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Discipline

**The Responsible
Christian Parent
(Part 3)**

924-A

Series: Living Lessons From Proverbs



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Discipline

When the subject of being a responsible Christian parent surfaces, one issue always seems to generate more discussion than any other. It is the issue of discipline! Psychologists, theologians, and educators have wrestled through the years without much success trying to harmonize the concepts of the world and the precepts of the WORD where the dynamics of discipline are concerned, and they have wrestled in vain! For the world's concepts have drifted from one generation to another, and from one extreme to another.

We have seen the pendulum swing from the philosophy of the "BOARD of education"; which properly applied to the seat of the problem would produce right behavior, to the philosophy that discipline damages the little darlings' freedom of expression, so you creatively divert their attention rather than convincingly paddle their posterior. And in between those extremes there have been at least a thousand variations of philosophies spawned by well meaning "experts" both in and out of the Christian community, until... even the very word "DISCIPLINE" itself... means different things to different people.

Our objective is not in any way to add to the confusion, nor generate any new concepts; but rather simply to reiterate the precepts, so you and I can both be reminded of what the Scripture says about discipline, and then allow the Holy Spirit to make application individually as HE sees fit.

If you are NOT a parent, or if discipline is no longer an issue where your children are concerned, I would ask that you not tune out this lesson just yet; for an integral part of any study of "How God wants parents to discipline their children" ought to include an understanding of how God disciplines HIS children as well. That is an issue that affects us all!

So welcome to part three of our look at "THE RESPONSIBLE CHRISTIAN PARENT." Our title for this study is "The Dynamics of Discipline", and we will view the subject from four vantage points:

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I- Defining Discipline

II- Principles from Proverbs on Disciplining Children

III- Practical Problems in Disciplining Children

IV- The Perfect Parent Disciplines His Children

DEFINING DISCIPLINE

Just what is discipline? Can we define it? I think we can, if we just stick to the Scripture. It does not change!

The Hebrew word translated “discipline” or “chasten” is used some 90 times in the Old Testament. It is used of God disciplining His children, and it is used of God’s children disciplining their children! It is used 9 times in the Pentateuch. It is used 26 times by the Prophets. It is used 36 times in Proverbs (where the emphasis is nearly always on the parent-child relationship); and it is used 19 times in other parts of the Old Testament. Perhaps the most widely accepted and most easily understood definition of the word is this:

Discipline: correction which results in education

In viewing the Old Testament usage of this word we would have to come to some basic conclusions.

1- Discipline is a tool of restoration rather than condemnation when applied to God’s people. Its purpose is always to bring a person or a nation back to its rightful place spiritually.

2- Discipline, as used in the OLD TESTAMENT, does not always denote the infliction of pain or disappointment. It includes a balanced mixture of provision and punishment.

One example would be Deuteronomy, chapter 8, where we read in verse five, that God had been “disciplining” His children in wilderness; a discipline He had been describing in verses 1-4.

But the description in verses 1-4 included these kinds of discipline: He led them. He tested them. He humbled them. He allowed them hunger...then He fed them to teach them, He allowed them no new clothing...then He made what they had last. So their discipline was a supernatural blend of provision mixed with punishment!

3- He always preceded physical punishment by first communicating His Word. He would give them His word, then He

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would allow circumstances to confirm that word or to conform them to that word through correction. This process He called chastening or disciplining.

In the New Testament, meanwhile, the Greek word translated “chasten” or “discipline” (*paideuo*) means primarily “to bring up or to rear a child” and thus incorporates all of the aspects of child rearing. It involves three basic activities—training, correcting, and punishing.

The dictionary definition adds the final dimension. It says chastening is “training that is expected to produce a specified character or pattern of behavior”.

Then, as Christians, we might define discipline as all forms of training, correction, and punishment, which result in wisdom. It is God’s character in control of our children.

Divine Discipline then (or God’s discipline of us), would be God’s efforts through teaching, correcting, and punishment to restore the Christian to His likeness.

