

Under Loving Command

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Formerly: "Children - Fun or Frenzy?"

A word of warning

The primary message of this booklet is to relate to parents our struggle in learning to obey instructions in Scripture from a loving Heavenly Father. Therefore it is a word shared specifically from our experience rather than a technique or method for child rearing. For that, more than these few words would need to be written.

Throughout our experiences we always felt the assurance of our Father's loving attentiveness even during our reluctance to obey. We wanted to give our children the same assurance as we began to train them. Whatever lessons we learned were never intended to gain power over our children in order to manipulate and control their lives. The rod, training, or any form of discipline should never become license for arbitrary commands for the parent's benefit, nor should the home become authoritarian, cold, or militant.

Of all the places on this earth's troubled globe, home must become that place where a child knows throughout his life he will always find unconditional support, love, and forgiveness.., a refuge where his heart, mind, and hopes can find full expression.., a place of pleasant histories where his soul has become a storehouse full of good memories and gratefulness for his parents' loving and gentle care"

For I know him [Abraham], that he will command his children and his household after him, and they will keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him" (Genesis 18:19) (...**to bless him and make him a blessing** – Gen. 12:2).

Not long ago our three-and-a-half-year-old son prayed, "Lord, help me to look at your eyes and do what you say," I thought how beautifully he expressed Psalm 32:8-9, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with my eye. Do not be like the horse, or like the mule, which have no understanding; which must be harnessed with bit and bridle." This is the kind of response we desire in our own lives toward God.., not as the mule with no understanding that needs to be jerked about from one direction to another, but as one with a submissive heart who has **already** decided to obey and merely waits to be guided with His eye. We pray for this quality of obedience for ourselves and also for our children.

Any victory which God has given in our experience has come as we have been brought to the end of ourselves in failure and defeat. Then He has taken over and done the work in us. There is no other area in our lives where we are more completely cast in dependence on the Lord than with our children.

TRAINING IS MORE THAN TEACHING

In Proverbs 22:6 God promises, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." There is a distinction between **training** and **teaching**. Many of us are **teaching** our children the way they should go, but we are neglecting to **train** them in the way they should go. A child can be trained to respond to his parents in willing obedience and trust.

The dictionary gives the meaning of the word 'train' – "to mold the character, instruct by exercise, drill, to make obedient to orders, to put or point in an exact direction, to prepare for a contest." This is what God wants us to do with our children.

ALL PARENTS TRAIN THEIR CHILDREN

All of us are training our children in some way.., either consciously or unconsciously. When we ask a child to do something more than once, we are training him to wait until we have told him twice before he obeys.., or we are training him to wait until we have raised our voice before he obeys.., or we are training him to

wait until we have threatened him before he obeys. We can train him to obey immediately when we tell him once in a normal conversational tone.

The child who is only **taught** "the way he should go" can also hear other teaching and depart from the way he has been taught. But the promise to the parent who **trains** his child is: "WHEN HE IS OLD, HE WILL NOT DEPART FROM IT."

Here are two examples in Scripture: one in which the child was trained the way he ought to go and the other in which two brothers were taught the way they ought to go, but were not trained.

In I Samuel 1:11, Hannah asked the Lord for a son. She prayed, "If you... will give your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord." She did not say, "Lord, if you give me a son, I will do my best to teach him to serve you, and if he is willing and won't object, I will take him up to the tabernacle to serve you." No, she never doubted that Samuel would do anything else but what she chose for him. I Samuel 1:27 says: "For this child I prayed; and the Lord has given me the petition which I asked of him; therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshiped the Lord there." Samuel did go to the tabernacle and was a willing servant to Eli, the priest. That Samuel had been trained to obey is evident in I Samuel 3 when, as a young boy, he gets out of bed three times to run to Eli and ask him what he wants. And he served God as long as he lived.

