.

Likewise, a parent can insist upon honesty without humiliating a child for telling an uncomfortable truth.

As children mature, their responsibilities and appropriate freedoms should gradually increase. Good parental authority prepares them to make wise decisions when the parent is no longer present to make every decision for them.

HOW FAR IS TOO FAR?

Here is a practical question every parent should learn to ask:

Am I still teaching this child, or have I begun using my authority against this child?

The line has been crossed when correction becomes violence, degradation, coercion, or retaliation.

It has been crossed when the adult knowingly endangers the child through painful physical punishment, exhausting exercise, deprivation of basic necessities, or frightening threats. It has been crossed when the parent attacks the child's personal worth rather than addressing behavior.

It has also been crossed when the parent uses religion to terrorize the child, announces that the child is cursed or demonized without sound basis, or insists that questioning an adult is equivalent to rebelling against God.

A parent who recognizes such behavior should stop, protect the child, and seek appropriate assistance. Serious mistreatment is not merely a difference in parenting styles.

A child does not have to display visible injuries before an adult should recognize that the treatment has become harmful.

HASSLING IS NOT THE SAME AS TRAINING

Some adults continually pick at their children. They criticize clothing, mannerisms, personality, interests, speech, appearance, and ordinary mistakes. The child may be unable to complete a simple activity without being corrected several times.

Eventually, the household becomes a place of constant irritation.

The adult may believe this is diligent parenting, but continual faultfinding can undermine the very relationship through which instruction is supposed to occur.

Colossians 3:21 (KJV)

"Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged."

The warning against discouragement deserves serious consideration. A child should not grow up believing that nothing is ever good enough.

Responsible parents learn to choose their concerns carefully. Some matters require immediate correction. Others require patient teaching over time. Still others are simply differences in personality or preference.

Wisdom helps the adult distinguish among them.

A child who has been corrected for nearly everything may eventually stop taking correction seriously. The parent then wonders why the child no longer responds.

The adult should consider whether constant criticism has made meaningful instruction difficult to recognize.

LEGALISM: WHEN FAMILY PREFERENCES BECOME DIVINE LAW

Christian parents sometimes confuse biblical commands with family customs.

A parent may have strong preferences concerning clothing, music, hairstyles, friendships, church activities, or social behavior. Some of these concerns involve legitimate questions of safety, modesty, character, or responsibility.

But not every personal preference is a commandment of God.

A parent should be honest about the difference.

There is a difference between explaining that a particular expectation is a household rule and declaring that God condemns a child for disagreeing with the parent's preference.

Religious language should not be used to make every parental decision unquestionable. The parent may possess legitimate authority to establish reasonable household expectations without pretending that every expectation is directly prescribed in Scripture.

Mark 7:8 (KJV)

"For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do."

Jesus was addressing religious traditions that displaced God's commandments. Although the passage is not specifically about parenting, its warning is relevant whenever human traditions are elevated into supposedly unquestionable divine requirements.

Christian parents should be particularly careful when attaching God's name to personal opinions. A child should not be taught to confuse the parent's every preference with the voice of the Lord.

THE CHILD'S FALLEN NATURE DOES NOT EXCUSE THE PARENT'S FALLEN NATURE

Christian theology recognizes that human beings require moral instruction and correction. Children can be selfish, dishonest, impulsive, disrespectful, or deliberately disobedient.

But parents are also human beings.

The adult may struggle with anger, jealousy, pride, fear, impatience, resentment, or the desire to control others. It is inconsistent to speak continually about the child's sinful nature while refusing to examine the adult's own conduct.

Romans 3:23 (KJV)

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;"

The parent is included in that statement.

A Christian parent should not use the doctrine of human sinfulness as an excuse to assume that every childhood disagreement is evidence of deep rebellion. Nor should the adult use religious authority to avoid personal repentance.

Sometimes the child is wrong. Sometimes the parent is wrong. Sometimes both need to change. And sometimes the difficulty is not primarily moral wrongdoing at all, but immaturity, misunderstanding, stress, disability, grief, or another circumstance requiring a different response.

Understanding the difference requires patience and attention to the individual child.

THE STEPPARENT: AUTHORITY MUST DEVELOP WITH TRUST

Stepparenting deserves particular attention.

A person may marry a child's mother or father and immediately assume that marriage establishes the same relationship with the child that the biological parent has developed over many years.

But a new marriage does not automatically produce emotional trust.

A stepparent can possess real household responsibilities while recognizing that the relationship with the child needs time. The adult should not demand instant affection or use discipline to force the child to acknowledge a particular emotional status.

The biological parent should remain involved in establishing expectations and addressing serious misconduct. Where possible, the adults should agree privately upon reasonable household rules rather than placing the child between competing authorities.

A stepparent must not use the child as a rival for the spouse's attention. Nor should a biological parent ignore mistreatment merely to preserve peace within the marriage.

A blended family needs fairness, patience, protection, and clear responsibilities. The adult who enters an existing family relationship should be willing to understand the child's history, loyalties, losses, and concerns.

Trust may develop gradually through dependable conduct.

TRUE AUTHORITY ALLOWS REASONABLE QUESTIONS

A parent does not have to negotiate every instruction with a young child. Sometimes an immediate safety concern requires prompt obedience.

But there is no biblical virtue in making a household hostile to all questions.

As children mature, they should have increasing opportunities to understand the reasons behind rules, express concerns respectfully, and participate in appropriate decisions.

A teenager who asks why a rule exists is not automatically committing rebellion. The question may provide an opportunity for instruction.

The parent can explain the reason for a decision while maintaining the decision.

James 3:17 (KJV)

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

Heavenly wisdom is described as easy to be intreated. A Christian adult should be capable of listening.

Listening does not require surrendering authority. It requires maturity and a willingness to consider whether one's judgment is sound.

A parent who has made a mistake should be able to acknowledge it without feeling that parental authority has been destroyed.

THE PARENT MUST NOT BE AFRAID OF THE CHILD

There is also the opposite extreme.

Some parents become so afraid of upsetting a child that they stop exercising reasonable authority. The child may refuse ordinary responsibilities, mistreat siblings, ignore safety rules, or deliberately disregard household expectations.

The parent repeatedly gives in because confrontation feels unpleasant.

That is not the balance we are seeking.

Children need dependable boundaries. They need adults who can remain calm while saying no. They need to learn that disappointment is part of life and that wrongdoing may have reasonable consequences.

A parent can be gentle without being weak. The adult can be compassionate without allowing the child to govern the household.

Some children are especially persistent and argumentative. Their determination may become a valuable quality when properly developed, but they must also learn that other people have legitimate boundaries.

The parent should neither surrender responsibility nor turn every disagreement into a battle for personal supremacy.

HOW CAN A PARENT EXAMINE PERSONAL AUTHORITY BEFORE GOD?

Before administering correction, a parent should consider what the child actually did and whether the response is appropriate to the child's age, understanding, and circumstances.

The adult should also examine personal motives. Is the purpose to teach the child, protect someone, or address genuine misconduct? Or has the parent's pride become involved?

An exhausted or angry parent may need to postpone a nonurgent discussion until calm judgment returns. The adult should consider whether the proposed consequence is safe, reasonable, and possible to carry out consistently.

It is also wise to listen to the child's explanation. Listening may reveal important information that the parent did not initially understand.

One particularly revealing question is whether the adult would regard the proposed treatment as acceptable if another person used it against a child the parent dearly loves.

These considerations do not replace Scripture or parental judgment. They help the adult examine the exercise of authority.

A parent who repeatedly finds it difficult to remain calm, determine appropriate consequences, or understand the child's needs may benefit from wise counsel and additional support.

THE A.R.T. KETCHUP TEST: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUR AUTHORITY IS CHALLENGED?

The A.R.T. Ketchup Test becomes especially revealing when a child challenges the adult.

What emerges under pressure?

Does the parent immediately become furious? Does the adult feel personally humiliated by disagreement? Does the parent begin threatening, accusing, or making unreasonable demands?

Another parent may respond by becoming frightened and abandoning every boundary.

These reactions can reveal unresolved fears, habits, or personal attitudes that interfere with responsible parenting.

Proverbs 16:32 (KJV)

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

The parent who can govern personal reactions possesses an important form of strength.

Self-government helps the adult make decisions based upon the child's actual needs rather than the parent's immediate emotional state.

This is especially important when the parent has experienced harsh treatment in childhood. The adult may have learned to associate authority with intimidation, anger, or absolute control.

Those patterns can be examined and changed.

TRUE AUTHORITY IS WILLING TO SEEK HELP

A parent does not have to know everything.

When a child has persistent difficulties, the adult may need assistance from the other parent, a trustworthy relative, an experienced caregiver, a teacher, or a qualified professional.

The family may also benefit from prayer and pastoral support.

Seeking help does not eliminate parental authority. It may be one of the wisest ways to exercise it.

The parent who is approaching the point of losing control should not simply increase the severity of punishment. The adult should recognize the danger and seek a better approach.

Likewise, a parent who has become so exhausted that ordinary boundaries are repeatedly abandoned may need practical assistance rather than criticism.

Christian communities can serve families by providing trustworthy encouragement, prayer, and appropriate help.

THE CHRISTIAN EXAMPLE OF AUTHORITY

Jesus Christ exercised authority without making cruelty His method of leadership.

He confronted wrongdoing and spoke plainly about truth. He also welcomed children, showed compassion, and exposed religious hypocrisy.

Christian parents cannot reproduce every aspect of Jesus' unique authority, but they can examine His character and teachings.

Matthew 20:25–26 (KJV)

"But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;"

Jesus was instructing His disciples about greatness and leadership. The passage is not a direct parenting manual, but it challenges the assumption that possessing authority gives a person permission to dominate others for personal advantage.

Parents should recognize that responsibility for another human being is not an invitation to self-importance.

The authority of the parent should be exercised with seriousness, restraint, fairness, and a willingness to serve the child's genuine welfare.

CONCLUSION: THE AUTHORITY TO TRAIN, NOT THE LICENSE TO DOMINATE

Christian parents should not be ashamed of exercising legitimate authority. Children need guidance, correction, protection, and instruction.

But the authority entrusted to parents is not unlimited. It does not authorize cruelty, humiliation, personal revenge, or the use of religion to frighten children into submission.

Neither does Christian gentleness require parents to abandon reasonable boundaries.

The mature parent seeks to understand the child, identify wrongdoing accurately, choose appropriate consequences, and remain accountable for personal conduct.

The parent is not required to be perfect. But the parent must be willing to learn.

True authority protects and prepares the child for maturity. False authority uses the child to satisfy the adult's need for control.

That distinction deserves a permanent place in Christian teaching

CHAPTER ONE REVIEW

TRUE AUTHORITY AND FALSE AUTHORITY IN CHRISTIAN PARENTING

Vocabulary, Clarifications, and Points to Ponder

1. Parental Authority

The responsibility entrusted to a parent or guardian to protect, guide, teach, and make appropriate decisions for a child. Authority includes establishing boundaries and correcting wrongdoing. It also requires the adult to exercise judgment and remain accountable for personal conduct.

For consideration: Does possessing authority automatically make every decision or disciplinary method correct?

2. Legitimate Authority

Authority exercised within the responsibilities and reasonable limits of the person's position. Parents have legitimate responsibilities concerning safety, conduct, education,

and household order. Their position does not grant unlimited power over a child's dignity, thoughts, or developing personality.

3. False Authority

An appearance or claim of authority that is being used to justify intimidation, unreasonable control, personal superiority, or mistreatment. An adult may hold a legitimate parental position while exercising that authority improperly.

Clarification: The position and the manner in which the position is exercised must be examined separately.

4. Correction

An effort to address wrongdoing or irresponsible behavior through instruction, appropriate consequences, and guidance. Correction should help the child recognize what happened, why it matters, and what needs to change.

5. Discipline

The broader process of training a child in responsibility, self-control, judgment, and appropriate conduct. Discipline includes daily instruction, example, routines, and correction when necessary. It is a broader concept than punishment alone.

6. Punishment

A consequence imposed in response to misconduct. Punishment may form part of discipline, but its severity or effectiveness should not be judged solely by how much distress it produces.

7. Domination

The use of superior power or position to control another person's behavior through intimidation, fear, or excessive demands. Domination may produce outward compliance without developing understanding or responsible judgment.

8. Parental Self-Government

The adult's responsibility to govern personal anger, speech, impulses, and reactions while exercising authority. This includes recognizing when embarrassment, fatigue, resentment, or frustration is affecting judgment.

For consideration: How can a parent teach self-control while regularly demonstrating uncontrolled anger?

9. Proportionate Correction

A response reasonably suited to the seriousness of the misconduct, the child's age, understanding, circumstances, and ability to respond. A minor mistake and a serious act of deliberate harm should not automatically receive the same treatment.

10. Accountability

The obligation to answer for one's conduct and accept appropriate responsibility. Children are accountable for their behavior according to their maturity and understanding. Parents remain accountable for how they exercise authority.

Closing thought: Christian parenting calls for examining both the child's conduct and the adult's use of authority.

CHAPTER TWO

WHEN GOD CONFRONTED HIS FIRST HUMAN SON

The Garden of Eden, Accountability, Correction, and the Exercise of Godly Authority

THE FIRST HUMAN DISOBEDIENCE

Before examining the methods Christian parents use to correct their children, I want to consider an important biblical account involving God and the first human beings. It is found in Genesis 2 and 3, where the Lord establishes a command, human disobedience occurs, and God confronts Adam and Eve concerning their actions.

Adam was not a little child. He was an adult, and the circumstances involved the first human disobedience against God. This account should not be treated as a modern parenting manual. Nevertheless, I believe there are important observations to consider about authority, responsibility, confrontation, and the way wrongdoing is addressed.

God gave Adam a command before Eve was created.

Genesis 2:16–17 (KJV)

"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

The instruction was clear. Adam was permitted to eat freely from the trees of the garden, with one particular prohibition. God had established a boundary, and Adam had been informed of the consequence of disobedience.

This is worth considering when discussing parental authority. Children need to understand what is expected of them. They also need reasonable freedom appropriate to their age and development. A household in which every harmless preference becomes a contest of wills can produce unnecessary conflict. Wise parents establish meaningful boundaries while allowing children opportunities to learn, explore, and gradually develop sound judgment.

When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they became aware of their nakedness and attempted to hide themselves. The account then describes God's approach.

Genesis 3:8–9 (KJV)

"And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?"

I find the question particularly significant.

God called to Adam and asked, "Where art thou?" The question was not evidence that God lacked knowledge of Adam's location. Rather, the account presents Adam being summoned to respond before the Lord.

Consider what happens in many households when a parent discovers that a child has done something wrong. The adult may immediately become angry, raise the voice, or begin announcing punishment before hearing what occurred. Sometimes the parent has witnessed the incident and already understands the facts. At other times, the adult knows only part of the story.

A question can open the way for a truthful explanation.

It may reveal whether the child understood the instruction, acted deliberately, misunderstood the circumstances, or was influenced by another person. Even when wrongdoing is apparent, the parent can learn something important by allowing the child to speak.

The purpose is to make a fair judgment rather than react solely from anger or embarrassment.

QUESTIONS, EXPLANATIONS, AND PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The Genesis account continues with Adam's response.

Genesis 3:10–13 (KJV)

"And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat."

Adam explained that he was afraid and had hidden himself. When questioned about the forbidden tree, he acknowledged eating the fruit but also pointed toward the woman God had given him. Eve explained that the serpent had deceived her.

Their explanations revealed circumstances surrounding the disobedience, but those circumstances did not erase personal responsibility.

Children sometimes respond in similar ways. A child may blame a sibling, a friend, or another person when confronted about misconduct. The explanation may contain relevant information, but the parent must still determine what responsibility belongs to the child.

Suppose a young person has damaged property after being pressured by a friend. The parent may need to address the child's decision while also recognizing the influence of the other person. If a child has lied because of fear, the dishonesty still needs attention, but the adult should also consider what created that fear.

Understanding the circumstances helps the parent determine an appropriate response.

Some parents worry that allowing a child to explain will weaken parental authority. They believe that the adult must speak first, speak loudest, and never permit the child to question an accusation. Yet the parent remains responsible for discovering the truth. Refusing to hear relevant information may result in punishing the wrong child, misunderstanding an accident, or imposing a consequence that does not fit the misconduct.

Proverbs 18:13 (KJV)

"He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him."

This principle deserves a place in Christian parenting. An adult who makes a hasty accusation may cause unnecessary harm, particularly when the child is publicly embarrassed or repeatedly blamed for things that have not been established.

Consider a parent who enters a room and discovers that something valuable has been broken. One child is standing nearby, so the adult immediately assumes that child is responsible. Angry accusations follow, perhaps accompanied by punishment. Later, the parent learns that another child caused the damage or that the incident was accidental.

The first child has already experienced the injustice of being wrongly accused.

Parents are human beings. They do not possess God's complete knowledge of circumstances or motives. They may misunderstand a child's behavior, overlook important information, or react from their own exhaustion and frustration. For this reason, humility is essential when exercising authority.

A parent can acknowledge an error, apologize for an unfair accusation, and correct the decision. Such accountability demonstrates that honesty and responsibility apply to adults as well as children.

There is another consideration. Children who expect humiliation or unpredictable anger may begin hiding their mistakes. They may become more concerned about escaping the parent's reaction than about correcting their own wrongdoing. This does not excuse dishonesty, but it should cause the adult to examine whether the household encourages truthful communication.

A child should be able to admit a mistake without fearing that personal worth, basic safety, or the parent's love will disappear. Reasonable consequences may still follow. The parent can address the misconduct while preserving the child's dignity.

CONSEQUENCES, PROVISION, AND THE PURPOSE OF CORRECTION

God's questions did not eliminate the seriousness of Adam and Eve's disobedience. Genesis 3 records consequences involving the serpent, the woman, and the man. The human condition changed, and Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden.

Genesis 3:22–23 (KJV)

"And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:

Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken."

This was a unique event in the biblical account of humanity's fall. God's authority over creation is not identical to the authority entrusted to a human parent. We should therefore be careful about using the severity of divine judgment as permission to impose extreme punishments upon children.

Nevertheless, the account demonstrates that wrongdoing can be confronted through a process in which the responsible person is called to answer and consequences are established.

There is also another detail that I believe deserves attention.

Genesis 3:21 (KJV)

"Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them."

After the disobedience had been confronted and consequences announced, Scripture records that God made clothing for Adam and Eve. The passage does not explain every theological implication of this act, but it plainly records God's provision for their need.

I find that significant when considering the treatment of children after correction.

Some adults become so personally offended by a child's misconduct that they withdraw ordinary affection, kindness, or care. The child may be made to feel unwanted or rejected long after the original incident has been addressed. In severe situations, the adult may withhold necessities or use isolation and humiliation as punishment.

Christian parents should consider whether their responses are serving a legitimate corrective purpose or expressing personal resentment.

A child who has lied may need to apologize and rebuild trust. A child who has damaged something may need to make appropriate restitution. A teenager who has violated an important safety rule may temporarily lose a privilege. These consequences can be administered without treating the child as an enemy.

The adult's continuing responsibility for the child's welfare remains.

Some parents react to wrongdoing as though the child has attacked their personal dignity. The adult may feel embarrassed, especially when other people have witnessed the incident. Anger then begins influencing the consequence, and the punishment becomes more severe because the parent wants to demonstrate who is in charge.

This is where parental self-government becomes particularly important.

James 1:19–20 (KJV)

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

There are circumstances in which a parent must act immediately to protect a child or another person from danger. But when the situation is not urgent, the adult can take time to understand the facts and choose a reasonable response.

A parent who is exhausted, frightened, or angry may need to postpone a nonurgent discussion until calm judgment returns. The matter should still be addressed, but the adult does not have to settle everything while struggling to maintain self-control.

Children learn from the way adults handle difficult situations. A parent who demonstrates restraint and fairness is teaching through personal conduct as well as verbal instruction.

TRAINING THE CHILD WITHOUT DESTROYING THE CHILD'S WILL

Some parenting traditions speak about breaking the child's will. That expression deserves careful examination.

Children need to learn self-control, responsibility, obedience to legitimate instructions, and consideration for others. They must also learn that personal desires cannot govern every decision within a household.

But the child's developing personality should not be treated as an enemy.

A strong-willed child may be unusually persistent, determined, independent, or energetic. Those qualities can create difficulties when the child refuses necessary boundaries. Yet determination can become a valuable strength when joined with wisdom, humility, and self-government.

The parent's responsibility is to teach the child how to exercise personal will responsibly.

Proverbs 22:6 (KJV)

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

Training involves preparation for life. A parent should consider what kind of adult is being formed through the methods used during childhood.

A child who obeys only because of intimidation may not have learned how to make wise decisions independently. Another child who has never encountered reasonable boundaries may struggle to accept responsibility when dealing with teachers, employers, spouses, or other people.

Both situations reveal the importance of balanced parental guidance.

The child needs correction when wrongdoing occurs, but also opportunities to understand the reasons behind expectations, practice sound judgment, and accept appropriate responsibility.

Parents should remember that children differ in temperament, maturity, abilities, and circumstances. A method that helps one child may not be appropriate for another. Some children require additional patience, specialized assistance, or a different approach because of developmental, emotional, or other individual needs.

The adult should be willing to learn rather than repeatedly increasing the severity of punishment when a particular method is unsuccessful.

WHAT THE GARDEN ACCOUNT TEACHES US TO CONSIDER

The account of Adam and Eve is foundational to the biblical understanding of human disobedience, accountability, and the consequences of the fall. It is not a formula prescribing the exact steps of modern parenting.

Nevertheless, several features deserve thoughtful consideration.

God had established a command before the disobedience occurred. The account records questions directed to Adam and Eve, their explanations, the announcement of consequences, and God's provision of clothing.

These observations invite Christian parents to examine the way they establish expectations, seek the truth, address wrongdoing, and continue caring for children after correction.

A parent should not be afraid to ask questions or listen carefully. Neither should the adult abandon appropriate boundaries because a child offers an explanation.

There is also a necessary distinction between divine authority and human authority. God possesses knowledge and judgment beyond anything available to a father, mother, or guardian. Parents can misunderstand circumstances and make mistakes. They must therefore remain willing to examine their own decisions.

Christian authority should be exercised with humility, fairness, and personal accountability.

The child may require correction, but the adult also requires self-government. The parent is responsible for choosing methods that serve the child's genuine welfare rather than personal anger or wounded pride.

When a parent recognizes that an accusation was unjust, an expectation unreasonable, or a consequence excessive, the adult should be willing to make the necessary correction.

That willingness is part of mature parenting.

The purpose of raising children is to prepare them for responsible adulthood. They need truth, instruction, reasonable boundaries, and opportunities to develop sound judgment. They also need to know that mistakes can be addressed without destroying the relationship through which they are being taught.

I believe that is an important perspective for Christian parents to carry forward as we examine the biblical rod, the New Testament instructions concerning children, and the difference between responsible correction and authoritarian control.

CHAPTER TWO REVIEW

TRUE AUTHORITY AND FALSE AUTHORITY IN CHRISTIAN PARENTING

Vocabulary, Clarifications, and Points to Ponder

1. Divine Authority

God's rightful authority as Creator. In Genesis, God's authority is presented in connection with His creation, instructions, and dealings with Adam and Eve. Human parental authority is limited and must not be treated as identical to God's.

2. Divine Confrontation

God's direct address to human wrongdoing. Genesis 3 records God questioning Adam and Eve after their disobedience. The questions form part of the biblical account of accountability and judgment.

Genesis 3:9 (KJV)

"And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?"

Clarification: The passage records God's question. Any proposed application to how parents should begin a disciplinary conversation is a teaching application, rather than an explicit command about parenting methods.

3. Moral Responsibility

The responsibility to answer for one's choices and actions. Adam and Eve were confronted concerning their disobedience, and the account also records their explanations and the consequences that followed.

4. Blame-Shifting

An attempt to redirect responsibility for one's conduct toward another person or circumstance. In Genesis 3, Adam refers to the woman God gave him, and Eve refers to the serpent.

For consideration: When correcting a child, how can a parent recognize the difference between a truthful explanation and an attempt to avoid responsibility?

5. Disobedience

Failure or refusal to follow a legitimate instruction. In Genesis 3, the disobedience concerns God's explicit command. In family life, adults must distinguish between deliberate refusal, misunderstanding, inability, and ordinary immaturity.

6. Consequences

Results that follow an action or decision. Some consequences occur naturally; others are imposed by legitimate authority. Genesis 3 records consequences pronounced by God, whose divine authority must be distinguished from the limited authority of human parents.

7. Judgment

A decision concerning conduct and its consequences. In biblical theology, divine judgment belongs to God. Parents exercise human judgment in family matters, but their knowledge and decisions remain imperfect.

8. Mercy

Compassion shown toward someone who has done wrong or is in need. The Genesis account records God's continuing dealings with Adam and Eve after their disobedience.

Genesis 3:21 (KJV)

"Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them."

The clothing of Adam and Eve may invite reflection upon God's care following judgment. The passage itself should be distinguished from any broader interpretation a teacher develops.

9. Correction Versus Retaliation

Correction addresses wrongdoing with the aim of responsible instruction and accountability. Retaliation arises when an offended person seeks to repay hurt, embarrassment, or frustration.

For consideration: Is the parent responding to the child's actual conduct or attempting to relieve personal anger?

10. Relational Responsibility

The responsibility to consider how conduct affects relationships. Wrongdoing can damage trust, and restoring a healthy relationship may require truthfulness, accountability, and changed behavior.

Closing thought: The Genesis account invites parents to examine how they confront wrongdoing, while remembering that God's authority and knowledge are greater than those of any human adult.

CHAPTER THREE

THE OLD TESTAMENT ROD AND THE NEW TESTAMENT PARENT

Biblical Correction, the Meaning of the Rod, and the Responsibility of Christian Adults

WHAT DID THE OLD TESTAMENT MEAN BY THE ROD?

One of the most frequently discussed subjects in Christian parenting is the biblical rod. For generations, parents have quoted passages from Proverbs when explaining their beliefs about discipline, punishment, and the responsibility to correct children. Some have understood these passages as requiring physical punishment, while others have questioned whether the rod must always be interpreted literally.

I believe we need to examine the Scriptures carefully rather than rely entirely upon inherited traditions, popular parenting books, or the personal experiences of adults who were raised under particular disciplinary methods.

The question is important because children are real human beings, entrusted to the care of adults who are themselves imperfect. A parent may sincerely desire to obey the Bible and still misunderstand how a particular passage should be applied. Another parent may reject all correction because of painful childhood experiences. Neither response relieves us of the responsibility to study the Word of God and exercise sound judgment.

The Hebrew word commonly translated as *rod* is **shebet**. Depending upon its context, the word can refer to a rod, staff, scepter, or an emblem of authority. It appears in passages involving shepherding, ruling, correction, and other uses of an actual rod or staff.

For example, David writes:

Psalm 23:4 (KJV)

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

In this familiar passage, the shepherd's rod and staff are associated with the Lord's protective presence. Elsewhere, the rod can represent governing authority or an

instrument of punishment. The meaning must therefore be determined by the passage in which it appears.

It would be inaccurate to insist that the rod always means a literal instrument for striking a person. It would be equally inaccurate to claim that every biblical reference to the rod is merely symbolic.

The Proverbs passages deserve particular attention because some explicitly describe physical correction.

THE PROVERBS PASSAGES AND THEIR ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

Proverbs 13:24 (KJV)

"He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."

This proverb associates parental love with the willingness to correct a child. Its language is forceful, reflecting the wisdom tradition in which neglecting necessary discipline is regarded as a failure of parental responsibility.

Proverbs 22:15 (KJV)

"Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him."

The passage speaks about childhood foolishness and correction. Parents have historically understood it as support for physical discipline, although the broader principle concerns the necessity of training children rather than allowing foolish behavior to continue unchecked.

The language becomes more explicit in the following passage.

Proverbs 23:13–14 (KJV)

"Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die.

Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell."

We should not avoid the wording simply because it raises difficult questions for modern readers. These verses explicitly refer to striking with a rod. An accurate biblical discussion must acknowledge that fact.

However, recognizing what an ancient proverb says does not settle every question concerning how Christian parents should act today. We must consider literary genre,

historical context, the rest of Scripture, the responsibilities of adults, and the teaching of Jesus Christ and His apostles.

A proverb is a form of wisdom literature. Its purpose is to communicate wisdom through memorable and often emphatic language. Proverbs should be studied seriously, but we must be careful about treating every expression as a universal guarantee or an instruction detached from its context.

Proverbs 29:15 (KJV)

"The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame."

Notice that this verse mentions both the rod and reproof. Verbal instruction and correction are part of the discussion.

A child who is left without guidance may develop habits that create serious difficulties later in life. Responsible parenting involves teaching, supervision, reasonable consequences, and the gradual development of personal responsibility.

The larger biblical question is how these responsibilities should be carried out by Christian adults who are also commanded to exercise self-control, patience, mercy, and wisdom.

THE ROD IN THE BROADER OLD TESTAMENT PICTURE

The Old Testament contains much more instruction about raising children than the familiar rod passages.

Deuteronomy 6:6–7 (KJV)

"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

This passage describes a continuing relationship of instruction. Parents are to teach God's commandments as part of everyday life, through conversation and example.

The teaching is not confined to the moment when a child misbehaves.

Proverbs 1:8–9 (KJV)

"My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:

For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck."

Here we see the instruction of both father and mother presented as valuable guidance. The child is being invited to receive wisdom that will become part of personal character.

This broader picture matters. If parents build their entire understanding of biblical child training around a handful of punishment passages, they may overlook the daily work of teaching, conversation, personal example, encouragement, and relationship.

A parent who rarely speaks with a child except to issue commands or announce punishment has neglected an important part of training.

Children need instruction before wrongdoing occurs. They need explanations appropriate to their maturity, opportunities to practice responsibility, and adults who demonstrate the behavior they expect.

WHAT CHANGES WHEN WE COME TO THE NEW TESTAMENT?

When we come to the New Testament, we encounter Jesus Christ and the apostolic instructions given to Christian households.

The New Testament does not contain a direct command instructing Christian parents to strike their children with a rod.

That observation should be stated accurately. It does not mean that the Old Testament Proverbs have disappeared from Scripture, nor does it mean that parents are forbidden to correct wrongdoing. It means that we should not claim the New Testament explicitly commands a disciplinary method that it does not prescribe.

Consider how Jesus received children.

Mark 10:13–16 (KJV)

"And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them.

But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them."

The disciples attempted to prevent children from approaching Jesus. He corrected the adults and welcomed the children.

This passage does not provide a complete system of child discipline, but it does reveal the importance Jesus placed upon children and the way they were treated in His presence.

He did not regard them as interruptions without value.

In another passage, Jesus gave a solemn warning about causing little ones to stumble.

Matthew 18:6 (KJV)

"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

The immediate context concerns those who believe in Him, and the word translated *offend* concerns causing someone to stumble. This passage should not be carelessly turned into a claim that every parental mistake fulfills its warning.

Nevertheless, Jesus' seriousness about the treatment of vulnerable believers should cause Christian adults to examine their conduct carefully.

Children should never become convenient targets for an adult's anger, frustration, pride, or desire to dominate.

PAUL'S INSTRUCTIONS TO CHRISTIAN PARENTS

The apostle Paul directly addresses children and parents.

Ephesians 6:1–4 (KJV)

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.

Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;)

That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Paul acknowledges the responsibility of children to obey their parents. But he also gives a direct instruction to fathers concerning the way they raise their children.

The father is warned against provoking children to wrath and is instructed to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The Greek word translated *nurture* is **paideia**, a word associated with upbringing, training, education, and discipline. The word translated *admonition* is **nouthesia**, which concerns instruction, warning, or corrective counsel.

These words describe serious parental responsibility. They do not reduce parenting to pleasant conversations without boundaries or consequences. At the same time, neither word, by itself, establishes a requirement that Christian parents administer physical punishment.

Paul's instruction includes the conduct of the adult.

This is particularly important in homes where a parent believes that being in charge means never having to explain a decision, acknowledge a mistake, or exercise restraint when angry.

Colossians 3:20–21 (KJV)

"Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.

Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged."

The warning about discouragement should not be overlooked.

A child can become discouraged through continual criticism, humiliation, unreasonable expectations, favoritism, or unpredictable punishment. Some adults may believe they are training a child diligently when they are actually creating an atmosphere in which the child feels that nothing will ever be good enough.

A parent should consider the child's age, understanding, temperament, and circumstances. The adult should also be willing to examine whether the methods being used are producing greater responsibility or increasing fear, resentment, and confusion.

WHAT ABOUT HEBREWS AND THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD?

Another passage frequently discussed in connection with parental discipline is Hebrews 12.

Hebrews 12:5–6 (KJV)

"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

The chapter continues by comparing God's dealings with His children to the discipline exercised by earthly fathers.

Hebrews 12:10–11 (KJV)

"For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

The passage teaches about God's discipline of believers and the purpose of spiritual correction. It acknowledges the experience of earthly parental discipline as part of its comparison.

We should be careful, however, about claiming that Hebrews gives parents permission to imitate every expression of divine judgment. God's wisdom and authority are perfect. Human parents are capable of serious errors.

The passage emphasizes a purpose: the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Christian adults should therefore examine the intended and actual results of their correction. A disciplinary practice should be judged with concern for the child's welfare, the seriousness of the wrongdoing, and the parent's own conduct.

WHEN A PARENTING BOOK BECOMES A HOUSEHOLD AUTHORITY

Many Christian families have relied upon popular parenting books to help them understand the Bible and manage difficult behavior.

One influential example is the work of psychologist and Christian author James Dobson, particularly *Dare to Discipline* and *The Strong-Willed Child*.

These books became important parts of American evangelical parenting discussions. Dobson emphasized parental authority, firm boundaries, and the challenges of raising determined children. His work also defended forms of corporal punishment under certain circumstances.

The historical influence of these books deserves recognition, whether a reader agrees with every recommendation or not.

However, no Christian parenting book should become a substitute for Scripture, wise judgment, or careful attention to the individual child.

A parent may read a book written decades earlier and assume that its recommendations apply without modification to every child and every family situation. Another parent may interpret a description of strong-willed behavior as evidence that a child's personality must be defeated.

We need to distinguish between a child's persistent refusal to obey reasonable instructions and characteristics that arise from developmental differences, stress, trauma, disability, or other circumstances.

A child who has difficulty remaining seated, regulating emotions, processing instructions, or responding quickly may require a different approach from a child who clearly understands a direction and deliberately refuses it.

A parent should not assume that every difficult behavior represents a moral contest between the adult's authority and the child's will.

Neither should the parent abandon appropriate expectations because a child has particular challenges.

The responsible adult seeks to understand the child and determine what instruction, support, and boundaries are appropriate.

Historical parenting books can provide useful insights, but their recommendations must be examined rather than treated as unquestionable authority.

WHEN CORRECTION BECOMES AN EXCUSE FOR CRUELTY

There is a serious danger when a parent uses biblical language to justify personal anger or excessive punishment.

An adult may begin with a legitimate concern about disobedience and then escalate the response because the child cries, protests, or fails to display the reaction the parent demands.

The correction becomes a struggle for dominance.

Some adults believe that the child's will must be broken before the parent has succeeded. They may continue punishment until the child appears sufficiently defeated or frightened.

This approach deserves serious scrutiny.

Children require training in self-control, responsibility, and respect for legitimate authority. Their personalities, however, are not enemies to be destroyed.

A determined child may become a determined adult who uses persistence to accomplish worthwhile things. The parent's responsibility is to help develop wisdom and appropriate self-government.

