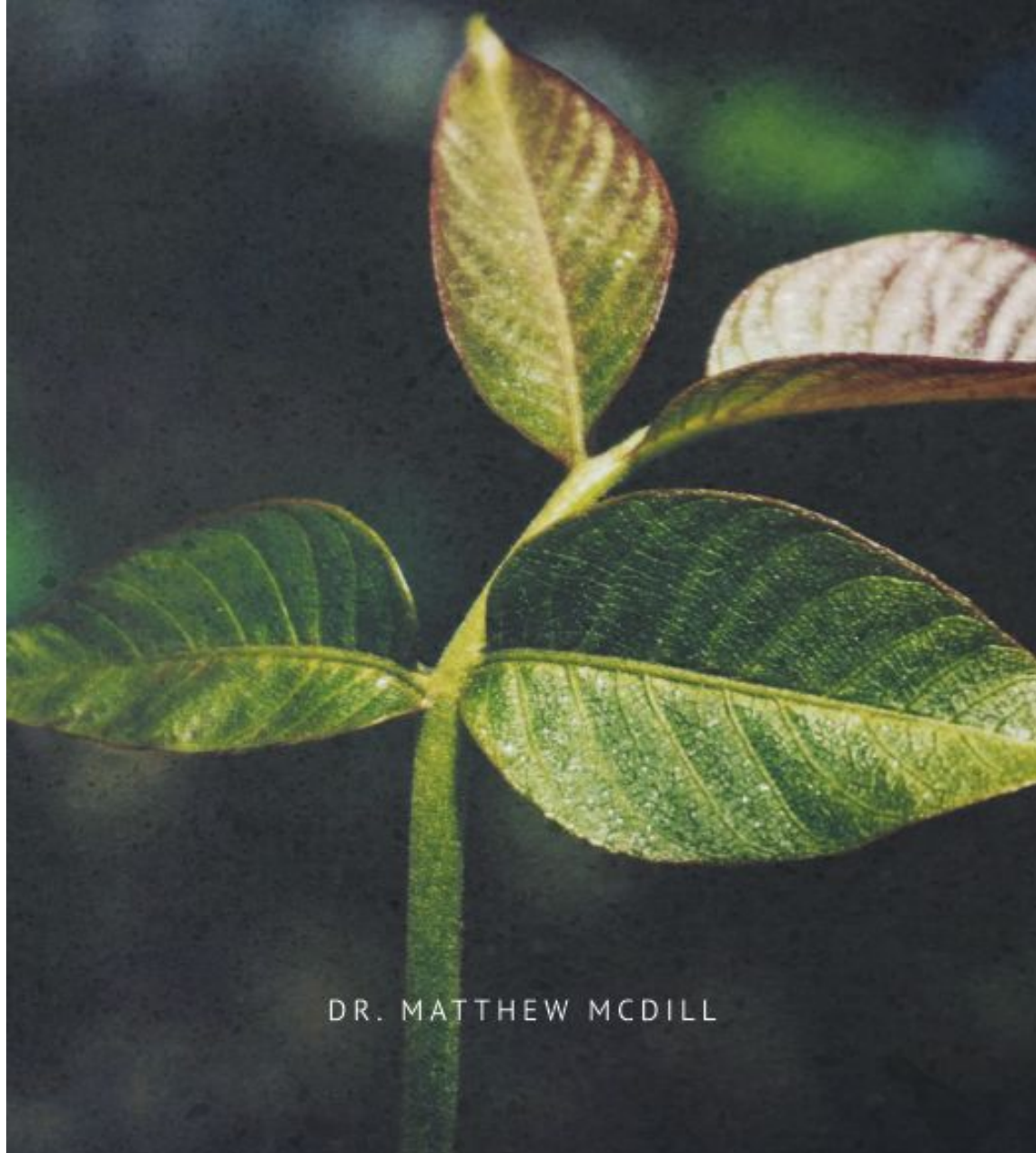


# LOVING GOD

a practical handbook for discipleship



DR. MATTHEW MCDILL



# Chapter 10

## Living in Community—Family

Imagine a large, solitary eyeball—disturbing, I know. I wonder if Paul was trying to be humorous with this outrageous idea: What “if the whole body were an eye...” (1 Corinthians 12:17)?

