

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a black top and a tan pleated skirt, is walking away from the camera on a dirt path. She is holding the hand of a young girl with blonde hair, wearing a black cardigan and a white lace-trimmed skirt. The path is surrounded by tall grasses and dense trees, with sunlight filtering through the leaves, creating a warm, golden glow. The background is a soft, hazy blue-green.

SPARE THE ROD

FIVE TIMES YOU SHOULD NOT
SPANK YOUR CHILD

RICHARD MALM

5 Times
You Should Not
Spank Your Child

by
Richard Malm

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GOD ONLY
LOANS US
CHILDREN.
HE EXPECTS US
TO GIVE THEM
BACK TO HIM.

5 TIMES YOU SHOULD NOT SPANK YOUR CHILD

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Introduction

It's surprising to me that even among Christians spanking is a controversial topic. It seems to me that if you believe the Bible can instruct you on how to get to heaven it should be able to also instruct you in how to train your children – so they get there also.

If we believe it's outdated on something as simple as training children, how can we possibly trust it on topics as ethereal as heaven or eternity?

And the Bible is clearly in favor of spanking. In fact, though nothing in Scripture says spanking is the only tool a parent should use for discipline, it's the only tool God personally promises will be effective. It definitely needs to be an option you keep in your parenting toolbox.

The wonderful thing about spanking

If done in a Biblical way spanking is an act of love and deals with disobedience quickly so the joy can return to the relationship. While “time outs” and “grounding” may have a place, they drag the punishment out. Perhaps that’s why God puts His stamp of approval on spankings. He likes to get our misbehavior in the past as quickly as possible and restore harmony to the relationship.

From what I’ve seen, parents who refuse to spank end up replacing “the rod” with words – lashing their children with nagging, lecturing, scolding, counting to three. These beatings with words seldom produce a change in behavior and tend to inflict injury upon the child’s self-esteem.

The soul of a child is much more fragile and bruises much more easily than his backside. The soul-bruises of a beating with words can’t be seen but they are just as real and often more lasting in the pain they inflict.

But there are at least five times we should “spare the rod” and not spank our child.

1

When you're angry or embarrassed

All day long little Tommy had pushed mom to the limit by screaming and throwing one tantrum after another. When Dad came home things didn't get any better. When he let out an ear shattering scream it was all mom could take. She grabbed Tommy, dragged him into the bedroom and let him have it.

Tommy's wailing now filled the house.
"That didn't do a whole lot of good." Dad wryly noted.

Mom replied, "It might not have done him any good, but it did me a world of good."

That's the image many folks have of spanking – frustrated parents venting their rage on a helpless child. But spanking is not intended to be a way to vent our frustration or anger. We need to get that under control before we "take up the rod".

Spanking is something we do for our child, not something we do to our child.

It's an act of love designed to help our children break free from slavery to the folly that is naturally in their heart.

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away.
Proverbs 22:15

Parents who spank to vent their anger and frustration are a major reason spanking has gotten such a bad reputation from its critics who claim:

1. Spanking is child abuse.
I agree it can quickly lapse into child abuse if driven by anger.
2. Spanking teaches children that violence is a way to solve problems.

I agree that it can imply that violence is a way to solve problems if a parent is using it as a way to solve his or her own problem with anger.

3. Spanking simply doesn't work because it does not change a child's behavior.

Actually, I couldn't believe it when I heard someone give this as a reason for not spanking. Though my experience has been that spanking does change behavior I can see how it might not if:

- The parent is not consistent. Children will gamble that you won't do anything this time.
- The spanking is inadequate to bring the child to a point of repentance. Some parents only spank enough to anger or frustrate the child but not subdue the will.

Child discipline starts with self-discipline.

We men often appear to be mono-emotional - our one emotion being anger. However, anger is a secondary emotion, meaning some other emotion triggered the anger. Many men appear to be mono-emotional because, at least in my case, in a millisecond I blast past the initial emotion and go straight to anger.

I discovered if I could hit the rewind button and go back to figure out what emotion prompted the anger, I could more easily deal with the situation in a

calm manner. I wish I could give you an example of this working with my kids but, unfortunately, I didn't learn this until after my kids were grown. But here's how it has worked with my wife.

Jana does something. I get angry. She doesn't know why I'm angry and isn't about to approach this erupting volcano to find out. Besides, I don't know why I'm angry, either. I think it's because of what she did but if anger is a secondary emotion then what she did produced an emotion that produced the anger.

When I learned to stop and hit the rewind button to discover the emotion that led to my anger I found that what she did or said actually embarrassed me, or made me feel small or hurt my feelings. (No wonder I blasted past those emotions. Real men don't get their feelings hurt. Right?)