No biblical discussion of correction should be used to excuse violence, humiliation, dangerous physical punishment, deprivation of necessities, or retaliation against a child.

Parents should also examine the effect of continual faultfinding. An adult who corrects nearly every harmless preference, facial expression, or minor mistake may create a household filled with unnecessary conflict.

There is a difference between teaching a child to behave responsibly and demanding that the child continually satisfy the adult's personal preferences.

Christian parents should be especially careful about attaching God's name to punishments that arise from their own anger.

The adult remains accountable before the Lord for the manner in which authority is exercised.

PARENTAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IS PART OF BIBLICAL CORRECTION

A parent who intends to correct a child should first examine personal conduct.

Proverbs 16:32 (KJV)

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

This verse has particular relevance to adults responsible for children.

A parent may possess the physical strength, financial control, and household position to impose a consequence. But possessing power does not guarantee that the decision is wise.

The adult may be exhausted from work, frightened about the child's future, embarrassed by public misconduct, or carrying unresolved experiences from childhood.

Those circumstances can influence the response.

The parent needs to recognize when personal emotions are interfering with sound judgment. When safety permits, it may be wiser to postpone a nonurgent disciplinary decision than to act while struggling with uncontrolled anger.

A child who has behaved wrongly still needs appropriate instruction. The adult's responsibility to exercise self-government remains.

Parents who discover that their disciplinary methods are becoming frightening, harmful, or uncontrollable should stop those methods and seek appropriate assistance.

Christian correction should be governed by wisdom and concern for the child's development, rather than by the adult's need to win a confrontation.

CONCLUSION: READING THE ROD PASSAGES RESPONSIBLY

The Old Testament rod passages should not be dismissed or rewritten to avoid their difficult language. Some explicitly describe physical correction, and an accurate examination of Scripture must acknowledge that fact.

At the same time, Christian parents must read those passages within the larger biblical teaching concerning children, instruction, wisdom, human responsibility, and the character of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament commands children to obey their parents and instructs fathers to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It also warns fathers against provoking their children to anger and discouragement.

Those instructions place responsibility upon both generations.

Parents need not abandon legitimate authority to treat children with dignity. They can establish reasonable boundaries, address wrongdoing, require restitution when appropriate, and teach personal responsibility while remaining accountable for their own conduct.

The important question is whether the adult is helping the child develop wisdom and self-government through methods consistent with Christian responsibility.

As we move forward, we will examine more closely the difference between authority and authoritarianism, including the danger of adults who confuse a child's obedience with personal domination.

CHAPTER THREE REVIEW

Vocabulary, Clarifications, and Points to Ponder

1. Shebet — Hebrew: שֵׁבֶט

A Hebrew word translated in different biblical contexts as rod, staff, scepter, or tribe. It can refer to an actual object, an emblem of governing authority, or a tribal designation.

Clarification: The context determines the meaning. It is inaccurate to insist that every occurrence refers to physical punishment, just as it would be inaccurate to claim that every reference is purely symbolic.

2. The Rod of Correction

An expression appearing in Proverbs in connection with correcting foolishness or misconduct.

Proverbs 22:15 (KJV)

"Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him."

For consideration: How should Christian parents understand ancient wisdom literature alongside the New Testament instructions concerning children and parental conduct?

3. Reproof

A correction or rebuke that identifies wrongdoing. Reproof often involves words, explanation, and warning.

Proverbs 29:15 (KJV)

"The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame."

Clarification: The verse mentions both rod and reproof, making verbal correction an important part of the discussion.

4. Chastening

Correction, discipline, or training, with meaning determined by context. In biblical passages, chastening may involve painful consequences or corrective instruction.

5. Paideia — Greek: παιδεία

A Greek word associated with upbringing, education, training, and discipline. In Ephesians 6:4, it is translated "nurture" in the KJV.

Its range of meaning is broader than a single method of punishment.

6. Nouthesia — Greek: νουθεσία

A Greek word associated with admonition, warning, and corrective instruction. In Ephesians 6:4, it is translated "admonition."

Ephesians 6:4 (KJV)

"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

7. Wisdom Literature

A category of biblical writing that includes Proverbs and communicates wisdom through sayings, observations, instruction, and comparisons. Individual proverbs should be read with attention to their wording, literary character, and broader biblical context.

8. Corporal Punishment

Physical punishment administered in response to misconduct. Some Proverbs passages explicitly refer to striking with a rod. Christian readers differ over how those passages should be applied to parenting today.

Clarification: The New Testament gives instructions to children and parents, but does not contain a direct command requiring Christian parents to strike their children with a rod.

9. Provocation

Conduct that stirs anger, resentment, or distress. Paul's warning to fathers against provoking their children deserves consideration when examining harshness, unfairness, and humiliating correction.

10. Discouragement

A loss of confidence, courage, or willingness to continue trying. Colossians 3:21 specifically warns fathers against provoking children to anger lest they become discouraged.

11. Parenting Philosophy

A collection of beliefs about how children should be raised. Books such as James Dobson's *Dare to Discipline* and *The Strong-Willed Child* have influenced Christian parenting discussions.

For consideration: How can parents benefit from a respected teacher's experience without treating that teacher's particular methods as commands of Scripture?

Closing thought: Understanding the original language and literary context helps Christian parents distinguish what the biblical text actually says from the disciplinary methods later readers may associate with it.

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CHAPTER FOUR

AUTHORITY IS NOT AUTHORITARIANISM

When Parental Correction Becomes Control, Intimidation, or Cruelty

PARENTAL AUTHORITY AND THE RESPONSIBILITY THAT COMES WITH IT

Christian parents have a genuine responsibility to govern their households, protect their children, establish reasonable expectations, and correct wrongdoing. The Bible does not require fathers and mothers to surrender their responsibilities whenever a child objects to correction or dislikes a household rule. Children need dependable adults who are willing to make decisions, including decisions that may be unpopular. Nevertheless, parental authority carries obligations that deserve careful examination, particularly when an adult begins to confuse the responsibility to lead with the supposed right to exercise unlimited control.

I believe that some Christian parents have inherited a misunderstanding of authority without ever examining it seriously. They were raised to believe that the parent must always be obeyed, must never be questioned, and should never have to explain a decision. In certain religious households, this becomes even more pronounced when the adult claims that questioning parental judgment is equivalent to questioning God. A child who is confused about an instruction, disagrees with a decision, or attempts to explain a circumstance may then be accused of rebellion before the adult has even considered what the child is saying.

This attitude can turn an ordinary household disagreement into a struggle over personal superiority. The father, mother, stepparent, or guardian may become so concerned about maintaining control that the original matter requiring correction receives very little attention. What began as a question about schoolwork, household chores, honesty, or appropriate behavior becomes an argument about whether the child has sufficiently acknowledged the adult's position.

Parents certainly have legitimate reasons to establish bedtimes, require school attendance, restrict dangerous activities, insist upon honesty, and assign reasonable

responsibilities. Children are still developing the judgment necessary to manage their own lives. They depend upon adults for protection, instruction, and guidance. However, when the adult's personal preferences become absolute commands and every disagreement is treated as a challenge to parental superiority, the household can gradually become organized around avoiding the parent's displeasure.

A child living under these circumstances may learn to watch the adult's moods more carefully than the actual rules. The parent may be approachable one day and explosive the next. The same behavior may be overlooked on Monday and severely punished on Tuesday, depending upon the adult's exhaustion, embarrassment, or frustration. Eventually, the child may become reluctant to admit mistakes or ask reasonable questions because the reaction cannot be predicted.

This can happen in families where the adults know many Bible verses, attend church faithfully, and speak often about godly authority. Familiarity with Christian teaching does not automatically mean that a person has learned to exercise authority wisely. The parent's conduct must also be considered.

Ephesians 6:4 (KJV)

"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Paul addresses the father's responsibility to raise children while warning him against provoking them to wrath. His instruction requires attention to the conduct of the adult. It should cause Christian parents to examine their methods, especially when they are tempted to assume that possessing parental authority excuses every decision they make.

A younger child may lack the understanding needed to follow an instruction correctly. An older child may have a legitimate concern that deserves consideration. Some children have developmental difficulties, emotional struggles, or individual limitations that affect how they respond. Responsible parents must learn to distinguish deliberate misconduct from misunderstanding, immaturity, distress, and ordinary differences in personality.

Listening to a child does not require surrendering parental responsibility. A father can hear an explanation and still maintain a necessary rule. A mother can acknowledge that a child has made a reasonable point without allowing the child to govern the household. Mature leadership requires enough personal confidence to consider information without regarding every conversation as a contest.

Parents are entrusted with human beings who will eventually need to govern themselves. As children grow older, appropriate responsibilities and freedoms should increase. A young child may require close supervision, while a teenager needs

opportunities to develop judgment and accept the consequences of personal decisions. An adult who resists every expression of growing independence may interfere with the very maturity that parenting is supposed to develop.

WHEN CORRECTION BECOMES HUMILIATION, INTIMIDATION, OR CRUELTY

Over the years, examples of public punishment have appeared in which parents deliberately embarrass children before strangers, neighbors, classmates, or an online audience. A child may be required to stand in a public place holding a sign announcing personal wrongdoing, poor grades, or some other failure. Sometimes the message identifies the child as dishonest or describes the child's character in degrading terms.

Such punishments are occasionally presented as creative discipline. The parent may believe that public embarrassment will make the lesson unforgettable, while other adults applaud the incident because they are frustrated with what they regard as permissive parenting. Yet I question whether the humiliation actually teaches the lesson that the child needs to learn.

A child who has lied needs to understand the seriousness of dishonesty and its consequences. A student who has neglected schoolwork may require closer supervision, practical assistance, or appropriate restrictions until responsibilities improve. When a young person has mistreated someone, an apology, restitution, or another meaningful response may be necessary. These are recognizable forms of accountability that address the misconduct itself.

Public humiliation can shift the entire matter toward the child's embarrassment and the adult's satisfaction in making an example of the offender. The parent may receive approval from spectators while the child experiences shame without gaining a clearer understanding of how to behave differently.

I am particularly concerned when an adult assigns a degrading identity to a child because of a particular mistake. A student who fails an examination has experienced an academic failure. That experience does not establish that the student is a worthless person. Likewise, a dishonest act should be addressed seriously without continually telling the child that dishonesty is the permanent definition of his or her character.

The consequences become more complicated when photographs or videos of humiliating punishments are placed online. A child may mature, correct the original behavior, and move forward, while the public record of embarrassment remains available. An angry parent's decision can follow the child long after the matter should have been resolved.

Colossians 3:21 (KJV)

"Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged."

Paul specifically warns fathers about discouraging their children. Repeated ridicule, public embarrassment, and personal degradation can undermine a child's willingness to acknowledge mistakes or trust the adults responsible for correction. A young person who expects humiliation may become more concerned with concealing wrongdoing than with learning from it.

Some misconduct must be addressed openly, especially when another person has been harmed and appropriate accountability requires acknowledgment. However, making restitution or admitting wrongdoing is a different matter from staging a child's humiliation before an audience. Christian parents should consider the long-term welfare of the young person rather than the immediate reaction of spectators.

Another disturbing practice involves forcing children to perform exhausting physical activities as punishment. A child may be ordered to run in place, complete repeated exercises, carry heavy objects, or remain in an uncomfortable position. The adult may continue demanding physical effort after the child has become exhausted, interpreting tears, fatigue, or inability to continue as additional disobedience.

Ordinary exercise, sports, and reasonable household chores can contribute to a child's development. Physical activity should be appropriate to the child's age, abilities, and medical circumstances. But forcing a young person into painful or dangerous exertion as punishment presents a serious problem, particularly when the adult disregards signs of physical distress.

Children differ considerably in strength, stamina, health, and development. An angry parent may fail to recognize when a child has reached a dangerous point. If the adult begins to regard suffering as proof that the punishment is effective, the original purpose of correction can disappear beneath the determination to make the child endure more.

Some adults defend such treatment by insisting that the child must learn toughness, endurance, or respect. Yet those qualities cannot justify placing a child in physical danger. The adult's superior size and strength create a greater obligation to exercise restraint because the child depends upon that same adult for protection.

There is another troubling development that can occur during these confrontations. The child may initially have disobeyed an ordinary instruction, but the parent's response becomes increasingly severe because the young person cries, protests, becomes exhausted, or fails to display the expected degree of submission. The adult begins treating every response as a fresh offense. By the time the confrontation ends, the original misconduct may have become almost irrelevant.

A parent who reaches this point needs to examine personal behavior seriously. Dangerous physical punishment, deprivation of basic necessities, frightening threats, and deliberate degradation should never be justified by attaching the language of biblical correction to them.

The same concern applies to verbal mistreatment. Some adults repeatedly criticize a child's intelligence, appearance, personality, interests, or abilities. Others predict a terrible future whenever the child makes a mistake. A young person may hear so many degrading descriptions that the parent's criticism begins influencing the child's understanding of personal worth.

In religious households, the words can become especially frightening when a parent accuses a child of being cursed, demonized, spiritually dangerous, or rebellious against God because of ordinary disagreements or difficult behavior. The adult may claim to know the child's motives through special spiritual insight while refusing to consider the child's explanation.

Human parents do not possess perfect knowledge of another person's heart. A child may be struggling with fear, grief, developmental difficulties, confusion, or emotional distress that the adult has not recognized. Sometimes further conversation or qualified assistance is needed before the parent can understand what is happening.

Ephesians 4:29 (KJV)

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

This instruction applies to Christian conduct generally, including the words spoken within families. Parents can identify dishonest behavior, confront disrespect, and require accountability without resorting to degrading names or frightening spiritual accusations. Their language should communicate truth while serving a constructive purpose.

Religious authority must never become a convenient way for an adult to avoid responsibility for personal conduct. A parent who invokes Scripture during correction should be willing to examine whether the passage is being understood and applied appropriately.

BREAKING THE CHILD'S WILL AND THE ADULT'S NEED TO WIN

Some traditional parenting discussions have emphasized the importance of breaking a child's will. I believe this expression deserves careful consideration because it can encourage a misunderstanding of what parents are supposed to accomplish.

Children need to learn that they cannot always have their own way. They must develop self-control, respect legitimate boundaries, accept reasonable consequences, and consider the rights of other people. A child who refuses every instruction cannot simply be permitted to govern the household through continual arguments or emotional outbursts.

At the same time, the developing will is part of the child's personality. Determination, persistence, courage, and independence can become valuable qualities when guided by wisdom and self-government. A strong-willed child may require unusual patience and consistency, particularly when the child is determined to argue or resist instruction. Nevertheless, the goal of raising such a child should include helping that determination mature into responsible conduct.

The expression "breaking the will" becomes dangerous when the adult interprets it as permission to crush the child's personality or demand complete emotional surrender. Some parents become involved in prolonged confrontations because the child has not displayed the response they expect. The young person may have obeyed the instruction, but the parent continues demanding tears, particular facial expressions, repeated apologies, or statements demonstrating submission.

The adult may begin to feel that allowing the confrontation to end without those displays would constitute defeat. This changes the nature of the encounter. The child is no longer being corrected primarily for the original behavior. The parent is attempting to obtain personal satisfaction through a demonstration of control.

Such confrontations can become especially harmful when the adult is angry and unwilling to stop. The child's fear, distress, or exhaustion may be interpreted as further resistance, causing the parent to increase the severity of punishment.

Proverbs 16:32 (KJV)

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

The ability to govern one's own spirit is an important part of mature authority. A father or mother may possess the physical power, financial control, and household position to impose consequences. Those advantages make restraint especially necessary when dealing with a dependent child.

Bullying is often discussed as a problem among children, but adults can also behave as bullies within their own households. An adult may use superior size, financial power, household position, or the child's dependence to enforce unreasonable demands. Some parents appear to take satisfaction in making children afraid, believing that fear demonstrates respect.

Children living with intimidation may comply outwardly while becoming anxious, resentful, or emotionally withdrawn. They may also imitate the adult's behavior toward younger siblings or other people. The household becomes an example of how the stronger person can control the weaker one through fear.

This should concern Christian parents who desire to teach their children honorable conduct. An adult who continually demands respect while behaving disrespectfully toward family members creates a confusing example. The child may be instructed to control anger while watching the parent express anger without restraint.

A responsible father or mother should be willing to consider whether the methods being used are actually developing sound judgment and self-government. The child's eventual maturity is more important than the adult's satisfaction in winning an argument.

THE OPPOSITE PENDULUM: WHEN PARENTS BECOME AFRAID TO CORRECT

There are also parents who struggle with the opposite problem because of harsh or frightening treatment experienced during their own childhoods. Having suffered under excessive punishment, unpredictable anger, or humiliation, they become determined never to treat their own children in the same manner.

This determination may produce greater patience, fairness, and sensitivity. However, some adults begin associating every firm correction with the cruelty they remember. They become hesitant to say no, require household responsibilities, or follow through with reasonable consequences.

When the child becomes upset, the parent may abandon a necessary decision because confrontation feels threatening or emotionally exhausting. Over time, the young person discovers that persistent arguing, refusal to cooperate, or emotional outbursts can cause the adult to surrender.

The difficulty becomes especially pronounced when a parent is carrying heavy responsibilities. A mother or father may be working long hours, struggling financially, managing the household without dependable assistance, or raising several children while physically exhausted. After a demanding day, another argument over homework, bedtime, chores, or appropriate behavior can feel overwhelming.

Under these circumstances, giving in may provide immediate relief. Unfortunately, repeated inconsistency can create additional difficulties because the child no longer knows which expectations will actually be enforced.

Children need to understand that other people have rights, responsibilities, and limitations. They must learn to accept disappointment, complete necessary tasks, and

respect reasonable boundaries even when those boundaries interfere with personal preferences.

Proverbs 29:17 (KJV)

"Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul."

This proverb affirms the value of correction. It should not be treated as a guarantee that every child will respond perfectly or that all family difficulties can be resolved through discipline. Nevertheless, the passage recognizes the importance of instruction and correction in raising children.

Adults who experienced harmful discipline may need time and support to develop healthier methods. They can establish dependable routines, explain expectations clearly, and apply reasonable consequences consistently. When a child disagrees, the parent can listen without automatically surrendering the decision.

Some children are unusually persistent. They may question every instruction and continue arguing long after the parent has explained the matter. Their determination can become a strength as they mature, provided they learn to govern their reactions and consider other people's needs. The adult's responsibility includes helping them develop those qualities through patient, consistent guidance.

A young person who has never been required to respect reasonable boundaries may encounter serious difficulties in relationships outside the home. Teachers, employers, neighbors, and eventually spouses will have legitimate expectations that cannot always be negotiated away through emotional pressure.

The parent's responsibility is to prepare the child for those relationships while recognizing that the child is still developing. This requires judgment, patience, and consistency, particularly when the adult is tired or carrying unresolved memories of personal mistreatment.

THE PARENT MUST EXAMINE THE HEART

Parental authority becomes more difficult when the adult's emotional history begins influencing reactions to the child. Memories of humiliation, rejection, abandonment, harsh punishment, or other painful experiences can affect how a father or mother interprets disagreement and ordinary childhood behavior.

Someone who experienced continual disrespect during childhood may become unusually sensitive when a son or daughter questions a decision. A parent who suffered abandonment may interpret a teenager's growing independence as personal rejection. In

either situation, the child may receive a response more severe than the present circumstances warrant.

Adults need to recognize when earlier experiences are influencing their judgment. The child cannot be expected to repair the parent's past, and an ordinary household disagreement should not become an occasion for reliving earlier conflicts.

Personal habits also deserve examination. A father may have responded to frustration with anger for so many years that he regards it as part of being a strong leader. A mother may have spent so long avoiding confrontation that even reasonable correction feels threatening. Both may sincerely love their children while needing to reconsider familiar patterns of behavior.

James 3:17–18 (KJV)

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

The description of heavenly wisdom has particular relevance for Christian adults who exercise authority over children. The expression "easy to be intreated" should encourage parents to remain willing to listen and consider circumstances. A mature father or mother can acknowledge a mistake, reconsider a decision, or receive helpful counsel while continuing to lead the household.

The reference to being without partiality also deserves attention. Parents should examine whether one child receives harsh punishment for conduct that is overlooked in another. Favoritism, jealousy, resentment, or personal disappointment can influence discipline, sometimes without the adult recognizing what is happening.

Blended families may face additional complications. A stepparent may resent the attention a spouse gives to a child from an earlier relationship, while the biological parent may hesitate to confront mistreatment because of a desire to preserve peace within the marriage. These circumstances require particular care because the child should not be made responsible for unresolved adult conflicts.

Parents should also consider how their expectations change as children mature. A young child requires close supervision, but a teenager needs opportunities to practice independent judgment and accept increasing responsibility. An adult who cannot tolerate that development may continue demanding the same degree of personal submission long after the young person has demonstrated the ability to make responsible decisions.

Conversely, parents who have avoided teaching responsibility may find that their older children expect increasing freedom without understanding the obligations that accompany it.

A Christian parent should be willing to acknowledge personal mistakes, exercise restraint, and treat family members fairly. Children benefit from observing adults who practice the honesty, self-control, and respect they expect to see in others. Such an example gives practical meaning to the instruction being offered.

CONCLUSION

Christian parents have a serious responsibility to guide their children, establish appropriate boundaries, and address wrongdoing. That responsibility requires adults to consider the welfare of the child and to remain accountable for their own conduct.

I believe parents should be particularly careful when anger, embarrassment, exhaustion, or personal history begins influencing correction. The child may have behaved wrongly and still deserve a measured, fair response from the adult.

Children will eventually remember more than the rules that governed their households. They will remember how they were treated when they made mistakes, whether their parents were willing to listen, and whether correction was exercised with reasonable concern for their welfare.

Those memories are worth considering before a parent moves, speaks, acts, or reacts.

PARENTS: REACHING THE RELATIONSHIPS

Remembering, Valuing, and Viewing Our Children—Especially When Perturbed

LUKE 1:17 (KJV)

"And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

One of the most important statements in Luke 1:17 concerns the turning of the hearts of fathers toward their children. This was part of the angel's announcement concerning John the Baptist, who would prepare people for the coming of the Lord. The passage is not merely a parenting instruction. It concerns repentance, spiritual preparation, and the restoration of right relationships. Nevertheless, the words about fathers and children deserve particular attention when we consider what happens within Christian homes.

I want to examine this passage through the perspective of Abiding Relationship Theology (A.R.T.), especially as it concerns the way adults remember, value, and view their children when family relationships become difficult.

"TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS TO THE CHILDREN"

Notice that the passage specifically mentions the hearts of the fathers. It does not merely command children to behave differently. It identifies a needed change within the adults.

A father may be physically present in the household, provide financially, establish rules, and exercise authority while remaining emotionally distant from his children. He may know their grades, their chores, their faults, and their disciplinary history without giving equal attention to their personalities, concerns, abilities, and developing understanding.

Turning the heart toward the child invites a deeper examination.

What does the father actually think about his child? Does he regard that child primarily as someone who must obey him, or does he remember that he has been entrusted with a developing human being who needs instruction, patience, guidance, and genuine personal attention?

This principle also deserves consideration by mothers, grandparents, guardians, and others responsible for raising children.

The heart must be involved in the relationship, not merely the authority.

REMEMBERING WHO THE CHILD IS

When adults become perturbed, it is easy to concentrate entirely upon the behavior that has offended or inconvenienced them.

The parent remembers the repeated disobedience, the unfinished chores, the argument, the embarrassing incident, or the difficulty that occurred earlier in the day. Sometimes the adult has already decided what kind of child this is becoming.

Yet the child is more than the latest incident.

That son or daughter has a personality, a history, developing abilities, emotional needs, and a future that the parent cannot fully see.

A father who is angry with his son should remember that he is addressing his son, not an opponent in a contest for authority. A mother who is exhausted by her daughter's repeated complaints should remember that the child is still learning how to express disappointment and manage frustration.

Remembering the relationship does not require overlooking wrongdoing. It helps the adult approach the wrongdoing without forgetting the person.

The child may need correction, but the parent also needs to remember whom he or she is correcting.

VALUING THE CHILD EVEN WHEN DISPLEASED

There is an important distinction between disapproving of a child's conduct and allowing that displeasure to influence the value assigned to the child.

Some children grow up believing that they are loved and appreciated primarily when they perform well, remain agreeable, or make their parents look successful.

When they disappoint an adult, they may experience rejection, contempt, prolonged withdrawal of affection, or repeated reminders of their failures.

Parents should examine whether their words and reactions are communicating that the child's personal worth rises and falls according to behavior.

A child who has acted wrongly remains a valuable human being. Appropriate correction can address misconduct without treating the child as worthless, unwanted, or fundamentally inferior.

This is particularly important in homes where one child is considered the successful, obedient, attractive, talented, or favored child while another is repeatedly identified as the difficult one.

The wisdom described in James 3:17 is "without partiality, and without hypocrisy." That standard deserves consideration within family relationships.

VIEWING THE CHILD THROUGH A MORE COMPLETE PICTURE

Parents sometimes develop fixed opinions about their children.

One becomes "the troublemaker." Another becomes "the smart one." One is described as lazy, another as sensitive, and another as the child who can never do anything right.

These descriptions may begin as casual observations, but repeated labels can eventually influence how the adult interprets nearly everything the child does.

A parent who has decided that a son is rebellious may interpret an honest question as defiance. A parent who considers a daughter irresponsible may overlook genuine improvement because the earlier opinion has become firmly established.

The adult needs to remain willing to see new evidence.

Children develop. They learn. They make mistakes, and they can change. A wise parent allows room for that development rather than continually bringing the child back under an old accusation.

A.R.T. encourages us to examine the actual relationship rather than rely upon assumptions, appearances, or familiar patterns of judgment.

"AND THE DISOBEDIENT TO THE WISDOM OF THE JUST"

The second part of Luke 1:17 also deserves attention.

The passage speaks of turning "the disobedient to the wisdom of the just."

This is a movement toward wisdom, not merely outward compliance.

In its original context, John the Baptist was preparing people for the Lord through a message of repentance. The wording is not a promise that every child will immediately become obedient when a parent changes. Nevertheless, it provides a meaningful distinction for Christian parenting.

Parents should desire that children eventually understand what is right and learn to choose it responsibly.

A child may comply because an adult is frightening, physically stronger, or capable of imposing unpleasant consequences. Such compliance does not necessarily mean the child understands wisdom, justice, self-control, or responsibility.

The parent has an opportunity to teach the reasons behind appropriate expectations, helping the child develop discernment rather than simply learning how to avoid punishment.

This requires instruction, consistency, example, and patience appropriate to the child's development.

WHEN THE PARENT IS PERTURBED

Here is where I believe the practical examination becomes especially important.

Most parents can speak kindly about their children when everything is going well. They can remember their children's good qualities when the household is peaceful, the children are cooperative, and the adult is well rested.

But what happens when the parent is irritated?

What happens when a child interrupts an important task, talks back, refuses an instruction, embarrasses the parent in public, or repeats a behavior that has already been corrected?

At that moment, the parent's inward view of the child becomes especially important.

Does the adult still remember the relationship? Does the child remain a person to be taught and guided, or has the parent begun viewing that child as an adversary?

Some adults become so personally offended by a child's misconduct that the correction begins to resemble retaliation. Their immediate concern is no longer primarily the child's instruction. They want to win the confrontation, silence the resistance, or make the child feel the seriousness of having offended them.

That is a moment for personal self-government.

The parent may still need to establish a boundary, address misconduct, or impose an appropriate consequence. However, the adult should not permit personal anger to determine the child's value or become the governing force behind correction.

Proverbs 16:32 (KJV)

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

This verse is worth remembering before a parent attempts to govern another person's behavior.

"TO MAKE READY A PEOPLE PREPARED FOR THE LORD"

Luke 1:17 concludes with the purpose of preparing a people for the Lord.

John the Baptist's calling was to prepare the way for Jesus Christ. The verse should be understood within that larger purpose.

For Christian parents, however, it also raises a question worth considering: What are we preparing our children to understand about God, righteousness, authority, and human relationships?

If children repeatedly experience religious authority as angry, unreasonable, humiliating, or impossible to question, what conclusions may they begin forming about the God whom their parents profess to represent?

If they experience appropriate correction accompanied by patience, consistency, honesty, and genuine concern, they may be better able to understand the distinction between loving authority and its misuse.

Parents cannot manufacture a child's personal relationship with God. Each person must eventually respond to truth personally. But parents can examine the example they are setting within the home.

THE A.R.T. PARENTING EXAMINATION

I would encourage fathers and mothers to consider three words whenever correction becomes necessary:

REMEMBER. Remember who this child is, the relationship you have been entrusted with, and the difference between the child's present misconduct and the child's whole person.

VALUE. Value the child as a human being even when the behavior is unacceptable. Do not make affection, dignity, or personal worth dependent upon flawless performance.

VIEW. Examine how you are viewing the child. Are you responding to the actual situation, or are old labels, personal frustrations, inherited family habits, and unresolved emotions shaping your judgment?

Luke 1:17 speaks of hearts being turned. That is the point I especially want to emphasize.

A parent can change a rule, establish a new routine, or learn a better method of discipline while still needing a deeper change in attitude toward the child.

In our A.R.T. teaching, we speak of **allowing revival to reach the relationships**.

For parents, this includes the relationships with the sons and daughters who live under their care. The turning of the heart should become evident in the way the adult listens, instructs, corrects, forgives, and recognizes each child as an individual.

The real examination often comes when the adult is perturbed, because that is when familiar habits of anger, control, impatience, and judgment may rise to the surface.

A father or mother who is willing to examine these reactions is taking seriously the responsibility of Christian parenting.

The child still needs guidance. The parent still has authority. But the heart of the adult must not be forgotten in the process.

WHEN ONE MOMENT FRACTURES THE RELATIONSHIP

In a moment of haste, anger, violence, demeaning disrespect, or belittlement, an adult can inflict damage upon a relationship that may take years to repair. A Christian father, mother, step-parent, caregiver, pastor, or other person in authority may believe that the incident is finished simply because the shouting has stopped, the punishment has ended, or the child has become quiet. Yet within the child, something may have changed.

The child may continue to obey, attend church, participate in family activities, and outwardly appear to have recovered. Nevertheless, the memory of what happened may remain, accompanied by fear, apprehension, humiliation, resentment, or an inward accusation against the adult. What appeared to the authority figure to be a brief episode of frustration may have produced a lasting **accusing fracture within the relationship**.

I refer to these lingering injuries as *soul wounds*. I am using that expression to describe the emotional and relational injuries that may remain after a person has experienced frightening, humiliating, violent, or deeply disrespectful treatment, particularly from someone whom he or she was expected to trust.

The child may begin to anticipate the adult's next angry reaction, carefully watching facial expressions, tone of voice, footsteps, or changes in mood. Instead of feeling secure in the relationship, the child may become anxious about making an ordinary mistake, asking a question, or expressing an honest concern. The relationship may continue outwardly, but inwardly the child has begun protecting himself or herself from the person who was supposed to provide protection.

This is particularly serious when the adult represents Christian authority. A father may consider himself the spiritual head of the household. A mother may regularly teach Scripture. A pastor may speak publicly about God's love, and a step-parent or caregiver may insist upon respect because of an appointed position. Yet when these adults repeatedly demonstrate uncontrolled anger, intimidation, partiality, or humiliating correction, the younger person may begin associating Christian authority with fear rather than trustworthy guidance.

One of the painful consequences is that the child may carry an accusing memory of the adult long after the adult has forgotten the incident. The child may remember the words, the look on the adult's face, the embarrassment, or the frightening loss of control. The adult may later wonder why the son or daughter has become distant, guarded, resentful, or reluctant to communicate. In some cases, the explanation is found in experiences the adult has minimized, excused, or never acknowledged.

This does not mean that every disagreement or moment of parental frustration produces a permanent injury. Relationships can recover, and sincere acknowledgment, changed behavior, appropriate protection, and patient rebuilding of trust can make a meaningful difference. But an adult should never presume that a child has recovered merely because the child has stopped crying, become obedient, or ceased discussing what happened.

Colossians 3:21 (KJV)

"Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged."

Ephesians 6:4 (KJV)

"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

These passages deserve consideration whenever Christian adults defend harsh conduct by appealing to their position of authority. The responsibility of the adult includes more than requiring obedience. It also includes examining whether the manner of correction is producing unnecessary fear, discouragement, or injury within the relationship.

This brings us back to Luke 1:17 and the turning of the hearts of fathers toward their children. The father may need to remember what the child experienced, value the child's account of what happened, and reconsider how he has been viewing that son or daughter. The same examination applies to mothers, step-parents, caregivers, and spiritual leaders.

An adult cannot demand that trust return immediately simply because an apology has been offered. The child may need time, consistent evidence of changed conduct, and, in serious circumstances, protection and qualified assistance. Where violence or abuse has occurred, restoring contact must never take priority over the child's safety.

In A.R.T., when we speak of **allowing revival to reach the relationships**, we must include the relationships that have been damaged by the conduct of people who profess to represent God. A person's religious title, family position, years of ministry, or knowledge of Scripture does not erase the responsibility to acknowledge and address harm.

Parents and Christian leaders should therefore ask themselves whether those entrusted to their care feel able to approach them with an honest concern, or whether they have learned to remain silent because they fear the adult's reaction.

A relationship may be fractured in a moment, while the rebuilding of trust requires considerable time and genuine change. This is one reason the turning of the adult's heart matters so deeply. The adult must be willing to see the person who has been hurt, rather than concentrating only upon the authority that has been challenged.

The A.R.T. question is whether our Christian faith has reached the actual relationship, including the places where our own conduct may have wounded another person.

Taveau D'Arcy

EORR / A.R.T. Abiding Relationship Theology "Allowing revival to reach the relationships.

CHAPTER FOUR OVERVIEW

AUTHORITY IS NOT AUTHORITARIANISM

Vocabulary, Clarifications, and Points to Ponder

1. Authoritarianism

An approach to authority characterized by excessive control, rigid demands, intimidation, or unwillingness to consider reasonable questions. In parenting, authoritarianism may place the adult's need for obedience above the child's understanding and development.

2. Public Humiliation

The deliberate exposure of a person's mistakes, weaknesses, or misconduct before others for the purpose of embarrassment. Examples include forcing a child to display a degrading sign or publishing an embarrassing punishment online.

For consideration: Does public embarrassment teach responsibility, or does it mainly demonstrate the adult's power to expose the child?

3. Personal Dignity

The inherent worth of a human being, including a child who has behaved wrongly. Recognizing dignity does not eliminate correction. It influences how correction is carried out.

4. Intimidation

The use of threats, frightening behavior, superior power, or fear to influence another person's actions. Children may obey an intimidating adult while remaining confused, resentful, or afraid.

5. Coercion

Pressure or force used to compel compliance. In parenting, the term deserves particular consideration when an adult demands emotional submission, painful physical exertion, or agreement under threat.

6. Breaking the Will

An expression sometimes used in traditional parenting discussions to describe overcoming a child's resistance. Its meaning requires clarification because teaching self-control and crushing a child's personality are very different objectives.

For consideration: Is the adult developing the child's ability to make responsible decisions or demanding a demonstration of personal defeat?

7. Strong-Willed Child

A child who displays unusual determination, persistence, or resistance to direction. Strong will is a description of behavior or temperament, not a diagnosis or proof of moral corruption.

Determination may become a valuable quality when developed alongside judgment and consideration for others.

8. Physical Endangerment

Exposure to an unreasonable risk of injury or harm. Punishments involving excessive exercise, heavy loads, prolonged painful positions, or disregard of physical distress raise serious safety concerns.

9. Religious Intimidation

The use of religious claims, spiritual accusations, or supposed divine authority to frighten or control another person. A child may be especially vulnerable when an adult claims to know the child's spiritual condition without listening or considering the circumstances.