Or what if the eyeball of a certain body began to criticize the hand of his body? “I don’t need you; I will get along just fine without you.” I’m guessing that the eye is going to see a lot of wonderful things to touch and do. Seeing is awesome, but only seeing is not enough. I certainly would not choose to be blind, but would I choose instead to have my sight and be paralyzed?

Paul used this analogy to help believers understand that we need each other, that God does not intend for us to operate independently. We are like different parts of the human body. All the parts are important for functioning at our highest potential. No part survives on its own.

So God gives us families, churches, and communities. Learning to love God includes learning how he wants us to function and accomplish his mission in these various communities. Proverbs 18:1 explains that anyone who refuses to operate in community is being selfish and is rejecting the wisdom of learning from others.

*Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire.*

*He breaks out against all sound judgment.*

Proverbs 18:1

In this chapter and the next, we will talk about the biblical principles related to living in community. We will start with the foundational principle of submission and then explore the relationships we have within marriage, parenting, and the church. Finally, we will discuss biblical conflict resolution.

## Submission

One day, there was a huge fight taking place in my house. It seemed that every family member was involved. So I called a cease-fire and invited everyone to peace talks. We sat down in the living room, and I read this single question from James 4:1:

*What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?*

What a simple and powerful question! If we could understand the cause of our fights, maybe we could prevent them from happening. James goes on to explain:

*Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?*

*You desire and do not have, so you murder.*

*You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.*

*You do not have, because you do not ask.*

*You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly,*

*to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people!*

*Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?*

*Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

*Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says,*

*“He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”?*

*But he gives more grace. Therefore it says,*

*“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*

*Submit yourselves therefore to God.*

*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

James 4:1–7

In chapter eight, we discussed our three main enemies for living in freedom. Each one appears in this passage:

- 1) “your passions...within you...you desire...you covet;”
- 2) “the world;” and
- 3) “the devil.”

James teaches that these desires, systems, and spirits that oppose God destroy relationships. He exhorts us to turn to God with our needs, to refuse to align ourselves with the world, and to resist the devil. This can all be summarized this way: “Submit yourselves therefore to God” (James

4:7a). So the first way we can avoid conflicts with other is to entrust our desires and needs to God.

Not only are we called to submit to God but we are also called to submit to each other in various ways. Submission is the key to functioning well in any community or relationship. Submission is when one person yields to another person. When two cars are headed for the same lane at the same time, if one driver doesn't yield, there is going to be a wreck. In the same way, when one person isn't willing to yield in a conflict, there is going to be a fight. The second way, then, that we can avoid conflicts with others is to learn to submit to them in the right ways. The Bible reveals at least three important reasons we ought to submit to one another: love, truth, and authority.

Submission is the key to functioning well in any community or relationship.

1. *Love: We submit to one another because we want what is best for each other.* Love is when we sacrifice ourselves for the good of another. This means that we are yielding our own wills and desires for the benefit of someone else. We must understand, though, that loving others is not trying to make them happy by giving them what they *want*. Remember, getting what we want will not make us happy in the long run. Instead, loving others means giving them what they *need*. So, when we submit to one another in love, we are putting someone else's needs, as defined by Scripture, before our own desires and needs.

*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit,  
but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*

*Let each of you look not only to his own interests,  
but also to the interests of others.*

Philippians 2:3–4

2. *Truth: We submit to one another when we speak what is true and right to each other.* When truth is delivered to us by any human agent, it is our responsibility to submit to it. Over and over in Scripture, we are instructed to teach, correct, warn, exhort, encourage, and remind one another of the truth. "Speaking the truth in love" is central to the function and growth of the body of Christ (see Ephesians 4:11–16). Jesus gives authority to the individual believer, and to the church as a whole, to call our brothers and sisters to repentance from sin (Matthew 18:15–17).