It is by teaching through the use of His Word, by correcting through the work of the Holy Spirit, and by punishing through the divine arrangement of circumstances which get our attention, and inflicting just enough pain to alter the course of our behavior.

Parental discipline, meanwhile, would be the father or mother operating under a divine mandate, for teaching for correcting, and for punishing their children, all for the sake of restoring them to the image of their Heavenly Father.

So, every time you share a Scriptural principle with your child, you are disciplining him. When you are eating dinner, you can share a principle about Christ’s return. That is discipline. You are training him in Godliness.

Every time you demonstrate by your life how to properly respond to the Word, you are disciplining him. If you lose your job, but respond with praise, prayer, and joy, that is discipline, training by example in Godliness.

Every time you correct them in love for violating a Scriptural precept, you are disciplining them. Little Johnny doesn’t understand it’s wrong to touch that vase. So you stop him and share with him why he shouldn’t do that. That’s discipline, training by correcting. There are some things children shouldn’t touch. God tried to tell Eve that!

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Every time you have to inflict either emotional or physical pain to get their attention or redirect their paths, you are disciplining them. When you send Betty to her room it is discipline. You turn Billy over your knees and delay his ability to sit. That, indeed, is discipline.) But unless they come to see all of those as discipline, they will come to resent the pain of the paddling, and question your love. All of their spiritual training is discipline. The painful part is just the final stage when the other methods have not fully accomplished God's purpose. But our main mission in this lesson is to remind you that that final step, physical punishment, is not an option for the Christian.

It may or may not be for the non-Christian depending on the psychology of his age. But for the Christian, physical punishment is a priority item for the parent, the reasons we shall see are spiritual, but the pain inflicted is often quite physical.

How do we know? Well, by simply taking principles from Proverbs and learning precepts about the issue of parenthood. Proverbs leaves no question marks by the issue of spanking a child, only exclamation marks.

Let's peruse Proverbs for some Principles on Punishment and see what revelations about the rod will be forthcoming. We will simply take every passage Proverbs lists on disciplining children and see what Principles emerge.

Principle 1- WHEN YOU PUNISH A CHILD IT PROVES TO HIM THAT YOU LOVE HIM!

He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him takes care to chastise him. (Proverbs 13:24 NIV)

Another translation says:

The man who is free with his correction loves his son.

The rod, used here, is an instrument of correction, a tool to inflict just enough pain to cause a child to be grieved and repent.. But the issue in this passage is not the rod, but the reason you punish a child in order to demonstrate your love. To refuse to do so, God says, is to say to your child, I hate you; or I do not love you enough to bear the pain of disciplining you.

Principle 2- THE TIME TO PUNISH IS FROM THE BEGINNING.

Discipline your son in his early years, while there is (still) hope. If you don't, you will ruin his life. (Proverbs 19:18 TLB)

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So the principle is that the earlier you begin, the better your chances; and the longer you wait, the tougher the odds. If you discipline a child from his first sign of rebellion, there is hope. If you wait until the patterns of resistance to authority are etched in concrete, you may not have a chance to break those patterns.

The second half of that verse in the NEB is a warning against abuse. It says, “Be careful not to flog him to death.” You must know how to spank and when to stop, but you also must know when to start... and that’s right away!

Principle 3- THE PURPOSE OF PUNISHMENT IS TO DESTROY A SPIRIT OF REBELLION.

A youngster’s heart is filled with rebellion, but punishment will drive it out of him. (Proverbs 22:15 TLB)

Another translation words it like this:

Innate in the heart of a child is folly, but judicious beating will rid him of it.

So, the object of discipline is to deal with rebellion. Just what is rebellion? Rebellion is the mind-set of Satan that imputes to man the right to manage his own life. It causes a child to say, “Don’t tell me what to do. No parent can control my life. I don’t want to do that.” It causes the adult to say, “God can’t tell me what to do. My boss can’t tell me what to do. My husband can’t tell me what to do...” Rebellion is, in a nutshell, the refusal of man to be ruled. It surfaces early in the life of a child, and discipline is designed to train it out of him first by teaching, then by correcting, finally by punishing, if nothing else works.