10. Favoritism and Partiality

Preferential treatment that influences fairness. A parent may be more tolerant of one child's misconduct than another's because of personality, affection, resentment, or family

11. Turning the Hearts of the Fathers to the Children (Luke 1:17)

In its biblical context, this refers to part of John the Baptist's mission of preparing people for the Lord. In A.R.T. parenting teaching, it also provides an opportunity to examine whether fathers and other responsible adults are genuinely turning their attention, concern, and attitudes toward the children entrusted to them. It involves more than providing financially or enforcing rules.

12. Remembering the Relationship

The deliberate choice to remember who the child is, especially when the adult is irritated, disappointed, or angry. The child is a developing human being, not an opponent or merely the sum of recent misconduct. Remembering the relationship helps the adult address behavior without forgetting the person.

13. Valuing the Child

Recognizing the child's continuing human worth even when correction is necessary. A child's value should not depend upon performance, appearance, personality, popularity, or the parent's present approval.

14. Viewing the Child

The attitude, assumptions, and expectations through which an adult interprets a child's behavior. A parent may unknowingly view a child through old accusations, negative labels, favoritism, or memories of previous conflicts rather than considering the actual situation fairly.

15. Perturbed

Disturbed, irritated, upset, or emotionally unsettled. In parenting, this describes moments when frustration may influence the adult's judgment, words, or manner of correction.

16. Parental Self-Government

The adult's responsibility to manage personal anger, impulses, words, and actions while exercising authority over a child. A parent who expects self-control from a child must also examine personal self-control.

17. Accusing Fracture

An A.R.T. teaching expression describing damage to trust within a relationship following frightening, humiliating, violent, or deeply disrespectful treatment. The injured person may retain painful memories and inward accusations concerning the adult's conduct, even after the immediate incident has ended.

18. Soul Wounds

An expression used in this teaching for lingering emotional and relational injuries associated with frightening, demeaning, abusive, or deeply hurtful experiences. It is a descriptive spiritual and relational term, not a formal medical or psychological diagnosis.

19. Demeaning Disrespect and Belittlement

Words, attitudes, or actions that humiliate another person, treat that person as inferior, or diminish personal dignity. In parenting, this may include ridicule, insulting labels, public humiliation, and repeated statements that attack the child's worth rather than addressing specific misconduct.

20. Fear-Based Compliance

Outward obedience motivated primarily by fear of an adult's anger, intimidation, humiliation, or punishment. Fear-based compliance should not automatically be mistaken for genuine understanding, respect, or developing self-government.

21. Religious or Parental Authority

The responsibility entrusted to an adult through a family, caregiving, or ministry role. Such authority carries obligations of wisdom, accountability, appropriate boundaries, and responsible conduct. A position of authority does not make every action of the authority figure righteous.

22. Rebuilding Relational Trust

The process through which damaged trust may be restored by acknowledgment of wrongdoing, consistent changed behavior, respect for appropriate boundaries, and time. In cases involving abuse or violence, safety and appropriate professional assistance take priority over expectations of reconciliation.

23. The Opposite Pendulum

A teaching expression describing an excessive reaction against a harmful practice. An adult raised under harsh discipline may become so afraid of repeating that experience that reasonable correction and household boundaries are neglected.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. When my child makes me angry, do I remember the whole person, or do I concentrate entirely upon the latest offense?
2. Have I ever treated a child's questioning, disappointment, or disagreement as a personal attack upon my authority?
3. Do I value and treat each child fairly, including the child whose personality or behavior I find most challenging?
4. Have I assigned a negative label to a child and continued viewing that child through the label even when improvement has occurred?
5. Can I distinguish between a child's genuine respect for me and a child's fear of my reactions?
6. Have I ever assumed that an angry incident was over simply because the child stopped crying, arguing, or discussing it?
7. Could an adult's harsh words, humiliating correction, or frightening behavior leave an accusing fracture in a relationship long after the adult has forgotten the incident?
8. Have I considered whether my own childhood experiences influence the way I exercise parental authority?

9. If I have injured a relationship, am I willing to acknowledge what happened, change my conduct, and allow appropriate time for trust to be rebuilt?
10. In light of Luke 1:17, what would it mean for my heart to turn more fully toward the children entrusted to my care?
11. Am I teaching my children to understand wisdom and responsibility, or am I primarily concerned with obtaining immediate compliance?
12. Does my behavior as a Christian parent, step-parent, caregiver, or ministry leader reflect the wisdom described in James 3:17?

SCRIPTURES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Luke 1:17 — Turning the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient toward the wisdom of the just.

Ephesians 6:4 — Fathers instructed not to provoke children to wrath.

Colossians 3:21 — Fathers warned against provoking children to anger and discouragement.

Proverbs 16:32 — Being slow to anger and ruling one's spirit.

James 3:17–18 — Heavenly wisdom, mercy, good fruits, and righteousness.

Psalm 139:23–24 — Inviting God to examine one's heart and thoughts.

CHAPTER FIVE

BEFORE YOU MOVE, SPEAK, ACT, OR REACT

The Parent's Inner Condition Before Correcting the Child

A child has disobeyed an instruction. Perhaps the child has lied, spoken disrespectfully, neglected a responsibility, or done something that could have caused harm. The parent discovers what happened and immediately feels the need to respond. That response may be necessary, particularly when the child's behavior involves danger or serious wrongdoing. Yet something important occurs between the moment an adult recognizes a problem and the moment that adult begins correcting it.

The parent's own thoughts, emotions, assumptions, and physical condition become involved.

This is an area of Christian parenting that deserves more attention because adults sometimes assume that recognizing wrongdoing automatically qualifies them to administer correction wisely. They may be entirely correct about what the child has done and still respond in a manner that creates additional problems.

A father can be justified in requiring obedience while becoming unjustifiably angry during the confrontation. A mother may have a legitimate concern about a child's behavior while allowing exhaustion or personal embarrassment to determine the severity of the response. The original matter requiring correction remains important, but the adult must also consider what is taking place within himself or herself.

For that reason, I want to address the moments before a parent moves, speaks, acts, or reacts.

THE MOMENT BEFORE THE RESPONSE

In an ordinary household, difficulties do not necessarily arrive when adults are rested, prepared, and emotionally composed. A child may misbehave while dinner is being prepared, when the parent is rushing to work, after an exhausting day, or during a period of financial or family pressure. Sometimes the incident takes place in public, where the parent becomes embarrassed by the child's conduct and feels compelled to respond immediately.

These circumstances can influence judgment more than the adult realizes.

Consider a mother who has worked all day and returns home to discover that an older child has neglected an agreed-upon responsibility. The mother may have reminded the child several times, and her frustration is understandable. She has obligations of her own and reasonably expects the young person to contribute.

However, the mother's exhaustion may intensify her reaction. A relatively ordinary problem can become the occasion for a lengthy argument because the adult has reached the limit of her patience. The child may then respond defensively, further increasing the tension.

By the time the confrontation ends, both may have said things they regret, while the original responsibility remains unfinished.

A father may experience something similar when a child behaves disrespectfully in front of relatives, friends, or strangers. His embarrassment can become mixed with a concern about how other adults will judge his parenting. Instead of addressing the child's conduct in proportion to the offense, he may feel pressure to demonstrate publicly that he is in control.

The child may require correction, but the adult's concern about personal reputation should not determine the punishment.

Proverbs 16:32 (KJV)

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

This proverb places considerable value upon the ability to govern one's own spirit. The comparison with military strength is striking because it recognizes a form of self-control that may be more difficult than exercising power over other people.

In the home, the parent usually possesses the greater authority. The adult can establish rules, assign responsibilities, and impose appropriate consequences. Yet those privileges do not eliminate the need for restraint. They make restraint especially important because the child depends upon the adult's judgment.

I believe Christian parents should learn to recognize when their own emotional condition is becoming involved in correction. Anger can sometimes alert us that something serious has occurred, but the intensity of anger does not establish the seriousness of the offense. A parent who is already distressed may react more severely than the circumstances require.

Where immediate safety is involved, the adult must intervene promptly. A young child approaching a busy road, a dangerous object, or another serious hazard cannot be left in danger while the parent reflects upon personal emotions. Protection comes first.

Once the immediate danger has been addressed, however, the parent can consider how to explain what happened and what correction is appropriate. Many household disagreements do not require an instant punishment. A brief opportunity to regain composure may prevent the adult from turning a manageable problem into an unnecessary confrontation.

WHAT IS REALLY MOVING THE ADULT?

A parent may believe that a child's conduct is the sole reason for an angry reaction. Sometimes the behavior is genuinely serious. At other times, the adult's response is being influenced by experiences or concerns that have little to do with the present incident.

Personal embarrassment is one example. Some adults are especially sensitive to the possibility that other people may think their children are poorly behaved. A child who interrupts, argues, or behaves foolishly in public may trigger an unusually strong reaction because the parent feels personally exposed.

Another influence is fear. A father or mother may recognize a behavior that resembles something painful from the family's past. The parent becomes frightened about what the child might become and responds as though the worst possible outcome has already occurred.

A teenager's dishonesty, for example, deserves serious attention. But the parent who immediately assumes that one dishonest incident establishes a lifetime of deception may respond with accusations that go far beyond the evidence.

Memories of the adult's own upbringing can also influence judgment. Someone who was harshly punished for questioning authority may become unusually sensitive when a child asks for an explanation. Another parent who experienced rejection may feel personally wounded when an older child expresses a desire for greater independence.

These reactions are understandable subjects for personal examination. They do not establish that every adult difficulty comes from childhood experiences, nor should a parent automatically attribute present problems to past wounds. Nevertheless, when a response seems unusually intense, the adult would be wise to consider whether something else has become involved.

Psalm 139:23–24 (KJV)

"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:

And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

David's prayer provides a valuable example of inviting God's examination of one's own heart. For Christian parents, that examination can include personal motives, resentment, impatience, fear, and the desire to maintain control.

An adult may be completely justified in addressing a child's misconduct while also needing to acknowledge personal wrongdoing in the manner of correction. Those two realities can exist within the same incident.

It takes humility to recognize that a parent has overreacted. Some adults resist making that acknowledgment because they fear that apologizing will weaken their authority. Yet a sincere apology for inappropriate words or excessive anger can demonstrate the very honesty and accountability that the parent wishes to teach.

The child still remains responsible for the original misconduct. Acknowledging the parent's mistake does not erase the child's responsibility.

The adult should also consider whether personal resentment has been accumulating. A mother who feels unsupported may become increasingly irritated by ordinary requests from her children. A father experiencing financial pressure may react sharply to a minor household expense. In blended families, unresolved tension between adults can influence how a child is treated, particularly when the child reminds a stepparent of an earlier marriage or an ongoing family disagreement.

Such circumstances require careful attention because children should not become the recipients of anger that belongs to another relationship.

THE POWER OF WORDS DURING CORRECTION

The words spoken during an angry confrontation can remain in a child's memory long after the immediate incident has passed.

Some adults speak harshly because they believe forceful language is necessary to establish authority. Others become accustomed to sarcasm, ridicule, or exaggerated accusations and no longer recognize how frequently they use them.

A child who has forgotten to complete a task may hear that he never does anything correctly. A daughter who has made an unwise decision may be told that she will never amount to anything. A teenager who has been dishonest may be accused of having no character whatsoever.

These statements often arise from frustration rather than careful judgment. Nevertheless, they can affect the child's understanding of personal worth and the relationship with the parent.

Proverbs 12:18 (KJV)

"There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health."

The proverb recognizes the capacity of speech to wound and the value of wise words. Parents should consider this when correcting children because the adult's words carry unusual influence within the household.

Correction sometimes requires direct and uncomfortable statements. A parent may need to identify dishonesty, cruelty, irresponsibility, or disrespect without minimizing the seriousness of the behavior. The adult should speak truthfully about what happened and explain the consequences that follow.

However, describing misconduct accurately is different from making sweeping declarations about the child's entire character or future. A single failure should not become an occasion for announcing that the child is hopeless.

The same concern applies to religious language. A Christian parent may sincerely believe that a child's conduct reflects a spiritual problem, but that belief does not authorize careless accusations about the child's heart. Parents should exercise particular caution before describing a young person as cursed, demonized, or spiritually corrupt.

Some children are already frightened or confused about their behavior. They may need instruction, patient conversation, or appropriate assistance. Frightening religious accusations can make it more difficult for them to communicate honestly.

Ephesians 4:29 (KJV)

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

Paul's instruction concerns the speech of believers. It has a practical application within families because parents are continually teaching through ordinary conversation as well as deliberate correction.

An adult who regularly uses degrading language may discover that the children begin speaking to one another in the same manner. The younger child may ridicule a sibling because ridicule has become familiar. An older child may learn to respond to disagreement with threats or sarcasm after observing those habits in the household.

The parent who desires respectful communication must be willing to examine personal speech.

This does not require elaborate speeches whenever a child makes a mistake. Sometimes a brief, clear explanation and a reasonable consequence are sufficient. At other times,

the child needs a longer conversation because the matter involves dishonesty, damaged trust, or behavior that could cause serious harm.

The adult should consider the child's capacity to understand the correction. A young child may need simple language and immediate guidance. A teenager may benefit from a more substantial discussion about motives, responsibility, and the consequences of decisions.

The purpose of speaking should be to communicate what needs to be understood, without allowing the parent's anger to take over the conversation.

WHEN THE PARENT NEEDS TO STOP AND RECONSIDER

There are times when an adult recognizes that a confrontation is becoming unproductive. The child is arguing, the parent's voice is rising, and neither person is listening carefully. What began as a manageable disagreement is turning into a contest.

When there is no immediate danger, the parent may need to interrupt that pattern before proceeding.

This can be difficult for an adult who believes that every argument must be settled immediately. Some parents fear that allowing a pause will be interpreted as weakness or that the child will regard the delay as a victory.

But a decision made after the adult has regained composure may be wiser than one imposed during escalating anger.

The parent can make clear that the matter has not been forgotten and that it will be addressed appropriately. Depending upon the child's age and circumstances, the adult may require the young person to remain available for the later conversation or to complete an immediate responsibility while further consequences are considered.

A pause should not become a method of avoiding correction indefinitely. Children need consistency and should be able to trust that household expectations will be addressed fairly.

At times, the adult may also discover that the original instruction was unclear or unreasonable. A child might have misunderstood what was expected, lacked the ability to complete the task, or been dealing with a problem the parent did not know about.

Listening can reveal those circumstances.

James 3:17–18 (KJV)

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

I believe this description of heavenly wisdom deserves consideration whenever Christian adults exercise authority. The phrase "easy to be intreated" is particularly meaningful because it describes a willingness to receive an appeal or consider another person's concerns.

Parents do not have to surrender legitimate authority in order to listen. They can reconsider a decision, recognize a misunderstanding, or acknowledge that an earlier response was excessive.

The reference to being without partiality is equally important. Correction should not depend upon which child is the favorite, which child resembles the parent, or which child is easiest to manage. An adult may naturally find one personality easier to understand than another, but personal preference should not determine whether a child receives fair treatment.

Parents should also consider whether fatigue has begun influencing the entire household. Exhaustion can make ordinary problems seem much larger than they are. A mother working two jobs may have little patience remaining for repeated arguments. A father facing financial pressure may become unusually sensitive to interruptions or unexpected expenses.

These circumstances deserve compassion and practical attention. Where possible, adults may need assistance, rest, more dependable routines, or support from trusted people. A parent who is overwhelmed should not be expected to solve every difficulty through determination alone.

If an adult recognizes that anger has become frightening, uncontrolled, or physically dangerous, protecting the child and obtaining appropriate assistance must take priority over completing the punishment.

THE EXAMPLE THE PARENT LEAVES BEHIND

Children learn about authority through the manner in which authority is exercised around them. They observe how adults respond to frustration, disappointment, mistakes, and disagreement. They notice whether a parent can admit an error, whether promises are kept, and whether the same standards are applied fairly to different family members.

This influence continues as children grow older.

A young child may obey because the parent is physically present and capable of enforcing a rule. An older child begins developing personal judgment and must gradually learn to make responsible choices without constant supervision.

The parent's example can help prepare the child for that responsibility.

A father who governs his temper demonstrates something valuable about strength. A mother who acknowledges an unfair accusation teaches the importance of honesty. When adults correct wrongdoing without humiliation, children can learn that accountability is compatible with dignity and respect.

None of this requires parents to be perfect. Fathers and mothers are human beings who become tired, make mistakes, experience frustration, and sometimes need assistance. Their responsibility is to remain willing to examine their conduct and make necessary corrections.

I believe that willingness is particularly important in Christian homes because children are watching how the faith their parents profess is practiced in ordinary relationships.

A parent may teach extensively about love, patience, wisdom, and the authority of Scripture. The child's daily experience of family life will influence how those teachings are understood.

For this reason, the adult's inner condition deserves attention before correction begins. The child may need a firm consequence, an explanation, or protection from danger. The parent must be prepared to provide what the situation genuinely requires while exercising the personal restraint expected of a responsible Christian adult.

CONCLUSION

Parental correction often begins with something a child has done, but the adult's response can determine whether the incident becomes an opportunity for instruction or an unnecessary struggle.

Before responding, parents would do well to consider whether their judgment is being influenced by anger, embarrassment, exhaustion, fear, or unresolved personal concerns. Such examination can help them address the child's conduct without allowing their own reactions to become the greater problem.

The responsibility to lead remains with the adult. So does the responsibility to exercise that authority with wisdom.

Before you move, speak, act, or react, consider what is happening in your own heart.

CHAPTER FIVE

BEFORE YOU MOVE, SPEAK, ACT, OR REACT

Vocabulary, Clarifications, and Points to Ponder

1. Emotional Reaction

An immediate response of anger, fear, embarrassment, frustration, or distress. Such feelings may arise during a child's misconduct, but their intensity does not automatically establish the seriousness of the offense.

2. Knee-Jerk Reaction

A familiar expression for a rapid, largely unexamined response. In parenting, it may describe speaking, threatening, or imposing punishment before considering the child's conduct and the adult's emotional condition.

For consideration: Is the adult responding to what actually happened, or reacting to what the incident brings to mind?

3. Emotional Trigger

A circumstance that produces an unusually strong emotional response, sometimes because it resembles an earlier experience. The term can help describe a reaction, but should not be used to assume that every parenting difficulty originates in unresolved trauma.

4. Self-Examination

The willingness to consider one's motives, attitudes, assumptions, and behavior. Christian parents may use prayer and honest reflection to recognize anger, resentment, favoritism, or other influences affecting judgment.

5. Self-Government

The practice of regulating one's own conduct, especially under pressure. In this chapter, the term concerns the parent's responsibility to exercise restraint before speaking or administering correction.

6. Escalation

The process by which a disagreement becomes increasingly intense. An argument may escalate when an adult raises the voice, makes additional accusations, or increases punishment in response to the child's distress.

7. Proportionate Response

A response reasonably suited to the actual conduct and circumstances. Proportionate correction considers the seriousness of the wrongdoing, the child's age and understanding, and any immediate safety concerns.

8. Blame-Shifting

Redirecting responsibility for one's conduct toward someone else. A child may attempt to blame a sibling, while a parent may blame the child for the adult's own uncontrolled words or excessive anger.

9. Verbal Degradation

Speech that demeans another person's worth, intelligence, character, or future. Examples include repeatedly calling a child worthless, stupid, or hopeless rather than addressing the actual misconduct.

10. Discernment

The ability to consider circumstances carefully and distinguish among possible explanations. In Christian teaching, spiritual discernment should be exercised with humility, truthfulness, and an awareness of human limitations.

11. Partiality

Unfair preference or unequal treatment. A parent may react differently to similar misconduct because one child is easier to manage, more personally favored, or associated with unresolved family conflict.

12. De-escalation

Actions that reduce the intensity of a confrontation. When there is no immediate danger, allowing time to regain composure can help an adult return to the matter with clearer judgment. The necessary correction should still be addressed.

13. Accountability After an Overreaction

The parent's willingness to acknowledge inappropriate conduct, including excessive anger or hurtful speech, while continuing to address the child's original wrongdoing.

For consideration: Can a parent apologize for an unfair reaction without surrendering legitimate authority? Yes. The adult's responsibility and the child's responsibility can both be addressed.

Closing thought: Before administering correction, the adult should consider whether personal emotions are interfering with a fair understanding of what happened.

CHAPTER SIX

THE ADULT TEMPER TANTRUM

When the Parent's Anger, Resentment, and Personal Frustration Take Over

WHEN THE ADULT BECOMES THE ONE WHO LOSES CONTROL

Most adults recognize a childhood temper tantrum. A young child becomes frustrated, begins crying, raises the voice, refuses an instruction, or makes a considerable commotion because something has not gone as expected. Parents generally understand that children must gradually learn to manage disappointment, control their reactions, and express themselves appropriately.

But what happens when the person having the temper tantrum is the adult?

This question deserves serious consideration in Christian parenting because some fathers, mothers, stepparents, and guardians become so accustomed to their own anger that they no longer recognize its effect upon the household. The adult may shout, threaten, accuse, slam doors, or make unreasonable demands while insisting that the children must remain respectful and composed. If a child responds with similar behavior, the parent may immediately impose punishment without considering the example being demonstrated.

I believe that adults sometimes excuse behavior in themselves that they would never permit in a child.

A parent may describe an angry outburst as necessary firmness, righteous indignation, or evidence of being in charge. In reality, the adult may have become overwhelmed by frustration and temporarily abandoned personal self-government. The fact that a child has behaved wrongly does not excuse the adult's loss of control.

Proverbs 16:32 (KJV)

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

This proverb places great value upon the ability to govern one's own spirit. That responsibility becomes especially important when a person exercises authority over someone younger, smaller, and dependent upon adult care.

A child's misconduct may require correction, sometimes immediately. Yet the parent's response must be considered separately. A father who discovers that his son has lied may have every reason to address the dishonesty. If he becomes so enraged that he begins screaming accusations, threatening excessive punishment, or frightening other family members, his own conduct has become part of the household problem.

The original wrongdoing has not disappeared. The child remains responsible for the lie. Nevertheless, the adult must answer for the manner in which the correction was administered.

Some parents believe that admitting an inappropriate reaction will weaken their authority. They fear that an apology will encourage children to become disrespectful or to question future decisions. I do not believe responsible parental leadership requires adults to pretend that they never make mistakes.

When a father or mother acknowledges an angry outburst, the child receives an example of accountability. The parent can correct personal wrongdoing while maintaining the necessary consequence for the child's behavior.

There is no reason to teach children that accountability belongs exclusively to the youngest or least powerful members of the household.

THE ADULT'S ANGER AND THE FAMILY ATMOSPHERE

A household can gradually become accustomed to one person's temper.

The family learns which subjects should be avoided, when the adult is likely to become irritated, and how to recognize the early signs of an approaching outburst. Children may become skilled at reading facial expressions, footsteps, the sound of a door closing, or a sudden change in the parent's voice.

These habits sometimes develop so gradually that the adults fail to recognize what is happening. The family may appear orderly from the outside, while those living inside are continually adjusting their behavior to prevent another angry episode.

The adult who has become the household's emotional center of gravity may regard this caution as respect. The children are quiet when the parent enters the room, reluctant to disagree, and quick to obey. Yet their conduct may be influenced by anxiety rather than understanding.

A father who regularly explodes over minor household problems may eventually find that his children avoid discussing important matters with him. A mother whose reactions are unpredictable may discover that the children conceal mistakes because they fear the consequences of telling the truth.

These developments can undermine the very qualities that parents hope to establish. Honesty requires a reasonable opportunity to speak truthfully. Trust develops through dependable conduct. Children who expect humiliation or uncontrolled anger may become more concerned with protecting themselves from the next confrontation than with learning from the previous one.

James 1:19–20 (KJV)

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

James addresses believers generally, and the instruction certainly deserves consideration within Christian families. Human anger can become so intense that the person expressing it assumes the strength of the emotion proves the righteousness of the cause.

A parent may be angry about something genuinely wrong. The child may have behaved dishonestly, endangered another person, or deliberately violated a reasonable instruction. Nevertheless, the adult's anger does not automatically produce a wise response.

Sometimes the parent's frustration has been accumulating for days or weeks. Financial pressure, marital conflict, physical exhaustion, disappointment, or a sense of being unappreciated may contribute to an unusually severe reaction when a child commits a relatively ordinary offense.

The child becomes the person standing nearby when the adult finally loses patience.

This is particularly concerning when the parent begins assigning motives without sufficient knowledge. An unfinished chore becomes proof that the child is deliberately disrespectful. A forgotten instruction becomes evidence of personal rebellion. An ordinary disagreement is interpreted as an attempt to humiliate the adult.

By the time the parent begins speaking, the accusation may be considerably more serious than the behavior that actually occurred.

Children should be held accountable for what they have done. They should not be required to accept responsibility for the adult's accumulated frustration or assumptions about their motives.

RESENTMENT, JEALOUSY, AND THE CHILD WHO BECOMES A TARGET

Anger sometimes develops from circumstances that have little to do with a child's conduct. This is especially important in families where adults are carrying unresolved resentment, jealousy, or disappointment.

A parent may feel overlooked, unsupported, or deprived of affection. Another adult may resent the attention a spouse gives to a child. In some blended families, a stepparent may experience jealousy because the husband or wife has a continuing parental relationship with a son or daughter from an earlier marriage.

These feelings may be difficult for adults to acknowledge because they conflict with the image of the loving, mature parent they want to present. Yet refusing to recognize resentment does not prevent it from influencing conduct.

Consider a stepparent who feels that a spouse gives too much attention, time, or financial support to a child from a previous relationship. The child may have done nothing wrong, but the adult begins regarding ordinary parental affection as competition. Small mistakes are noticed more readily, harmless behavior becomes irritating, and correction may be administered with unusual severity.

A child who already faces the challenges of adjusting to a blended household may then become the recipient of anger connected to adult relationships.

Sometimes the biological parent recognizes the problem but hesitates to address it because of fear of another marital conflict. The desire to preserve peace between adults can leave the child exposed to ongoing unfairness.

I believe these situations require serious self-examination. Adults must recognize that children should never be made responsible for repairing a marriage, resolving jealousy, or compensating for disappointments from earlier relationships.

Favoritism can also influence a biological parent's conduct. A father or mother may naturally find one child's personality easier to understand than another's. One child may be affectionate and cooperative, while another is independent, argumentative, or unusually determined. Without careful attention, the adult may begin interpreting similar behavior differently depending upon which child is involved.

The favored child receives patience and explanation. The less favored child encounters criticism, suspicion, or harsher consequences.

James 3:17 (KJV)

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

The phrase "without partiality" is especially relevant here. Christian parents should be willing to examine whether personal affection, disappointment, resentment, or jealousy is interfering with fairness.

This does not require pretending that every child has the same personality or needs identical forms of instruction. Children differ in age, maturity, abilities, and circumstances. Fairness requires that those differences be considered honestly, without allowing personal preference to determine who deserves patience and who receives condemnation.

A parent who recognizes jealousy or resentment may need prayer, honest conversation, and appropriate assistance. Such feelings should be addressed within the adult's own responsibilities rather than expressed through unfair treatment of a child.

WHEN RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY IS USED TO DEFEND THE TANTRUM

An adult temper tantrum can become especially confusing when religious authority is used to defend it.

A Christian parent may insist that children must honor their father and mother, obey household instructions, and respect the authority established within the family. These are legitimate biblical subjects. However, the parent may emphasize the child's obligations while overlooking the passages that address the adult's conduct.

Ephesians 6:1–4 (KJV)

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.

Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;)

That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Paul addresses both generations. The children are instructed concerning obedience and honor, while fathers are instructed concerning the manner in which they raise their children.

The parent who repeatedly quotes the first part while disregarding the final verse is overlooking an important part of the passage.

Some adults may regard every objection as rebellion against God. A child who says that a punishment seems unfair may be accused of having a rebellious spirit. A teenager who attempts to explain a misunderstanding may be told that the explanation demonstrates disrespect.

Certainly, children can become argumentative and disrespectful. Parents must teach them to communicate appropriately. Nevertheless, an adult should be willing to distinguish deliberate insolence from an honest attempt to explain what happened.

Religious language becomes particularly troubling when a parent claims spiritual authority to make frightening accusations about a child's motives or character. A child may be described as demonized, cursed, or spiritually rebellious because the adult is angry or personally offended.

Such accusations should never become convenient substitutes for understanding the actual situation.

Christian parents have access to Scripture, prayer, and the instruction of the Holy Spirit, but they remain human beings whose judgment can be mistaken. A strong emotional impression does not establish perfect knowledge of another person's heart.

The adult who sincerely wants to exercise Christian authority should be willing to listen, consider circumstances, and acknowledge personal mistakes. These qualities are consistent with the wisdom described in James 3:17.

I have long believed that what Christians teach about relationships should be visible in the way they treat real human beings. Children are among the people most directly affected by the quality of those relationships.

A household may have excellent Bible teaching and still suffer because the adults have not learned to apply that teaching to their own speech, anger, and treatment of family members.

WHEN THE ADULT HAS ALREADY LOST CONTROL

There are occasions when a parent realizes, perhaps in the middle of a confrontation, that personal anger has become excessive. The adult's voice is rising, accusations are becoming more severe, and the child is frightened or responding defensively.

At that point, continuing the confrontation simply to demonstrate authority may make matters worse.

Where immediate safety is involved, the adult must act promptly to protect the child or others. Once danger has been addressed, however, many disciplinary decisions can wait until the parent is sufficiently composed to exercise sound judgment.

An adult who is becoming overwhelmed may need to stop speaking, step away when the child can safely be left or supervised, and return to the matter after regaining control. The purpose of doing so is to prevent further harm while preserving the responsibility to address the original behavior.

The parent should not use the delay as an excuse to avoid correction indefinitely. Children need dependable expectations and reasonable consequences. They also benefit from knowing that an adult will not impose punishment simply because the adult is furious.

When inappropriate words have already been spoken, the parent may need to acknowledge them directly. A sincere apology should identify the adult's conduct without shifting responsibility onto the child.

For example, a father who shouted degrading accusations might explain that the child's dishonesty still requires correction, but that his own insulting language was wrong. He can then address the original misconduct without pretending that his anger was justified in every detail.

This approach requires maturity because adults sometimes find it easier to defend an angry reaction than to admit that they behaved badly.

A child may also need reassurance after a frightening incident. If the adult's conduct has involved threats, physical violence, or a loss of control that places the child at risk, appropriate outside assistance and immediate protection may be necessary.

Parents should not wait until serious harm occurs before recognizing that an uncontrolled temper requires attention.

Proverbs 15:1 (KJV)

"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger."

This proverb describes an important principle concerning the influence of speech. It does not guarantee that every calm response will immediately resolve a difficult confrontation, but it encourages thoughtful consideration of how words can either reduce or intensify conflict.

In the family, the adult has a particular responsibility to consider that influence because children are learning how to manage disagreements through daily experience.

THE EXAMPLE THAT REMAINS WITH THE CHILD

Children observe much more than their parents' formal instructions. They notice how adults speak to one another, how disagreements are handled, and what happens when someone makes a mistake.

A father who frequently loses his temper may teach his children that anger is an acceptable way to establish control. A mother who uses ridicule during correction may later hear similar language among the children. When adults excuse their own behavior while punishing the same conduct in others, the family receives a confusing lesson about responsibility.

The influence may continue into adulthood. Some children imitate the harsh methods they experienced because those methods became familiar. Others become determined to avoid conflict altogether, sometimes struggling to establish necessary boundaries within their own families.

Neither outcome is inevitable. Human beings can learn, change, and develop healthier ways of relating to others. Nevertheless, parents should recognize the influence their conduct may have upon children who are still learning how relationships work.

Christian parenting provides an opportunity to demonstrate the importance of personal responsibility in ordinary family life. Adults who acknowledge mistakes, exercise restraint, and make sincere efforts to improve their conduct show children that maturity includes continuing growth.

I do not expect parents to become perfect human beings. Fathers and mothers carry responsibilities, experience fatigue, and sometimes face circumstances that are genuinely difficult. Some are raising children alone or working several jobs while attempting to maintain a household. Others are navigating blended-family tensions, financial pressures, or relationships affected by earlier disappointments.

Those circumstances deserve compassion. They also make it important for parents to recognize when additional support is needed.

The adult who repeatedly loses control may benefit from prayer, honest counsel, practical assistance, and, when appropriate, professional help. Seeking such assistance can be an expression of responsibility toward the family.

CONCLUSION

An adult temper tantrum can leave a child frightened, confused, or uncertain about what will happen next. When anger becomes a familiar method of household government, the family may gradually organize itself around avoiding the next outburst.

Christian parents have a responsibility to correct their children, but they must also examine the anger, resentment, jealousy, and personal frustration that can interfere with sound judgment.

A child may need correction for genuine wrongdoing. The adult may need correction as well.

The willingness to recognize that possibility is an important part of mature parental leadership.

CHAPTER SIX REVIEW

Meaningful Vocabulary and Specific Points to Ponder

1. Adult Temper Tantrum

An expression used in this chapter for an adult's uncontrolled outburst of anger, frustration, intimidation, or emotional pressure. It is a descriptive teaching term rather than a clinical diagnosis.

For consideration: Does the adult excuse behavior in himself or herself that would bring immediate correction if demonstrated by a child?

2. Emotional Self-Government

The ability and responsibility to manage personal reactions, particularly when frustrated, embarrassed, or angry. It includes recognizing when emotions are interfering with judgment.

3. Intimidation

The use of frightening conduct, threats, or superior power to influence another person's behavior. A child may comply with an intimidating parent while becoming increasingly reluctant to speak honestly.

4. Resentment

Lingering anger or bitterness connected to a perceived injury, disappointment, or unfair situation. In parenting, unresolved resentment may influence reactions to a child whose behavior reminds the adult of another relationship or experience.

5. Jealousy

An emotional response involving fear of losing affection, attention, position, or another valued relationship. Jealousy can become particularly troublesome when an adult begins treating a child as a competitor for a spouse's affection.

6. Favoritism

Preferential treatment based upon affection, personality, resemblance, or other personal considerations. Favoritism may influence how parents interpret misconduct and administer consequences.

7. Partiality

Unfair preference or unequal judgment. James 3:17 describes heavenly wisdom as being "without partiality," a principle worth considering when parents evaluate the fairness of their conduct.

8. Blended-Family Resentment

Unresolved frustration or jealousy within a household that includes children from previous relationships. Such resentment may influence discipline when an adult directs dissatisfaction with a spouse or former relationship toward a child.

9. Religious Intimidation

The use of spiritual accusations, religious authority, or frightening claims about God's judgment to control another person. Parents should distinguish actual biblical teaching from personal anger or unsupported assumptions about a child's spiritual condition.

10. Escalation

The process through which a disagreement becomes increasingly intense. An argument may escalate when an adult raises the voice, makes additional accusations, or increases punishment in response to the child's fear or resistance.

11. Accountability

The responsibility to acknowledge and answer for one's conduct. In family life, accountability applies to children according to their maturity and understanding, and to adults in the exercise of parental authority.

12. Reconciliation After an Outburst

The effort to address harm following an angry confrontation through acknowledgment, appropriate apology, changed conduct, and the restoration of reasonable communication. Reconciliation may require time, particularly when trust has been seriously damaged.

For consideration: How might a child understand Christian authority differently when a parent is willing to acknowledge personal wrongdoing?

13. Parental Modeling

The influence of the adult's example upon a child's developing attitudes and conduct. Children observe how parents handle frustration, disagreement, responsibility, and mistakes.