3. *Authority: We submit to those to whom God has given the responsibility to lead.* God has given each of us particular roles in our various communities. Some are given the authority to lead and others the responsibility to follow. In marriage, the husband is given authority to lead, and the wife is called to follow (Ephesians 5:22–33). In the family, parents are given the authority to train and discipline their children, and the children are responsible to obey (Ephesians 6:1–4). In the church, elders are given the authority to teach, care for, and lead God’s people (Acts 20:28). The church is responsible to follow their lead (Hebrews 13:17). In the world, there are people with authority to lead in our employment (Ephesians 6:5–8) and in the state (Romans 13:1–7). These roles of authority will be touched on in the following discussion of the various communities in which we live. The important thing is to realize that if God has given someone authority to lead us, then our job is to submit to their leadership.

Have you already considered how countercultural all of this sounds? Our culture encourages self-gratification and individualism instead of love. Dominated by secularism, our culture has difficulty acknowledging that truth even exists. Since there are no absolutes, everyone is entitled to his or her own truth. In addition, our culture values autonomy to such a degree that almost every God-given authority is rejected.

But what if we did things God’s way? What would our relationships look like if we submitted to one another in love and truth, and if we submitted to those in authority? Imagine each of us looking out for the interests of those around us instead of our own. Imagine each of us listening to others when they are helping us get on the right path. Imagine each of us faithfully following those who have authority to lead. If we all lived in this way, there would be significantly more peace. In addition, our relationships would be transformed, and we would enjoy the blessing and power of God in our communities.

Now, let’s take a look at how these principles work out in our relationships as husbands and wives, and as parents and children.

## Marriage

A married couple is the first, smallest, and most basic community. This was a part of God’s good plan from the very beginning.

*Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone;  
I will make him a helper fit for him."  
Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother  
and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*  
Genesis 2:18, 24

## Unmarried Believers

Most believers spend the majority of their lives married. Those who are not married either have not yet married, are called to be unmarried, or have lost their marriage partners. The most important thing to understand is that no matter what marital status we are in, our purpose and mission remain the same. We are to love God, love people, and make disciples, whether we are married or not. In addition, our purpose and the goals of our mission are eternal, while marriage is not. This should help us get a proper perspective on marriage; sometimes we make it more important than it really is.

So if you are currently unmarried, don't be concerned about it. If God wants you to marry, he will lead you and provide a partner for you. Wait on the Lord. In the meantime, focus all your attention on loving God and pursuing his call for your life!

While it is not necessary to be married in order to fulfill our purpose in life, the Bible teaches that marriage is a central part of God's overall strategy for accomplishing his purposes on the earth. For example, two of the most important functions of marriage are to create human life and to pass on love for God (Malachi 2:15). We will talk about this more in the next section on parenting. Since marriage is central to God's mission, the church needs to understand how to respond to our culture's current attack on this important relationship.

Marriage is a central part of God's overall strategy for accomplishing his purposes on the earth.

## The Cultural Attack on Marriage

What does our culture say about marriage? According to the most recent moral developments, we don't really need marriage at all. We can have sexual intimacy with multiple partners outside

of marriage. Divorce is normal and acceptable. Men can marry men, and women can marry women.

But *God* says that marriage is good and necessary for most people (Genesis 2:18, 24). God says that sexual intimacy should take place only within the context of a marriage between one woman and one man, who are married for life (Matthew 19:4–5; Ephesians 5:3; Hebrews 13:4). To the extent that our state and national laws do not reflect God’s principles for marriage, we forsake the blessings of God. But regardless of what the government and culture do, our responsibility is to teach God’s design and purpose for marriage in our homes and churches.