If I could calmly tell her what she said or did hurt my feelings, made me feel disrespected or whatever, then she could understand, empathize and we could deal with the problem. When I was just angry we were never able to get to the real issue because neither of us even knew what the problem was.

I'd like to say that after I learned this principle I was able to always stay calm and maturely solve my anger issues. I'd like to say that ... but it wouldn't be

true. The truth is this is a lot easier said than done but at least understanding what was happening helped me move toward more self-control.

When we're angry with our child, if we can pause, hit the rewind button and figure out what produced the anger, we can more easily bring it under control. Sometimes we'll discover it wasn't even the child's fault. We're mad because they messed up our plans or inconvenienced us just by being a kid. We're the problem, not them.

And if they did do something wrong, instead of spewing hot lava everywhere, we can calmly explain what they did wrong and why they are going to be disciplined. "I'm going to have to spank you because you were disobedient. It is important that you learn to obey." In this way, a spanking incident becomes a learning time for both parent and child.

Don't spank when you are embarrassed

While I think anger is more the realm of men embarrassment over a child's behavior seems to be more the realm of women. Perhaps because many women have a greater sense of the child being an extension of themselves. After all, for nine months, they were literally one.

When a child misbehaves, it makes us look bad. Suddenly we become the center of attention in the mall, the grocery store, or the restaurant. We feel self-conscious. "What's everyone thinking? Do they think I'm a bad mom? Am I a bad mom?"

I've often seen moms whose concern for how they appear to others drives them to overreact in such situations. If we spank our children it needs to be because what they did was done in willful disobedience – they knew what was expected of them and they chose to disobey.

Spanking is not an action we take based upon how the child's action made us feel.

Slow down. Cool down. It's better to not spank a child who has earned one than to do it in anger because ... *A quick tempered person does foolish things. - Proverbs 14:17*

That's one advantage of never hitting or slapping your child with your hand. Going to get, or having your child go get "the rod," allows you time to cool off and proceed in a calculated and measured way.

2

When your child acts like a child

Why do kids act so childish? One exasperated father blurted out to his son, "I just don't know why you behave this way." The son calmly replied, "I don't know either, Dad. It has to be either a problem with my heredity or my environment."

It's easy to view children as little adults. But the Bible makes it clear – and research confirms – that their thinking process is totally different than adults.

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.

1 Corinthians 13:11

Children think and reason differently which often leads to conclusions and outcomes that totally confound parents. Little ones can't understand why you put the glass of milk way on the other side of the plate instead of keeping it handy near your elbow.

My straight "A" middle school daughter always thought she was "dumb" because she had to study to get good grades. "Smart kids get good grades without studying."

Even teenagers think and reason differently. The research on this is mixed. Some say it's due to brain development, claiming the part of the brain which helps us evaluate risk isn't fully developed until we're in our 20s. Other research suggests adolescents can understand the risk and are able to make wise choices, but it's often overridden in the presence of peers because of the anticipated rush of peer approval. In other words, the reward is worth the risk.

Whatever the reason, this explains some of the just plain stupid things many of us did in high school. A story from my son Joel illustrates childish irresponsibility and its consequences.

From Joel

We didn't intend to start the fire. In fact, we thought we were being safety conscious launching the bottle rockets into the dry field behind the house rather than into the neighborhood.

The fire started small, but once it hit the high grass we knew the small cups of water we were using to try to douse the flames wouldn't be enough.

The entire neighborhood started flocking into the field with shovels and buckets doing their best to control the rising flames and protect their homes until the fire department arrived.

An hour or so later the fire department had the blaze under control. The adrenaline began to die in my chest until I saw my dad across the charred field.

I'm dead.

The friend who started the fire with me got in big trouble with his parents. But nothing happened to me. We may have had a conversation about fire safety, but that was it.

As I look back over dumb things I did as a kid I now realize that there was method to my dad's madness, or lack thereof.

At the burning center of any punishment that was ever doled out was one central theme.

My heart.

Dad never punished me for doing stupid kid things. But whenever he smelled even a hint of rebellion in my heart he pounced on it. He wouldn't let those sparks shift into a flame. He doused it with a vengeance.

Looking back I think I did "nothing" because I wasn't fully aware of how much of a part Joel played in this near disaster. But it's true I didn't hyperventilate over some things I saw other parents go ballistic over. I tried to not sweat the stupid kid stuff.

Yes, there need to be consequences appropriate to the offense, take away a privilege or two, the infamous "time-out" for little ones, or whatever works for your child but no need to get out "the hangin' rope" unless ...

Unless it involves sin or rebellion.

We need to deal with sin and rebellion differently than we deal with stupid kid stuff.

God never said, "Thou shalt not slide back and forth in the bathtub until a tidal wave washes over the side and floods the bathroom." But he did talk about lying, stealing, and dishonoring parents. We need to keep sin and rebellion serious because it's serious in God's eyes.