In contrast we have the two sons of Eli, the priest, in 1 Samuel 2:12: "Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord." The Scripture goes on to tell how Eli's sons were disobedient and immoral. Eli knew what his sons were doing and he no doubt had taught them what was right. In I Samuel 2:23-24, Eli scolds his boys, "And he [Eli] said to them, Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons; this is not a good report that I hear; you are making the LORD's people transgress." But scolding isn't training.

Eli neglected to train his sons: "they did not heed the voice of their father." And the Lord cut off Eli's descendants from being priests. I Samuel 3:13 says, "For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knows; because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them." He honored his sons above the Lord (I Samuel 2:29). Eli loved the Lord, he was sincere, he performed the office of priest, but he did not train his sons to obey.

HOW? (The struggle with myself to do it God's way)

But **how** can we train? How can we train our children to obey us? God has given us the answer in His Word. Proverbs 22:15 says, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him."

Oh, but Lord. You surely don't mean I am to use a rod, a stick, on my child. My first thought is, "What am I to be, a policeman with a stick to keep him in line?" I love him too much to want to hurt him. "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly" (Proverbs 13:24).

Then I argue, but there are other ways of discipline. Words can be rods., the scolding, a rebuke. "Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell" (Proverbs 23:13-14).

But I want to let him grow up free, without inhibitions. "The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (Proverbs 29:15).

I am tempted to say, "Surely these little disobediences are not serious enough yet. He is so young. I will wait until he is older and I can reason with him and he can understand more. "Chasten your son while there is hope..." (Proverbs 19:18).

But I am afraid if I discipline him he will only rebel more. "Correct your son and he will give you rest; yes, he

will give delight to your soul" (Proverbs 29:17).

I had to ask myself... do I believe the Lord means what He says in these verses? Do I believe that if I love my children and want to obey God concerning them that I must take a stick and physically spank them when they disobey? I do believe He means just that. I also believe that if I, by faith, obey His Word, He will fulfill each promise He has given concerning child training.

My obedience to God to train my child requires that every time I ask him to do something, either "come here," "don't touch," "hush," "put that down" - or whatever it is, I must see that he obeys. When I have said it once in a normal tone, if he does not obey immediately, I must take up the switch and spank him enough to hurt so he will not want it repeated. Love demands this.

LOVE WILL PAY THE PRICE

A selfish love always wants an easier way. I can feel a selfish sentiment toward my child and spare **myself** the pain of seeing him endure suffering and disappointment, sending him into the world unprepared for the natural suffering life will exact from him. But a self-giving love realizes that obedience must come at cost and pain. God demonstrates His special love to His sons whom He trains through suffering. "For whom the LORD loves he chastens, and he scourges every son whom he receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons" (Hebrews 12:6-7). It is put even more strongly later in this portion which says that if God does **not** chasten us, then we are **illegitimate children**.

The pain that the rod inflicts on the body delivers one from the pain his character will suffer later in life because of a selfish will. "Blows that hurt cleanse away evil, as do stripes the inward depths of the heart" (Proverbs 20:30).

"I know, O LORD, that your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me" (Psalm 119:75).

"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I may learn your statutes" (Psalm 119:71).

"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word" (Psalm 119:67).

The child who is never trained to discipline himself and bring his will into submission to another will necessarily require chastening as he grows older if he is ever to mature in his obedience toward God. God in His grace will chasten that child, but after years of self will and self indulgence... through what greater suffering? "It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth" (Lamentations 3:27).

Using the rod on my child is unpleasant, but immediately after the correcting I can take the child on my lap to comfort and kiss him; I can tell him I love him, but that he must obey. The Lord does this to us, doesn't He? Who of us has not been chastened severely by Him and then known His sweet comfort as He tells us, "I am doing this because I love you." "Come, and let us return to the LORD, for he has torn, but he will heal us; he has stricken, but he will bind us up" (Hosea 6:1).

A ROD OF LOVE DELIVERS FROM HOSTILITY

This restoration of fellowship is the blessing of the rod. After it is used, after we have chastened, we can completely forget the incident and enjoy the fellowship restored between parent and child. If we continue to nag or scold, we may develop a prolonged alienation or hostility toward the child because he has not yet been corrected and taught to obey. Such nagging on our part only sends a message of fear and punishment rather than of loving attention.