A more subtle way that the culture has twisted our understanding of marriage is to make it a means of selfish fulfillment. Even in the church, many believers seem to think that the

Our goal is not to make our spouse happy, but to make him or her holy.	primary purpose of marriage is to make us happy. Therefore, many go into marriage thinking that their new partners will give them what they want and make them happy. The reality of marriage is often a rude awakening for those who get married with these expectations.
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## Jesus First in Marriage

Our couch is broken, because it was used as a trampoline. Our broom is broken, because it was used as a pole vault. Our wall has a hole in it, because it was used as the rope in a boxing match. I am trying to teach my children that if you use an object for a purpose for which it was not intended, it usually breaks.

Our culture has turned marriage into something it was not intended to be. People are using it to accomplish something it wasn’t intended to accomplish. Just like the objects in my home, marriages will break when we are not honoring God’s design and purpose for it. God never intended for us to seek happiness and fulfillment in marriage. We are to seek fullness only in Jesus! He is very clear about the priority of our love and loyalty to him, even above our family relationships.

*Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth.*

*I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.*

*For I have come to set a man against his father,*



*and a daughter against her mother,  
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.  
And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.  
Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,  
and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*

Matthew 10:34–37

We must repent of loving others more than Christ. This is idolatry. We cannot look for our meaning and satisfaction in another person, even our spouse, and we should not want our spouse to look to us for such fulfillment either.

Certainly, there is pleasure and joy in marriage. But this comes from sharing the love of Christ with one another. Marriage is the first and most important relationship in which we can fulfill our mission of helping others follow Christ. Our goal is not to make our spouses happy, but to make them holy. To be holy is to be set apart for the purpose of God and this, of course, will make a spouse truly happy. There is amazing joy in following Christ together with your husband or wife.

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All of our personal  
struggles come from  
not being full in Christ.  
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So our first responsibility in marriage is to find our purpose and satisfaction in Christ alone. When we do not do this, we will have problems in our marriages. That is why I often say that we don't really have "marriage problems"; we just have people problems. All of our personal struggles come from our failure to find our fullness in Christ. As James explains, we fight because of unfulfilled desires, and our desires are not fulfilled because we are not looking in the right direction (James 4:1–7).

We often think that we will fix our marriages by learning to communicate better, pleasing our partners more, or spending more time together. These are all good ideas. But the quickest way to fix your marriage is to get right with God and to rely on him alone for all your needs. Those other strategies will not be successful if the marriage is still made up of two prideful, selfish people. However, when two people are full in Christ, they are in a wonderful position to minister to each other. Then, as they minister to each other, they are able to experience the joy and intimacy that come from sharing the love of Christ.

## Submission in Marriage

When a married couple can minister to each other out of fullness in Christ, they are then in a position to accomplish their purpose and mission together: to love God, love people, and make disciples. God puts husbands and wives together so that they can help each other fulfill this mission. A married couple is a ministry team. As a ministry team, it is important for a them to function well together. As we have discussed already, this functionality will come through mutual submission. First, a husband and wife submit to one another in *love* by placing the other's needs before his or her own. We have already talked about how a married couple can love each other in this way. Now, let's talk some more about the other reasons we submit to one another: *truth* and *authority*. These forms of submission are critical to having a marriage that works.

A couple can learn to submit to one another in *truth* because a Christian marriage is one in which Jesus is Lord. Jesus rules by the revelation of his Word and the presence of his Spirit in our lives. A couple that wants to bring honor to Christ and to have unity in his mission will be mutually submitted to the truth of his Word and the leading of his Spirit. Because of this commitment, the husband and the wife will also submit to each other in truth. Each one is responsible to speak truth to the another in love, and each one is responsible to submit to any truth spoken.

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A married couple  
is a ministry team.  
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The final form of submission that applies in the marriage is submission to *authority*. God has given the husband the responsibility to love and care for his wife. He has also given him the authority to lead in the marriage, and he calls the wife to submit to the husband's leadership (Ephesians 5:22–33; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1–6).