Learn to discern a spirit of rebellion in yourself and in your children. It is the opposite of submission. Submission yields to authority and thus to yields to God. Rebellion defies authority and thus defies God. When you have discerned that rebellion exists, deal with it God’s way, first through instruction, next through warning, finally through punishment if all else fails. Remember, you are not punishing to demoralize or be vengeful. You are punishing to drive out a spirit of rebellion and thus to free the one you are punishing from the grasp of a Satanic lie.

Principle 4- TEMPORARY PAIN IS PROFITABLE FOR PERMANENT CHARACTER CHANGE.

Do not withhold discipline from a child, if you punish him with the rod, he will not die.” (Proverbs 23:13 NIV)

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Don't fail to correct your children. Discipline won't hurt them. (TLB)

Oh, child-psychologists, listen! The principle here is that the pain of discipline is temporary. It won't create lasting physical damage. But the character change it affects could be eternal. So often we lose sight of the fact that in life we must face pain for a season to enjoy reality for a lifetime.

Principle 5- THE REAL BENEFITS OF PUNISHMENT ARE SPIRITUAL.

Punish him with the rod and (you'll) save his soul from Sheol. (Proverbs 23:14 NIV)

They won't die if you use a stick on them. Punishment will keep them out of hell. (TLB)

The issue is that physical punishment reaps spiritual benefits. Because it honors God's principles, it honors God. and it is important to realize that by driving out a Satanic spirit of rebellion, you open a child's soul to respond to a call to Lordship and thus to Jesus Christ Himself. Discipline drives self from the throne of the life and makes room for Jesus.

Principle 6- THE PURPOSE OF PUNISHMENT IS TO REDIRECT THE LIFE.

Guide a horse with a whip, a donkey with a bridle, and a rebel with a rod to his back. (Proverbs 26:3 TLB)

The principle in that verse is not that you treat your child like an animal, but rather that the tools you use to guide an animal are illustrations of how God uses discipline in a child's life. The whip speaks of punishment to motivate; the bridle speaks of punishment to control or direct. Both speak of an effort to give direction to a life by bringing it under another's control: not to break its spirit, but rather to give it purpose. The child who is bent on rebellion can only have his direction changed by inflicting just enough pain to gain his attention, then maintaining that pain until he turns and moves in the direction he was designed to go. With a horse you use a whip, with a donkey a bridle, with a child in rebellion, you use a rod; otherwise, he will race down the wrong path, and you will have not exerted enough pressure to alter his course.

Principle 7- THE NATURAL RESULT OF AVOIDING THE ISSUE OF PUNISHMENT IS EVENTUAL SHAME.

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Scolding and spanking a child helps him to learn. Left to himself, he brings shame to his mother. (Proverbs 29:15 TLB)

The mother is often the one who must face the shame of an unbridled child. Unless the child is properly scolded and physically brought to a point of submission, the natural result of rebellion will ensue. Rebellion left untended always brings about shame...to the child...to the parent... and eventually to others as well.

Principle 8- THE REVERSE IS ALSO TRUE. PROPER PUNISHMENT LEADS TO PARENTAL PEACE.

You will have done what God called you to do. Then the child's choices are his or hers and are not caused by your neglect.

Discipline your son and he will give you happiness and peace of mind. (Proverbs 29:17 TLB)

The happiness comes from seeing the child's perspective change. The peace of mind comes from knowing you have obeyed the will of God.

Principle 9- PHYSICAL DISCIPLINE IS THE NATURAL COURSE WHEN VERBAL INSTRUCTION IS NEGLECTED.

Sometimes mere words are not enough-discipline is needed. For the words may not be heeded. (Proverbs 29:19 TLB)

The obvious truth is that words must precede punishment. Punishment comes when the words are not heeded. Just as God precedes discipline with His Word, and when we obey His Word, our need for discipline diminishes. The same is true when we parent. We give our children truth to instruct them, remind them of truth to correct them, then when necessary inflict punishment to redirect them, lest they choose to ignore the truth altogether.

