



Biblical Parenting 4: Formative Instruction of Children

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Formative Instruction*

- **Formative Instruction:**
 - Not corrective discipline
 - Teaching our children through all occurrences of life to think and to act biblically.
- **Five Goals for Formative Instruction**
 1. **Understand self biblically and understand the Bible as speaking about us**
 - “This revelation isn’t just about distant physical and spiritual relatives – it’s about each of us by name” (Tripp, 24).
 - “We must show our children the vital connection between the powerful story of redemption in the Scriptures and their daily experience” (Tripp, 26).
 2. **Develop godly habits**
 - “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Prov. 22:6).
 - Learning a lifestyle that reflects biblical truth: “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word” (Ps. 119:9).
 3. **Apply Scripture to everyday life**
 - Topics like authority, obedience, conflict resolution, God-given roles in relationships. Responding to lost book-bags, failed exams, the needs of others, and the ups and downs of life.
 4. **Model spiritual vitality**
 - Live out before our children a personal relationship with God through His Word and through prayer. Live spiritual life and then invite our children into it. “Parenting that exhibits a vital relationship with God in all the joys and storms of life is irresistible to children and young people. Conversely, the surest way to harden our children’s hearts to God and his ways is “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:5).
 5. **Grow into a mature relationship with children**
 - “a mutual relationship of living working together for Christ’s kingdom” (Tripp, 29).
 - Ministry together inside and outside the home. Scriptural exhortation and encouragement going both ways between parent and child.

* Adapted from Tedd & Margy Tripp, *Instructing a Child’s Heart*.



Formative Instruction

The Sowing and Reaping Principle

“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life” (Gal. 6:7-8).

- Our goal in discipline is to mold the heart, not teach behaviorism
- Therefore, convey the blessings of eternal life
 - “Use the illustrations, commands, callings, and promises of Scripture and church history to embolden and ennoble children’s minds and hearts to pursue holiness and put sin to death. Be careful to represent the blessings of life in the Spirit as beautiful and life-giving” (Tripp, 65).
- Communicate that sowing and reaping is a biblical reality
 - “Sowing to the sinful nature brings destruction, both in time and eternity. Sowing to the Spirit brings peace with God and the spiritual comfort of his nearness” (Tripp, 66).
 - Convey this through the teachings and examples of Scripture (for example, Eli and his sons, 1 Sam. 2-3).
- Biblical sowing and reaping differs from behaviorism in that...
 - Whereas behaviorism focuses on immediate rewards, godliness builds character and faith.
 - Whereas behaviorism imposes raw power, sowing and reaping emphasizes consequences that organically result from actions.
 - Whereas behaviorism does not relate to motive, sowing and reaping is concerned with spiritual fruit and character.
 - Whereas behaviorism reflects parent’s demands and goals, sowing and reaping reflects the Law of God and the path of obedience that leads to blessing and peace.

Biblical Correction*

Sowing & Reaping Principle in Correction of Children

1. Biblically identify the situation
 - "Billy, I have noticed that you are complaining and arguing quite a lot. Do you know what I mean by this?"
2. Biblically instruct:
 - "Billy, do you remember what our heavenly Father says about complaining and arguing?... A complaining spirit shows a thankless, ungrateful heart toward God and others. 2 Timothy 3:2-4 lists ungratefulness with sins of godlessness.
3. Remind about sowing & reaping consequences of sin:
 - "Billy, remember that the Bible says, "Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right." Complaining and anger give you a bad reputation and hurt your relationships with others. When you are complaining we do not enjoy the blessings we should have as Christians.
4. Identify with sin problem:
 - "Billy, I know what it is like to have a sin problem, because I have one, too. Let's remember what God says about the dangers of sin, and also His promise to help us when we strive against sin."
5. Partner in appealing to God's remedy for sin
 - "Billy, let's pray together thanking God for sending His Son to forgive us for our sins, and also asking His Holy Spirit to give us power not to complain or argue, so as to displease God and hurt ourselves and others."

* Adapted from Tedd & Margy Tripp, *Instructing a Child's Heart*, chapter 13

Biblical Communication in Child-Rearing

- Your communication approach is guided by your child-rearing strategy
 - If focus is on controlling and constraining behavior, then communication will involve yelling, scolding, and harassing. If focus is on heart, then communication will focus on parental nurture and discipleship.
- Biblical Wisdom for Discipleship Communication with Children
 1. Restraint (not thoughtless or impetuous): “A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered” (Prov. 17:27)
 - Restrained speech is quiet speech: “The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools” (Eccl. 9:17).
 - Restrained speech does not use many words: “The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone” (Eccl. 6:11).
 - Restrained speech thinks first and speaks second: “The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil” (Prov. 15:28).
 2. Pleasant Words: “The wise in heart are called discerning, and pleasant words promote instruction” (Prov. 16:21).
 - Harsh, loud, and demeaning words do not reflect the God who gave parents their authority. Such words make instruction hard to receive.
 - Harsh words create an offense that gets in the way of the message being communicated.
 - Pleasant words make it easier to receive instruction: “Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones” (Prov. 16: 24).
 - The ability to “get results” with harsh speech says little about getting to the heart. For getting to the heart, soft words are far more effective. “The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment” (Prov. 10:21).
 3. Understanding: “A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions” (Prov. 18:2); “He who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame” (Prov. 18:13); “The purposes of a man’s heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out” (Prov. 20:5).

* Adapted from Tedd & Margy Tripp, *Instructing a Child’s Heart*, chapter 14