This is yet another way that the culture has denied God's design for marriage. Our culture generally refuses to acknowledge the leadership of the husband. We are taught that if men and women are to be thought of as equal, then one must not lead the other. However, having identical roles and responsibilities is not the same as being equal in value and dignity. Men and women are equal in dignity and value before the Lord and should be treated accordingly. At the same time, they have different roles and responsibilities.

God has authorized the husband to lead with self-sacrificial love and care in obedience to Christ. If the husband chooses to lead with a selfish agenda, then he is abusing his position and not operating in the authority Christ has given to him. A wife is called to submit to her husband “as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22). This means that her choice to submit to her husband is in fact a choice to submit to God. Her husband will not always be right in his leadership, but even when he makes mistakes, she can rest in the love and protection of God, to whom she is ultimately submitting. Wives are even called to submit to husbands who do not obey the Word (1 Peter 3:1–2)! However, she is not called to submit to leadership that requires disobedience to God.

There is so much more to discuss about marriage that we can’t cover here. Gary Thomas’ book on marriage (*Sacred Marriage: What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy?*) is a great resource for further study.

## Parenting

The last time my mom tried to spank me, I was just about as big as she was. Of course, my mother is a pretty small lady! As she approached me in the hallway with the spanking utensil, I reasoned with her. “Mom, can’t we talk about this?”

“No!” was her answer, and she just kept coming.

I continued to try to talk with her about it, but she had no intentions of talking. Finally, I reached out and took the paddle from her! I shudder to think what would have happened if my dad had been home at the time.

My mom thought I needed discipline, but I figured we could just talk. This story serves to illustrate the difficulty of parenting a child who is old enough to disciple but still may need discipline. When is it time for discipline and when is it time for discipleship?

God gives parents, particularly fathers, the responsibility to both discipline and to disciple their children.

*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger,  
but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

Ephesians 6:4

Let's look at these two areas in turn and then see how they relate to each other.

## Discipline

First, parents have authority to discipline their children (See Proverbs 13:24; 22:15; 23:14; 29:17; Hebrews 12:7–11). Discipline is the use of external motivation to train behavior. It can take various forms of negative consequences for wrong behavior. One that is clearly described in Scripture, but our culture generally no longer approves of, is spanking. There are also positive ways of encouraging good behavior through affirmation and rewards.

Here are a few basic tips for effective discipline:

- Train your children to look you in the eye when you speak to them.
- Train your children to respond respectfully to your instructions with “Yes, sir” or “Yes, ma’am.”
- Train your children to obey the first time. Your children will learn when you expect them to obey. If you count to three, they will wait until *two*. If you count to ten, they will often wait until you count *nine*. If you don't discipline your children until after you yell at them, then they will not obey you until you yell at them. But if you lovingly, calmly, and consistently discipline your child the first time he or she disobeys, your child will learn to listen the first time you give an instruction.
- Never spank or discipline out of anger or in such a way that would cause harm to your child.
- Hold your child responsible only for what he or she understands.
- Be creative with ways of giving your children consequences for disobedience and disrespect. When possible, give consequences that relate to the area of disobedience.
- Remember that children are different and that some forms of discipline will be much more effective on some than others. Find out what best gets your child's attention.

## Discipleship

The next and most important responsibility parents have is discipleship. When Jesus answered the question about the most important commandment of all, he quoted from Deuteronomy 6:4. Look at what Moses said right after this most important commandment:

*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart  
and with all your soul and with all your might.  
And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.  
You shall teach them diligently to your children,  
and shall talk of them when you sit in your house,  
and when you walk by the way,  
and when you lie down, and when you rise.*  
Deuteronomy 6:5–7

The ultimate goal for parents is to raise mature, Christ-loving believers. This fits into God's mission for us to help others to love God and follow Jesus.

Another way that our American culture has eroded the strength of the family is by encouraging parents to abdicate to others the responsibility of teaching their children. Many parents feel it is the church's job to disciple their children. They depend on the pastor, the Sunday School teacher, and the children's or youth pastor to teach their children about God. Pastors, and the rest of the body of Christ, are certainly responsible for discipleship. But the primary responsibility of discipleship belongs to parents.