14. Personal Motives

The reasons or desires influencing a person's actions. Parents may need to examine whether a disciplinary decision is being shaped by concern for the child, personal embarrassment, jealousy, resentment, or the desire to win an argument.

Closing consideration: When a parent becomes angry, the child's conduct still deserves fair examination. So does the adult's response.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE KNEE-JERK REACTION AND THE KETCHUP TEST

What Comes Out of the Adult When the Child Applies Pressure?

"Trying to remove the JERK from all of those KNEE JERK reactions!"

Sincerely, T. D'Arcy

There are moments in family life when a child does something that immediately provokes a strong reaction in the adult. Perhaps the child has disobeyed an instruction, spoken disrespectfully, made an embarrassing remark in public, or neglected a responsibility that the parent has already discussed several times. The adult may have been patient throughout the day, managing work, household obligations, financial concerns, and other demands. Then something happens, and before the parent has carefully considered the circumstances, an angry response has already begun.

We commonly call this a knee-jerk reaction. The expression describes a response that seems to occur almost automatically, without the person first examining the situation. It may arise from fear, irritation, embarrassment, exhaustion, or an earlier experience that has made the adult especially sensitive to a particular kind of behavior.

I believe Christian parents need to recognize these reactions because the adult's authority gives them considerable power to influence what happens next. A child's mistake may require correction, but the parent's immediate emotional response can turn an ordinary disciplinary matter into an extended confrontation. The child may be accused of motives that have not been established, subjected to punishment that is more severe than the circumstances warrant, or spoken to in a manner that causes unnecessary harm.

Some parents have reacted in the same ways for so many years that their habits have become familiar. A particular tone of voice, facial expression, or disagreement may produce anger before the adult has heard an explanation. What the child intended as a question may be interpreted as disrespect, while an honest mistake may be regarded as deliberate rebellion.

The parent may be correct in recognizing misconduct. Nevertheless, the adult's first impression should not become the final judgment without considering what actually happened.

James 1:19–20 (KJV)

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

James addresses believers generally, and his instruction is especially worth considering when an adult exercises authority over children. Listening requires attention to the circumstances. Being slow to speak allows time to consider what has happened before making accusations or announcing consequences. Being slow to wrath requires restraint when anger begins influencing judgment.

Immediate action is necessary when a child is in danger or harming another person. A parent must intervene to protect the child or others. Once the immediate danger has passed, however, the adult can consider how to address the misconduct without allowing alarm or anger to govern the entire conversation.

Many ordinary household disagreements do not require an instant punishment. A parent may need to stop the behavior, establish that the matter will be addressed, and allow enough time to regain composure. Such restraint can prevent an already difficult situation from becoming unnecessarily harmful.

THE KETCHUP TEST: WHAT IS INSIDE COMES OUT UNDER PRESSURE

In my A.R.T. (Abiding Relationship Theology) teaching, which began developing in Dallas around 2012, I have used a simple illustration that I call **the Ketchup Test**.

Imagine a plastic bottle of ketchup sitting on a restaurant table. Someone picks up the bottle and squeezes it.

Pressure is applied to the **OUTSIDE** of the bottle, and whatever is on the **INSIDE** begins to come **OUT**.

That ordinary picture illustrates something important about human relationships. Life applies pressure to people in many different ways. We experience disappointments, financial struggles, family disagreements, rejection, criticism, exhaustion, and unexpected difficulties. Some pressures are temporary, while others continue for years.

When those circumstances press upon us, our reactions can reveal attitudes, habits, fears, and unresolved concerns that deserve attention.

A parent who has been carrying financial worries may become unusually angry when a child wastes something valuable. A mother who feels unsupported may react sharply to another request for help. A father who has experienced repeated disrespect in another relationship may interpret an ordinary disagreement with his child as a personal challenge to his authority.

The pressure may come from outside the person, but the response involves what is taking place within.

Luke 6:45 (KJV)

"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh."

Jesus teaches about the relationship between the heart and what a person brings forth. The Ketchup Test is my practical illustration of that principle, particularly as it applies to everyday relationships.

I do not use the illustration to claim that one angry moment reveals everything about a person's character. Human beings can become exhausted, frightened, ill, or overwhelmed. A reaction may reflect temporary distress as well as established habits. We should be careful about pretending to know another person's entire heart from a single incident.

However, when the same harmful responses repeatedly emerge under pressure, we should be willing to examine them.

Some adults become sarcastic. Others resort to accusations, threats, intimidation, or personal insults. A person who feels rejected may begin rejecting others before they have the opportunity to cause further disappointment. Someone who has endured years of humiliation may respond aggressively whenever embarrassment seems possible.

These patterns can become especially harmful when they influence the treatment of children, who depend upon adults for protection and guidance.

The Ketchup Test invites us to examine our own hearts before directing attention toward the failures of others. It is easy to notice when a spouse, former spouse, stepparent, or child reacts badly. Personal self-examination requires a willingness to recognize the attitudes and habits that emerge from within ourselves.

I have long emphasized in A.R.T. teaching that revival needs to reach our relationships. Christian faith should influence the way we speak, respond, forgive, correct, and treat real human beings during ordinary circumstances.

For parents, the Ketchup Test can become a useful reminder when pressure begins accumulating. Before an angry reaction becomes an accusation or punishment, the adult can consider whether the response is being influenced by something beyond the child's actual behavior.

WHEN THE CHILD TOUCHES AN OLD WOUND

Some knee-jerk reactions become more understandable when we consider the adult's personal history.

A father who was repeatedly humiliated during childhood may become unusually sensitive when his son questions him in front of other people. A mother who experienced rejection may feel personally wounded when a teenager begins seeking greater independence. Someone raised in a household where questioning an adult brought immediate punishment may interpret an ordinary request for explanation as disrespect.

The child may have no knowledge of these earlier experiences.

A teenager asking to spend time with friends may simply be seeking age-appropriate independence. The parent may have legitimate concerns about supervision, safety, and household responsibilities. Yet if the adult interprets the request as personal abandonment, the resulting conversation may become far more painful than necessary.

Likewise, a child who questions an instruction may need to learn how to speak respectfully. But the parent who has endured years of being dismissed or belittled may respond as though the child has committed a much more serious offense than the actual words justify.

The young person should not be expected to carry responsibility for injuries that occurred before the present disagreement.

I do not believe every strong reaction must automatically be attributed to childhood trauma. Some circumstances are genuinely serious, and a parent's alarm may be appropriate. Fatigue, illness, financial strain, and immediate pressures can also influence behavior. Careful judgment requires considering the circumstances rather than assuming that one explanation accounts for every difficulty.

Nevertheless, when a particular response occurs repeatedly, especially with unusual intensity, it is worth asking why that situation is so upsetting.

The answer may involve a familiar habit, resentment toward another adult, fear of losing control, or embarrassment about how the family appears to outsiders.

Blended families can face additional complications. A stepparent may react strongly to behavior that resembles the conduct of a former spouse or another difficult relationship. A biological parent may have unresolved resentment toward a former spouse and find that certain qualities in a son or daughter bring those feelings to the surface.

The resemblance may involve appearance, mannerisms, temperament, or a familiar way of speaking. Yet children are individual human beings. They should be permitted to develop their own identities without being treated as substitutes for adults with whom the parent has unresolved conflicts.

Jealousy can also become involved. An adult may feel threatened by a child's confidence, opportunities, or close relationship with another family member. Such feelings may be uncomfortable to acknowledge, but refusing to examine them can allow unfair treatment to continue.

Psalm 139:23–24 (KJV)

"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:

And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

David's prayer expresses a willingness to invite God's examination of the heart. Christian parents can apply this prayer personally when considering motives that may be influencing their treatment of children.

Recognizing the influence of earlier experiences can help an adult understand a reaction, but understanding should lead toward responsible change. A parent who has been mistreated deserves appropriate compassion and assistance. The child also deserves protection from repeated verbal cruelty, intimidation, or unfair punishment.

THE TONGUE, THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT, AND THE ADULT'S RESPONSE

One of the first places a knee-jerk reaction becomes visible is in the parent's speech.

An adult who is angry or embarrassed may say something far more severe than the circumstances warrant. A forgotten chore becomes an accusation that the child never does anything correctly. A dishonest statement produces a declaration that the young person cannot be trusted about anything. A disappointing school grade becomes an occasion for criticizing the child's intelligence or predicting a hopeless future.

Such words may be spoken quickly, but children can remember them long after the adult has calmed down.

Proverbs 12:18 (KJV)

"There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health."

The proverb recognizes the harmful potential of speech. Within the household, a parent's words carry particular influence because the child depends upon that adult for instruction, protection, and guidance.

Correction sometimes requires serious and uncomfortable statements. A child who has lied should understand that dishonesty damages trust. A young person who has deliberately harmed someone must recognize the seriousness of that conduct. Parents should be willing to address wrongdoing clearly.

Yet the actual offense should be described accurately. A dishonest act needs correction for dishonesty. It does not require the parent to announce that the child's entire character is worthless or that the future is already ruined.

Sarcasm can also become a familiar habit. Some adults ridicule a child's questions, appearance, interests, or mistakes and later insist that the remarks were merely humorous. The child may gradually become reluctant to speak openly because another embarrassing response is expected.

Ephesians 4:29 (KJV)

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

Paul's instruction concerns the speech of believers. Parents can apply it to the manner in which they address children, especially when emotions are running high.

A father or mother may need to speak firmly, but firmness does not require degrading language. When the adult recognizes that a conversation has become filled with accusations or insults, it may be wise to stop and reconsider the response.

This brings us to the importance of the fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22–23 (KJV)

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."

In A.R.T. teaching, I have emphasized the importance of abiding in the Lord and allowing His fruit to influence the way we treat people. The qualities Paul identifies are relevant to ordinary family relationships, especially when parents are disappointed, exhausted, or angry.

Longsuffering deserves particular attention because raising children involves repeated instruction, ordinary immaturity, and the gradual development of judgment. A young person may need to hear an explanation more than once. A child may understand a rule but struggle to apply it consistently.

Gentleness and temperance are equally important. The parent may possess the authority to impose consequences, yet still needs the ability to govern personal speech and behavior.

James 3:17–18 (KJV)

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

The description of heavenly wisdom provides a valuable standard for Christian relationships. Being "easy to be intreated" encourages a willingness to listen and consider circumstances. The reference to being "without partiality" is particularly relevant when an adult is tempted to treat one child more harshly than another.

I have sometimes expressed this teaching in a simple way: **Abide in longsuffering, and you will never have to be mean.**

The expression is intended to encourage deliberate attention to the fruit of the Spirit before irritation becomes harmful conduct. It does not suggest that parents will never experience frustration or make mistakes. We are human beings who continue learning and growing.

What matters is our willingness to recognize when our responses are becoming destructive and to seek God's help in developing better habits.

WHEN PRESSURE BECOMES AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SELF-EXAMINATION

The Ketchup Test can be useful because it gives an ordinary picture to something that might otherwise remain difficult to recognize.

A parent who has spent years reacting angrily may regard the habit as a normal part of family life. Someone who frequently uses sarcasm may believe that everyone

understands the remarks are harmless. Another adult may consider intimidation necessary because the children become quiet whenever the parent raises the voice.

Yet the atmosphere of the household may tell a different story.

Children may begin concealing mistakes, avoiding difficult conversations, or watching the adult's moods before asking ordinary questions. They may imitate the parent's harsh language toward siblings or classmates. Some become argumentative, while others withdraw.

These responses are not inevitable, and individual children react differently. Nevertheless, they demonstrate why parents should examine the example being established through daily conduct.

A parent who recognizes an inappropriate reaction has an opportunity to demonstrate accountability. The adult can acknowledge having spoken unfairly, explain that the conduct was wrong, and make a serious effort to change the pattern.

The original misconduct should still be addressed. A father who overreacts to his son's dishonesty can apologize for insulting language while requiring the son to take responsibility for the lie. A mother who has shouted because she was exhausted can acknowledge her response while maintaining a reasonable household expectation.

Children benefit from seeing that responsibility applies throughout the family.

Developing different habits may require sustained effort. A parent may need to recognize the familiar urge to accuse, threaten, or assume the worst and then consider what response would be appropriate to the actual situation.

Prayer can become part of that process. So can thoughtful conversation, practical assistance, and a willingness to reconsider long-established patterns.

John 16:13 (KJV)

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come."

Jesus spoke these words to His disciples concerning the coming Spirit of truth. In Christian life, the passage has encouraged believers to depend upon the Holy Spirit rather than assuming that personal understanding is always sufficient.

Parents who seek God's guidance should also remain willing to examine their own conduct honestly. Prayer should never become an excuse to disregard clear evidence of harmful behavior or to avoid taking practical responsibility for necessary changes.

In A.R.T., I have emphasized that the Christian walk involves abiding in the Lord while allowing His influence to reach our relationships. Family life provides daily opportunities to practice that teaching because the people closest to us often experience our responses under the greatest pressure.

We may have developed habits over many years, and some will require considerable patience to change. Nevertheless, recognizing those habits can help us become more thoughtful in the way we respond to the people entrusted to our care.

CONCLUSION

The Ketchup Test asks Christian parents to consider what emerges from within them when pressure is applied from outside. The pressures of family life are real, and children sometimes behave in ways that require firm correction. Yet the adult's response can be influenced by personal history, fatigue, resentment, fear, and long-established habits.

Before a knee-jerk reaction becomes an accusation or punishment, it is worth considering what has been stirred within the adult.

The parent who recognizes a harmful response can seek God's help, exercise greater restraint, and address the child's conduct with fairness. That willingness to examine ourselves is an important part of allowing Christian faith to reach the relationships within our own homes.

CHAPTER 7 REVIEW

1. Knee-Jerk Reaction

A quick, largely unexamined response to an event or statement. In parenting, it may involve anger, accusations, threats, or punishment before the adult has considered the circumstances.

For consideration: Does the parent's first impression accurately reflect what happened?

2. The Ketchup Test

Taveau D'Arcy's A.R.T. teaching illustration concerning what emerges from within a person when pressure is applied from outside.

A plastic ketchup bottle provides the picture: pressure is applied to the outside, and the contents inside come out.

The illustration encourages personal examination of the attitudes, words, and reactions that emerge during frustration, conflict, and other relational pressures.

Clarification: The Ketchup Test is a teaching illustration for self-examination, not a clinical assessment or a method of claiming perfect knowledge of another person's heart.

3. A.R.T. — Abiding Relationship Theology

A Christian teaching framework emphasizing an abiding relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and the importance of allowing spiritual growth and revival to influence everyday relationships.

One of its central concerns is that the fruit of the Spirit and heavenly wisdom should become evident in the way people treat one another.

4. External Pressure

The circumstances and demands that place strain upon a person, including financial concerns, family disagreements, exhaustion, rejection, criticism, and unexpected difficulties.

External pressure can influence behavior, but it does not automatically excuse harmful conduct.

5. Internal Response

The thoughts, emotions, attitudes, and habits that become evident when a person experiences pressure.

The Ketchup Test invites adults to examine their own internal responses rather than immediately assigning blame to someone else.

6. Emotional Trigger

A circumstance that produces an unusually strong reaction, sometimes because it resembles an earlier experience.

The term should be used carefully, without assuming that every angry response originates in past trauma.

7. Longsuffering

A quality identified among the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23. It concerns patient endurance and restraint, particularly when circumstances or relationships become difficult.

For consideration: How might longsuffering influence a parent's response to repeated mistakes or frustrating behavior?

8. Temperance

A KJV term appearing in Galatians 5:23 that refers to self-control or mastery over one's conduct.

In parenting, it is especially relevant when anger or embarrassment threatens to influence correction.

9. Heavenly Wisdom

The wisdom described in James 3:17–18 as pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

Its qualities offer Christian adults a basis for examining their conduct within family relationships.

10. Verbal Degradation

Speech that demeans another person's intelligence, worth, character, or future. Repeated personal insults and humiliating accusations can damage family communication and trust.

11. Resentment

Lingering anger or bitterness connected to disappointment, mistreatment, or perceived unfairness. Unresolved resentment may influence how an adult interprets and responds to a child's behavior.

12. Parental Self-Examination

The willingness to consider personal motives, assumptions, words, and reactions.

For Christian parents, self-examination may involve prayer, honest reflection, and recognizing when personal history or emotional pressure is interfering with judgment.

13. Accountability After an Outburst

The adult's responsibility to acknowledge inappropriate speech or conduct and make necessary changes.

A parent's apology does not automatically cancel the child's responsibility for the original wrongdoing.

14. Proportionate Correction

A response suited to the seriousness of the misconduct and the child's age, understanding, and circumstances.

The parent's emotional intensity should not determine the severity of correction.

15. Abiding in Relationships

The practical expression of Christian faith through continuing fellowship with the Lord and conduct shaped by His Word.

In A.R.T. teaching, abiding includes attention to the fruit demonstrated in ordinary relationships, particularly during disagreement, disappointment, and pressure.

Point to Ponder

When outside pressure is applied, what comes out of the adult? How can prayer, self-examination, and the fruit of the Spirit help a parent respond with greater wisdom?

Closing Consideration

The Ketchup Test begins with examining ourselves. Its purpose is to encourage growth in our own hearts and relationships rather than provide another reason to accuse or condemn someone else.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE BACKSTORY OF THE ADULT

What We Bring Into Parenting Before the Child Has Done Anything Wrong

THE ADULT HAS A HISTORY, TOO

Every parent brings a personal history into the relationship with a child. Long before becoming a father, mother, stepparent, guardian, or grandparent, that adult was a human being with experiences, expectations, disappointments, and ideas about how people should behave. Some were raised in affectionate homes where discipline was firm but reasonable. Others grew up with unpredictable anger, humiliation, neglect, favoritism, or excessive control. Still others experienced a mixture of loving care and unhealthy behavior that they did not fully recognize until much later.

These earlier experiences can influence the adult's understanding of authority. A person raised by an approachable father may find it natural to listen to a child's questions. Someone who grew up with an intimidating parent may believe that children should remain silent whenever an adult speaks. A mother who experienced little affection may struggle to express warmth, even while sincerely loving her children. Another parent may be determined to provide so much affection and freedom that reasonable correction becomes difficult.

I believe we need to examine the backstory of the adult because parenting involves more than knowing which rules to establish or which consequences to impose. It also involves the attitudes, habits, and expectations that adults have developed over many years.

A parent may know the Bible, attend church regularly, and sincerely desire to raise children in the Christian faith while remaining unaware of certain unhealthy patterns learned earlier in life. Familiarity with religious teaching does not automatically remove habits of intimidation, excessive criticism, jealousy, or resentment.

The adult may have spent decades responding to frustration in a particular manner. When a child behaves unexpectedly, those established responses can emerge before the parent has considered what the situation actually requires.

An adult who was repeatedly embarrassed as a child may become especially sensitive to public disagreement. Someone who was punished severely for minor mistakes may regard ordinary childhood immaturity as a serious character defect. A person who experienced rejection may become unusually troubled when a teenager begins seeking appropriate independence.

These possibilities deserve consideration without turning every parental difficulty into a diagnosis. Human behavior is complicated. Exhaustion, financial pressure, illness, present family circumstances, and individual temperament also influence reactions. We should be careful about assuming that every angry response must originate in childhood trauma.

Nevertheless, when the same difficulty repeatedly appears in an adult's relationships, examining personal history may help explain why certain situations produce such strong reactions.

THE ADULT'S EMOTIONAL FRAMEWORK

A child's experience of parental authority is influenced by the emotional atmosphere that adults establish in the household. Some families have a dependable pattern of affection, conversation, and reasonable expectations. Others operate under continual tension because one or more adults are carrying unresolved anger or disappointment.

People sometimes speak about an emotional *love tank*, meaning the sense of being loved, valued, and emotionally supported. I use that expression here as a familiar illustration, rather than a precise psychological measurement. An adult who feels continually rejected, unsupported, or unappreciated may become more vulnerable to resentment and impatience.

That does not excuse mistreatment. It helps explain why the parent's inner condition deserves attention.

A mother who has worked several jobs, cared for family members, and received little practical assistance may become exhausted by ordinary household demands. A father experiencing financial insecurity may react sharply to an unexpected expense. A stepparent who feels excluded from family decisions may begin resenting the attention a spouse gives to a child.

Such circumstances can affect how adults interpret behavior. A child asking for help may be viewed as another burden. A teenager seeking independence may be regarded as ungrateful. An ordinary disagreement may seem like one more example of being disrespected.

The parent needs to recognize when the child's actual conduct has become entangled with the adult's personal disappointments.

Proverbs 16:32 (KJV)

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

The proverb values the ability to govern one's own spirit. This responsibility belongs to adults regardless of the circumstances that may have contributed to their frustration.

A parent who has endured hardship deserves understanding and appropriate support. Yet children should not be expected to absorb the adult's accumulated anger, compensate for an unhappy marriage, or repair disappointments that occurred before they were born.

WHEN HARSH RELIGION BECOMES THE MODEL FOR AUTHORITY

Some adults acquire their ideas about authority through religious environments that emphasize fear, accusation, punishment, and unquestioning submission.

I have observed forms of religious conduct in which the person presenting himself as a defender of righteousness appears more interested in condemning people than in understanding them. The outward appearance may be stern, the language severe, and the attitude continually suspicious.

We have seen public religious demonstrations in which people carry placards announcing condemnation, shout accusations at strangers, or even picket funerals. Families already experiencing grief may be confronted by people who believe that their public denunciations represent God's will.

I find such behavior deeply troubling.

These examples are relevant to Christian parenting because some adults develop a similar understanding of authority within the household. They begin to believe that the person who speaks most severely, identifies the most faults, or creates the greatest fear must be the strongest spiritual leader.

The result can resemble a religious caricature: the bony, finger-pointing figure who seems perpetually prepared to announce judgment upon someone else. I have sometimes described this sort of character as a **prophet of the pointing finger**—the person whose entire approach to ministry appears to consist of identifying what is wrong with everybody.

The illustration is intentionally pointed because the behavior deserves examination. However, I am discussing an attitude and a manner of treating people, rather than claiming that every stern religious person has the same motives.

A child raised under continual condemnation may begin associating God with the adult's harshness. If every mistake produces an accusation of rebellion, every disagreement is interpreted as spiritual defiance, and every question is treated as evidence of a bad

heart, the child may have difficulty distinguishing biblical teaching from the parent's personal temperament.

Ephesians 6:4 (KJV)

"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Paul gives fathers a responsibility to raise their children while warning them against provoking those children to wrath. This instruction deserves careful attention in households where religious language is frequently used to defend anger or intimidation.

Christian parents should certainly teach Scripture and address wrongdoing. Yet the manner in which they exercise authority remains important.

A father who demands unquestioning obedience while refusing to acknowledge personal mistakes may teach his children that authority is above accountability. A mother who continually invokes spiritual accusations during ordinary disagreements may create confusion about the difference between a biblical command and her personal judgment.

I believe parents should be especially careful about claiming to know a child's motives through supposed spiritual insight. Adults can observe behavior, ask questions, consider circumstances, and make reasonable judgments. They do not possess perfect knowledge of another human being's heart.

A child may be dishonest, disrespectful, or deliberately disobedient. Such behavior should be addressed appropriately. But ordinary immaturity, confusion, fear, or disagreement should not automatically become evidence of demonic influence or a permanently rebellious character.

James 3:17–18 (KJV)

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

The description of heavenly wisdom gives Christian adults a meaningful standard for examining their conduct. The phrase "easy to be intreated" is especially relevant to someone exercising authority. It suggests a willingness to receive an appeal and consider what another person is saying.

Parents may still need to make unpopular decisions, but they should not regard every reasonable question as a threat to their position.

"THEY PUSHED MY BUTTONS!" — WHEN IRRITATIONS BECOME EXCUSES

Here is another part of the adult's backstory that deserves serious examination: the excuses people make after behaving badly.

Modern conversation contains many expressions that allow adults to describe their misconduct as though someone else caused it.

"They pushed my buttons."

"That child made me lose my temper."

"She knows exactly how to set me off."

"He made me so mad that I couldn't help myself."

"I just snapped."

"They got on my last nerve."

"I was having a bad day."

"That's just how I am."

"I can't help it. I was raised that way."

"You don't know what I've been through."

"Well, if they had listened the first time, I wouldn't have had to act like that."

Some of these statements describe genuine frustration. Children can be persistent, argumentative, and difficult to manage. A parent may be physically exhausted, financially strained, or carrying responsibilities that other people do not understand.

Nevertheless, I want to examine the point at which an explanation becomes an excuse for mistreatment.

A child can behave disrespectfully without possessing the power to make an adult become cruel. A teenager may deliberately provoke an argument, but the parent remains responsible for threatening language, degrading accusations, or excessive punishment. The adult's history may explain why certain situations are difficult, yet it does not transfer responsibility for the adult's conduct onto the child.

I find the expression "They pushed my buttons" particularly revealing.

Q. Who is responsible for the buttons?

If a particular remark repeatedly produces an uncontrolled reaction, the adult needs to examine that pattern. Perhaps the child has learned that a certain kind of argument causes the parent to become upset. The child may require correction for deliberately provoking others. But the parent must also learn to govern the response.

Otherwise, the adult is effectively declaring that another person possesses control over his or her behavior.

That is a troubling admission for someone who expects children to develop self-control.

Consider a father who repeatedly tells his son, "You made me do that." The father may have shouted, insulted, or imposed an unreasonable punishment. The child is then expected to accept responsibility for the father's conduct because the original disagreement began with the child's misconduct.

This creates confusion about accountability. The son may indeed have disobeyed. The father may also have behaved wrongly. Both matters deserve examination.

A similar problem occurs when a mother says, "If you hadn't upset me, I wouldn't have said those things." The statement may sound like an explanation, but it can also become a way of avoiding responsibility for hurtful words.

The child's conduct should be addressed honestly, while the adult acknowledges the manner in which the response was handled.

James 1:19–20 (KJV)

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

James does not make an exception for adults who have endured an unusually difficult day. The passage calls believers to exercise restraint, even when circumstances are frustrating.

This does not mean that every parent will remain perfectly composed. Human beings make mistakes. Some circumstances can be extraordinarily stressful, and adults may need support or assistance in managing them.

But repeated excuses can prevent necessary change.

The parent who continually says, "That's just how I am," may stop considering whether personal habits need improvement. Someone who blames every outburst on the behavior of others may never examine the anger that repeatedly emerges from within.

In A.R.T. teaching, I have used the Ketchup Test to illustrate what happens when pressure is applied from outside and something within begins to come out. The illustration is particularly relevant here.

External pressure may reveal what a person has been carrying internally. Recognizing that influence can help the adult understand the reaction. The next responsibility is to consider what needs to change.

A parent who has developed a habit of shouting may need to practice responding more deliberately. Someone who resorts to sarcasm may need to examine how those remarks affect the child. An adult who becomes frightened by disagreement may benefit from considering whether an earlier experience is influencing the present situation.

The process may require prayer, honest counsel, practical support, and sustained effort. Whatever assistance is needed, the child should not be made responsible for the adult's refusal to address harmful conduct.

THE "WOE IS ME" DEFENSE

There is a related pattern in which an adult responds to concerns about personal behavior by shifting the entire conversation toward personal suffering.

A child or another family member raises a concern about harsh treatment, and the adult immediately begins describing everything he or she has endured.

"Nobody appreciates what I do around here."

"After everything I've sacrificed, this is how you treat me?"

"You have no idea how hard my life has been."

"Everybody is always against me."

"I'm the one who does everything, and I'm the one who gets blamed."

Such statements may contain elements of truth. Many parents make extraordinary sacrifices for their families. Some are raising children alone, working several jobs, caring for elderly relatives, or managing serious difficulties without dependable assistance.

Their sacrifices deserve recognition.

However, those sacrifices do not make the adult's conduct immune from examination.

When a parent responds to every concern by presenting a long account of personal suffering, the original issue may never be addressed. The child may begin feeling guilty for raising a legitimate concern, even when the adult's behavior was genuinely harmful.

This can become especially confusing in religious households where children are taught to honor their parents. Honoring parents is an important biblical responsibility, but it should not be used to prevent reasonable discussion of mistreatment.

The adult may need understanding, appreciation, and practical assistance. The child may also need protection from unfair treatment. Both concerns can be acknowledged without requiring one person to deny the other's experience.

There is another form of blame-shifting that deserves attention. An adult may admit having behaved badly but immediately minimize the conduct by comparing it with something worse.

"At least I didn't hit you."

"You should be grateful you have a parent who cares enough to correct you."

"My father treated me much worse."

"Other children have it harder than you do."

These comparisons may describe real differences in experience. Yet they do not establish that the parent's present conduct was appropriate.

The fact that an adult experienced harsher treatment during childhood does not make every lesser form of mistreatment acceptable.

Christian parents should be willing to evaluate their behavior according to sound judgment and Scripture rather than relying upon comparisons with someone else's failures.

THE BACKSTORY CAN EXPLAIN, BUT THE ADULT MUST STILL CHOOSE

A person's upbringing can exert a powerful influence upon habits and expectations. Adults who were raised under severe discipline may sincerely believe that harshness is necessary for children to develop responsibility. Others who experienced humiliation may become determined never to correct their children firmly, even when reasonable boundaries are needed.

Both patterns deserve thoughtful consideration.

Some parents need to learn that discipline can be administered without intimidation or degradation. Others need reassurance that establishing reasonable expectations does not automatically make them cruel.

The aim is to develop mature judgment rather than merely repeat or reject everything learned during childhood.

Colossians 3:21 (KJV)

"Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged."

Paul's warning should encourage parents to consider the effects of their conduct. Children need instruction, appropriate correction, and dependable guidance. They also need adults who are willing to examine whether repeated criticism, unfairness, or uncontrolled anger is producing discouragement.

The backstory of the adult can help explain why certain habits developed. It can also identify areas where the parent may need assistance.

An adult who recognizes a pattern of intimidation may need to learn different ways of addressing misconduct. Someone who has difficulty controlling anger may need practical strategies and appropriate support. A parent who feels overwhelmed by responsibilities may require rest, dependable assistance, or changes in household routines.

If a child is being frightened, threatened, or physically harmed, protecting the child must take priority while the adult obtains necessary help.

I believe it is important to remember that adults can change. Long-established habits may require sustained effort, particularly when they have been reinforced over many years. Yet recognizing a harmful pattern is a meaningful beginning.

The parent who is willing to acknowledge personal wrongdoing can demonstrate honesty and responsibility. An apology may be necessary when the adult has spoken cruelly or imposed an unfair consequence. That acknowledgment should be accompanied by a genuine effort to behave differently.

Children can benefit from observing adults who take responsibility for their conduct. They learn that maturity includes the willingness to reconsider one's actions, receive correction, and make improvements.

The Christian parent who seeks to follow the Lord should be willing to apply those principles personally.

Psalm 139:23–24 (KJV)

"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:

And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

David's prayer invites God's examination of the heart. For parents, it offers a meaningful example of personal humility before the Lord.

The adult may have been raised under harsh authority, suffered rejection, experienced disappointment, or carried responsibilities that few people understand. Those experiences deserve appropriate consideration. Nevertheless, the child standing before the parent is a separate human being who deserves to be treated according to the present circumstances.

The parent must learn to recognize the difference between the child's actual misconduct and the adult's emotional history.

CONCLUSION

The backstory of the adult matters because earlier experiences can influence the way parents understand authority, respond to disagreement, and administer correction.

Some inherited habits are worth preserving. Others require serious reconsideration.

When an adult recognizes that personal history, resentment, fear, or exhaustion is influencing the treatment of a child, that awareness creates an opportunity for change. The parent can address the child's conduct while also accepting responsibility for personal words and actions.

A difficult upbringing may help explain why an adult struggles. It should never become a permanent excuse for passing the same harm to another generation.

CHAPTER EIGHT REVIEW

1. Backstory

The earlier experiences, relationships, circumstances, and learned habits that help explain how a person developed particular attitudes and responses.

In parenting, the adult's backstory may influence expectations about obedience, discipline, affection, authority, and family relationships.

2. Emotional Framework

The established patterns of thinking, feeling, and responding through which a person interprets experiences and relationships.

A parent's emotional framework may influence whether a child's question is interpreted as curiosity, disagreement, disrespect, or rebellion.

3. Emotional Love Tank

A familiar illustration describing a person's sense of being loved, valued, supported, and emotionally connected.

Clarification: The expression is metaphorical and should not be treated as a precise psychological measurement.

4. Childhood Conditioning

Habits, expectations, and responses learned through repeated experiences during childhood.

Some conditioning may be beneficial, while other learned patterns may require reconsideration as an adult.

5. Blame-Shifting

Redirecting responsibility for one's conduct toward another person or circumstance.

Examples include a parent blaming a child for the parent's uncontrolled anger or insisting that personal mistreatment occurred only because the child was difficult.

For consideration: Can the child be responsible for misconduct while the adult remains responsible for the reaction? Yes.

6. "They Pushed My Buttons"

A common expression suggesting that another person's behavior produced a strong emotional reaction.

The expression can describe frustration, but it becomes an excuse when used to deny responsibility for threatening, degrading, or harmful conduct.

7. Excuse-Making

Using explanations, comparisons, or circumstances to avoid acknowledging personal responsibility.

An explanation may help identify why something happened. An excuse may prevent the person from addressing what needs to change.

8. Victim Mentality

An informal expression sometimes used to describe a persistent pattern of interpreting events primarily through personal injury or unfair treatment.

Clarification: This expression should be used cautiously. Genuine victims of mistreatment deserve understanding and protection. The concern in this chapter is the use of personal suffering to avoid responsibility for present harmful behavior.

9. "Woe Is Me" Defense

A conversational description of shifting attention from one's own conduct toward a lengthy account of personal hardship.

For example, a parent confronted about harsh speech may respond by emphasizing personal sacrifices rather than addressing the words spoken.

10. Religious Intimidation

The use of spiritual accusations, religious authority, or frightening claims about God's judgment to control another person.

Within families, this may include treating ordinary disagreement as spiritual rebellion or claiming knowledge of a child's motives without sufficient basis.

11. The Prophet of the Pointing Finger

The author's illustrative expression for a harsh, continually accusatory religious attitude that appears preoccupied with identifying and condemning other people's faults.

Clarification: The expression is a teaching illustration, not a biblical office or formal theological classification.

12. Generational Patterns

Behaviors, expectations, and relationship habits that may be repeated across generations.

These patterns are influences rather than unavoidable destinies. Adults can recognize unhealthy habits and develop different ways of responding.

13. Parental Self-Government

The adult's responsibility to regulate personal anger, speech, reactions, and conduct while exercising authority.

Self-government becomes particularly important when the adult is tired, embarrassed, frightened, or dealing with unresolved personal concerns.

14. Emotional Projection

In psychology, projection refers to attributing one's own feelings or characteristics to another person.

In everyday conversation, the expression is sometimes used more loosely to describe reacting to a child as though the child represents an earlier painful relationship.

Clarification: These meanings should not be confused, and parents should avoid casually diagnosing another person's motives.

15. Accountability

The responsibility to acknowledge and answer for one's conduct.

Children are accountable for behavior according to their maturity and understanding. Adults remain accountable for the manner in which they exercise authority.

16. Intergenerational Change

The process of recognizing and changing harmful patterns that have been repeated within families.

A parent who was raised under harsh or unpredictable authority may learn to establish firm boundaries while treating children with greater patience and fairness.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Which parenting habits were learned during childhood, and which have been reconsidered through adult experience and biblical study?

2. When an adult says, "They pushed my buttons," is the statement explaining frustration or avoiding responsibility?

3. How can a parent acknowledge genuine personal hardship without making children responsible for that hardship?

4. Does the adult's religious language encourage sound correction, or has it become a way to defend anger and intimidation?