Anger and hostility toward the child is the result of our own disobedience when we parents fail to chasten as God commanded us, or from our delay in obeying until we become frustrated with the child's behavior. That delay and disobedience opens up the dangerous possibility that our frustration will erupt as abusive

words or actions toward the child who is simply responding to **our** inconsistent actions and words. When the rod is used consistently for the slightest disobedience, it is never associated with anger, displeasure, or rejection, because the parent chastens the child with a patient, loving spirit in obedience to God. No matter the nature or the circumstance of the offense, the correction is always the same because the wrong-doing is always one of disobedience. This is the rod of correction which brings hope.

Children soon understand that the rod is saturated with our love and they receive it as loving training for their benefit. The message is not one of a traumatic, judgmental act of punishment for an evil deed, nor a reaction from the parent to "get even" or to strike out in anger with an emotional outburst of scolding or punishment for a list of uncorrected acts. Consistent gentle training with loving chastening is quickly understood as a caring act.

As I was busy getting breakfast one morning I asked our daughter to put on her shoes and socks. I am sure she intended to obey me, but she got busy playing and forgot. I told her to go in and lie across the footstool, because she did not obey me and I must correct her. I was busy in the kitchen and failed to go in immediately as I should have done. When I did, there she was lying on her tummy across the footstool, waiting for her correction, singing, and swinging her feet. She was waiting in complete rest. She accepted the switch as the inevitable result of disobedience. Each one of our children sweetly receives the switch; they realize we use it to train them, because we love them. And afterward, oh how free we are to show them our affection!

I must add another word in relation to this incident. As I corrected my daughter I had to judge myself, because I had done the very thing for which I was chastening her. I also had not obeyed immediately. I was disobedient in delaying the correction. When I saw her sweetly waiting for me, my heart was struck again with my responsibility to hear and obey God in the same way I was training my children to hear and obey.

IS EVERY CHILD DIFFERENT?

A comment we hear so often is, "But every child is different and should be dealt with differently." We agree that every child is different. We have as much variety of personality and temperament in our four children as any you will find. But they all have one thing in common., they were all born with a self-centered nature. And each one has required the rod to bring him to a place of submission. Nowhere in Scripture does the Lord qualify His command on the basis of personality.

Let me share two personal illustrations of this. Our youngest boy has a strong temper. It was revealed long before he could talk. When we crossed his will by saying "No" to him, he would not directly disobey. Instead he would throw himself down on the floor and kick and scream. At first I would go over, pick him up, and say, "No, no," and set him on my lap to make him hush. I realized, however, that though I relieved the situation for the time, I was not training him to live outside himself.

The next time he was disappointed by a "No," threw himself down and screamed, I spanked him on his bottom right during the middle of his tantrum. Then I went to a chair, set him on my lap, made him hush, and loved and comforted him. He came to the place that when his will was crossed, he would throw himself down, begin to scream, and right in the middle of it catch himself. By the time I got to him with the switch, he was up walking around, busying himself as though everything were fine. Of course, he still got the switch because he had to learn to accept my will immediately. This is what he has learned to do, overcoming tantrums.

Will this training break his spirit? No, only his self-will, that will which is wholly centered in self will be broken. This is the part that requires **faith**. I believe that as I obey the Lord in this, He will teach our son to subject his will to our loving authority and still develop his personality to the fullest. In fact, it is the disciplined spirit that is free to blossom to its fullest because it is not thrown by circumstances. It is the pruned vine that flourishes and bears the sweetest fruit.

In contrast, our older boy is unusually sensitive and emotional. He has been this way since he was an infant. When he was very young, he would often burst into tears when we asked him to do something he did not want to do. He would burst into tears at the slightest provocation. The tears came with any new situation, happy or sad. We would withhold correction, excusing him on the basis of his sensitivity.

Things got worse instead of better, because he would escape into his tears when he did not want to obey. He was showing more insecurity all the time. I don't believe he did this consciously, but we, in a sense, were **training** him to give in to his emotions. We reasoned that if we used the rod on him it would only deepen the problem.