So Proverbs has much to say about the process of physical punishment and children. Again, our objective is not methodology, but principles; not concepts, but precepts. The Holy Spirit may choose to apply these in many varied ways in many varied homes, but the precepts are unchangeable. They are:

1- Physical punishment is a demonstration of a parent's love. (If you love your child, you will be willing to spank him)

2- Correction and punishment must begin early.

3- Its objective is to drive out a spirit of rebellion; to remove one's resistance to being under authority.

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- 4- It hurts temporarily, it helps permanently.
- 5- The real objective of physical punishment is spiritual change.
- 6- The goal is restoration and redirection.
- 7- Avoiding physical discipline leads to shame.
- 8- Accepting the responsibility to discipline leads to peace and happiness.
- 9- Verbal correction comes first, then physical punishment comes when the words are not heeded.

Those are Principles from Proverbs on Punishment. They will not change with the times. Neither Dr. Spock, nor Dr. Speck, nor Dr. Spock coming along with a new theory on child management will alter their authenticity one iota. You do not measure these precepts by the latest theories; you measure the latest theories by these precepts. If the theories are at odds with the Word, reject them, no matter what great authority on child-rearing wrote the book. THE AUTHORITY ON CHILD RAISING wrote this book, and it will be as current as the daily news for all eternity. Many are the parents who risked their children's future on the latest theory only to find when their children were grown that even the author had changed his mind. God won't! (God can't and still be God.)

So God's dynamics of discipline are in concrete. Memorize them; meditate on their meaning; and ask the Holy Spirit to weave them into tender reality in your life. But remember, Satan hates these precepts! He cannot tolerate the principle of discipline.

He always gets tripped up! He did with Job. He did with Joseph! He plans those things for evil; God uses the very things Satan plans to use to destroy as tools to discipline; and in the process God is glorified. Satan despises that! So he moves with deliberate intensity to destroy this concept at every turn. Discipline demands dependence. Rebellion demands independence! And so the battlefield in the home over the control of the children is a spiritual struggle.

You aren't wrestling against flesh and blood... The battle over whether to discipline your children is a battle between Satan and God for control of their lives. It is not a matter of philosophy. It is a matter of spiritual obedience!

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But many of us have found that the process of maintaining discipline in the lives of our children is not and was not as simple as we might like it to be. I will spend but a moment here, but I believe there are at least six reasons we falter in our discipline, and we look at them only to help us recognize them. Some of us can now look back and see why we failed to be faithful.

1- We fail because we are ignorant of scriptural principles. We get confused between the world's concepts and the Word's precepts. We let the world squeeze us into its mold.

2- We want acceptance! Most of all we want acceptance from our children; and the first time we punish them, and they cry "I don't love you anymore" we melt.

3- We yield to our emotions rather than honoring the Word. It is called the absence of self-control. We don't feel like spanking. God does not punish us because He FEELS like it, but because He is honoring His Word. And instead of objectively looking to others for help, we subjectively overlook their rebellion.

4- We wait too long to start. We find ourselves with a sledgehammer trying to chip away concrete instead of being potters trying to mold shapeable clay. We let small habits of rebellion slide, only to find ten years later they have blossomed into full-grown spiritual diseases that require radical surgery. They become seemingly untreatable because they were not treated in their early stages.

5- We have no plan. We fail because we have not determined in advance what we will do if they rebel, and how we will respond if they refuse to yield to correction. God has a plan. The very word, discipline, implies a plan. Without a plan we respond to our feelings, and our feelings fail us continually.

6- We forget that the battle is not between us and our children. The battle is between Satan and God. It is a spiritual battle and will be won on a spiritual battlefield. In the next lesson we will deal in more detail with the weapons of our warfare; but never forget that Satan is the author of rebellion. All rebellion stems from him. God is the author of discipline and authority, and all authority comes from Him! And all conflict between those two issues are conflicts that originate in the heavenlies. Remembering, that changes the whole context of our discipline.