5. What inherited patterns might deserve change before they are passed to another generation?

Closing ConsiderationA parent's personal history may help explain certain reactions, but it does not determine every future choice. Recognizing the backstory creates an opportunity to exercise authority with greater wisdom, responsibility, and concern for the child.

CHAPTER NINE

WHEN THE PARENT HAS A FAVORITE CHILD

Favoritism, Jealousy, and the Responsibility to Love Without Partiality

WHEN PERSONAL PREFERENCE ENTERS THE FAMILY

Parents do not always find every child's personality equally easy to understand. One child may be affectionate, cooperative, and eager to please, while another is independent, questioning, unusually sensitive, or determined to do things differently. Some children resemble a parent in appearance or temperament, and others remind the adult of a spouse, former spouse, grandparent, or another family member.

These differences are part of ordinary family life. Children are individual human beings, each developing a personality, abilities, interests, and ways of relating to others. A parent may enjoy certain activities with one child more readily than with another, particularly when they share interests or similar temperaments.

The difficulty begins when personal preference influences the fairness of the parent's treatment.

A father may naturally enjoy spending time with a son who shares his interest in sports, music, or practical projects. Another child may prefer reading, artistic activities, or quieter pursuits. If the father begins treating the second child as less valuable because their interests differ, an ordinary preference has become a relational problem.

A mother may find one child's affectionate personality especially comforting. Another child may be less demonstrative, more independent, or more likely to ask difficult questions. Without recognizing what is happening, the mother may begin responding more warmly to the affectionate child while becoming impatient with the other.

Children often notice these differences before adults acknowledge them.

The favored child may receive more generous explanations, greater freedom, and additional opportunities. When that child makes a mistake, the parent readily considers the circumstances. Another child may encounter suspicion, criticism, or a punishment that seems more severe for similar conduct.

Over time, such differences can affect the relationships among siblings. Children may begin competing for approval, resenting one another, or assuming that family affection must be earned by becoming the kind of person the parent prefers.

I believe Christian parents need to examine these patterns because favoritism can become so familiar that the adult regards it as normal.

The parent may sincerely love every child while failing to recognize that affection is being expressed unevenly. A father or mother may insist that there are no favorites, yet the children experience a different reality through daily decisions, words, and treatment.

The important consideration is whether personal preference has begun interfering with justice, patience, and reasonable parental judgment.

James 3:17 (KJV)

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

The phrase **"without partiality"** deserves particular attention in Christian parenting. James is describing heavenly wisdom generally, but the principle has clear relevance to the family. Adults who seek to exercise godly wisdom should be willing to examine whether personal preferences are affecting the way they treat their children.

Fairness does not require pretending that children have identical needs. Age, maturity, understanding, individual abilities, and circumstances must be considered. A younger child may need closer supervision than an older teenager. A child experiencing unusual difficulty may require additional time and assistance.

Such differences can be reasonable. Favoritism becomes evident when the adult's personal affection or irritation determines who receives patience, who is believed, who is blamed, and who is treated as important.

ISAAC, REBEKAH, ESAU, AND JACOB

The Bible gives us a particularly revealing account of parental favoritism in the family of Isaac and Rebekah.

Genesis 25:27–28 (KJV)

"And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.

And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob."

The Scripture states the difference plainly. Isaac loved Esau, and Rebekah loved Jacob. The passage even identifies Isaac's enjoyment of Esau's venison as a reason for his preference.

The boys had different personalities and interests. Esau was associated with hunting and life in the field, while Jacob was described as a plain man dwelling in tents. Their father and mother developed different attachments to them.

We should not add details that the passage does not supply, but the distinction in parental affection is unmistakable.

Later, when Isaac intended to bless Esau, Rebekah intervened by arranging for Jacob to deceive his father. Jacob disguised himself as Esau, and Isaac, whose eyesight had become dim, gave him the blessing intended for his brother.

Genesis 27:18–19 (KJV)

"And he came unto his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I; who art thou, my son?

And Jacob said unto his father, I am Esau thy firstborn; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me."

The deception was serious. Rebekah encouraged it, and Jacob participated in it. When Esau learned what had happened, the family conflict became intense.

Genesis 27:41 (KJV)

"And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob."

The account contains more than parental favoritism. It involves the birthright, the blessing, deception, personal choices, and God's earlier word concerning the two sons. Those elements should not be ignored when interpreting the passage.

Nevertheless, the family's divided affections form an important part of the narrative. The parents' preferences became involved in a conflict that separated the brothers and brought considerable distress into the household.

Christian parents can learn from this without claiming that every instance of favoritism will produce the same outcome.

A child who believes that a brother or sister is preferred may begin interpreting ordinary family decisions through that expectation. A favored child may become accustomed to

special treatment. Another may develop resentment, discouragement, or an intense desire to win approval.

The parent may not intend to create rivalry, but repeated unfairness can influence how children relate to one another.

The family of Isaac and Rebekah reminds us that parental affection and personal preference deserve careful examination, especially when adults begin taking sides.

JACOB AND JOSEPH: FAVORITISM CONTINUES INTO ANOTHER GENERATION

The biblical account becomes even more significant when we consider Jacob's later treatment of his own children.

Jacob had experienced the divided affections of Isaac and Rebekah. Yet as a father, he developed a particularly strong preference for Joseph.

Genesis 37:3–4 (KJV)

"Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours.

And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him."

The passage directly connects Jacob's greater affection for Joseph with the brothers' resentment.

Joseph's brothers recognized the unequal treatment. The special coat became a visible expression of their father's preference, and their hostility toward Joseph increased.

The subsequent account includes Joseph's dreams, his brothers' envy, their decision to sell him, and the suffering that followed. Each person remains responsible for his own conduct. Jacob's favoritism did not excuse the brothers' cruelty.

Yet the Scripture does not conceal the family atmosphere in which their resentment developed.

Parents should consider how visible favoritism can affect children who are already struggling with jealousy or insecurity.

A child may become convinced that nothing he or she accomplishes will ever equal the achievements of the favored sibling. Another may attempt to gain attention through misconduct because positive efforts seem to go unnoticed.

Some children become competitive. Others withdraw or develop bitterness toward the sibling who receives greater affection.

The favored child may also experience difficulties. Special treatment can create unrealistic expectations, resentment from brothers and sisters, or a mistaken belief that ordinary rules do not apply equally.

These responses are possibilities rather than unavoidable outcomes. Children differ in temperament and in the ways they interpret family relationships. Nevertheless, the biblical narrative provides a serious reason for parents to consider whether their conduct is contributing to unnecessary rivalry.

I find it especially striking that favoritism appears in more than one generation of this family. Jacob knew what it was to grow up in a household where the parents preferred different sons. Yet he later showed a preference that his own children clearly recognized.

Adults do not always recognize that they are repeating patterns from their upbringing.

A person may strongly dislike certain features of childhood family life while unconsciously adopting similar habits when raising children. Familiar behavior can become so deeply established that it seems normal until someone is willing to examine it.

The purpose of studying these biblical accounts is to learn from what Scripture actually records and consider how those lessons may apply to our own conduct.

WHEN A PARENT FEELS JEALOUS OF A CHILD

There is another subject I want to discuss because it is seldom addressed openly: the possibility that an adult may experience jealousy toward a child or young person.

We usually think of jealousy as something that occurs between siblings, spouses, friends, or people competing for recognition. Yet adults are human beings with personal histories, disappointments, insecurities, and desires. Under certain circumstances, a child's confidence, opportunities, appearance, accomplishments, or relationships may stir an uncomfortable feeling within an adult.

I have personally recognized how such a feeling can arise, even briefly.

I recall noticing a confident fourteen-year-old and becoming aware of a momentary feeling of envy. The important matter was recognizing the feeling and refusing to welcome or cultivate it.

I share this because mature Christian adults should be willing to examine their own hearts rather than assume that age, religious experience, or a position of authority makes them incapable of inappropriate attitudes.

A young person may possess qualities that an adult wishes had been encouraged during his or her own childhood. Perhaps the child is confident, socially comfortable, talented, attractive, or surrounded by opportunities that the adult did not have.

A parent who experienced severe restrictions or continual criticism may feel an unexpected resentment toward a son or daughter who is growing up with greater freedom and encouragement.

Someone who struggled for years with insecurity may find it difficult to understand a child who speaks confidently and expects to be heard.

These feelings require personal honesty.

The child has not committed wrongdoing by possessing qualities or opportunities that the adult lacked. Nor should a young person be made to feel guilty for developing confidence, ability, or healthy independence.

If jealousy begins influencing the adult's conduct, the parent may become unnecessarily critical. Achievements are minimized, harmless enthusiasm is treated as vanity, or the child is repeatedly reminded of personal shortcomings.

A mother might become irritated when her daughter receives attention or praise. A father might resent a son's abilities or opportunities, especially if the father feels disappointed by his own experiences.

Such possibilities should not become grounds for casually accusing parents of jealousy. We cannot assume another person's hidden motives merely because a disagreement occurs.

However, adults can examine their own hearts.

Psalm 139:23–24 (KJV)

"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:

And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

David's prayer provides a meaningful example of inviting God's examination of personal motives.

When an inappropriate feeling becomes apparent, the adult has an opportunity to address it before it develops into harmful conduct. Recognizing envy does not require

surrendering to it. A parent can acknowledge the feeling before the Lord, refuse to nourish resentment, and continue treating the child with fairness and affection.

In my A.R.T. teaching, I have emphasized the importance of allowing our relationship with the Lord to influence our relationships with real human beings. That includes recognizing what may be taking place within ourselves before personal emotions begin affecting others.

A child should be free to grow, learn, and develop without becoming the target of an adult's unresolved disappointments.

WHEN FAVORITISM INFLUENCES DISCIPLINE AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Favoritism may be especially noticeable when children require correction.

Consider a household in which two children commit similar offenses. The favored child receives a patient explanation and an opportunity to make amends. The other child is immediately accused of being irresponsible, rebellious, or deliberately troublesome.

The parent may insist that the circumstances are different. Sometimes they genuinely are. Children have different histories of behavior, levels of understanding, and responsibilities.

Yet when unequal treatment becomes a consistent pattern, the adult should examine whether personal preference is influencing judgment.

A similar difficulty arises when one child is continually blamed for disagreements among siblings. The parent may have decided long ago that this child is the troublemaker. Whenever conflict occurs, the adult assumes responsibility belongs to the same person before hearing the circumstances.

Over time, the child may become discouraged by the belief that fairness is unavailable.

Other families develop a favored child who is regularly defended. The parent excuses that child's misconduct, minimizes complaints from siblings, or insists that the others are jealous and therefore cannot be believed.

Such patterns can damage trust within the household.

Parents have a responsibility to consider the facts rather than allowing established preferences to determine the outcome of every disagreement.

Colossians 3:21 (KJV)

"Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged."

Paul's warning deserves consideration when a child repeatedly experiences criticism, unfairness, or unequal treatment. The verse does not specifically discuss favoritism, but discouragement is a relevant concern when applying its instruction to family relationships.

Parents should also be aware that favoritism can develop through circumstances beyond personality. A child who resembles a beloved relative may receive special affection. Another who resembles a former spouse associated with painful experiences may encounter unusual impatience.

Blended families can face additional complications. A stepparent may find it easier to bond with a biological child than with a stepchild. That difference in attachment may be understandable, especially when relationships are still developing. However, the adult should take care that personal feelings do not become a reason for humiliation, exclusion, or unfair discipline.

Biological parents also have a responsibility to recognize when a spouse or partner is treating one child unjustly.

Children should not be required to compete for basic respect or protection.

The family may need honest conversation, thoughtful adjustments, and practical assistance to address established patterns. Adults who recognize favoritism should be willing to consider how their behavior is experienced by the children rather than relying entirely upon their own intentions.

A parent may sincerely believe that every child is loved equally. The more difficult question is whether that love is being expressed through fair and dependable conduct.

CHRISTIAN LOVE WITHOUT PARTIALITY

Christian parents have the responsibility to teach children about love, respect, responsibility, and the character of God. Those teachings become more meaningful when they are demonstrated through daily relationships.

A child who is difficult to understand still deserves patient instruction. The young person whose interests differ from the parent's deserves encouragement. A son or daughter who requires additional correction should not be made to feel permanently inferior to a sibling who is easier to manage.

Parents may need to establish different expectations according to age, maturity, or individual circumstances. A child with developmental challenges may require additional assistance. Another may be ready for greater responsibility and independence.

Fairness requires careful consideration of those differences.

It also requires the adult to recognize when personal affection, disappointment, or resentment is interfering with judgment.

Acts 10:34–35 (KJV)

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

Peter's statement concerns God's impartiality as the gospel reaches beyond earlier boundaries. It should be understood within that biblical context. Nevertheless, the principle of impartiality is worth considering when Christian parents examine their own conduct.

A father or mother should not measure a child's value according to popularity, appearance, accomplishments, resemblance to a favored relative, or usefulness in fulfilling the parent's personal ambitions.

Children need to understand that they are valued as human beings, even while being held accountable for their behavior.

The parent who recognizes personal favoritism may need to make deliberate changes. Perhaps more time should be spent listening to the child who has felt overlooked. A disciplinary pattern may need reconsideration. The adult may need to acknowledge having made unfair assumptions or spoken more harshly to one child than another.

Such changes require more than a declaration that the parent intends to be fair. Children often recognize consistency through repeated experiences.

A parent who has shown partiality over many years may need patience while rebuilding trust. The child may remain cautious or skeptical at first, particularly if previous attempts to discuss unfair treatment were dismissed.

The adult should be willing to demonstrate improvement through conduct.

I believe the wisdom described in James 3:17 offers a valuable reminder here. Heavenly wisdom is described as peaceable, gentle, full of mercy and good fruits, and without partiality or hypocrisy.

These qualities are relevant to the everyday responsibilities of raising children, especially when personal preferences threaten to influence judgment.

CONCLUSION

The biblical families of Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, Jacob, and Joseph provide serious examples of how parental favoritism can become involved in jealousy, resentment, deception, and conflict among children.

Christian parents should be willing to examine their own preferences, particularly when one child's personality, accomplishments, or resemblance to another family member produces stronger feelings than those experienced toward a sibling.

Recognizing an inappropriate feeling creates an opportunity to address it before it influences conduct.

Children will differ in temperament, maturity, interests, and abilities. Each deserves to be treated with fairness, appropriate affection, and responsible correction.

The parent who seeks to exercise authority with heavenly wisdom should remain willing to examine personal motives and make necessary changes wherever partiality has entered the family.

CHAPTER NINE REVIEW

VOCABULARY, CLARIFICATIONS, AND POINTS TO PONDER

1. Favoritism

The practice of giving one person preferential treatment because of personal affection, similarity, convenience, or another preference.

Within families, favoritism may influence attention, privileges, discipline, and the interpretation of children's behavior.

2. Partiality

Unequal judgment or treatment influenced by personal preference rather than fair consideration of the circumstances.

James 3:17 describes heavenly wisdom as being "without partiality."

For consideration: Does a parent apply similar standards of honesty, responsibility, and respectful conduct to each child?

3. Sibling Rivalry

Competition, jealousy, or conflict among brothers and sisters. Sibling rivalry may develop for various reasons. Visible parental favoritism can intensify competition for affection or approval.

4. Parental Preference

A parent's natural inclination toward particular personalities, activities, or interests.

Clarification: Enjoying certain activities with one child does not automatically establish unfair favoritism. The concern arises when preference influences the child's treatment or perceived value.

5. Unequal Discipline

Differences in correction or consequences that may be influenced by favoritism, resentment, or assumptions about a child's character.

Different consequences can be reasonable when circumstances differ. Parents should examine whether those differences are fair.

6. Jealousy

An emotional response involving fear of losing affection, attention, position, or another valued relationship.

Within families, jealousy may occur among siblings or influence an adult's response to a child's relationships and accomplishments.

7. Envy

A feeling of discontent or resentment concerning another person's advantages, abilities, possessions, opportunities, or accomplishments.

Clarification: A fleeting feeling can become an occasion for self-examination. The adult remains responsible for deciding whether to encourage the feeling or allow it to influence conduct.

8. Intergenerational Patterns

Attitudes and behaviors that may be repeated across generations.

The biblical account of Jacob illustrates the importance of examining whether familiar family patterns are being repeated.

9. Family Triangulation

A term used in family relationship discussions for situations in which conflict between two people draws in a third person, sometimes creating alliances or divided loyalties.

Clarification: The term is offered as vocabulary for consideration, not as a diagnosis of the biblical families.

10. Blended-Family Favoritism

Preferential treatment involving biological children, stepchildren, or children from earlier relationships.

Differences in attachment may exist, but adults should ensure that children receive fair treatment and appropriate protection.

11. Parental Projection

An expression sometimes used to describe an adult responding to a child through feelings associated with another person or earlier experience.

For example, a child's resemblance to a former spouse may influence the adult's interpretation of behavior.

Clarification: The expression should not be used to make unsupported claims about another person's motives.

12. Discouragement

A loss of confidence, hope, or willingness to continue making an effort.

Colossians 3:21 warns fathers against provoking their children to anger, lest they be discouraged.

13. Impartiality

The practice of considering people and circumstances fairly without allowing improper preferences to determine judgment.

In Christian parenting, impartiality includes treating each child as a person of value while considering individual needs and responsibilities.

14. Self-Examination

The willingness to consider personal motives, attitudes, and conduct.

Psalm 139:23–24 provides an example of prayerful examination before God.

15. Relational Accountability

The responsibility to consider how personal choices affect other people within a relationship.

For parents, this includes recognizing when personal preferences or resentments influence treatment of children.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Do I find one child's personality easier to appreciate than another's? If so, has that preference affected my conduct?

2. When siblings disagree, do I listen to each child's explanation, or do I automatically assume that the same child is responsible?

3. Have I ever minimized one child's accomplishments while giving another child greater recognition?

4. Could an earlier family experience, disappointment, or unresolved relationship be influencing the way I respond to a particular child?

5. Am I willing to recognize envy or jealousy within myself before those feelings become unfair treatment?

6. What can the biblical families of Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, Jacob, and Joseph teach us about the consequences of divided parental affection?

7. How can the wisdom described in James 3:17 help Christian parents exercise authority without partiality?

CLOSING CONSIDERATION

Children may have different personalities, interests, needs, and levels of maturity. Christian parents can recognize those differences while treating each child with fairness and respect.

Personal preferences deserve examination whenever they begin influencing affection, discipline, or family relationships.

CHAPTER TEN

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PENDULUM: AFRAID TO CORRECT

When a Wounded Parent Becomes Afraid to Exercise Authority

WHEN A PAINFUL CHILDHOOD INFLUENCES PARENTAL AUTHORITY

Some parents enter adulthood carrying vivid memories of being raised under excessive control, harsh punishment, humiliation, or continual criticism. They remember being afraid to make mistakes, being forbidden to ask reasonable questions, or receiving punishment without an opportunity to explain what happened. Such experiences may influence their understanding of authority long after they have left their childhood homes.

When these adults become parents themselves, they may sincerely determine that their children will have a different experience. They want their sons and daughters to feel loved, secure, respected, and comfortable approaching them with questions or concerns. Having known what it was like to live under intimidation, they may be especially sensitive to the possibility of repeating those behaviors.

I believe that desire deserves consideration. A parent who recognizes the harmful features of an earlier upbringing has an opportunity to establish a healthier household. However, difficulties can develop when the adult becomes so determined to avoid the former extreme that reasonable correction begins to feel threatening.

A father who was severely punished for minor mistakes may hesitate to impose any consequence upon his own children. A mother who was continually criticized may find it difficult to tell a child that certain behavior is unacceptable. Someone who grew up under rigid restrictions may become reluctant to establish ordinary household rules because those rules remind the adult of earlier experiences.

The parent may begin to associate a child's disappointment with personal wrongdoing. When a son protests a decision or a daughter becomes angry over a reasonable boundary, the adult may feel guilty and immediately reconsider the expectation. Sometimes the parent abandons the decision altogether, even though the original requirement was appropriate.

I describe this as **the other side of the pendulum**. In attempting to escape the harsh authority experienced during childhood, the adult moves toward a different difficulty: becoming afraid to exercise authority at all.

The child's present circumstances deserve to be considered independently of the parent's past. An ordinary disagreement over household responsibilities does not necessarily resemble the intimidation or mistreatment the adult once experienced. A child who becomes upset about being told no may simply be disappointed. The parent's responsibility is to consider whether the expectation is reasonable and whether the correction is being handled appropriately.

Children are still learning to manage frustration, fulfill responsibilities, and consider the needs of other people. They will not always welcome instruction, particularly when it interferes with something they would rather do. Their feelings deserve respectful consideration, but parental decisions cannot depend entirely upon whether those decisions produce immediate happiness.

The adult who experienced harsh authority may need to learn that a child's temporary displeasure is sometimes an ordinary part of family life. A reasonable boundary can be maintained without threats, humiliation, or unnecessary confrontation.

WHEN AFFECTION AND GUILT BEGIN TO GOVERN THE HOUSEHOLD

Parents naturally want their children to feel loved. For someone who grew up without dependable affection, the desire to provide a warmer home may become especially important. Such an adult may enjoy offering encouragement, allowing children to express their opinions, and creating opportunities that were unavailable during his or her own childhood.

Those are worthwhile intentions. Yet affection can become confused with permissiveness when the parent begins avoiding every situation that might disappoint the child.

Consider a mother who asks her child to complete an ordinary household responsibility. The child complains, delays, and eventually refuses. The mother remembers how severely she was treated whenever she failed to satisfy an adult's demands. She begins feeling uncomfortable about insisting that the task be completed and finally does the work herself.

Perhaps this happens occasionally because the family is unusually busy or the child is having a genuinely difficult day. Such flexibility may be reasonable. The problem

develops when surrendering the expectation becomes the established response to resistance.

A father may encounter a similar difficulty when his teenager speaks disrespectfully. The father recognizes the conduct as inappropriate but remains silent because he fears that addressing it will produce an argument. He remembers how his own father reacted angrily to disagreement and wants to avoid becoming that kind of parent. Over time, however, his reluctance to respond allows disrespectful speech to become increasingly familiar within the household.

A child may begin assuming that household expectations are negotiable whenever enough protest is offered. The adult, meanwhile, becomes frustrated by responsibilities that are continually neglected.

This situation can produce considerable confusion. The parent wants peace, yet the avoidance of correction may contribute to repeated arguments and resentment.

Proverbs 29:15 (KJV)

"The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame."

As discussed earlier in this book, Christians differ in their understanding of how the Old Testament rod passages should be applied to contemporary parenting. The verse also refers to *reproof*, which involves correction and instruction. Its warning about leaving a child to himself deserves consideration when parents become reluctant to provide guidance.

Children need opportunities to learn honesty, responsibility, cooperation, respect, and consideration for others. Those qualities develop through teaching, example, practice, and appropriate correction. An adult who consistently avoids addressing misconduct may unintentionally deprive the child of necessary instruction.

I also want to consider the familiar statement, "I just want to be my child's best friend."

There is much to appreciate about a parent and child enjoying one another's company. A healthy relationship may include laughter, shared interests, conversation, affection, and genuine friendship as the child matures. Nevertheless, a parent has responsibilities that an ordinary childhood friend does not carry.

A friend may sympathize when a child dislikes a rule. The parent must determine whether the rule is reasonable, explain its purpose when appropriate, and remain willing to enforce it.

A child may strongly disagree with an adult's decision. The parent should listen and consider the child's explanation, particularly when new information becomes available. However, the adult should not automatically abandon a sound decision simply because disagreement has become uncomfortable.

The parent who fears correction may need to develop confidence in maintaining reasonable expectations while continuing to demonstrate affection.

WHEN GUILT BECOMES A SUBSTITUTE FOR JUDGMENT

There are circumstances in which parental reluctance develops through guilt rather than memories of harsh discipline.

A mother raising children alone may feel sorrow that she cannot provide everything she once hoped to give them. A father who has been absent for extended periods may become reluctant to establish expectations during the limited time he spends with his children. Parents who have experienced divorce, financial hardship, family conflict, or other painful circumstances may worry that additional correction will make an already difficult childhood even harder.

These concerns deserve understanding. Children who have experienced significant changes may need additional reassurance, stability, and patient attention. Nevertheless, their circumstances do not eliminate the need for dependable guidance.

A parent may attempt to compensate for family hardship by purchasing unnecessary gifts, granting privileges that are inappropriate for the child's maturity, or overlooking misconduct. The adult may believe that refusing a request would add to the child's suffering.

The difficulty is that guilt can begin making decisions that should be governed by careful consideration of the child's actual needs.

For example, a child who has experienced the absence of another parent may need affection, dependable routines, opportunities to express concerns, and appropriate support. Allowing the child to disregard reasonable responsibilities may provide temporary relief from conflict, but it does little to develop the habits needed for future relationships.

Blended families can face similar uncertainties. A stepparent may hesitate to correct a child because the family relationship is still developing, while the biological parent may feel protective or guilty about earlier family changes. These situations require thoughtful communication between adults and sensitivity toward the child. They also require a reasonable understanding of household expectations.

Parents cannot remove every disappointment their children will experience. They can, however, provide a dependable relationship in which affection and appropriate correction are both present.

WHAT THE NEW TESTAMENT ACTUALLY REQUIRES OF PARENTS

Christian parents need to examine Scripture carefully when considering the responsibilities of adults and children. Personal experiences may influence how we interpret authority, but those experiences should not become the final measure of what constitutes responsible parenting.

Ephesians 6:1–4 (KJV)

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.

Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;)

That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Paul addresses the responsibilities of children and fathers within the same passage. Children are instructed concerning obedience and honor, while fathers are commanded to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord without provoking them to wrath.

The terms *nurture* and *admonition* deserve attention. They involve upbringing, training, instruction, and corrective guidance. The passage recognizes the adult's responsibility to participate actively in the child's development.

Some parents who have experienced harsh authority become especially concerned about Paul's warning against provoking children to wrath. That concern is understandable, particularly when the adult remembers unreasonable punishments or an intimidating household.

However, the warning should be considered carefully. Children sometimes become angry when they are corrected appropriately. A young child may cry because playtime has ended. A teenager may resent being required to fulfill an agreed responsibility. Such reactions do not automatically establish that the parent has behaved wrongly.

The adult must examine the manner of correction, the fairness of the expectation, and the circumstances surrounding the disagreement.

A father who repeatedly humiliates his children, refuses to hear reasonable explanations, or responds to minor mistakes with excessive anger should take Paul's warning seriously. So should a parent whose continual criticism leaves a child discouraged.

Yet the same passage calls fathers to provide nurture and admonition. The responsibility to guide children remains even when the parent finds disagreement uncomfortable.

Colossians 3:20–21 (KJV)

"Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.

Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged."

The warning about discouragement is particularly important. Adults need to consider how their conduct affects children over time. Continual faultfinding, unreasonable demands, or unpredictable punishment can make a young person feel that improvement is impossible.

On the other hand, avoiding all correction may leave a child without clear expectations or dependable guidance.

Parents who have experienced harmful authority may need time to develop confidence in exercising their responsibilities. They may also need help distinguishing a reasonable consequence from the punishments they endured during childhood.

The New Testament provides a framework in which children are instructed to obey their parents, while fathers are held accountable for how they exercise authority.

I believe Christian parents should take both responsibilities seriously.

RELEARNING AUTHORITY WITHOUT REPEATING THE PAST

An adult raised under severe discipline may have little personal experience with calm, reasonable correction. Perhaps childhood instruction consisted mainly of punishment, criticism, or commands that could never be questioned. The parent may understand what should be avoided while remaining uncertain about what to do instead.

This can make ordinary family disagreements surprisingly difficult.

Suppose a child has neglected an assigned responsibility. A parent who was raised under harsh authority may remember being shouted at or punished excessively for similar mistakes. The adult now faces a choice about how to address the situation.

The parent can explain the responsibility, determine whether the child understood what was expected, consider any relevant circumstances, and require the task to be completed. If a consequence is appropriate, it can be proportionate to the conduct and suited to the child's maturity.

Such an approach requires the adult to remain attentive to the present situation rather than responding through memories of earlier mistreatment.

Children differ considerably in age, temperament, abilities, and understanding. A young child may need repeated reminders and direct assistance. An adolescent may be capable of managing responsibilities with less supervision, although guidance and accountability remain important.

A parent who recognizes these differences is better prepared to exercise sound judgment.

There may also be occasions when the child raises a legitimate concern. Perhaps the adult misunderstood what happened, established an unreasonable expectation, or overlooked a circumstance that deserves consideration.

Being willing to listen and reconsider a decision does not diminish responsible authority.

James 3:17 (KJV)

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

The expression "easy to be intreated" is especially meaningful in relationships involving authority. It describes a quality of heavenly wisdom that includes a willingness to receive an appeal.

A Christian parent should be able to hear a child's explanation without assuming that every question represents rebellion. The adult may reconsider a decision when new information warrants it, while maintaining reasonable expectations when the original decision remains appropriate.

This can be especially important for parents who were silenced during childhood. They have an opportunity to provide their children with an experience of authority that includes communication, fairness, and accountability.

The parent must also learn to tolerate the discomfort of ordinary disagreement.

A child may remain disappointed even after receiving a reasonable explanation. An adolescent may disagree respectfully with a decision and continue believing that another

choice would have been better. These experiences can become opportunities for learning how to handle frustration and differences of opinion.

The adult should not require children to pretend that every parental decision makes them happy. Reasonable expectations can be maintained while acknowledging that the child has feelings and opinions.

Parents who have been wounded by earlier experiences may find this difficult at first. They may need encouragement, practical support, and time to establish more dependable habits.

When earlier mistreatment continues to interfere seriously with daily parenting, qualified assistance may also be valuable. Seeking help can support the adult's effort to provide a healthier household.

WHEN AVOIDANCE LEADS TO AN ANGRY OUTBURST

Some parents alternate between avoiding correction and responding with excessive anger.

The adult overlooks repeated misconduct because addressing it feels uncomfortable. Household responsibilities remain unfinished, disrespectful remarks are ignored, and reasonable expectations gradually lose their meaning. Meanwhile, the parent's frustration continues to increase.

Eventually, an incident that might ordinarily require a brief correction produces a much stronger reaction.

The parent may shout, impose an excessive consequence, or speak in a manner that causes distress. Afterward, guilt returns, particularly if the adult recognizes similarities between the outburst and the harsh authority experienced during childhood.

The parent then becomes reluctant to correct again, and the pattern continues.

This situation can leave children uncertain about what to expect. A rule may be ignored repeatedly and then suddenly enforced through an angry confrontation. The child may struggle to understand why behavior tolerated yesterday has produced a severe response today.

The adult needs to examine the entire pattern rather than treating the final outburst as an isolated event.

Reasonable expectations should be communicated clearly and addressed consistently. Minor problems can often be corrected before frustration accumulates. Parents may also

need to recognize when fatigue, personal stress, or unresolved feelings are affecting their ability to respond calmly.

Consistency should never become an excuse for rigidly defending an unreasonable decision. Good judgment includes recognizing when circumstances justify flexibility.

However, continually withdrawing expectations to avoid disagreement can make responsible parenting more difficult over time.

Proverbs 16:32 (KJV)

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

The ability to govern one's spirit is relevant to parents at both extremes.

An adult inclined toward harshness needs to restrain anger and exercise authority without intimidation. The parent who fears correction may need to manage anxiety and guilt while maintaining appropriate boundaries.

Both require maturity and a willingness to examine personal responses.

DEVELOPING A DEPENDABLE HOME

I believe children benefit from knowing that the adults responsible for them are prepared to make thoughtful decisions, provide instruction, and address misconduct without becoming threatening or unpredictable.

Such an atmosphere does not require perfect parents. Adults will occasionally misunderstand circumstances, become frustrated, or make decisions that later require reconsideration. What matters is their willingness to take responsibility and develop healthier habits.

A parent who recognizes having reacted unfairly can acknowledge the mistake. An adult who has avoided correction for too long can begin establishing clearer expectations. Families may need time to adjust when familiar patterns change, especially if children have learned that rules are rarely maintained or that disagreement usually produces an angry confrontation.

The adult should expect this adjustment to require patience.

Children who are accustomed to permissiveness may initially resist newly established responsibilities. A parent should consider whether those expectations are reasonable and communicate them clearly. The child's resistance may be uncomfortable, but it does not automatically mean the change should be abandoned.

Similarly, a child who has experienced harsh authority may need time to believe that correction can occur without humiliation or threats. The parent can demonstrate improvement through repeated experiences of fairness and self-control.

The Christian parent who desires to govern the household wisely should remain willing to examine personal motives, habits, and decisions. Prayer and biblical reflection can accompany practical changes in the way responsibilities are explained and disagreements are handled.

The goal is a family environment in which children understand that they are loved and valued while also learning to accept appropriate correction and responsibility.

CONCLUSION

A parent who endured harsh authority during childhood may understandably want to spare the next generation from similar experiences. That desire can encourage greater patience, compassion, and willingness to listen.

However, the adult must also recognize when fear of repeating the past has become reluctance to exercise reasonable authority.

Children need dependable instruction, appropriate boundaries, and adults who are willing to make responsible decisions. A parent can provide these things while remaining gentle, fair, approachable, and accountable.

The difficult experiences of an earlier generation deserve serious consideration. They do not have to determine how the next generation is raised.

CHAPTER TEN

VOCABULARY, CLARIFICATIONS, AND POINTS TO PONDER

1. The Pendulum Effect

A descriptive illustration of moving from one extreme to another.

In parenting, an adult who experienced excessive control may become so determined to avoid harshness that reasonable correction is neglected.

2. Permissive Parenting

A pattern in which an adult provides affection or freedom but has difficulty establishing or maintaining appropriate expectations and boundaries.

Permissiveness can develop for different reasons, including guilt, exhaustion, uncertainty, or fear of repeating earlier mistreatment.

3. Parental Authority

The responsibility entrusted to parents and guardians to provide care, guidance, instruction, protection, and appropriate correction.

Authority requires judgment and accountability in its exercise.

4. Authoritarianism

An excessively controlling approach to authority that may emphasize unquestioning compliance, intimidation, or severe punishment.

Clarification: Establishing reasonable boundaries does not automatically make a parent authoritarian.

5. Fear-Based Parenting

An informal description of parenting decisions strongly influenced by fear.

In this chapter, the expression primarily concerns adults who fear that ordinary correction will resemble the mistreatment they experienced as children.

6. Parental Guilt

Feelings of regret or personal responsibility that may influence decisions about children.

Guilt can become problematic when an adult repeatedly abandons reasonable expectations in an attempt to compensate for past difficulties.

7. Boundaries

Reasonable limits and expectations concerning conduct, responsibilities, safety, and relationships.

Healthy boundaries should reflect the child's age, maturity, circumstances, and needs.

8. Consistency

A dependable pattern of applying reasonable expectations and responding appropriately to conduct.

Clarification: Consistency does not require rigid enforcement of a mistaken decision. Parents can reconsider circumstances and make fair adjustments.

9. Correction

The process of addressing inappropriate behavior and helping a child understand and develop better conduct.

Correction may involve instruction, conversation, restitution, completion of responsibilities, or reasonable consequences.

10. Reproof

An expression of correction or disapproval intended to identify wrongdoing and encourage improvement.

Proverbs 29:15 associates the rod and reproof with wisdom.

11. Nurture

The upbringing, care, training, and discipline involved in raising a child.

In Ephesians 6:4, nurture is part of the responsibility assigned to fathers.

12. Admonition

Instruction, warning, or corrective counsel.

The word appears in Ephesians 6:4 in connection with raising children in the Lord.