The Lord began to convict us about the fact that we were not being obedient to His Word and trusting Him for the result. Finally one evening during our family Bible-reading time, Daddy asked our son to do something he did not want to do, with the usual result... tears. We tried to comfort and coax him, but it only brought on more tears. That night he went to bed without being brought to the place of obedience.

As his dad and I sat there and talked about it, our conviction grew that **we** were the ones who were not obedient, and that we had to begin to obey immediately for our son's sake. So Daddy went into his room. He put him on his lap and told him that we didn't have peace about what happened. He confessed to our son that we had not been obedient to the Lord who wanted us to be sure that our son obeyed. Daddy told him that he would have to correct him. So he spanked him, held him in his arms and comforted him, had him do the thing he had been asked to do in the first place, then put him back to bed. We know our son went to sleep that night more secure in Daddy's love. He began to see our obedience, and it caused his heart to rest. He needed to see that **we** were saying "yes" to God in assuming the responsibility to correct his disobedience.

This was a real turning point for both our son and us. After that the Lord gave us the grace to use the rod whenever our son did not obey. He became much more secure and settled and began to learn to live above his emotions. His temperament is the same and he is just as sensitive as ever, but he is learning that issues are more important than his emotions. Before, he evaluated everything by his feelings. When he learned not to be controlled by his emotions, he became much more interested in others and less involved with himself. I have often thought, with this tendency to be so sensitive, how insecure he would be today if we had continued to cater to his tears and our own lack of faith. Now his sensitivity shows in his gift for positive creativity and benefits all of us.

That evening brought another turning point in our son's life. He began to open his heart to the Lord in a new way. It was as though he had been holding back that one area of his heart, and when he discovered that he had to give it up, he was free. His prayers were much more real. He became more attentive and interested in family devotions, and ever since I have never known him to feel anything but warmth and love toward the Lord.

GOD IS TRAINING US

Shouldn't our relationship to our children be a picture of our Heavenly Father's relationship to us? He is our Lord and we, at this point in their lives, are the lord of our children. This necessarily places the responsibility on us to act in the same loving consistency toward our children as our Heavenly Father does toward us.

God is training me as His child even as I train mine. His training teaches me to be very sensitive to what is truly **for the good of the child. Tyranny has no place in training.** When my Father chastens me, it is an action toward me for my good, not an angry reaction or rejection. "Oh that they had such a heart in them that they would fear me and always keep all my commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" (Deut. 5:29). "For they (earthly fathers) indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness" (Hebrews 12:10).

To illustrate, let us suppose that my child has just spoken rudely to me (or to his brother). My natural

impulse is to feel personally offended and to react in a similarly rude way by chiding and scolding him. But love for the child and obedience to God demand that I take up the rod and chasten patiently, set the child on my lap, and lovingly teach him that he must always speak in a loving way. This is the action of love for the **good of the child**.

Again, suppose my child wants something very much that may not be best for him. To give in to his desire is to indulge **myself**. I must for the **good of the child** take the time and trouble to train him to receive his disappointment with an accepting attitude, trusting in his parents' love for him, believing that they have made the decision that is **best for him**. Through this he will learn to trust God's will as best for him. If we are faithful to train the child to bring his will into submission to ours, I believe (and have seen) that the child will transfer that submission to God as he grows older. But if he takes our word lightly, he will take God's word lightly.

INCONSISTENT USE OF THE ROD IS NOT TRAINING

To be consistent is so important. What can be more frustrating to a child than to never know quite what to expect from us. It is our inconsistency as parents that provokes and discourages our children. One day we feel stern and say "No" to something. The next day we feel indifferent and preoccupied, and in order to save ourselves the inconvenience, we allow them to go ahead, or we overlook "little" disobediences. When we operate with the rod in this way, it becomes something other than training; it is brute force to make the child cater to our moods. I believe this kind of bullying strengthens a child's resistance to authority. He is provoked to anger, becomes discouraged, and rebels. "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged" (Colossians 3:21). We as parents must be obedient to follow through each time we speak.