But the issue of disciplining children goes even deeper than

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the spiritual conflict over the lives of those children. The real battle, once again, is one of divine demonstration. By teaching us how to discipline our children, God is teaching us how HE disciplines us. (He is asking us to make the spiritual switch!!) It works both ways. He demonstrates divine discipline to teach us how to discipline our children, and He teaches us how to discipline our children to demonstrate His discipline of us. The mirror once again reflects in both directions.

The issue is clearly explained in Hebrews chapter 12. Please turn there with me and let's read the first few verses.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,

because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son".

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?

If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline) then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. (Notice it implies discipline is natural and imputes most of the responsibility to the Father!)

Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. (Underline that!) How much more should we submit to the Father of our Spirits and live!

Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.

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No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.

Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but healed. (Hebrews 12:1-13 NIV)

Please consider with me, in closing, the intense power in that passage. It has a great message concerning parent-child relationships, a great message concerning God's Divine Discipline, and an even greater message about the relationship between the two! Let's just draw out the principles and see them crystallize into the exact same patterns as those we just tasted in Proverbs. After all, they WERE written by the same author! Very quickly, here are the principles:

1- The issue is divine discipline (verses 6-7), God's training of His children.

2- The example is Jesus (verses 3-4). He endured as an example.

3- The motive is love (verses 5-6). God disciplines only those He loves; and the very fact that He does is in fact, a seal of His love!

4- Discipline is also an exclusive sign of sonship! You do not discipline your neighbor's children (at least not without their permission). They are not your responsibility! But you MUST discipline your own! The very act of doing so confirms that they are yours (verse 8). Likewise coming into the family of God means God must discipline you, or you are not HIS!

5- Next the Holy Spirit says to consider the hardships of this life as God's loving hand of discipline tenderly applied to sons and daughters He loves (verse 7). He uses our mistakes. He uses Satan's ploys, and He uses the rains of life that fall on the just and unjust alike as the tools of his trade to demonstrate love and to change lives.

6- Discipline breeds respect (verse 9). Oh, how we need to learn that. The failure to correct carries with it temporary acceptance, but the willingness to correct carries with it ultimate respect.

7- Parental discipline is temporary. We only have a few years at best to mold the shape of a life free of rebellion. (verse 10) We

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must begin early while the clay is soft!

8- God's discipline is for eternal purposes; it is to produce character, His character in us (verse 11).

9- Discipline is never pleasant (either to the one disciplining or to the one being disciplined). It is painful (verse 11), but it is worth the pain.

10- Peace is the product of discipline endured (verse 11).

11- Our job in the midst of divine discipline is to stand in God's energy and continue the walk of faith. We mustn't shrink beneath it's pain and faint, nor must we turn and run to pastures greener for temporary relief. God knows our needs, and God knows our limits. Trust Him. He only disciplines those He loves, and His very discipline itself is a mark of ownership... of sonship. It is therefore an honor for which to be grateful, not a source of shame.

Do you see how beautifully God has interwoven into the fabric of this passage the responsibilities of a parent to discipline with His responsibility to shape our lives into His likeness by discipline? They paint identical pictures!

We must discipline our children when they are young; teaching them first, correcting them secondly, and finally when necessary inflicting just enough pain (in love) to gain their attention and alter their direction. Our objective is always restoration, never condemnation. Our motive is always to demonstrate love, never to demonstrate power, and our example is our loving Heavenly Father, who first demonstrates His plan through His Word, then lovingly corrects by His Spirit, but who finally, because He loves us so, will gently allow the winds of life to blow against our lives to alter our steps, reinforce our faith, and make us dependent. He loathes a rebellious spirit. He longs for a spirit of Lordship. So, in love, He patiently disciplines His children... always in harmony with His purposes. What a loving Father we have. And the Scripture teaches us that,

After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace-Who imparts all blessing and favor-Who has called you to His [own] eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will Himself complete and make you what you ought to be, establish and ground you securely, and strengthen (and settle) you.

(1 Peter 5:10 Amplified)

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He personally will come and pick you up, and set you firmly in place, and make you stronger than ever.

(I Peter 5:10 TLB)

That's the kind of Father we have. And that's the kind of parents we're supposed to be; not afraid to discipline, but only to restore. So as little hearts turn from rebellion to submission, we can tenderly lift them into our arms, comfort them, strengthen them, and know that they are now stronger than they have ever been before.