13. Emotional Avoidance

A tendency to withdraw from situations that produce uncomfortable feelings.

A parent may avoid necessary correction because disagreement awakens memories of earlier mistreatment.

14. Conflict Avoidance

A pattern of avoiding disagreement or confrontation, sometimes even when a legitimate concern needs to be addressed.

Clarification: Choosing a calmer time to discuss an issue can be wise. Continually neglecting necessary correction is a different matter.

15. Overcompensation

An attempt to make up for an earlier hardship by moving toward an opposite extreme.

For example, a parent who experienced excessive restrictions may become unwilling to establish reasonable limits for children.

16. Parental Self-Government

The adult's responsibility to govern personal anger, fear, guilt, speech, and conduct while exercising authority.

Self-government includes remaining composed when children disagree with reasonable decisions.

17. Developmentally Appropriate Expectations

Responsibilities and boundaries suited to a child's age, maturity, understanding, and individual circumstances.

A younger child may require more assistance and supervision than an older adolescent.

18. Responsible Flexibility

The willingness to reconsider decisions when circumstances or new information justify a change.

Flexibility differs from repeatedly abandoning reasonable expectations merely to avoid conflict.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Did my own childhood experiences influence whether I find it easy or difficult to correct children?

2. Am I sometimes afraid that saying no will make my child feel rejected or unloved?

3. Have I confused a child's ordinary disappointment with evidence that I have acted unfairly?

4. Do I maintain reasonable expectations, or do I frequently abandon them when a child protests?

5. Am I attempting to compensate for family hardship, divorce, absence, or personal guilt by overlooking conduct that requires correction?

6. Can I listen to a child's concerns respectfully while continuing to make necessary parental decisions?

7. Have I moved from one extreme of parenting into another because I am determined not to repeat the past?

8. How do Ephesians 6:1–4 and Colossians 3:20–21 help me understand the responsibilities of both parents and children?

CLOSING CONSIDERATION

The parent who was once harmed by harsh authority may need to learn that responsible correction can be exercised without humiliation, intimidation, or cruelty.

Children benefit from adults who provide affection, guidance, and reasonable expectations while remaining willing to examine their own conduct.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE TIRED PARENT: WHEN EXHAUSTION GOVERNS THE HOUSEHOLD

The Working Parent, the Overloaded Household, and the Responsibility to Govern Ourselves

WHEN THE PARENT HAS ALMOST NOTHING LEFT TO GIVE

There is another side to the subject of parental correction that deserves serious consideration. It concerns the mother or father who understands the need for responsible parenting, genuinely loves the children, and wants to do what is right, but is physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted.

I am thinking particularly of the single parent who must work long hours, sometimes holding two or even three jobs to keep the household functioning. There are also married parents whose responsibilities have become overwhelming because of financial pressure, illness in the family, irregular employment schedules, caregiving obligations, or the absence of dependable assistance. Some parents carry the responsibilities of several adults while receiving very little practical support.

These are real human beings who must earn a living, pay the bills, purchase groceries, arrange transportation, attend to school matters, maintain the home, and still provide the attention and guidance their children require. They may rise early, work through most of the day, return home already worn down, and discover that the evening brings another round of demands.

The children need dinner. Someone has homework that requires attention. Another child cannot find something needed for school. Laundry has accumulated, the kitchen needs cleaning, and an unexpected expense has arrived. Meanwhile, the parent is trying to remember an appointment, answer an important message, or prepare for the next working day.

Then comes an argument over something that should have been a simple household responsibility.

Perhaps the child refuses to turn off an electronic device, complains about a chore, or begins arguing with a sibling. Under ordinary circumstances, the parent might have the patience to listen, explain the expectation, and settle the matter reasonably. But this evening the adult has reached the point of exhaustion.

A minor disagreement suddenly feels enormous.

Some parents react sharply. Others give up and allow the child to have whatever was requested, simply because they cannot endure another argument. Still others move back and forth between these responses, depending upon how much energy remains.

I believe we need to discuss these circumstances without pretending that every parent begins the day with an equal supply of time, money, rest, or assistance. The parent who is struggling to survive financially may be facing pressures that a more comfortably situated family has never experienced.

Nevertheless, fatigue can influence parental decisions in ways that deserve attention. The exhausted adult still has responsibilities toward the children, and those children remain dependent upon the parent's judgment, even during difficult seasons.

WHEN THE CHILD MEETS THE PARENT AT THE END OF THE DAY

Children generally experience their own needs as immediate. A young child may have little understanding of why a mother is exhausted after working a double shift. A teenager may know that a father has financial responsibilities without fully appreciating the pressures involved in meeting them.

When the parent arrives home, the child may want attention, assistance, permission, conversation, or a decision about something important. From the child's perspective, the request may have been waiting all day.

From the parent's perspective, it may be one more demand added to an already overwhelming collection of responsibilities.

This difference in perspective can produce misunderstandings.

A child may interpret a weary response as rejection or indifference. The parent may interpret the child's repeated requests as selfishness or deliberate disrespect. Both may be reacting to circumstances the other does not fully understand.

The adult has the greater responsibility to recognize what is happening. Children are still developing the ability to consider the burdens carried by other people. Parents can gradually teach that consideration, but they should not assume that a child already

possesses an adult understanding of employment, finances, household management, or physical exhaustion.

It is reasonable for children to learn that parents become tired and that some requests must wait. A mother can explain that she needs a few minutes to settle after work before discussing a complicated matter. A father can establish a reasonable time for reviewing homework or resolving an ordinary disagreement.

The explanation should be appropriate to the child's age. The adult need not describe every financial difficulty or place the weight of the household's problems upon young shoulders.

Children can learn consideration without being made responsible for carrying their parents' burdens.

At the same time, a parent should be careful about assuming that a child's need for attention is merely another inconvenience. Sometimes a child has been waiting all day to tell an adult about a disappointment, a frightening experience, or something that happened at school.

The exhausted parent may need to distinguish between an ordinary request that can reasonably wait and a matter requiring immediate attention.

That distinction is not always easy when the adult is worn down. It becomes easier when the household develops dependable habits of communication rather than attempting to settle every issue during moments of greatest fatigue.

WHEN EXHAUSTION BEGINS MAKING THE DECISIONS

One difficulty with prolonged exhaustion is that it can gradually become part of the household's normal operating pattern. The parent may no longer recognize how much fatigue is affecting speech, judgment, patience, or consistency.

A mother may begin the week intending to maintain ordinary responsibilities for her children. By Wednesday, after several demanding workdays and inadequate rest, she may find herself doing those responsibilities simply to avoid arguments.

A father may have established a reasonable expectation concerning schoolwork or bedtime. Yet when the child protests, he may abandon the requirement because he cannot face another disagreement.

There may be occasions when flexibility is entirely appropriate. A child who is ill, a family experiencing an emergency, or an unusually demanding day may justify changing

ordinary routines. The difficulty arises when exhaustion repeatedly determines whether household expectations will be maintained.

Children gradually learn what occurs within the family. They may discover that a rule is enforced when the parent is rested but ignored when the adult is tired. Some children begin waiting until the parent has little energy left before asking for privileges that would ordinarily be refused.

This does not mean every child is deliberately calculating how to take advantage of an exhausted adult. Young people learn patterns through ordinary experience. If repeated protesting regularly produces a different answer, they may come to expect that result.

Other children may become anxious because the household feels unpredictable. They cannot tell whether a small mistake will be overlooked or produce an angry reaction.

The parent may then become increasingly frustrated, believing that the children are becoming less cooperative despite all the sacrifices being made for them.

It is worth examining whether the children have received clear and dependable instruction or whether the household has gradually become governed by whichever adult is most exhausted.

Fatigue can also interfere with a parent's ability to distinguish between serious misconduct and ordinary childhood behavior.

A spilled drink, a misplaced shoe, or a child taking longer than expected to complete a task may be inconvenient. Such events do not necessarily require a severe response. Yet when the adult is under considerable pressure, the inconvenience may feel like a personal offense.

A parent might say, "After everything I do around here, why can't anybody do one simple thing?"

The statement may express genuine frustration. However, the child may hear an accusation that goes far beyond the immediate mistake.

The adult's sacrifices are real, and children should gradually learn appreciation and responsibility. Nevertheless, the parent needs to consider whether the correction addresses the child's conduct or releases frustration accumulated through unrelated pressures.

This is particularly important when the adult has experienced an exhausting workday, financial disappointment, or conflict with another person.

The child should not become the convenient recipient of anger that began elsewhere.

THE EXHAUSTED PARENT AND THE CONTROLLING CHILD

Some households develop a particularly difficult pattern when an exhausted parent repeatedly surrenders reasonable expectations to a child who argues, protests, or refuses cooperation.

The parent may have little remaining strength to insist upon a necessary responsibility. The child discovers that continued resistance often ends the discussion in his or her favor.

Over time, the young person may begin acting as though the household's decisions are subject to personal approval.

A parent asks that an ordinary chore be completed, and the child refuses. The adult explains the requirement, but the child begins arguing. After several minutes, the parent gives up, completes the task, and attempts to move on with the evening.

The immediate disagreement has ended, but the underlying responsibility remains unresolved.

If this becomes the established pattern, the child may grow accustomed to directing family activities through persistent opposition. The parent becomes increasingly resentful, and the child may have difficulty understanding why the adult occasionally responds with sudden anger.

In some cases, the parent begins feeling intimidated by the prospect of another argument. The adult may avoid mentioning responsibilities, asking questions, or addressing conduct because doing so is expected to produce conflict.

A child should not be placed in the position of governing the household through repeated pressure upon an exhausted adult.

At the same time, the parent needs to examine the circumstances carefully. A child's resistance may reflect confusion, discouragement, emotional distress, developmental difficulties, or expectations that have not been explained adequately. Responsible authority requires attention to these possibilities.

When a child has learned to obtain privileges through prolonged arguing, the parent may need to change the pattern gradually and consistently. That change should begin with clear expectations, reasonable responsibilities, and a calmer approach to disagreements.

The adult should also recognize the importance of choosing the right time for a discussion. Attempting to resolve every longstanding family difficulty late at night, when everyone is exhausted, may produce little improvement.

Some conversations deserve a more suitable hour.

A household can become so accustomed to arguments that ordinary instructions immediately provoke defensiveness. In such circumstances, rebuilding cooperation may require patience and repeated demonstrations that expectations will be reasonable and that disagreements can be addressed without shouting or surrender.

WHEN THE PARENT'S FATIGUE BECOMES AN ANGRY TONGUE

Earlier chapters have addressed the power of words and the responsibility of adults to govern their reactions. Exhaustion makes these matters especially important because a tired parent may speak more sharply than intended.

Consider the adult who has worked all day and comes home to find that a child has failed to complete an agreed responsibility. The parent begins with a reasonable concern, but the conversation quickly expands into accusations about the child's character.

Instead of addressing the unfinished task, the adult may say that the child is lazy, ungrateful, selfish, or impossible to live with.

Those statements can remain in a child's memory long after the particular disagreement has ended.

Proverbs 12:18 (KJV)

"There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health."

The proverb gives us reason to examine the effect of our speech. Words spoken in anger may wound deeply, especially when they come from someone whose approval and affection matter greatly to the child.

Parents should not excuse harmful speech merely because they are tired.

However, it is also important to understand the conditions that contribute to repeated angry exchanges. An adult who has been functioning without adequate rest may need practical changes in household routines, assistance with responsibilities, or a more realistic understanding of what can be accomplished in one day.

There may be times when the wisest immediate response is to stop an escalating conversation and return to the matter after everyone has had an opportunity to settle.

A parent can acknowledge being too upset or exhausted to discuss something fairly at that moment. The adult should then follow through at a reasonable time rather than allowing the matter to disappear indefinitely.

The child can learn from this example that strong feelings do not have to control speech.

Proverbs 16:32 (KJV)

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

Self-government is especially challenging when a person is physically depleted. Nevertheless, the principle remains important.

A parent may need to apologize for speaking unfairly, correct an exaggerated accusation, or acknowledge that an ordinary mistake received an excessive response.

Such accountability does not eliminate the parent's responsibility to address the original conduct. The child may still need to complete the task, make restitution, or accept an appropriate consequence.

The adult's responsibility for personal speech and the child's responsibility for conduct can both be addressed fairly.

THE SINGLE PARENT WHO IS DOING THE WORK OF TWO

I want to give particular attention to parents who are raising children without dependable assistance from another adult.

Some are working several jobs. Others have employment schedules that change unexpectedly, leaving them to arrange childcare, transportation, meals, and school responsibilities with very little notice.

There are parents who cannot afford to miss work when a child becomes ill. Some must choose between paying an essential bill and purchasing something the family needs. Others have no nearby relatives who can provide even a few hours of relief.

The strain may be intensified when the parent is also coping with divorce, bereavement, conflict with a former spouse, or the emotional needs of children who are struggling with family changes.

A parent in such circumstances may hear advice about discipline that sounds simple in theory but is difficult to carry out within the actual conditions of the household.

For example, someone may recommend an elaborate evening routine requiring uninterrupted attention, careful supervision, and considerable time. The suggestion may be useful for one family and impractical for another.

I believe Christian teaching should take these realities seriously.

The parent who must leave home before daylight and return late in the evening cannot always manage family life according to an idealized schedule. Practical wisdom includes considering what the adult can reasonably maintain.

A small number of dependable household expectations may serve the family better than an elaborate collection of rules that nobody has the time or energy to supervise.

Children who are old enough can be taught to contribute appropriately to the household. They may help with ordinary chores, care for their own belongings, prepare simple items, or participate in age-appropriate family responsibilities.

Such cooperation can teach valuable habits and reduce unnecessary pressure upon the parent.

However, a distinction must be maintained between appropriate responsibility and placing adult burdens upon a child. A young person should not be expected to become the substitute spouse, permanent household manager, or emotional caretaker of an overwhelmed parent.

Children can contribute meaningfully while remaining children.

The single parent may also need to resist the belief that every difficulty represents a personal failure. Financial pressure, inadequate childcare, or a lack of community support can create genuine limitations.

Recognizing those limitations can help the adult identify where assistance is needed.

At the same time, the parent should remain attentive to the child's need for dependable affection, guidance, and correction. Even brief periods of undivided attention may be meaningful when they are offered sincerely and consistently.

PRACTICAL HELP IS PART OF THE DISCUSSION

Christians frequently encourage struggling parents to pray, trust God, and remain faithful. I agree that prayer and faith have an important place in family life.

But a parent who is exhausted may also need someone to help with transportation, prepare a meal, supervise children for a short period, or assist with an urgent practical responsibility.

Galatians 6:2 (KJV)

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

This instruction deserves consideration within the Christian community.

A church may have parents who are faithfully attending services while privately carrying enormous responsibilities. Some may be reluctant to disclose their circumstances because they fear criticism or embarrassment. Others may have asked for assistance previously and received little practical response.

A congregation should be careful about judging the condition of a household without understanding the burdens being carried by the adults responsible for it.

There may be opportunities for mature, trustworthy individuals to provide practical assistance, encouragement, or appropriate referrals. Such support should respect the parent's dignity and the children's safety.

The parent who needs help should not automatically be regarded as irresponsible or spiritually deficient.

I also believe parents should consider whether they have become so accustomed to managing everything alone that they hesitate to receive reasonable assistance.

Some adults have spent years functioning independently because they had no dependable alternative. Accepting help may feel uncomfortable, especially when earlier relationships involved criticism, manipulation, or broken promises.

Careful judgment is appropriate. Parents should be discerning about whom they trust with their children and personal circumstances.

Nevertheless, there may be dependable relatives, friends, community resources, or responsible members of a Christian fellowship who can help relieve particular burdens.

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 (KJV)

"Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.

For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up."

The passage speaks broadly about the value of companionship and assistance. Its wisdom is relevant when considering the isolation of a parent who has little practical support.

Sometimes the most useful encouragement is accompanied by a willingness to help with an actual need.

THE HOUSEHOLD NEEDS REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

An exhausted parent may benefit from examining which household difficulties occur repeatedly and whether reasonable adjustments could reduce unnecessary conflict.

If mornings are continually chaotic, it may be helpful to prepare certain items the evening before. If arguments repeatedly arise over chores, responsibilities may need to be explained more clearly and assigned according to age and ability.

A parent who is frequently interrupted during an essential task may need to establish a reasonable time when ordinary requests can be discussed.

These arrangements do not have to become complicated systems.

The purpose is to make daily responsibilities more manageable and to reduce situations in which exhaustion leads to unnecessary arguments.

It is also worth considering whether the adult has established expectations that exceed what the household can reasonably maintain during a difficult season.

A family experiencing a medical crisis, financial hardship, or an unusually demanding work schedule may need to simplify some activities temporarily. The parent can distinguish essential responsibilities from preferences that can wait.

Children may benefit from understanding why certain arrangements are changing. The explanation should be honest and appropriate to their maturity without creating unnecessary fear.

A parent can also examine the household's pattern of rest.

When everyone is overtired, ordinary disagreements may become more difficult. Children and teenagers have their own needs for adequate sleep, and adults may require significant adjustments to protect whatever rest their circumstances permit.

Of course, telling a parent who works multiple jobs simply to obtain more sleep may be unrealistic. Some families face conditions that cannot be resolved by a better schedule alone.

That is one reason practical support and realistic expectations matter.

Parents should be careful about comparing their households with families that have greater financial resources, more available adults, or more predictable working hours.

The important question is whether the family is developing dependable habits of care, communication, responsibility, and appropriate correction within its actual circumstances.

WHEN A PARENT NEEDS TO STOP BEFORE RESPONDING

A tired parent may recognize familiar warning signs before an argument becomes serious. The adult may notice growing impatience, a raised voice, difficulty concentrating, or the feeling that even a small request has become unbearable.

Recognizing these signs provides an opportunity to respond more thoughtfully.

When immediate safety is not at issue, the parent may be able to delay a discussion briefly, take care of an urgent physical need, or arrange to address the matter when calmer.

This should not become a method of avoiding every difficult conversation. Children need to know that reasonable responsibilities will still be addressed.

The parent can explain the delay without blaming the child for the adult's entire emotional condition.

For example, the adult might say that the matter is important and will be discussed after dinner or at another specified time. The parent should then return to it.

Some matters require immediate intervention. A child who is placing someone in danger, behaving aggressively, or engaging in seriously harmful conduct may need prompt adult action. Even then, the adult should seek to respond as safely and calmly as possible.

The distinction between an urgent situation and an ordinary disagreement is important.

Exhaustion can make everything feel urgent. A parent who recognizes this tendency may become better able to reserve immediate intervention for matters that genuinely require it.

PRAYER, WISDOM, AND THE PARENT'S OWN NEEDS

The parent who is exhausted may have very little time for lengthy periods of reflection. Prayer may take place while preparing breakfast, traveling to work, or attending to ordinary responsibilities.

I believe God understands the circumstances of those who are carrying heavy burdens.

James 1:5 (KJV)

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

A parent may need wisdom concerning a child's conduct, the use of limited resources, the timing of a difficult conversation, or the decision to seek assistance.

Prayer can accompany these responsibilities.

Yet the adult should not use prayer as a reason to disregard practical needs that require attention. An exhausted parent may need rest, medical attention when appropriate, assistance with childcare, or changes in an unsustainable arrangement.

There may also be circumstances in which ongoing exhaustion is accompanied by discouragement, anxiety, or feelings of being unable to cope. A parent experiencing serious or persistent difficulties may benefit from qualified professional support.

Christian faith and responsible practical action can work together.

Parents who are continually sacrificing for their families may find it difficult to acknowledge personal limitations. Some believe that admitting exhaustion demonstrates weakness. Others feel that they must continue functioning without interruption because no one else is available.

I believe it is important to recognize that parents are human beings with physical and emotional needs.

The children depend upon the adult's care, but the adult also requires sufficient support to continue providing that care responsibly.

When a parent has reached the point of repeated angry outbursts, constant surrender of necessary expectations, or serious difficulty functioning, the situation deserves attention. It should not simply be dismissed as an ordinary feature of raising children.

CONCLUSION

The tired parent may love the children deeply while struggling to provide consistent guidance under difficult circumstances. Financial pressure, long working hours, single parenthood, inadequate rest, and the absence of dependable help can place enormous strain upon family relationships.

These circumstances deserve compassion and practical consideration.

They also remind us that responsible parenting requires attention to the adult's condition as well as the child's conduct. Exhaustion can influence how a parent interprets behavior, responds to disagreement, and maintains ordinary expectations.

The parent may need to simplify routines, obtain trustworthy assistance, reconsider unrealistic demands, or learn to postpone a discussion until it can be handled more fairly.

Children should gradually learn cooperation and consideration for the people who care for them. Parents, meanwhile, remain responsible for governing their speech and exercising appropriate authority.

Christian families and fellowships have opportunities to assist those who are carrying burdens that have become too heavy to manage alone.

A weary mother or father may need encouragement, prayer, and practical help. With greater support and more dependable household arrangements, the adult may be better equipped to provide the patient instruction and responsible correction the children need.

CHAPTER ELEVEN OVERVIEW

VOCABULARY, CLARIFICATIONS, AND POINTS TO PONDER

1. Parental exhaustion: Physical, mental, or emotional fatigue that interferes with a parent's ability to manage ordinary responsibilities and respond thoughtfully to family situations.

2. Decision fatigue: Difficulty making or evaluating decisions after prolonged demands upon attention and judgment. It may contribute to impulsive reactions or avoidance of decisions.

3. Parental self-government: The adult's responsibility to manage personal speech, anger, frustration, and conduct while providing appropriate guidance to children.

4. Inconsistent correction: A pattern in which similar conduct receives markedly different responses without a reasonable explanation. Exhaustion may contribute to this difficulty.

5. Permissiveness through exhaustion: The repeated abandonment of reasonable expectations because the parent lacks the energy to address resistance or disagreement.

6. Escalation: The process by which a disagreement becomes increasingly intense, sometimes moving from an ordinary correction to shouting, accusations, or an excessive response.

7. Household responsibilities: Age-appropriate tasks and obligations that contribute to the care and functioning of the family.

8. Age-appropriate expectations: Requirements that take account of a child's maturity, abilities, understanding, and circumstances.

9. Emotional burden: The strain associated with worry, conflict, grief, uncertainty, or other difficult experiences that affect a person's ability to function.

10. Overloaded household: A family situation in which available time, energy, money, or practical assistance is insufficient for the demands being carried.

11. Practical support: Tangible assistance, such as help with transportation, childcare, meals, or other responsibilities, provided in a trustworthy and appropriate manner.

12. Conflict avoidance: Repeatedly withdrawing from necessary disagreements or correction because confrontation feels too difficult or exhausting.

13. Responsible flexibility: Adjusting household arrangements when circumstances justify a change, while preserving essential responsibilities and appropriate guidance.

14. Parental accountability: The adult's willingness to recognize unfair speech, mistaken decisions, or harmful responses and to make appropriate corrections.

15. Family cooperation: The shared effort of household members to fulfill suitable responsibilities and treat one another with consideration.

16. Support network: Trustworthy people or appropriate community resources that can provide practical assistance, encouragement, or guidance.

17. Discernment: Careful judgment concerning the circumstances, needs, and responsibilities involved in a particular decision.

18. Burden-bearing: The willingness to assist others with genuine difficulties, as encouraged in Galatians 6:2.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Does exhaustion affect how I interpret my child's ordinary behavior or mistakes?
2. Have I ever abandoned a reasonable household expectation simply because I was too tired to continue the discussion?
3. Do my children experience correction as dependable, or does my response vary considerably according to my level of fatigue?
4. Are there household responsibilities that could be simplified, clarified, or shared appropriately?
5. Have I expected my children to understand adult financial or emotional burdens beyond their maturity?
6. When I am exhausted, do I recognize the difference between an urgent safety concern and a disagreement that can reasonably wait?
7. Is there a trustworthy person or appropriate resource that could provide practical assistance with a genuine family need?
8. Have I mistaken asking for help as evidence of personal weakness?
9. When I have spoken unfairly because of exhaustion, am I willing to acknowledge my conduct while still addressing the original concern?
10. How can the Christian community more effectively fulfill Galatians 6:2 toward parents carrying unusually heavy responsibilities?

CLOSING CONSIDERATION

The condition of the parent matters because the parent is responsible for making decisions that affect the children. Exhaustion deserves compassion, and children deserve dependable care. Practical assistance, reasonable household expectations, prayer, and adult self-government can help families navigate seasons when responsibilities become unusually demanding.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE POWER OF WORDS: THE CHILD'S OPEN HEART AND THE ADULT'S TONGUE

What Enters the Heart, What Comes Out of the Mouth, and What Parents Must Learn to Govern

THE CHILD'S OPEN HEART

One of the most serious responsibilities of Christian parenting concerns the words spoken over children, around children, and directly to children. We often give considerable attention to what a child does, whether the child obeys, and what form of correction should follow misconduct. Yet the adult's own speech deserves equally serious examination, because words become part of the atmosphere in which children learn who they are, what is expected of them, and how human relationships operate.

Children begin learning about themselves through the people who care for them. Long before they can explain complicated feelings, they recognize affection, anger, approval, rejection, and the tone of familiar voices. They listen to the conversations taking place around them, observe how adults settle disagreements, and gradually develop their own ways of speaking.

I want parents to consider how open a child's heart can be to the words of an adult. A young child may have very little experience by which to evaluate an accusation, an exaggerated criticism, or an angry remark. When a trusted adult repeatedly says something about the child's character, the child may begin to believe it.

A parent might say, "You're always causing trouble," after a particularly frustrating incident. Another may repeatedly call a son lazy or describe a daughter as impossible to please. Perhaps the adult is tired, angry, disappointed, or worried about the child's conduct. Nevertheless, the words communicate more than concern about a particular behavior. They begin assigning the child a continuing identity.

Some children resist such statements outwardly. Others remain silent and carry them privately. A child may begin thinking, "I'm the bad one in this family," or "Nobody expects anything good from me."

Those thoughts can influence the child's confidence, conduct, relationships, and willingness to attempt improvement.

This is why I want to examine the difference between correcting wrongdoing and attacking the person who has done wrong. Parents have legitimate reasons to address lying, stealing, cruelty, disrespect, dishonesty, or other harmful behavior. Children must learn that conduct has consequences and that responsible adults will intervene when necessary.

However, the parent should consider the actual words being used during correction. An adult can identify a lie without continually calling the child a liar as though dishonesty has become the child's permanent identity. A parent can address selfish conduct without repeatedly declaring that the child is worthless or incapable of caring about anyone.

Children need to understand what they have done, why it matters, and what responsibility they must accept. They also need to know that improvement remains possible.

The adult's manner of speech can either help the child understand that responsibility or bury the lesson beneath shame and resentment.

THE BIBLE TAKES THE TONGUE SERIOUSLY

The Scriptures give substantial attention to human speech. Words may communicate wisdom, comfort, correction, encouragement, truth, deception, hatred, and accusation. They can also reveal what a person has been allowing to develop inwardly.

Proverbs 18:21 (KJV)

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof."

This proverb deserves careful consideration. The tongue has considerable power to affect relationships, reputations, decisions, and the direction of human lives. Speech can encourage a discouraged person to continue, expose wrongdoing that needs correction, or communicate truth at an important moment. It can also injure, intimidate, mislead, and discourage.

Parents should recognize that their words carry particular weight because of the authority and influence entrusted to them.

Yet I do not want readers to treat Proverbs 18:21 as though every spoken sentence automatically creates a supernatural event. The proverb speaks about the serious consequences of speech. Its meaning should be understood within the biblical teaching concerning wisdom, righteousness, and human conduct.

We should take the spiritual importance of words seriously without turning them into a mechanical formula.

Proverbs 12:18 (KJV)

"There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health."

The comparison with a sword is especially meaningful when considering repeated verbal mistreatment. A child who is constantly mocked, threatened, belittled, or humiliated may carry painful memories of those words for many years.

Some parents believe that physical punishment is the principal issue when discussing abuse or harsh correction. However, the tongue can become an instrument of considerable suffering.

A child may never have been struck and still have lived under continual verbal intimidation. The adult may have used sarcasm, contempt, public embarrassment, or frightening declarations as familiar methods of control.

Other parents may believe that raising the voice is necessary to establish authority. There are certainly occasions when an urgent warning must be spoken loudly, particularly when someone is in immediate danger. But continual shouting can become so familiar that the child begins associating adult authority with anger.

We should examine whether our speech actually instructs the child or merely demonstrates that the adult has become emotionally overwhelmed.

Ephesians 4:29 (KJV)

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

Paul was writing to believers concerning Christian conduct. His instruction has direct relevance to the speech of adults who profess to follow Jesus Christ.

The word *edifying* concerns building up. This does not mean that every statement must be complimentary or pleasant. Necessary correction may be uncomfortable, and a child may be disappointed when an adult addresses wrongdoing.

Nevertheless, the parent's words should serve a responsible purpose. Correction ought to help the child understand truth, consequences, responsibility, and the possibility of doing better.

A parent who becomes accustomed to insulting a child should consider whether such speech is consistent with the instruction to minister grace to the hearer.

The child may need correction. The adult may need correction also.

WHAT COMES OUT UNDER PRESSURE

I have used the illustration of the Ketchup Test elsewhere in this book because it helps explain something about human reactions. When pressure is applied to a container, what is inside comes out.

In the same way, stressful circumstances often reveal what an adult has been carrying inwardly. Fatigue, disappointment, financial pressure, family conflict, or a child's repeated misconduct may bring unresolved anger and resentment to the surface.

The pressure itself deserves consideration, but so does the substance of the response.

Luke 6:45 (KJV)

"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh."

Jesus directs attention to the relationship between the inward condition and outward speech. This should encourage personal examination rather than giving parents another verse with which to accuse their children.

An adult may have been embarrassed at work, treated unfairly by another person, or overwhelmed by financial difficulties. Upon returning home, the parent encounters a child's ordinary mistake and reacts with anger far beyond what the incident warrants.

The child did not create the adult's entire emotional condition.

Yet the child may receive the full force of it.

This is where parental self-government becomes essential. Parents should recognize when their reactions are being influenced by earlier wounds, resentment, jealousy, personal disappointment, or exhaustion.

The fact that a child has behaved wrongly does not give an adult unlimited permission to speak destructively.

Sometimes a parent says, "That child knows how to push my buttons." There may be truth in the observation that certain behavior produces frustration. However, the statement can also become a convenient explanation for refusing to examine one's own reactions.

The adult remains responsible for what comes out of the mouth.

When parents discover that they have spoken unfairly, they should be willing to acknowledge it. They can correct an exaggerated accusation, apologize for an insult, and still require the child to take responsibility for the original misconduct.

This is an important distinction. Acknowledging adult wrongdoing does not require surrendering appropriate authority.

It demonstrates that accountability belongs within the household, including among those who exercise leadership.

THE INVISIBLE POWER OF WORDS AND THE SPIRITUAL ATMOSPHERE

There is another aspect of speech that I want Christian parents to consider. Words have effects that cannot always be seen immediately.

A sentence may be spoken in a moment and remembered for decades. A repeated accusation may influence the way a child understands personal worth. Threatening language may create fear long after the adult has forgotten the occasion. Encouragement, sincere affection, and truthful instruction may also remain with a person throughout life.

In Christian teaching, we recognize that human life includes spiritual concerns as well as visible behavior. Scripture warns about evil speech, deception, accusation, and the destructive use of the tongue.

James 3:9–10 (KJV)

"Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."

James addresses the contradiction of using the same tongue to bless God and curse human beings made in God's likeness.

That is a searching passage for any Christian parent, pastor, or ministry leader.

A person may participate in worship, pray publicly, quote Scripture, and speak frequently about spiritual authority while using harsh, accusing, or degrading language toward family members.

We need to examine that contradiction.

Some Christians describe particularly destructive speech as carrying a demonic or invisible spiritual influence. Such language reflects a concern that evil speech can become associated with accusation, fear, oppression, and destructive patterns within relationships.

I believe the subject deserves sober attention. Nevertheless, we should distinguish the biblical warning about cursing and harmful speech from a claim that every angry sentence automatically releases a demon or establishes an irreversible supernatural curse.

James clearly condemns the contradiction of blessing God while cursing people. The passage does not instruct parents to diagnose every family disagreement as demonic activity.

A parent who has spoken cruelly needs to repent of that conduct, make appropriate amends, and change the pattern. The child may also need reassurance, protection, and help processing what has happened.

We should avoid turning a serious teaching about the tongue into another occasion for frightening children.

If the adult has repeatedly told a child that the child is evil, cursed, worthless, or spiritually contaminated, the harm may be substantial. Adding further alarming religious declarations can make the situation worse.

Christian parents should be particularly careful about what they claim to know concerning the unseen spiritual condition of another person, especially a young person still learning to understand faith and personal responsibility.

WHEN A CHILD IS LABELED DEMONIZED

I want to address the practice of assigning spiritual labels to children because of difficult behavior.

Some children are strong-willed, argumentative, impulsive, unusually active, emotionally sensitive, or difficult to redirect. Others may be experiencing fear, grief, trauma, developmental differences, or problems that require specialized attention.

There are also children who engage in genuinely harmful conduct and need firm intervention, protection for others, and appropriate professional evaluation.

Parents and ministry leaders should be discerning about these circumstances.

Calling a child demonized, possessed, cursed, or spiritually dangerous is a serious matter. Such declarations can frighten a young person and affect the way other adults respond to the child.

I am especially concerned when a child is publicly labeled during a religious gathering, repeatedly accused of having an evil spirit, or treated as though ordinary developmental difficulties are proof of supernatural wickedness.

An adult's confidence in a spiritual impression does not remove the responsibility to examine facts, protect the child, and act with humility.

James 3:17 (KJV)

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

Heavenly wisdom should influence how Christians speak about children and how they respond to troubling behavior.

A parent who is genuinely concerned about a child's conduct may need to investigate what is happening at school, within friendships, through electronic media, or inside the household itself. The child may need instruction, reasonable boundaries, additional supervision, or qualified assistance.

A Christian family may also pray.

However, prayer should never be used to justify frightening, humiliating, isolating, or physically mistreating a child.

If a young person has become aggressive, threatening, or dangerous, the adult must address the actual safety concerns. Other children may need protection, and the family may require outside assistance.

Serious misconduct should not be ignored merely because the parent fears appearing unloving. Yet neither should the adult make sweeping spiritual accusations without careful consideration.

Children need truth and appropriate correction from adults who remain responsible for their own conduct.

WHEN THE CHILD BEGINS SPEAKING AGAINST HIMSELF OR HERSELF

Parents should also pay attention to the language children begin using about themselves.

A young person who repeatedly says, "I'm stupid," "Nobody likes me," "I always ruin everything," or "I can't do anything right," may be revealing something about the way personal experiences have been interpreted.

Sometimes these statements develop after repeated criticism. At other times, they arise through peer relationships, school difficulties, embarrassment, comparison with siblings, or discouragement about personal abilities.

The parent should listen carefully before assuming the cause.

A child who has made a mistake may begin treating that mistake as evidence of permanent failure. A teenager who has experienced rejection may believe that rejection defines personal worth.

These patterns of self-talk deserve attention because repeated thoughts and statements can influence behavior.

A parent can help the child distinguish between an actual problem and an exaggerated conclusion about the whole person.

For example, a child who has failed an examination may need assistance understanding the material, changing study habits, or seeking appropriate academic support. Repeatedly saying, "I'm stupid," does not accurately describe the situation.

The adult can address the practical difficulty while helping the child develop a more truthful understanding.

Similarly, a child who has behaved dishonestly needs to accept responsibility. The parent can make clear that lying is wrong without encouraging the child to believe that dishonesty is an unchangeable personal identity.