But it takes diligence. This is why we cannot possibly do it in our own strength or on the strength of any motive other than obedience to God. The motive to have nice well-behaved children will not carry us. For example, one day I may have lots of initiative and no other distractions. I may tell my child to "Come here." It is easy now to stop what I am doing in order to do what is necessary to train him if he disobeys. But the next day, I may be settled comfortably in a chair nursing my baby when I tell my child, "Come here, please." If he disobeys, the motive to have nice well-behaved children is not enough now. It is so much easier to repeat what I said a little sharply. But then I have trained the child to know that I do not really mean what I say the first time. No, it takes His grace to say, "Lord, You have told me to train my children. If I sit here in this chair I will be disobeying You. Please, help me to obey You by training my child to obey." He then gives me grace to get up out of the chair, put the baby down, take up the switch, use it patiently, take my child on my lap and comfort him. "But he who loves him is diligent to discipline him."

IT IS AN ACT OF FAITH

Many people have said, "I've tried spanking and it just makes matters worse. It doesn't work." To begin to operate on the premise of "I'll try it" **won't** work. To train our children in love with the rod is God's command. It is an act of faith to step out on His promise to fulfill His will in us, strengthened by Him. Faith will not give up because its object is obedience to God and His Word, not to ourselves or some "workable" principles.

When our first child was very small and began to show a selfish will, it was difficult to begin to train her with the switch. We had no idea what the results might be. But God made it clear to us that we were to trust Him and obey. Many well meaning people (some of them religious leaders) sought to discourage us in using the rod, saying the Scriptures were not literal in the use of the word "rod." They said that there were other forms of discipline.; "words could be rods." (What could be more cruel than to **beat a child with words**.) They advocated reasoning and redirecting. We were told our daughter might grow up with "all kinds of psychological problems."

But God gave us the grace to act in faith that His Word is true. Our daughter will soon be a teenager and

we can say, "As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is proven; he is a shield to all who trust in him" (II Samuel 22:31). She is a constant blessing and pleasure to us in every way. Many of the so called "teenage" attitudes were dealt with at age ten and eleven. She is outgoing and interested in others. Most important of all, she loves God and His Word and her spiritual growth is as evident as her physical growth. Her own basic relationship with us has been established. We are still training her; nothing is changed. The rod is still the loving instrument of training for her, and she welcomes it as readily as she did at two.

Of course there will come the time when the rod for her is laid aside and God alone will continue to train her with His own loving rod., but not yet. Particularly during these very emotional teenage years, it is a blessed instrument of training to deliver us from any need for hostility toward her, or from her toward us. With her heart so sensitive to the Lord, there is immediate repentance and sweet confession. Furthermore our Lord leads both her and us, her parents, to a mutual understanding and acceptance of decisions we must make together.

FREEDOM TO GROW

When we are training our children to obey, we are able to build their lives without being hindered by antagonism. We can help each child grow in the knowledge of God, and the entire family can enjoy a home filled with love, fun and humor, rejoicing in all the work of God in our lives day by day. There is a wonderful freedom in our relationship as we grow together spiritually. We are able to live honestly and openly before our children as examples of dependence on God. "And I will walk at liberty, for I seek your precepts" (Psalm 119:45).

TRAINING THEM TO RECEIVE GOD'S DIRECT GUIDANCE

Discovering the excitement of hearing God speak through His Word begins very early. Our regular family time around the breakfast table, when Daddy reads the Bible and we discuss it together as a family, is a source of growth and strength to us all. But as our children grow older, it becomes increasingly important that they get their guidance and help directly from the Lord. Therefore they need a special time of training in feeding themselves from God's Word. They are learning to study His Word in their own individual quiet time.

What blessings we have received as parents as Dad has taken time with our older boy two mornings a week before work and school to talk over the portions of Scripture they've been studying. With Dad's undivided attention, our son is able to talk about all that's on his heart. He has been able to bring out his questions and face them in the light of the Scriptures with his dad.