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Many parents are also realizing that they are capable of facilitating the education of their children. They have discovered the moral, spiritual, social, and academic benefits of teaching their children at home. Parents can seek the Lord for direction for their family on this important topic. Make sure that your decision is not based on what you think you are capable of, what you can afford, or what others will think of you. These are not substantial reasons by which to decide what is best for your child. God can provide for you and empower you to do whatever he calls you to do.

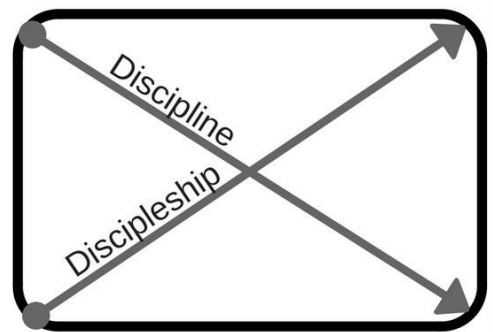
Some parents don't feel equipped to disciple their children. That is what this book is for! This is a practical handbook for discipleship. I have included what I consider to be the most important basic truths and practices for introducing people to Christ and helping them learn to love and follow God.

## Transitioning from Discipline to Discipleship

When my children turn eight, I bring them into my office and explain to them that it is time to turn their lives over to Christ. I explain the Gospel to them and then tell them to pray to receive Christ, or I am going to spank them.

No need to read that paragraph again. You know that that would be ridiculous, because faith and a real relationship with Christ are based on the free choice of the individual. This reflection helps us understand how different the parental responsibilities of discipline and discipleship are. As we have noted, discipline uses external motivation to bring about a change in behavior. Discipleship is leading by example and guiding children toward freely giving their hearts to Jesus.

As I mentioned before, one of the most confusing times in parenting is when the children should be transitioning out of discipline and into discipleship. Parents need to discern when to move from discipline to discipleship, from external motivation to internal motivation (Proverbs 13:24; Proverbs 23:26). This chart helps explain the process.



The chart moves from left to right, following the age of a child, from birth to adulthood.<sup>1</sup>

Both discipline and discipleship may take place throughout the time your children are in your home. But when a child is very young, parents exercise maximum control (or discipline) in their lives. This is when behavior training begins. At this time, there is a lot of discipline and not as much discipleship taking place. Then as the child grows, he or she develops his or her own ability to respond to God. The child can choose to obey the parents willingly, because it is the

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<sup>1</sup> Ted Tripp includes a similar chart in his book. Ted Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 2nd ed. (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2005), 201.

right thing to do, and not just because he or she fears the consequences. The child can take care of his or her own stuff and get along with siblings out of a heart of obedience to God.

The cross-point on the chart generally occurs around ages twelve to fourteen, depending on the development of the child. As you relate to your teenage children, your desire is primarily to teach them, appealing to their own consciences and desires to obey God. While discipline is based on power (the ability to carry out consequences), discipleship is based on influence, which is built on relationship. This is why it is so important to build strong, open relationships with your children.

Parents often experience a great deal of frustration and confusion at the cross-point. *When should I discipline, and when should I disciple?* Here is a biblical principle to help guide you: give correction in the form of discipleship instead of discipline when there is respect and teachability (Psalm 25:8–15; 32:8–9). When you begin to correct your child, you can set out this

⦿ _____⦿	choice before him or her: “If you will listen to me respectfully and receive correction, then I will teach you and help you grow. If you will not, then I will continue to discipline you until you are teachable.”
Discipleship is based on influence, which is built on relationship.	
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Here are a few other ways you can help your children develop self-motivation based on faith in Christ.