Children need to understand that choices matter and that choices can change.

Christian parents may also teach children to examine their thoughts in light of Scripture, prayer, and sound judgment. Such teaching should be appropriate to the child's maturity and should not become a demand that the child deny genuine sadness, fear, or disappointment.

A young person who is struggling needs someone willing to listen.

When self-condemning statements become persistent, particularly if a child speaks about wanting to disappear, die, or harm himself or herself, the situation requires prompt and serious attention. The adult should respond compassionately and seek appropriate professional help rather than treating the words as mere drama or disobedience.

The power of speech includes the responsibility to hear what another person is saying.

WHAT CHILDREN HEAR THROUGH MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT

Parents should also consider the words, images, and ideas entering children's lives through entertainment and electronic media.

Children may spend considerable time watching videos, listening to music, participating in online games, communicating through social platforms, or following personalities whose values and behavior are unfamiliar to their parents.

Some of this material may be harmless or genuinely useful. Other content may normalize cruelty, humiliation, sexual exploitation, dishonesty, violence, degrading speech, or contempt for authority.

A parent cannot evaluate every influence merely by looking at the title of a program or assuming that something advertised for young people is appropriate.

Children may encounter language and behavior that they do not yet have the maturity to understand. They may imitate what they hear, repeat expressions without appreciating their meaning, or develop ideas about relationships that require careful discussion.

Sexually explicit material is a particular concern. Children can encounter pornography or other inappropriate sexual content through accidental exposure, recommendations generated by online platforms, messages from other people, or deliberate searching.

The parent's response matters.

A child who has encountered disturbing material should be able to seek help without automatically expecting humiliation or an explosive reaction. The adult needs to determine what happened, whether another person has been involved, and whether the child is safe.

Appropriate safeguards and supervision may be necessary. Parents should also explain matters in language suited to the child's age and understanding.

If another person is pressuring, exploiting, threatening, or sexually harming a child, the situation requires immediate protective action and appropriate outside assistance.

Parents should recognize that digital influences can become part of a child's everyday vocabulary and expectations. Repeated exposure to contemptuous speech, cruel jokes, or sexualized material may affect the way children speak about themselves and other people.

It is reasonable for adults to establish limits concerning media, supervise online activity in an age-appropriate manner, and discuss what children are encountering.

These conversations can become opportunities for teaching discernment rather than simply issuing unexplained prohibitions.

The adult's own example also matters. Children notice when a parent condemns degrading entertainment while regularly enjoying similar material, or demands respectful speech while using abusive language during disagreements.

Christian instruction gains credibility when adults are willing to examine their own habits.

WHEN THE CHILD'S OWN WORDS BECOME HARMFUL

A chapter concerning the tongue must also address children who use words to injure other people.

A child may mock a sibling, spread rumors, threaten another young person, or use cruel language during disagreements. Some teenagers become accustomed to sarcasm, public humiliation, or online attacks because these behaviors are common within their peer groups.

Parents should not ignore such conduct.

The child needs to understand that words can cause genuine harm and that freedom to express an opinion does not remove responsibility for how other people are treated.

Sometimes the parent may discover that the child's speech resembles language frequently heard at home. A father who regularly insults people during disagreements should consider the example being set. A mother who speaks contemptuously about relatives or neighbors may find that the children have learned a similar pattern.

Other influences may come from peers, entertainment, or the child's own developing habits.

The adult should investigate the behavior rather than automatically assigning blame to one source.

When a child has threatened, bullied, or seriously mistreated someone, correction should address the actual harm. Depending upon the circumstances, the child may need to stop the behavior immediately, acknowledge what happened, make appropriate amends, and accept reasonable consequences.

The person who was harmed also deserves consideration.

Parents should be cautious about treating a forced apology as though it resolves every injury. A child may say the required words without understanding the seriousness of the conduct.

Teaching responsibility may require further discussion, supervision, and attention to whether the behavior continues.

The parent must also distinguish ordinary childish arguments from sustained intimidation or serious threats. Persistent cruelty, coercion, or violent language may indicate a need for additional intervention.

A child who has become harmful toward other children should receive appropriate correction and help. The adult should neither excuse the behavior nor define the child's entire future by it.

THE ADULT TONGUE IN THE CHRISTIAN HOME

I want to return to the adult because Christian parents are responsible for the example they establish.

A household may contain Bible reading, prayer, church attendance, and considerable discussion about obedience. Those activities can be valuable. Yet children also observe what happens when an adult becomes frustrated, embarrassed, contradicted, or disappointed.

They hear how parents speak to one another. They notice whether apologies are offered when someone has been treated unfairly. They learn whether truth is welcomed or whether speaking honestly brings unnecessary punishment.

A parent who demands respect while continually insulting family members creates confusion about the meaning of respect.

The same difficulty arises when an adult uses Scripture as a weapon during an argument. A biblical passage may contain genuine instruction, but quoting it angrily to silence a child can distract from the passage's actual meaning.

Parents should teach Scripture carefully and accurately.

When a child has done wrong, the adult can explain the relevant moral concern and help the child understand the responsibility involved. Scripture should be handled with reverence rather than used as a convenient means of winning an argument.

The same principle applies to prophetic or spiritual language. Adults who believe God has given them insight should exercise humility and remain accountable for what they say.

A parent should be especially cautious about declaring a child's future, spiritual identity, or hidden motives as though the adult possesses unquestionable knowledge of the child's heart.

God knows the heart completely. Human parents do not.

Children may need strong correction, and some circumstances require urgent intervention. However, the parent's confidence in personal authority does not remove the obligation to speak truthfully, exercise sound judgment, and remain willing to acknowledge mistakes.

I believe that much of what we call Christian maturity must eventually become evident in these ordinary relationships.

It is relatively easy to speak about love, patience, holiness, and spiritual wisdom when no one is challenging us. The family provides repeated opportunities to discover whether those qualities are developing in our conduct.

Ephesians 4:31–32 (KJV)

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

These verses belong within Paul's broader instruction to believers. Their application to family relationships is substantial.

A Christian parent who recognizes bitterness or habitual evil speaking should take that recognition seriously. The adult may need to seek forgiveness, change familiar patterns of speech, and obtain assistance when those patterns have become deeply established.

Children should also be taught kindness, forgiveness, honesty, and responsibility.

Forgiveness does not require pretending that serious harm never occurred, and kindness does not eliminate appropriate boundaries. Families may need practical changes and, in some circumstances, protection or outside intervention.

The biblical call to put away evil speaking applies to the adult's conduct as well as the child's.

PRAYER AND THE RESPONSIBILITY TO CHANGE OUR WORDS

Prayer has an important place in the Christian parent's response to harmful speech.

An adult who recognizes a pattern of anger, accusation, or careless language may ask God for wisdom and help in changing those habits.

Psalm 141:3 (KJV)

"Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

This is a meaningful prayer for anyone entrusted with authority over children.

Parents may need to become more aware of what they say when they are tired, disappointed, or under pressure. They may also need to recognize familiar expressions inherited from their own upbringing.

Some adults discover that they are repeating the same words they once found deeply hurtful.

That recognition can become an opportunity for change.

A parent who grew up hearing constant criticism may need to learn a different way of addressing mistakes. Someone raised in a household where shouting settled every disagreement may need practice in communicating firmly without intimidation.

The process may require patience, personal reflection, trustworthy support, and practical effort.

Prayer can accompany that work.

Children may also be taught to pray about their own speech, thoughts, and relationships. They can learn to ask forgiveness when they have hurt someone, speak truthfully, and consider the effect of their words.

Parents should avoid turning prayer into another method of pressure or public embarrassment. A child should not be forced to perform a dramatic confession merely to satisfy an adult's anger.

The purpose of Christian instruction is to help children grow in understanding, responsibility, and a sincere relationship with God.

CONCLUSION

The words spoken within a household become part of the child's daily experience of love, authority, correction, and human relationships. Parents possess considerable influence through their speech, particularly while children are young and still developing their understanding of themselves and the world.

That influence deserves careful stewardship.

The Bible's teaching about the tongue calls Christians to examine their own words, motives, and conduct. Parents should be prepared to correct harmful behavior while refusing to make humiliation, intimidation, accusation, or careless spiritual labeling familiar features of family life.

Children also need instruction concerning their own speech, including how they speak to siblings, peers, parents, and themselves. Their exposure to media and other influences deserves thoughtful attention.

When harmful patterns have developed, the family may need repentance, practical changes, appropriate assistance, and time to rebuild trust.

The Christian parent who desires to teach the child to speak wisely must remain willing to examine the adult tongue as well.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

PARENT, KNOW WHEN TO CALL FOR HELP

Recognizing Your Limits, Protecting Your Child, and Finding Wise Support Before a Family Crisis Becomes Worse

WHEN A PARENT HAS REACHED THE LIMIT

There comes a time in some families when a parent has done everything he or she knows how to do, yet the situation continues to become more difficult. The child may be increasingly defiant, emotionally distressed, withdrawn, aggressive, or involved in conduct that the adult does not understand. The parent may have prayed, corrected, explained, warned, encouraged, and attempted to establish reasonable boundaries. Nevertheless, the problems remain.

This is when I want parents to consider an important question: **Do I need help with something I can no longer handle wisely by myself?**

I believe Christian parents should take their God-given responsibilities seriously. Mothers and fathers are entrusted with the care, protection, instruction, and correction of their children. They should make a sincere effort to provide a stable home, teach right from wrong, and prepare their sons and daughters to become responsible people.

Yet being a parent does not mean possessing unlimited wisdom, energy, experience, or knowledge. Adults are human beings. They have personal histories, financial obligations, physical limitations, emotional concerns, and sometimes difficult relationships of their own.

There are parents who are doing a great deal with very little assistance. A mother may be working two jobs while caring for several children. A father may be raising his children without the daily support of their mother. A grandparent may have unexpectedly become responsible for grandchildren at an age when retirement had seemed near.

Other parents are trying to hold a family together while dealing with illness, unemployment, marital conflict, or the consequences of another adult's irresponsibility.

These circumstances matter.

When I speak about parental responsibility, I do not want to overlook the parent who is already making a tremendous effort simply to keep food in the house, transportation available, bills paid, and children properly supervised.

Nevertheless, even a loving and conscientious parent can reach the point where personal resources are no longer sufficient.

Recognizing that point is an important part of responsible leadership.

Some adults have been taught that asking for help demonstrates weakness. Others fear that admitting difficulty will cause relatives, church members, or professionals to judge their parenting. A parent may feel embarrassed that the child is behaving in ways that other families do not seem to experience.

There can also be considerable pressure within religious communities to present the appearance of a successful household.

A parent may attend church regularly, participate in ministry, teach the Bible, and still be struggling with serious difficulties at home. The family may be facing circumstances that require practical assistance beyond what the parent can presently provide.

I would rather see a parent recognize a genuine need and seek appropriate help than continue alone until exhaustion, anger, or desperation begins governing the household.

THE PARENT WHO HAS NO ONE AT HOME TO SHARE THE LOAD

I especially want to consider the parent who does not have another responsible adult living in the home.

When two parents are present and working together, they may be able to share supervision, household responsibilities, financial pressures, and difficult decisions. Even then, the relationship may require considerable effort, communication, and mutual respect.

However, a single parent often carries responsibilities that would ordinarily be shared.

The parent may be the primary wage earner, household manager, transportation provider, caregiver, disciplinarian, and source of emotional encouragement. When a child becomes ill or encounters trouble at school, that same adult may have to rearrange work obligations and find a way to respond.

A parent who is working several jobs may have very little time to rest. The children may also feel the effects of that schedule, particularly when they need attention, conversation, or additional help with their own difficulties.

It is possible for a parent to love a child deeply while being too exhausted to respond wisely to every situation.

I do not believe such parents need another person standing over them, continually announcing everything they have failed to accomplish. They may already be painfully aware of their limitations.

What would help?

Perhaps someone trustworthy could assist with transportation, provide occasional childcare, prepare a meal during an unusually difficult week, or spend time helping a child with schoolwork. A grandparent, aunt, uncle, or reliable family friend may be able to provide encouragement and practical support.

Some parents have no relatives nearby. Others have relatives who are unwilling, unreliable, or unsuitable to involve.

In those circumstances, the parent may need to investigate appropriate community resources, school services, family support organizations, or other dependable assistance.

The important consideration is that the help should actually benefit the household and protect the child's well-being.

A parent should not feel compelled to accept assistance from an unsafe or manipulative person merely because that individual is a relative or a prominent member of a religious community.

Trustworthiness matters.

A person who offers help while demanding inappropriate control over the parent or child may create additional difficulties.

The parent has a responsibility to exercise judgment about who is permitted to influence the family.

WHEN ORDINARY CORRECTION IS NO LONGER WORKING

There is a difference between the ordinary challenges of raising children and circumstances that have become unusually difficult or dangerous.

Children sometimes resist instructions, argue about responsibilities, complain about rules, or make immature decisions. Parents can often address these matters through patient teaching, consistent expectations, reasonable consequences, and continued supervision.

Yet some problems become more serious.

A child may repeatedly threaten family members, damage property during angry outbursts, run away, steal, engage in dangerous behavior, or become increasingly aggressive toward siblings.

Another child may become unusually withdrawn, frightened, distressed, or unwilling to attend school. The parent may notice changes in sleeping, eating, friendships, personal hygiene, or ordinary interests.

A teenager may become involved with harmful companions, substance use, online exploitation, or relationships that expose the young person to serious danger.

These situations require careful attention to what is actually happening.

The parent should not automatically assume that every problem is caused by rebellion, poor discipline, or an evil attitude. A child's behavior may reflect several contributing circumstances, including developmental difficulties, emotional distress, mistreatment by another person, or problems that require medical or psychological evaluation.

There are also occasions when a child is deliberately engaging in harmful conduct and needs clear accountability.

The parent should be willing to investigate the circumstances without deciding in advance that only one explanation is possible.

Repeatedly increasing punishment when a child is not responding may be particularly unwise. The adult may begin with ordinary restrictions, become frustrated when those restrictions fail, and eventually resort to shouting, threats, humiliation, or excessive physical force.

At that point, the parent's own conduct can become part of the crisis.

A wise adult should recognize when the familiar approach is failing and seek assistance before desperation produces further harm.

Sometimes the appropriate person to consult is a teacher, school counselor, pediatrician, qualified mental health professional, or another specialist whose training relates to the child's difficulties.

A trusted pastor may also provide encouragement and spiritual guidance. However, pastoral experience does not automatically qualify a person to diagnose a medical condition, developmental difference, or serious mental health concern.

Parents may benefit from several forms of assistance working together.

There is no biblical requirement that a family reject competent professional help in order to demonstrate faith in God.

KNOWING WHEN THE PARENT NEEDS HELP FIRST

I want to address something that may be uncomfortable for adults to acknowledge.

Sometimes the child needs help, but the parent also needs assistance with personal reactions, unresolved experiences, or an increasingly unmanageable household.

An adult may have grown up in a home where anger, threats, harsh punishment, or emotional rejection were common. Years later, the parent may discover that similar patterns emerge during stressful moments with the children.

Another parent may have experienced serious disappointment, betrayal, abuse, or prolonged hardship. Those experiences can influence the way the adult responds to disagreement, resistance, or perceived disrespect.

As discussed in earlier chapters, the parent's backstory deserves attention because personal history can affect present relationships.

However, the child should not be required to carry responsibility for wounds that existed before the child was born.

There are parents who become so frustrated that they fear losing control of their temper. Others recognize that they have begun speaking cruelly, making unreasonable threats, or administering punishment while emotionally overwhelmed.

Such warning signs should be taken seriously.

If an adult believes that anger may lead to physically harming a child, the immediate priority is to keep the child safe. The parent should stop the confrontation, arrange for another safe adult to take over supervision when possible, and seek urgent assistance if the danger cannot be controlled.

This is a moment for responsible action rather than concern about appearances.

A parent may need counseling, medical attention, assistance managing stress, practical respite, or guidance in establishing a safer household routine.

There is no shame in recognizing that personal exhaustion or unresolved emotional difficulties are interfering with the ability to parent wisely.

What matters is the willingness to address the problem.

Proverbs 16:32 (KJV)

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

This proverb gives considerable importance to self-government.

A parent may possess authority over a child, but that authority should be exercised by an adult who is willing to govern personal reactions.

A household cannot become healthy merely through increasing the child's obedience while ignoring serious problems in the adult's conduct.

Sometimes the most responsible step a parent can take is to acknowledge a personal need for help and begin addressing it.

ASKING THE RIGHT PERSON FOR THE RIGHT KIND OF HELP

Not every problem requires the same kind of assistance.

A parent struggling with transportation or childcare may benefit from practical support. A child who is having academic difficulties may need tutoring, school evaluation, or assistance with learning. Persistent medical symptoms require appropriate healthcare attention.

Family conflict may call for guidance from someone qualified to address relationships and communication. Serious behavioral or emotional difficulties may require assessment by professionals trained to work with children and adolescents.

Christian parents may also seek prayer, biblical counsel, and encouragement from mature believers.

I believe prayer belongs in the life of the Christian family. Yet we should recognize the difference between asking someone to pray and asking that person to provide professional services for which he or she has no training.

A pastor may be deeply compassionate and spiritually mature while lacking the qualifications needed to evaluate a particular medical or psychological condition.

Likewise, a physician or counselor may provide valuable professional assistance without being responsible for directing the family's entire spiritual life.

Parents can exercise discernment about the contribution each person is able to make.

James 1:5 (KJV)

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

I appreciate the directness of this instruction.

We are encouraged to ask God for wisdom. A parent who does not know how to respond to a difficult situation can pray sincerely for understanding, patience, and sound judgment.

That prayer may accompany a decision to consult someone with relevant experience.

The parent should also consider the character and conduct of those offering assistance.

Is this person trustworthy? Does the individual respect appropriate boundaries? Is the child treated with dignity? Does the person possess the necessary training or experience for the particular concern?

Some families have experienced additional harm because they trusted an individual who appeared impressive, authoritative, or religious but did not exercise sound judgment.

Christian parents should avoid confusing a forceful personality with genuine wisdom.

The ability to quote Scripture or speak confidently does not establish competence in every area of family life.

THE ROLE OF FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

There are many circumstances in which ordinary human kindness can make a substantial difference.

A parent who has become overwhelmed may need someone willing to listen without immediately delivering a lecture. Another may need practical assistance for a limited period while recovering from illness, changing employment, or addressing a difficult family situation.

The Christian community should be capable of recognizing such needs.

Galatians 6:2 (KJV)

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

Paul's instruction concerns the mutual responsibilities of believers. It has meaningful application to Christians who are struggling with the demands of family life.

Bearing a burden may involve prayer and encouragement. It may also involve practical action.

A trustworthy grandmother might spend time with a child while the parent attends an appointment. An aunt or uncle may be able to offer appropriate guidance to a teenager who needs another dependable adult to speak with. A family friend may assist during a difficult transition.

Sometimes a parent simply needs a reasonable opportunity to rest.

These contributions can be valuable when they are offered respectfully and with appropriate safeguards.

However, assistance should not become an excuse for controlling the household, undermining the parent, or interfering unnecessarily with family relationships.

Relatives sometimes believe that because they have raised children themselves, they possess unquestionable authority to dictate how another adult must parent.

Their experience may be valuable, but experience alone does not guarantee that every recommendation is wise.

Parents should listen carefully, consider the circumstances, and remain responsible for the decisions entrusted to them.

There is also a place for respecting the child's relationship with safe and caring adults.

A child who has an absent or uninvolved parent may benefit from dependable relationships with grandparents, extended family members, mentors, or other responsible people.

These relationships should develop with proper supervision and attention to safety.

No child should be pressured into private contact with an adult merely because that adult holds a religious title, occupies a respected position, or claims to have special spiritual insight.

The protection of the child must remain an important consideration.

WHEN THE FAMILY HAS BECOME ISOLATED

Some parents gradually withdraw from other people because of embarrassment, exhaustion, or repeated disappointment.

A mother may be reluctant to discuss her child's difficulties because she fears criticism. A father may believe that asking for help will cause others to question his authority.

Another parent may have experienced betrayal or mistreatment and become unwilling to trust anyone.

These concerns can be understandable.

Nevertheless, prolonged isolation may leave a family without assistance when a serious problem develops.

A parent who is carrying every responsibility alone may have fewer opportunities to obtain another perspective. Problems can become familiar, even when they are becoming increasingly harmful.

Sometimes another responsible adult recognizes a concern that the parent has become too exhausted to examine clearly.

The goal should be to develop appropriate, trustworthy relationships rather than opening the household indiscriminately to everyone who offers advice.

A family does not need a large circle of people interfering in its affairs.

One or two dependable individuals may be more helpful than many acquaintances who are willing to criticize but unwilling to assist.

A parent may also need to establish boundaries with relatives or ministry associates who continually create conflict.

Seeking support requires discernment about whom to trust.

WHEN THE CHILD'S SAFETY IS AT STAKE

There are circumstances in which a parent must act promptly because the situation has moved beyond ordinary family conflict.

If a child reports sexual abuse, serious physical mistreatment, exploitation, or threats from another person, the adult should take the disclosure seriously and take appropriate protective steps.

A parent should not dismiss a child's report simply because the accused person is a relative, respected professional, church leader, or longtime family friend.

The child may be frightened or uncertain about how to explain what happened. A calm response can help the adult obtain appropriate assistance without placing additional pressure on the young person.

The parent should avoid conducting an aggressive interrogation or demanding that the child repeatedly recount painful details to numerous people.

Appropriate authorities and trained professionals may need to become involved.

Likewise, a child who is threatening suicide, engaging in serious self-harm, or presenting an immediate danger to others requires urgent attention.

These circumstances should not be treated as ordinary disobedience or handled solely through punishment.

When immediate danger exists, emergency services or appropriate crisis assistance may be necessary.

A parent may pray while taking those protective actions.

Faith in God should encourage responsible care for the vulnerable.

Some adults have been taught to keep family problems private at almost any cost. They may fear embarrassment, damage to a ministry's reputation, or criticism from relatives.

I strongly believe that protecting a child must take precedence over preserving an outward appearance of family success.

When serious harm is occurring, silence can permit the situation to continue.

The parent has a responsibility to act according to the actual circumstances and the child's safety.

WHEN RELIGIOUS PRESSURE PREVENTS A PARENT FROM SEEKING HELP

Christian families sometimes encounter advice that sounds spiritual but places an unreasonable burden upon a struggling parent.

Someone may insist that a child's difficulties exist because the parent has insufficient faith, has failed to pray enough, or has allowed an evil influence into the home.

Others may confidently prescribe a particular religious method for every problem, regardless of the child's age, circumstances, or actual needs.

I believe parents should examine such statements carefully.

A child may have a medical condition, learning difficulty, developmental difference, emotional injury, or other concern that requires appropriate evaluation.

An adult who automatically assigns spiritual blame without investigating the facts may delay needed assistance.

There are also occasions when a parent has genuinely failed to provide adequate supervision or correction. In those circumstances, responsible counsel should help the adult recognize and address the problem.

However, responsible counsel requires discernment.

James 3:17 (KJV)

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

This passage is especially important when considering the manner in which Christian people advise distressed families.

A parent seeking help should be treated as a person who deserves respect and careful attention. The child should likewise be regarded as a valuable human being.

The advisor should be willing to listen, examine the circumstances, acknowledge limitations, and recognize when another form of assistance is appropriate.

Religious authority should never be used to prevent a parent from obtaining necessary medical care, mental health treatment, or protection from abuse.

Nor should a struggling family be made dependent upon a particular leader who claims exclusive authority to interpret every difficulty.

Christian wisdom includes humility.

HELPING THE PARENT MAKE A PRACTICAL PLAN

When a parent finally acknowledges the need for assistance, the next step is to identify what kind of help is required.

An overwhelmed parent may feel that everything has become a problem. Household routines are difficult, the child is not cooperating, work responsibilities are demanding, and ordinary conversations frequently end in arguments.

Trying to solve every difficulty at once may produce additional frustration.

The adult can begin by examining which matters are most urgent.

Is anyone unsafe? Does a child require medical attention or professional evaluation? Is the household lacking dependable supervision? Has the parent become so exhausted or angry that personal reactions are creating danger?

Those concerns deserve priority.

Once immediate safety issues are addressed, the parent can consider practical adjustments.

Perhaps a child needs a more predictable routine, clearer instructions, additional academic assistance, or a reasonable change in supervision. The parent may need help arranging appointments, managing transportation, or finding temporary relief from an overwhelming schedule.

If a child has been repeatedly disciplined for conduct that may reflect a developmental or learning difficulty, appropriate assessment may help the family understand what is happening.

A teenager involved in harmful behavior may require firmer boundaries together with specialized assistance.

The parent should also consider whether the child has been given an appropriate opportunity to explain personal concerns.

Listening does not require surrendering authority.

Children may provide important information about bullying, mistreatment, academic struggles, fear, or difficulties with other family members.

A wise parent will consider such information while remaining responsible for decisions and necessary correction.

Practical help should be evaluated by its actual effect upon the household.

If an approach is increasing fear, conflict, or danger, the parent should reconsider it and obtain further guidance when needed.

WHAT ABOUT THE PARENT WHO HAS TRIED EVERYTHING?

I realize that some parents reading this chapter may feel discouraged because they have already sought help from several people.

They may have spoken with teachers, relatives, pastors, physicians, or counselors. Perhaps the child has received treatment or participated in programs without the improvement the parent had hoped to see.

Such families may be dealing with difficulties that require continuing attention rather than a single solution.

The parent may need to revisit an earlier evaluation, seek an appropriate additional opinion, or reconsider whether the assistance currently being provided is addressing the actual problem.

It is also possible that progress is occurring slowly and is difficult to recognize during everyday family stress.

Parents should be cautious about interpreting every setback as evidence that all previous efforts have failed.

Children grow and change. Their needs may also change as they mature.

Some problems require sustained supervision and support over a considerable period.

The parent may need encouragement to continue doing what is reasonable while accepting that no adult can control every decision another human being will eventually make.

This becomes especially important as children move into adolescence and adulthood.

Parents remain responsible for providing appropriate guidance, boundaries, and care while their children are dependent upon them. Yet a growing son or daughter must also learn personal responsibility.

A parent cannot live another person's entire life.

I believe this is one reason prayer becomes especially meaningful in the parenting relationship.

We teach, correct, protect, and make the best decisions we can. We also recognize the limits of our ability to govern another person's heart.

That recognition should lead to humility rather than despair.

THE PARENT WHO NEEDS ENCOURAGEMENT

I want to speak directly to the parent who is weary from carrying a difficult responsibility.

Perhaps you have spent years trying to help a child whose needs are greater than you originally understood. You may have made mistakes along the way. There may be decisions you would handle differently if given another opportunity.

Most parents can identify something they wish they had understood earlier.

The important matter is what you are willing to do with the understanding you have now.

If you have been too harsh, acknowledge it and change your conduct. If you have avoided necessary correction, begin establishing appropriate boundaries. If exhaustion has become a serious problem, seek practical assistance. If a child's needs exceed your knowledge, consult someone qualified to help.

Parents should not remain trapped in an endless cycle of self-accusation when responsible action is available.

Neither should they excuse conduct that has harmed a child.

Christian repentance includes the willingness to turn away from wrongdoing and begin making appropriate changes.

Sometimes those changes require assistance from other people.

A parent may be deeply committed to Jesus Christ and still need a physician, counselor, teacher, or dependable relative.

There is no contradiction in that.

I also want Christian communities to consider their responsibility toward struggling families.

It is easy to offer opinions about another person's children. It takes more commitment to provide appropriate encouragement, practical assistance, and respectful support.

Some parents have received so much criticism that they are reluctant to ask for help again.

A mature Christian community should be capable of listening without immediately assigning blame.

At the same time, compassion should never become an excuse for overlooking abuse, dangerous conduct, or serious neglect.

Genuine care includes protecting the vulnerable and encouraging responsible change.

CONCLUSION

Parenting requires wisdom, patience, instruction, correction, and a willingness to examine our own conduct. It also requires recognizing the occasions when a problem exceeds our present ability to manage it responsibly.

A mother or father may love a child deeply and still need assistance. Another parent may need to confront personal anger, exhaustion, or unresolved experiences before those difficulties cause further harm within the household.

Children may require educational, medical, emotional, or behavioral support that ordinary family discipline cannot provide.

Christian parents can pray for wisdom while seeking appropriate practical help.

My encouragement is to recognize these needs before the situation becomes desperate. Be willing to consult trustworthy people, consider qualified assistance, and protect the child when safety is at stake.

A responsible parent does not have to possess every answer. The willingness to recognize a limitation and seek wise help may become one of the most important decisions that parent makes for the family.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN OVERVIEW

VOCABULARY, CLARIFICATIONS, AND POINTS TO PONDER

1. Parental responsibility: The obligation of a parent or caregiver to provide appropriate care, protection, guidance, supervision, and correction.

2. Parental self-government: The adult's responsibility to manage personal anger, reactions, speech, and conduct while exercising authority over children.

3. Parental exhaustion: Physical, mental, or emotional fatigue that may interfere with a parent's ability to respond thoughtfully to household responsibilities.

4. Single-parent household: A family in which one parent carries primary responsibility for raising the child or children, often without another parent available to share everyday duties.

5. Support system: Trustworthy people or organizations able to provide appropriate practical, emotional, educational, or professional assistance.

6. Respite: A temporary opportunity for a caregiver to rest or attend to necessary responsibilities while another suitable person provides safe care.

7. Professional evaluation: An assessment conducted by someone qualified to examine a particular medical, developmental, educational, psychological, or behavioral concern.

8. Pastoral counsel: Spiritual encouragement and guidance offered by a pastor or other Christian leader. It should remain within the advisor's knowledge and competence.

9. Discernment: Careful judgment concerning the facts, the character of those involved, and the most responsible course of action.

10. Crisis intervention: Prompt assistance intended to address an immediate or serious danger to a person or household.

11. Emotional regulation: The ability to recognize and manage emotional reactions so that they do not produce harmful or uncontrolled behavior.

12. Parental isolation: A situation in which a parent lacks dependable relationships or practical assistance and may be carrying major responsibilities alone.

13. Developmental differences: Variations in the way children develop, learn, communicate, regulate attention, or respond to their surroundings. Some differences require specialized evaluation or support.

14. Protective action: Reasonable steps taken to prevent further harm when a child's safety is threatened.

15. Spiritual intimidation: The misuse of religious claims, authority, or threats to frighten, control, or prevent a person from obtaining appropriate help.

16. Accountability: Recognizing one's conduct, accepting responsibility, and making appropriate changes.

17. Practical assistance: Help with concrete needs such as childcare, transportation, meals, educational support, or access to services.

18. Appropriate boundaries: Reasonable limits that protect the child, respect the responsibilities of the parent, and prevent unsafe or controlling interference by others.

19. Additional professional opinion: Further assessment by a suitably qualified person when a problem remains unresolved or an earlier evaluation requires reconsideration.

20. Burden-bearing: The Christian responsibility to assist others appropriately, as taught in Galatians 6:2.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Am I carrying parenting responsibilities that have become too difficult to manage wisely without assistance?
2. Have I confused asking for help with personal failure or weakness?
3. Are there trustworthy relatives, friends, or community resources that could provide practical support?

4. Have I continued using a form of correction even though it is clearly failing or making the situation worse?
5. Does my child have a difficulty that requires educational, medical, developmental, or mental health evaluation?
6. Am I allowing embarrassment or fear of other people's opinions to prevent me from seeking appropriate help?
7. Have my own exhaustion, anger, or unresolved experiences begun affecting the way I treat my children?
8. Do I distinguish between spiritual guidance and professional assistance requiring specialized training?
9. Have I made the safety of my child more important than protecting the reputation of a family member, ministry, or religious leader?
10. Am I willing to listen to my child's concerns without automatically assuming that every disagreement is rebellion?
11. Do I provide practical help and encouragement to other parents, or do I mainly offer criticism?
12. What responsible action could I take now to improve a difficult situation before it becomes a crisis?

CLOSING CONSIDERATION

Parents are entrusted with significant responsibilities, but they are not expected to possess unlimited knowledge or strength. Recognizing when additional help is needed can protect children, reduce harmful conflict, and enable families to make better decisions. Prayer, personal accountability, wise counsel, and appropriate practical assistance can work together in the care of a child.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

WHEN YOU HAVE NO ONE TO CALL

The Isolated Parent, the Unanswered Telephone, the God Who Hears, and the Search for Trustworthy Help

WHEN THERE REALLY IS NO ONE AVAILABLE

I want to close this portion of the book by addressing a parent whose circumstances may be very different from those of the family surrounded by relatives, close friends, a supportive church, or a dependable community.

I am thinking about the mother or father who has reached the point of needing help and discovers that there is no one available to call.

Perhaps the parent has already called several people. One person does not answer. Another is too busy. Someone else promises to return the call and never does. A relative who previously offered assistance is suddenly unavailable when the need becomes serious.

The parent may have a sick child, an urgent financial problem, a transportation difficulty, or a family situation that has become emotionally overwhelming.

Sometimes the immediate need is simply for another responsible adult to listen.

There are parents who have been managing family responsibilities alone for years. They have become accustomed to working, paying bills, preparing meals, handling school matters, supervising children, and making important decisions without another dependable person to share the responsibility.

They may appear capable and independent because they have learned how to function under difficult circumstances. Yet their outward competence does not mean they have an unlimited supply of physical strength, emotional endurance, or wisdom.

Some are divorced or widowed. Others have never had a dependable partner in raising their children. There are grandparents caring for grandchildren, foster parents managing demanding circumstances, and adults whose spouses are absent because of employment, illness, military service, or other obligations.

A parent may also be married and still feel profoundly alone because the other adult is unwilling or unable to participate responsibly in family life.

The circumstances differ, but the loneliness can be very real.

I believe we need to recognize this reality when discussing Christian parenting. It is easy to advise a struggling mother to ask her husband for assistance when there is no husband in the home. It is equally easy to tell a father to call relatives when those relatives are deceased, estranged, far away, or unwilling to become involved.

Some parents have moved to another state or country and have not yet developed dependable relationships. Others have experienced serious mistreatment and must be careful about whom they trust.

There are also parents who have attended church for years and still do not know whom they could contact during a genuine family emergency.

That should concern us.

The Christian community speaks frequently about fellowship, love, and bearing one another's burdens. These teachings should have practical meaning when a parent is facing circumstances that cannot be managed alone.

Nevertheless, the parent who has no immediate assistance still needs to decide what to do next.

THE PARENT WHO HAS BEEN DISAPPOINTED TOO MANY TIMES

Some adults have become reluctant to ask for help because previous experiences were painful.

Perhaps a parent confided in someone who later repeated private family information. Another asked a relative for assistance and received a lengthy lecture about personal failures. Someone else approached a church leader and discovered that the conversation became an opportunity for criticism rather than meaningful support.

There are parents who have been publicly embarrassed because their children were experiencing difficulties.

Others have been told that their problems exist because they lack faith, have failed spiritually, or have not submitted to the proper religious authority.

Such experiences can cause a person to withdraw.

The parent may conclude that it is safer to handle everything privately, even when the responsibilities have become overwhelming.

I understand why an adult might become cautious after repeated disappointment. Trust should be exercised with discernment, particularly when children are involved.

However, the experience of being failed by particular people does not mean that every potential source of assistance is equally unreliable.

A parent may need time to identify individuals or organizations whose conduct demonstrates responsibility, confidentiality, and genuine concern.

That process can be difficult when the need is immediate.

It may also require the adult to reconsider what kind of assistance is actually being requested.