Our older daughter and I receive this same blessing as we take time in the morning together, talking over our Bible studies and all the new experiences that growing into a young woman brings.

These are wonderful and exciting days for us with our children. The training process is often painful and unpleasant and requires constant commitment, but the rewards are glorious! "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful: nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11).

A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

There have been times when I have felt totally discouraged and defeated in training my children until I thought there is no hope, it's too late, I've lost so much ground that there is no recovery.

We went through a soul-wracking experience concerning our youngest daughter when she was around three years old. We were not being obedient to the Lord in her training. It was very involved, and I am not sure how to explain it except to say we were relying on ourselves and on our own reasoning., often rationalizing that we did not need to spank her. In many ways we were afraid of her. We disciplined her just enough to maintain order, but we were not training her to truly obey. We allowed her to maintain subtle

control over us with an unsubmitted will. We had a whole list of excuses why we were not obeying the Lord in this, but the Lord, in His grace, wouldn't give us peace. He brought us more and more under conviction about it until we were miserable.

I kept telling the Lord, "I can't, I just can't do it." And He would answer, "I know you can't. Of course not, you never could." I would **say**, "I can't" but **keep** struggling and trying. Finally I literally spent one entire night in tears telling the Lord that I was at the end of myself and that if He wanted my children trained, He would have to do it.

The next morning, after a sleepless night, when the first occasion arose, I took the switch in hand and said, "Okay, Lord, You do it." And He did. Because I had trained my daughter to be **ins**sensitive to my voice, I had to begin all over again to train her to listen. I spoke once and followed through with the switch. Each time as she sat on my lap and I loved and comforted her, I would repeat the words, "Listen to my voice and obey."

At lunch time that day, after many incidents of correction, she sat down to eat and bowed her little head to pray and thank the Lord for the food. Often before she had prayed, "Lord, teach me to obey." But today she prayed, "Dear Lord, thank You that I **will** obey." She stressed the "will" as though she were saying, "Thank You, Lord, that Mommy is finally obeying You by making me obey. I'm so glad I am not left to myself."

In the days that followed a beautiful transformation took place. She took on new sparkle, became interested in others, and began to live outside of herself. And what an inexpressible pleasure she became to her mommy and daddy and brothers and sister.

God meets us right where we are. If these principles are new to you and you already have untrained children, know that God will be very gracious to you. It is not too late. In his strength you can begin now to obey Him in what He has revealed to you. Your children will soon learn that because you love them, you are training them to obey. As you step out in faith, you will see that God is doing His work in you..., and in them.

A Word to Fathers

When I asked my wife to write these experiences, I felt that I was united with her in her commitment to train the children in obedience to the Lord. However, I had not faced the struggle to become obedient as a father. I took pride in their development without paying the price of confronting their will. For a long time my wife's obedience was a substitute for my own, and I continually resisted giving clear, thoughtful commands to the children, especially if I thought it might go against their will. I knew that to confront them with a command would force me to submit my will to God. I only used the rod for selected things and for disobediences which my wife saw and pointed out to me but which I often excused inwardly and rationalized away. This divided spirit frustrated much of the training of my wife.

By avoiding my responsibilities, I failed to receive the benefit of God's chastening and training through the spiritual struggle to obey in training my children. I also missed giving the children the trust and hope that they need in their father in order for me to reveal to them God's fatherhood.

But God is Sovereign Father. He has met me with difficult struggles and severe chastening, commanding me to see the need to judge myself and turn my attention from my own self-interests. He has taught me to redirect my work and the use of my time to consider what commands God is giving me to give to my children, and to come under these commands myself. Therefore, each time I command or chasten the children, it is to be my own confession and agreement with God's sovereign right to command me to obey for the good of my children and their children to follow.

I share this as a warning to every father who reads our testimony. It is a fearful thing to use the rod without giving our children holy and righteous commands. It is a fearful thing to judge our children without judging ourselves, for they are God's children as well and we must all come under His righteous Fatherhood.