- Pray for your children to surrender their hearts to Christ (Ephesians 3:14–21).
- Teach your children truth from God’s Word (Psalms 19:7–11).
- Teach your children God’s purpose for life and how everything we do fits into it (Deuteronomy 6:4–9).
- Encourage and affirm your children (1 Thessalonians 2:11–12).
- Offer new responsibility and freedom in response to obedience and respect (Matthew 25:14–30).
- Give your children freedom to make their own choices so that they can develop conviction (Hebrews 5:14).
- Help your children discover their gifts, talents, and interests. Equip and free your children to pursue them (Ephesians 4:7, 11–12).

## Children

If you are still at home under your parents' authority and you are old enough to read this book, then your responsibility ought to be clear by now. Just as a wife can submit to her husband "as to the Lord," so children can submit to their parents "in the Lord." It is an act of faith and obedience to God.

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

*"Honor your father and mother"*

*(this is the first commandment with a promise),*

*"that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."*

Ephesians 6:1–3

Once again, our culture has lied to us on this point. We are told that our goal is to be independent and pursue our own personal dreams and goals. You can see by now that this is not God's design for life. He intends for us always to be living in community, whether that is family, church, or society at large. As believers, we are called to live our lives always in awareness and consideration of others. We are called throughout life to submit to those whom God has placed in authority over us.

So you don't have to be like many young people, struggling and striving to be free from parents and family. Your family is exactly where God wants you to be right now. God has given you parents as your mentors and teachers. You can enjoy God's direction and protection through their leadership. Your family is a community in which you can grow and thrive, not a place to be held down. You might as well learn to live in community and submission now; you will have to live in cooperation with others and submission to authority for the rest of your life!

## Discussion Questions

- What is the key to functioning well in any community or relationship?
- What are three reasons we ought to submit to one another?
- If you are not married, what should your attitude be about being married?
- What does our culture say about marriage that is different than what God says?



- What is one of the biggest mistakes that people make about the purpose of marriage?
- What is our first responsibility in marriage?
- What authority structure has God built into marriage?
- What two responsibilities has God given to parents?
- What is the ultimate goal of parenting?
- How can parents know when to discipline and when to disciple their children?
- What kind of attitude should a young person have toward family and authority?

## Big Ideas

- God does not intend for us to operate independently.
- Learning to love God includes learning how he wants us to function and to accomplish his mission in various communities.
- Submission is the key to functioning well in any community or relationship.
- The Bible reveals at least three important reasons we ought to submit to one another:
  - Love: We submit to each other because we want what is best for each other.
  - Truth: We submit to one another when we speak what is true and right to each other.
  - Authority: We submit to those to whom God has given the responsibility to lead.
- God says that marriage is good and necessary for most people (Genesis 2:18, 24).
- God says that sexual intimacy should take place only within the context of a marriage between one woman and one man, who are married for life (Matthew 19:4–5; Ephesians 5:3; Hebrews 13:4).
- Our goal is not to make our spouses happy, but to make them holy, which means to be set apart for the purpose of God.
- Our first responsibility in marriage is to find our purpose and satisfaction in Christ alone.
- God puts a husband and wife together so that they can help each other fulfill God's mission. A married couple is a ministry team.

- A couple that wants to bring honor to Christ and to have unity in his mission will be mutually submitted to the truth of his Word and the leading of his Spirit.
- God has given the husband the responsibility to love and care for his wife. He has also given him the authority to lead in the marriage and calls the wife to submit to his leadership (Ephesians 5:22–33).
- God gives parents, particularly fathers, the responsibility to discipline and disciple their children.
- The ultimate goal for parents is to raise mature, Christ-loving believers. Generally, parenting should move from discipline to discipleship, from external motivation to internal motivation (Proverbs 13:24; Proverbs 23:26).
- Give correction in the form of discipleship instead of discipline when there is respect and teachability (Psalm 25:8–15; 32:8–9).
- Children can submit to their parents “in the Lord,” as an act of faith and obedience to God.

### For Further Reading

Thomas, Gary. 2000. *Sacred Marriage: What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Tripp, Ted. 2005. *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 2nd ed. Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press.