A person who is unable to provide childcare might still be able to help locate an appropriate service. A relative who cannot offer financial support may be able to provide transportation. A trusted friend may not know how to address a serious behavioral problem but could help the parent arrange an appointment with someone qualified.

The parent should not assume that every person can provide every form of help.

At the same time, those who offer assistance should be honest about what they can reasonably do.

Repeated promises that are never fulfilled can make an already difficult situation worse.

A struggling parent may have arranged an entire day around someone else's assurance of help. When that person fails to appear, the consequences may include missed work, financial loss, or an inability to attend an important appointment.

Christian reliability deserves greater attention.

People should be careful about offering assistance merely because it sounds compassionate at the moment.

THE GOD WHO HEARS WHEN PEOPLE DO NOT ANSWER

I believe there is a special place for prayer when a parent has reached the end of available human assistance.

The adult may be sitting alone after the children have gone to bed, thinking about unpaid bills, a child's troubling behavior, an important decision, or an emergency that cannot be postponed.

Perhaps the parent has spent the day attempting to contact someone who could help.

The telephone remains silent.

In such circumstances, a Christian parent may turn to the Lord with a sincerity that does not require elaborate religious language.

There may be tears, frustration, disappointment, or uncertainty about what to do next.

I believe God hears the prayers of His people.

Psalm 34:17–18 (KJV)

"The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.

The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

These verses express confidence in the Lord's attention to those who cry out to Him.

They can provide comfort to a parent who feels forgotten or overwhelmed.

However, we should be careful about promising that every difficulty will disappear immediately after prayer. The Scriptures do not teach that believers will never experience prolonged hardship, loss, disappointment, or circumstances requiring considerable endurance.

The Lord's faithfulness should not be reduced to a guarantee that every urgent request will receive the exact answer we prefer.

A parent may pray sincerely and still need to continue searching for employment, arranging medical care, obtaining childcare, or addressing a child's serious difficulties.

The parent may also need to make decisions that are uncomfortable but necessary.

I believe prayer can accompany these responsibilities.

There are times when the adult simply needs to acknowledge before God, "Lord, I do not know what to do."

That is a sincere place from which to ask for wisdom.

I WILL LIFT UP MINE EYES UNTO THE HILLS

Psalm 121:1–2 (KJV)

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth."

I especially appreciate these verses for the parent who has looked in every familiar direction for help and found no one available. Perhaps the telephone calls have gone unanswered, the relatives are unavailable, and even those who promised assistance have disappeared when the need became serious.

The psalmist directs our attention toward the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. His confidence rests in the One whose ability to help reaches beyond the limitations of human relationships and circumstances.

I believe this is especially meaningful for the single parent, the exhausted caregiver, and the mother or father who has become accustomed to handling every family difficulty alone. There may be moments when the adult has exhausted every reasonable option and can do little more than ask, "Lord, where will my help come from?"

Psalm 121 answers that question by directing our trust toward God.

This does not mean the parent should stop seeking practical assistance or refuse help when it becomes available. Rather, the passage reminds us that our ultimate confidence belongs in the Lord, even while we continue making responsible decisions and looking for trustworthy people who can help.

Sometimes the most sincere prayer is simply, "Lord, I need Your help. Please give me wisdom about what to do next."

The parent may still have responsibilities waiting the following morning, but there is comfort in remembering that human isolation does not place us beyond the hearing and care of God.

WHEN YOU HAVE REACHED THE END OF YOUR OWN WISDOM

Parents sometimes believe they must have an immediate answer for every problem.

A child asks a difficult question, and the adult feels pressured to respond at once. A teenager becomes involved in troubling behavior, and the parent assumes that some decisive action must be taken immediately, even when important facts are missing.

There are situations in which immediate intervention is necessary, particularly when someone is in danger.

However, many family decisions benefit from careful thought.

The parent who has no dependable person available for consultation may feel especially vulnerable to making decisions out of fear, anger, or exhaustion.

I want to encourage such parents to recognize the importance of asking God for wisdom.

James 1:5 (KJV)

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

The verse does not require the parent to pretend to know what is best.

It invites the believer to ask.

I believe this is especially meaningful for the mother or father who has reached the limits of personal understanding.

Perhaps the adult does not know whether a child's behavior is deliberate misconduct or a sign of some other difficulty. A parent may be uncertain about changing employment, relocating, seeking professional assistance, or establishing new household arrangements.

The adult can pray for wisdom while examining the available information.

There may be a need to research practical options, consult a qualified person, or reconsider an earlier decision.

Sometimes wisdom involves recognizing that a problem cannot be solved immediately.

The parent may need to address the most urgent responsibility first and return to other concerns when circumstances permit.

There is also wisdom in acknowledging that some decisions require information the adult does not yet possess.

A parent who has been disappointed by human advice may become tempted to reject all outside counsel. However, the absence of a trustworthy person nearby does not mean that qualified assistance is unavailable through other appropriate channels.

The adult may need to investigate resources beyond the immediate circle of acquaintances.

Prayer can accompany that search.

WHEN THE PARENT FEELS ABANDONED BY THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

I want to address the disappointment that can occur when a parent expects help from a Christian fellowship and receives little practical response.

The New Testament places considerable importance upon the relationships of believers.

Galatians 6:2 (KJV)

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

This instruction deserves more than occasional quotation.

A congregation may contain single parents, grandparents raising children, caregivers of family members with disabilities, and adults working several jobs to support their households.

Some of these people may be faithful in attendance, generous toward others, and reluctant to discuss their own difficulties.

Their silence should not automatically be interpreted as evidence that everything is going well.

There may be genuine needs that remain unknown because the individuals involved have learned to keep their struggles private.

Church leaders and members should consider how their communities respond when someone requests appropriate assistance.

Does the person receive respectful attention? Are practical needs taken seriously? Is confidential information handled responsibly? Are reasonable efforts made to identify suitable help?

I believe these questions deserve examination.

At the same time, a congregation may have limited resources. Some churches are small, financially strained, or composed largely of people who are themselves carrying substantial responsibilities.

No individual member or pastor can meet every need.

Nevertheless, Christian fellowship should encourage truthful communication and responsible efforts to help where possible.

Sometimes a parent may need assistance that the congregation cannot provide directly. A mature response may involve helping the family locate appropriate community services rather than offering promises that cannot be fulfilled.

I am also concerned about situations in which a parent receives religious criticism while practical needs remain unaddressed.

hypocrisy."A mother working several jobs may be told that she should attend additional meetings, volunteer more frequently, or demonstrate greater spiritual commitment. Yet the person giving that advice may have no understanding of her employment schedule, childcare responsibilities, or physical exhaustion.

A father raising children alone may be judged because his household does not resemble the ideal family arrangement presented in a particular religious setting.

Such judgments can increase isolation.

Christian wisdom should include compassion, fairness, and an honest consideration of another person's circumstances.

James 3:17 (KJV)

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

I believe this verse has considerable relevance to the way Christian communities treat struggling parents.

THE VALUE OF ONE TRUSTWORTHY PERSON

A parent who feels isolated may imagine that meaningful support requires a large network of friends and relatives.

Certainly, dependable relationships with several people can be valuable.

However, one trustworthy individual may make a significant difference.

A mature friend who listens carefully, respects confidentiality, and offers realistic assistance can become an important source of encouragement.

A responsible grandparent may provide stability for a child whose family is experiencing a difficult season.

A qualified professional may help a parent understand a problem that has remained confusing for years.

The important consideration is the quality of the relationship.

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 (KJV)

"Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.

For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up."

This passage speaks of the value of companionship and assistance.

Its wisdom is especially relevant to the parent who has been carrying major responsibilities without dependable support.

The person who helps may not possess every answer.

Sometimes the value lies in having another responsible adult who can think through a problem, provide practical assistance, or recognize when professional help is needed.

Yet the parent must exercise judgment about whom to trust.

An individual who repeatedly violates boundaries, humiliates the family, or attempts to establish inappropriate control may not be a suitable source of support.

Children should never be placed in unsafe situations merely because a parent is desperate for assistance.

A trustworthy person should demonstrate appropriate conduct over time.

WHEN THE PARENT MUST MAKE A DECISION ALONE

There are moments when an adult must make an important decision without another person immediately available.

Perhaps a child has become ill during the night. A teenager has failed to return home as expected. A parent discovers that an essential household expense cannot be paid on time.

The adult may feel frightened because the responsibility cannot be transferred to someone else.

I believe parents should recognize the difference between a situation requiring immediate action and one that allows time for further consideration.

When a child is in immediate danger, the parent should seek appropriate emergency assistance without delay.

If a young person is experiencing a serious medical emergency, threatening self-harm, or facing immediate violence, the adult should not wait for a pastor, relative, or prayer partner to become available before obtaining urgent help.

Prayer may accompany the action.

For less urgent concerns, the parent may have time to gather information, consider alternatives, and seek suitable advice.

A financial problem may require contacting a creditor, employer, community organization, or appropriate assistance program.

A school difficulty may require a meeting with a teacher or administrator.

A child's ongoing emotional or behavioral concerns may call for evaluation by a qualified professional.

The adult who has no close friend available can still investigate appropriate services.

Sometimes a parent becomes so accustomed to handling everything privately that the possibility of obtaining institutional or professional assistance is overlooked.

The difficulty may not be solved immediately, but identifying a responsible next step can reduce confusion.

PRAYER LINES, TELEPHONE SUPPORT, AND THE NEED FOR DISCERNMENT

Some parents may find it helpful to contact a Christian prayer ministry when they need encouragement and do not have someone available to pray with them.

A prayer line can provide an opportunity to speak with another person, share a concern appropriately, and request prayer.

However, parents should understand what such services can and cannot provide.

A prayer volunteer may be compassionate and sincere without being qualified to diagnose a medical condition, evaluate a serious mental health crisis, or resolve a dangerous family situation.

The adult should exercise care concerning private information.

It may be unnecessary to provide a child's full name, school, address, or other identifying details when requesting general prayer.

A trustworthy prayer ministry should respect reasonable boundaries and should not pressure callers into disclosing sensitive information.

Parents should also be cautious about individuals who claim that financial gifts, special spiritual formulas, or exclusive religious authority are required before God will respond.

Christian prayer should not become a means of exploiting a distressed person.

I believe parents can seek prayer while maintaining sound judgment.

There are also nonreligious telephone and community support services that may be appropriate for particular circumstances. Some provide information about local resources, parenting support, mental health concerns, or immediate safety needs.

The parent should choose the service according to the actual situation.

A prayer line is not a substitute for emergency assistance when someone is in danger.

Likewise, an emergency service should not be treated as the appropriate response to every ordinary parenting disagreement.

Discernment involves understanding the need and seeking help suited to that need.

THE CHILD WHO SEES THE PARENT STRUGGLING

Children sometimes become aware that a parent is carrying responsibilities alone.

A young child may notice that the adult is tired, worried, or frequently occupied with work. An older child may understand that the family is experiencing financial difficulties or that another parent is unwilling to help.

The parent may be uncertain how much information to share.

I believe children should receive honest explanations appropriate to their age and maturity.

A child can understand that a parent has work responsibilities, that the family must be careful with money, or that certain activities are temporarily unavailable.

However, children should not be made responsible for solving adult problems.

A young person should not become the parent's permanent emotional counselor or substitute spouse.

Some children are naturally compassionate and may try to comfort an exhausted mother or father. Their kindness can be appreciated without placing the adult's burdens upon them.

The parent should remain attentive to the child's need for reassurance.

A child who sees a parent crying or worrying may assume that something terrible is about to happen. The adult can provide an appropriate explanation without disclosing details that would create unnecessary fear.

Children also benefit from learning that asking for help is a normal part of responsible life.

When a parent seeks assistance appropriately, the child may learn that maturity includes recognizing limitations and making wise decisions.

There is no need to pretend that adults never become tired, disappointed, or uncertain.

The important consideration is how those circumstances are handled.

WHEN THE PARENT IS TEMPTED TO GIVE UP

There are seasons when prolonged responsibilities can become deeply discouraging.

A parent may feel that every effort has produced another difficulty. Employment is demanding, the household needs attention, and a child may be struggling with problems that have not improved despite repeated attempts to help.

The adult may begin thinking that nothing will ever change.

Such discouragement deserves serious attention.

I do not want to offer a collection of religious slogans to someone who is genuinely exhausted.

A parent who has been functioning under extreme pressure may need rest, practical assistance, medical attention, counseling, or a careful reconsideration of an unsustainable arrangement.

Sometimes the most useful next step is modest but concrete.

The parent may need to arrange childcare for an important appointment, obtain information about financial assistance, speak with a qualified professional, or identify one dependable person who can help with a specific responsibility.

A large problem may remain, but the adult can begin addressing what is immediately within reach.

If a parent is experiencing persistent hopelessness, thoughts of self-harm, or fear of harming a child, the situation requires prompt support and appropriate professional or emergency assistance.

Such concerns should not be dismissed as ordinary tiredness or insufficient faith.

Christian parents may pray sincerely while receiving the help necessary to protect themselves and their children.

WHEN THE PARENT HAS BEEN THE HELPER FOR EVERYONE ELSE

There is another situation I want to mention because it is familiar within many Christian communities.

Some adults have spent years helping other people.

They have prepared meals, provided transportation, offered financial assistance, cared for children, prayed with distressed friends, and made themselves available whenever someone else needed support.

Yet when their own family enters a difficult season, they discover that very few people are available to help them.

The disappointment can be considerable.

A parent may wonder why the kindness shown to others has not been returned.

I believe such feelings deserve honest consideration.

Christian service should not be treated as a commercial exchange in which every act of kindness guarantees an equivalent return. Nevertheless, relationships that remain entirely one-sided can become exhausting.

People who are accustomed to receiving help may not recognize that the person assisting them also has needs.

The parent who has always appeared strong may need to communicate those needs more directly.

There may also be relationships that require healthier boundaries.

An adult cannot continually neglect essential responsibilities at home in order to meet every request made by other people.

This is particularly important for parents involved in ministry or community leadership.

The desire to serve others should be accompanied by responsible care for one's own household.

A mother or father may need to decline an additional obligation, rearrange a schedule, or acknowledge that personal resources have become limited.

Such decisions can be made respectfully.

Christian maturity includes recognizing that human beings possess finite time and strength.

THE PARENT'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD DURING ISOLATION

I believe a season of isolation can become an occasion for sincere prayer and deeper reflection.

However, I do not want to romanticize loneliness or suggest that God requires a parent to remain without human assistance.

The Scriptures encourage fellowship, mutual care, and the bearing of one another's burdens.

A parent may develop a meaningful relationship with the Lord while also seeking trustworthy companionship and practical help.

These concerns are compatible.

Sometimes a person who has been disappointed by others begins to believe that trusting God requires refusing all human assistance.

I do not find that conclusion necessary.

God's wisdom may lead a parent to recognize an appropriate resource, reconsider a harmful relationship, or become willing to accept help from someone who has demonstrated reliability.

Prayer may also help the adult examine personal attitudes.

A parent who has experienced repeated betrayal may have become suspicious of everyone. Another may be reluctant to acknowledge personal limitations because independence has become part of the adult's identity.

These responses may have understandable histories.

Nevertheless, the parent can ask God for wisdom concerning present decisions.

Psalm 118:8–9 (KJV)

"It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man.

It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes."

These verses express the superiority of trusting the Lord over placing ultimate confidence in human beings.

They do not require believers to reject every human relationship or refuse appropriate assistance.

Rather, they remind us that human beings are limited and that our ultimate confidence belongs in God.

A parent may appreciate a trustworthy friend, physician, pastor, or relative while recognizing that no individual possesses unlimited ability to meet every need.

WHEN HELP FINALLY ARRIVES

Sometimes assistance becomes available after a parent has experienced a long period of difficulty.

A relative may offer dependable support. A community resource may become available. A child may begin receiving appropriate services, or a parent may establish a friendship with someone who demonstrates genuine care.

The adult may feel considerable relief.

Yet a person who has lived under prolonged pressure may find it difficult to accept that the circumstances are changing.

Some parents continue functioning as though they must personally manage everything, even when responsible assistance has become available.

Others may fear that accepting help will create obligations they cannot fulfill.

I believe discernment remains important.

The parent can evaluate the assistance, establish appropriate boundaries, and consider whether it is suitable for the family.

There may be an opportunity to express gratitude without surrendering personal judgment.

Trustworthy help should contribute to the family's well-being.

A parent who has experienced isolation may also discover the value of developing relationships gradually rather than expecting one person to meet every need.

A dependable network may take time to establish.

The adult can begin with realistic expectations and allow trust to develop through consistent conduct.

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY MUST CONSIDER ITS OWN RESPONSIBILITY

I want to address fellow Christians, including pastors, ministry leaders, and people who have been involved in church life for many years.

We can become accustomed to discussing biblical love, fellowship, and spiritual responsibility without always considering what these teachings require in ordinary human relationships.

A struggling parent may sit among us while carrying responsibilities we know very little about.

Perhaps the person is working several jobs, raising children alone, or coping with a serious family difficulty.

We may see the parent briefly during a meeting and assume that everything is satisfactory.

Sometimes we become so familiar with ministry activities, schedules, and responsibilities that we overlook the actual people attending.

I believe we should be willing to examine this.

A Christian fellowship should be a place where people can be treated with dignity, including those whose lives do not resemble the preferred social image of a congregation.

A parent who lacks money, fashionable clothing, a prominent position, or an impressive family background should not be regarded as less deserving of respect.

Likewise, a family experiencing difficulties should not automatically become the subject of gossip or speculation.

The parent may need friendship, encouragement, practical assistance, or help identifying an appropriate resource.

I believe the church should be willing to recognize such needs while respecting the limits of its own abilities.

There may be situations in which a congregation cannot provide direct assistance. Honesty about those limitations is better than offering promises that will not be fulfilled.

The Christian community can still demonstrate compassion, appropriate referrals, and respect.

The teachings of Jesus Christ should eventually reach our relationships.

WHEN THERE IS STILL NO ONE TO CALL

I realize that some readers may finish this chapter and still have no dependable person available.

Perhaps the relatives remain distant, the church has been unresponsive, and the parent has not yet located appropriate assistance.

I do not want to pretend that reading a chapter will immediately change those circumstances.

The parent may still need to work tomorrow, care for the children, pay the bills, and address the same difficult responsibilities.

However, I encourage the adult to continue seeking wisdom and to consider what responsible assistance may be available beyond the people already contacted.

There may be community services, school personnel, healthcare providers, local organizations, or other appropriate resources worth investigating.

If an urgent safety concern exists, the parent should seek emergency assistance rather than waiting for personal acquaintances to respond.

For ordinary but overwhelming responsibilities, the adult may need to identify one practical concern at a time.

Prayer remains available to the Christian parent.

The Lord can be approached without ceremony, elaborate language, or the approval of another person.

I believe a parent can speak honestly to God about disappointment, exhaustion, fear, and uncertainty.

The adult can also ask for wisdom concerning the next responsible decision.

There may be no immediate solution to every difficulty.

Nevertheless, the parent can continue seeking appropriate help while providing the best care possible under the circumstances.

CONCLUSION

The parent who has no one to call may be carrying responsibilities that other families are able to share. Such isolation deserves serious consideration, particularly when financial pressure, exhaustion, illness, or a child's difficult circumstances have made ordinary family life increasingly demanding.

Christian parents can turn to God in prayer while continuing to seek trustworthy human assistance.

The Scriptures encourage believers to bear one another's burdens, and Christian communities should examine how faithfully that instruction is reflected in their treatment of struggling families.

Parents also need discernment concerning the people they trust, the assistance they accept, and the circumstances requiring qualified professional or emergency intervention.

I believe a mother or father who has been left to manage alone deserves more than criticism or religious slogans. Such a parent may need someone willing to listen, offer practical help, and treat the family with genuine respect.

When no dependable person is immediately available, the Christian parent can continue asking God for wisdom while taking responsible steps toward obtaining the assistance the household needs.

The Lord remains worthy of our trust, including during the difficult seasons when human help has been delayed or has failed to arrive.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

VOCABULARY, CLARIFICATIONS, AND POINTS TO PONDER

VOCABULARY AND CLARIFICATIONS

1. Parental isolation: A situation in which a parent lacks dependable relationships or practical assistance while carrying significant family responsibilities.

2. Support network: A group of trustworthy people or appropriate organizations that can provide practical, emotional, educational, or professional assistance.

3. Burden-bearing: The Christian responsibility to assist others with genuine difficulties, as expressed in Galatians 6:2.

4. Practical assistance: Tangible help with needs such as childcare, transportation, meals, appointments, household responsibilities, or access to appropriate services.

5. Emotional exhaustion: A condition of considerable emotional fatigue that may affect a person's ability to manage ordinary demands and respond thoughtfully.

6. Single-parent responsibility: The responsibilities carried by a mother or father who is raising children without another parent consistently sharing everyday duties.

7. Discernment: Careful judgment concerning the character, reliability, qualifications, and suitability of those offering assistance.

8. Trustworthy assistance: Help provided by someone who demonstrates reliability, appropriate boundaries, respect, and genuine concern for the family.

9. Confidentiality: Responsible handling of private information, particularly when children and sensitive family matters are involved.

10. Respite: Temporary relief from caregiving responsibilities that allows a parent or caregiver to rest or attend to other necessary matters.

11. Spiritual intimidation: The misuse of religious language, claims, or authority to frighten, manipulate, or control another person.

12. Prayer support: Encouragement and prayer offered by trustworthy individuals or ministries, without claiming professional qualifications they do not possess.

13. Crisis assistance: Appropriate services intended to respond to urgent or serious circumstances involving safety, health, or immediate danger.

14. Parental self-government: The adult's responsibility to manage personal reactions, speech, and conduct while caring for children.

15. Age-appropriate communication: Explaining family circumstances in a manner suited to a child's maturity without placing adult responsibilities upon the child.

16. Healthy boundaries: Reasonable limits that protect a family's privacy, safety, responsibilities, and relationships.

17. Responsible independence: The ability to make appropriate decisions and fulfill responsibilities while recognizing when assistance is necessary.

18. Spiritual maturity: Growth in Christian wisdom, character, humility, self-control, and responsible treatment of others.

19. Mutual care: The practice of Christians showing practical concern and appropriate assistance toward one another.

20. Trust in the Lord: Confidence in God's character and faithfulness, while recognizing the limitations of human beings and the importance of responsible action.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Have I become accustomed to carrying responsibilities alone that could reasonably be shared with trustworthy people?
2. Has disappointment with particular individuals caused me to assume that no one can ever be trusted?
3. Do I know whom to contact if my child or I face a genuine emergency?
4. Are there appropriate community resources or professional services that I have not yet investigated?
5. Have I allowed embarrassment or fear of criticism to prevent me from asking for assistance?
6. Am I careful about whom I trust with my children, personal information, and family responsibilities?
7. Have I placed adult emotional burdens upon my children because I lack another person to confide in?
8. Do I distinguish between prayer support and the professional or emergency assistance required for particular situations?
9. Have I become so accustomed to helping others that I neglect essential responsibilities within my own household?
10. As a Christian, do I offer meaningful practical help to struggling parents, or do I mainly provide advice and criticism?
11. How does Galatians 6:2 challenge the way Christian fellowships respond to isolated families?
12. What does Psalm 118:8–9 teach about placing ultimate confidence in God while exercising wisdom concerning human relationships?
13. What is one responsible step I can take toward developing a more dependable support system?
14. How can I continue praying sincerely while taking practical action concerning my family's needs?

CLOSING CONSIDERATION

A parent who lacks dependable human assistance may be carrying considerable responsibilities under difficult circumstances. Christian faith provides an opportunity to seek God's wisdom and comfort, while practical judgment remains necessary in caring

for children and addressing family needs. Trustworthy relationships, appropriate professional services, responsible boundaries, and the willingness of Christians to bear one another's burdens can make a meaningful difference.

PRACTICAL PARENTING SELF-EXAMINATION

An EORR / A.R.T. Abiding Relationship Theology Review

James 3:17 (KJV)

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

Before concluding this book, I want to encourage parents to consider what has been discussed throughout these chapters. The Bible addresses the conduct of children, but it also speaks to the character, responsibilities, and personal self-government of the adults who raise them.

Some parents were raised under harsh correction and have never examined the methods they inherited. Others have become reluctant to correct because they fear repeating painful experiences from childhood. Still others are exhausted, overworked, or uncertain about how to respond to increasingly difficult family circumstances.

The following questions are offered for thoughtful personal examination. They are not intended as a contest to determine which parent appears most spiritual.

EXAMINING YOURSELF AS A PARENT

1. When my child disobeys, am I primarily concerned about teaching responsibility, or am I personally offended because my authority has been challenged?
2. Have I confused immediate obedience with genuine understanding and maturity?
3. Do I raise my voice, threaten, embarrass, or intimidate my children when I feel that I am losing control?
4. Have I adopted methods of correction primarily because those methods were used during my own childhood?
5. Am I willing to reconsider a familiar parenting practice when I discover that it is unreasonable, harmful, or inconsistent with biblical wisdom?
6. Do I recognize the difference between deliberate misconduct and behavior arising from immaturity, misunderstanding, distress, or other difficulties?
7. Have I excused my own anger by saying that my child pushed my buttons?
8. Am I more demanding of one child than another because of personal preference, disappointment, or favoritism?
9. Do I listen when my child attempts to explain what happened?

10. When I have behaved unfairly, am I willing to acknowledge my mistake without surrendering appropriate parental authority?

EXAMINING THE HOME

11. Are household expectations clear, reasonable, and appropriate for each child's age and abilities?
12. Do I enforce expectations consistently, or does my response depend upon how tired or angry I feel?
13. Have I become so concerned about avoiding conflict that I neglect necessary correction?
14. Do my children understand that I love them even when their conduct requires correction?
15. Have I repeatedly described a child through negative labels that may discourage improvement?
16. Are there words or expressions commonly used in our household that deserve reconsideration?
17. Have I allowed employment pressures, financial concerns, or unresolved adult conflicts to influence how I treat my children?
18. Are my children carrying responsibilities or emotional burdens that properly belong to adults?
19. Have I considered the influences entering my children's lives through friendships, electronic media, and other activities?
20. Does our home provide opportunities for respectful conversation, sincere apologies, forgiveness, and responsible change?

EXAMINING SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

21. Do I use Scripture to instruct and encourage understanding, or have I sometimes used biblical quotations to silence disagreement?
22. Have I confused a personal spiritual impression with unquestionable knowledge of another person's heart?
23. Am I willing to seek qualified assistance when my child's needs exceed my knowledge or experience?
24. Do I pray about my own attitudes and reactions as sincerely as I pray about my children's conduct?
25. Does my understanding of Christian parenting reflect the wisdom described in James 3:17?

A PRAYER FOR PERSONAL EXAMINATION

Psalm 139:23–24 (KJV)

"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:

And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

I encourage parents to consider these questions privately and honestly. Some may discover that substantial changes are needed. Others may recognize areas in which they have already grown.

The purpose is to continue learning how to exercise parental authority with responsibility, wisdom, and appropriate care.

WHEN YOU'RE TOO TIRED TO ARGUE

A Practical Reference for the Exhausted Parent

Some parents carry responsibilities that leave very little time for rest or thoughtful discussion. They may be working long hours, raising children alone, caring for other relatives, or attempting to manage difficult circumstances with inadequate assistance.

When exhaustion becomes severe, ordinary family disagreements may feel overwhelming. The parent may become unusually impatient, abandon necessary expectations, or react more harshly than the situation warrants.

In such moments, it is important to recognize whether a matter requires immediate action or can reasonably wait until everyone is calmer.

A child who is in danger, threatening serious harm, or experiencing a medical emergency requires appropriate protective action. However, many disagreements concerning chores, homework, bedtime, clothing, or ordinary privileges can be addressed after the adult has had an opportunity to settle.

An exhausted parent may agree to something unreasonable simply because the child continues protesting. The immediate argument ends, but the child may learn that prolonged resistance changes the parent's decision. When possible, explain that the matter will be discussed at a more suitable time, and then follow through.

Parents should also consider whether they are addressing the child's actual conduct or allowing frustration from work, finances, or unrelated relationships to enter the disagreement. Correction should identify what happened, why it matters, and what responsibility follows. It should not become an opportunity to attack the child's intelligence, character, or personal worth.

Some households may need simpler routines, clearer responsibilities, or more realistic schedules. Appropriate flexibility can reduce unnecessary conflict while preserving essential boundaries.

If exhaustion repeatedly leads to angry outbursts, serious conflict, or difficulty functioning, the parent may need practical or professional help. A responsible adult should not wait until a dangerous situation develops before acknowledging the need for support.

Proverbs 16:32 (KJV)

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

The parent may be weary, disappointed, or under considerable pressure. These circumstances deserve understanding, but they do not eliminate the responsibility to govern personal conduct.

A child can be held accountable for wrongdoing while the adult remains accountable for the manner of correction.

PRAYER AND FAMILY SUPPORT RESOURCES

When Additional Assistance Is Needed

There are times when prayer, personal reflection, and ordinary family discussion need to be accompanied by practical assistance.

A parent may require help with childcare, employment difficulties, financial pressure, transportation, a child's educational needs, or an increasingly serious behavioral concern. Other circumstances may involve medical needs, emotional distress, abuse, or immediate danger.

Christian parents should exercise wisdom in identifying the appropriate kind of assistance.

CHRISTIAN PRAYER AND SPIRITUAL ENCOURAGEMENT

A parent may wish to contact a trustworthy church, prayer ministry, or mature Christian who can provide respectful encouragement and prayer.

The individual or ministry should demonstrate appropriate boundaries and confidentiality.

Parents should be cautious about anyone who demands money in exchange for promised spiritual results, claims unquestionable authority over family decisions, or discourages necessary professional assistance.

James 5:16 (KJV)

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

PRACTICAL COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

In the United States, **211** can help people locate community resources in many areas, including housing, food, utilities, and other social services.

Website: www.211.org

Availability and services vary by location.

MENTAL HEALTH AND CRISIS SUPPORT

In the United States, the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** provides crisis support.

Call or text **988**.

Website: 988lifeline.org

Statements concerning suicide, self-harm, or immediate danger should always be taken seriously.

CHILD SAFETY AND ABUSE CONCERNS

For concerns about child abuse or neglect in the United States, the **Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline** offers information and support.

Call or text **1-800-422-4453**.

Website: www.childhelphotline.org

When a child is in immediate danger, contact emergency services.

EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

In the United States, call **911** for an immediate emergency requiring police, fire, or emergency medical assistance.

Readers outside the United States should use the appropriate services in their own countries.

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITY

A prayer volunteer, pastor, or ministry leader may offer valuable spiritual encouragement without possessing professional qualifications in medicine, psychology, child development, or crisis intervention.

Parents should seek assistance suited to their actual circumstances.

Prayer and responsible action can accompany one another.

KING JAMES VERSION SCRIPTURE REFERENCE GUIDE

Scriptures for Further Study

The following passages are arranged by biblical book and may assist readers who wish to continue examining parenting, correction, personal self-government, wisdom, and family relationships.

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis 2–3 — God's dealings with Adam and Eve; responsibility and consequences.

Deuteronomy 6:6–7 — Teaching God's commandments diligently to children.

Psalm 118:8–9 — Trusting the Lord above human beings.

Psalm 121:1–2 — Looking to the Lord as the source of help.

Psalm 139:23–24 — Inviting God to examine the heart.

Proverbs 12:18 — The tongue of the wise is health.

Proverbs 13:24 — The rod and parental correction.

Proverbs 16:32 — Being slow to anger and ruling one's spirit.

Proverbs 18:21 — Death and life in the power of the tongue.

Proverbs 22:6 — Training a child.

Proverbs 22:15 — Folly and the rod of correction.

Proverbs 23:13–14 — Old Testament instruction concerning correction.

Proverbs 29:15 — The rod, reproof, and the child left to himself.

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew 18:6 — Jesus' warning concerning those who offend little ones.

Mark 10:13–16 — Jesus receiving and blessing children.

Luke 6:45 — The relationship between the heart and speech.

Ephesians 4:29 — Communication that edifies.

Ephesians 4:31–32 — Putting away bitterness and evil speaking; kindness and forgiveness.

Ephesians 5:21 — Mutual submission in the fear of God.

Ephesians 6:1–4 — Children, parents, obedience, and the responsibility of fathers.

Colossians 3:20–21 — Children's obedience and the warning against provoking children.

Galatians 5:22–23 — The fruit of the Spirit.

Hebrews 12:5–11 — God's discipline and its purpose.

James 1:5 — Asking God for wisdom.

James 3:9–10 — Blessing God while cursing people.

James 3:17–18 — Heavenly wisdom and the fruit of righteousness.

James 5:16 — Confession and prayer for one another.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

TAVEAU D'ARCY

Taveau D'Arcy is a Christian author, Bible teacher, apostolic ministry leader, and developer of the EORR / A.R.T. Abiding Relationship Theology teaching perspective.

Her work draws upon approximately fifty years of biblical study, personal observation, Christian ministry experience, and involvement with a wide range of church traditions and leadership environments.

Raised in the family of a Southern Baptist senior pastor, she developed an early appreciation for Scripture, pastoral responsibility, and the importance of how Christian leaders treat other people.

Her ministry teaching emphasizes the character of Jesus Christ, the wisdom described in James 3:17, the responsibility of spiritual leaders, and the practical expression of Christian maturity within everyday relationships.

Through Cross Body Unity International and Taveau Creative Leadership, she encourages biblical reasoning, personal accountability, Equal Opportunity REAL Respect, and the importance of allowing revival to reach the relationships.

Her writing addresses Christian authority, family relationships, spiritual discernment, church leadership, prophetic ministry, and the difference between abiding relationships and controlling or transactional patterns of conduct.

She emphasizes the responsibility of every believer to examine Scripture personally and pursue truth with humility.

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ADDITIONAL TEACHINGS AND RESOURCES

Readers interested in further biblical teaching and EORR / A.R.T. Abiding Relationship Theology resources may visit:

Taveau Creative Leadership
www.taveaucreativeleadership.com

Cross Body Unity International
A Silent, James 3:17 peaceable fruit bearing, cross cultural, divine appointment no members, ministry move

A.R.T. Abiding Relationship Theology

www.abidingrelationshiptheology.com

Taveau Creative Ebook Store
www.taveaucreative.store

Topics include Christian relationships, ministry leadership, spiritual discernment, biblical authority, and practical Christian maturity.

A FINAL WORD TO THE READER

Thank you for taking the time to examine these important questions concerning Christian parenting.

We deeply understand this this book is incomplete and has no magic cure, happy home child raising formulas. Regard the main purpose in this, is to provoke homeward realistic thought, to give ideas to evaluate and guage your abiding relationships with ministers, families and called, now emerging SPECIAL generation.

If this book has encouraged you to study Scripture more carefully, reconsider an inherited method of correction, or examine the manner in which authority is exercised within your family, I hope you will continue that process prayerfully.

Parents and children are real people whose relationships deserve thoughtful attention.

We want to caregive, each of us reflecting the Big God's Goodness.
I have a Bible scripture for every age, even the Future Church:

Psalm 112 — King James Version (KJV)

1. Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly **in his commandments.**

2. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed.**

(within every generation and age.. who sets foot on this abundant earth)**

3. Wealth and riches shall be in his house: and his righteousness endureth for ever.

4. Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.

5. A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion.

6. Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.

7. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD.

8. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid, until he see his desire upon his enemies.

9. He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour.

10. The wicked shall see it, and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish.

May the wisdom of God reach our words, attitudes, correction, and the ordinary ways we treat one another.

Taveau D'Arcy

EORR / A.R.T. — Allowing revival to reach the relationships.