The issue is the dynamic of discipline. God says it is necessary if we are to be disciples and if we're to raise disciples.

Let me close with this illustration. It is called the Mirror of Discipline. From one side it looks at how God disciplines us, His children, from the other at how we are to discipline ours. From Proverbs to Hebrews we find the reflections are identical.

First, the Procedure - God's procedure is threefold: first to teach (by His Word), then to correct (by His Spirit), finally to punish (by life's circumstances). Man's procedure is the same: teach, then correct, finally punish.

The Purpose- God's purpose is not condemnation, but restoration. Man's purpose in disciplining his children should be the same.

The Motive- God's motive for discipline is described in Hebrews and tells us it's to demonstrate His love. Our motive for disciplining our children Proverbs tells us is to demonstrate our love.

The Object of Discipline- God's object is His own children. Ours should be the same.

The Objective- God's objective is to eliminate rebellion. Ours should be the same.

What is the reality of God's discipline? Hebrews says it is painful...physical discipline. Proverbs says the same.

The result of God's discipline is peace and growth. The result of disciplining our children should be exactly the same.

How does God follow up His discipline? Peter tells us it is by loving us and encouraging us and reestablishing us. Our task is exactly the same!

So if you never remember another thing that was said here

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this morning, remember this: God's plan for discipline and ours are identical! They ought to be. They were designed by the same sovereign God for the same beautiful purpose, and each was designed to mirror the other.

As you meditate this week on the issue of discipline, ask yourself these questions:

1- Do you and your children see physical punishment as just one facet of the diamond of discipline? If not, why not design a project to communicate to them this week God's broader perspective of discipline.

2- If your children are still small, are you willing to honor the Word over your emotions and spank your child when it is necessary in the future? If you have been struggling with this concept, why not make a covenant with God that you will do it HIS way regardless of what the world may be saying.

3- Do you realize your real mission in punishment is to recognize and remove rebellion? Why not begin to examine the areas of your children's lives where resistance to rule is the issue and focus your punishment on those areas?

4- Try to remind yourself this week, as the tests of life that seem to crush you surface, that God through the disciplines of life is saying, "I LOVE YOU. YOU ARE MY CHILD. And whom I love, I discipline."

5- Remember: The issue of punishing children is a spiritual matter. God and Satan are vying for control of your child's spirit. So lay aside your anger and prayerfully approach the real issue! God will be glorified; and you will find peace.

6- Remember: The mantle of responsibility to discipline falls basically on your shoulders! When my children were little, I abdicated most of that task to my wife and it was wrong! And some of you guys do the same thing. You delegate it to Mamma! It's not Mamma's job, it's yours! God has a blessing for men who assume their rightful role in the home. When you avoid your responsibility, you miss the blessing, and so do your children. If there's a Dad in the home, he must assume the responsibility God has given him –The responsibility to discipline his children. Carefully consider these principles this week! Because God wants to do a work in our lives and in our children's lives, He wants to do it HIS way. And He wants US to do it HIS way as well, through the dynamics of discipline!

THE DYNAMICS OF DISCIPLINE

Oh, the dynamics of discipline
God's plan for changing men
He gently designs the trials of life
To turn our hearts toward Him

He does it to prove that He loves us
To demonstrate we're His own.
He teaches, corrects, and rebukes us
Till into His Likeness we've grown.

Oh, the dynamics of discipline
He has called us as parents to see,
That the very same precepts must be applied
If our children submissive would be.

So He's told us to teach them and train them
And He's told us that when there's a need.
We must in love inflict enough pain
To teach them the message to heed.

No, punishment is not pleasant
But painful 'twill be in that hour,
Yet, God promises from the pain
Will emerge His transforming power

Oh, the dynamic of discipline
A part of God's perfect plan,
To alter the course of rebellion
And make straight the path of a man.

Do not neglect to discipline
Rather watch the rebellion cease,
And know that beyond the discipline
There comes the flood of God's peace!

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