Rebellion is so serious because it's rejecting God's authority and the authority of those He has put in charge of us. It's a heart issue. "I know right from wrong. I know what Dad wants, what Mom wants, what God wants, but I choose to do what I want. I will be god of my universe."

Consequences of childhood stupidity can be painful but they will pass. Consequences of rebellion affect eternity. That's why we have to take it seriously and attack it ruthlessly.

Punish appropriately for childish irresponsibility and misconduct, but save spanking for rebellion.

Though not always rebellion, a spanking may also be appropriate when a child hurts or endangers another child or damages property either intentionally or due to anger.

Sometimes it's hard to tell if bad behavior is childish irresponsibility or rebellion.

Marcy can't do her homework because her book was in her locker and she forgot the combination.

Timmy accidentally spills the juice he doesn't like - for the third time.

If I wasn't sure if it was rebellion or just being a child, I tried to give the child the benefit of the doubt. I would rather believe the best, assume it was just being a kid, and let the child learn from lesser consequences than spank one who simply made a childish mistake.

Besides, if it was rebellion I knew I would have an opportunity to deal with it later. Like a fire, rebellion grows hotter, bigger, brighter, and more evident. If the rebel gets away with it once, you can be sure he'll do it again and be more brazen about it. Once it screams like the demons, "We are rebellion," then we can go after it.

Two Types of Rebellion

It can also be tough to recognize rebellion because it has two faces. The defiant rebel will challenge you head on - "What gave you the silly idea that you can tell me what to do?" He will fight and endure all kinds of painful consequences before he submits his will to yours.

The compliant rebel is harder to recognize. He camouflages his rebellion with sweet intentions and an arsenal of excuses. Two of his favorite words are, "I forgot." Yes, forgetting may be childhood foolishness but it often morphs into a powerful tool for the compliant rebel.

How can you tell if he really did forget or if he just chose to not remember?

If they're old enough to remember things that are important to them then they're old enough to remember things that are important to you. If our child can remember a promised fun trip in two months, they can remember to take the garbage out on Friday.

One thing is important to them and the other isn't. Our job is to see that obedience to our wishes becomes as important to them as remembering an upcoming fun event.

I suggest you don't spank a kid for being a kid. Again, I'm not saying there aren't consequences - if they break something they pay to replace it, or if they're too young to do that they can at least help clean it up.

Stupidity has consequences but save the hell fire for sin and rebellion. There are lots of things we can do to discourage childish behavior but corporal punishment, your big gun, needs to be reserved for sin and rebellion.

Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness as bad as worshipping idols.

*So because you have rejected the command of the LORD, He has rejected you
1 Samuel 15:23*

3

When you're in a public place

My oldest son insists his fifth grade teacher was mean, hated kids and had no business teaching. Even at that young age Joel had a strong sense of justice but not a strong sense of self-control. When his fifth grade mind perceived some injustice he would explode in a ball of fury.

One beautiful spring day, my wife Jana went to pick him up after school. The teacher signaled her to park the car and come talk with her.

Standing on the sidewalk with lines of cars filing past the teacher said, "I just want to be sure you see this note about Joel."

When the teacher handed the note to my wife, Joel grabbed it, ceremoniously ripped it up and threw it on the ground right in front of mom, teacher, and other horrified onlookers.

I'm not sure I would have handled the situation as wisely as Jana did. Though she was totally embarrassed, she calmly escorted her son to the car and brought him home where the gallows were then prepared.

Hangings used to be public to instill fear into the hearts of other would-be criminals. But I believe spankings should not be a public affair. They should be done privately.

We've all heard stories of parents reported for child abuse because they spanked in a public place. But my reason for suggesting not spanking in public has nothing to do with avoiding prosecution – though avoiding prosecution does sound like a good idea.

The purpose for spanking is to help your child humble himself and submit his will to your will. The goal is not to make the child cry, embarrass the child

or even cause pain – though pain may be involved. A spanking is adequate when the child humbles himself and chooses to obey.

A spanking should bring a child to a point of humility not humiliation. Humility breaks a strong will. Humiliation breaks the spirit.

A public spanking can produce humiliation and, ironically, make it even harder for a child to come to a point of humility.

When I'm humbled I realize I am not god of the universe or even god of my universe. I realize other people have value and their feelings and opinions are as important as my feelings and opinions. I realize I don't have all the answers and that I have to listen to others.

I realize that God has put certain people and structures in place that I am commanded to obey and submit to – parents, teachers, police, the government, employers, and spiritual leadership in the church and in the home.

Humiliation breaks the spirit. It says I'm nothing. I have no value. Humiliation attacks the worth of the child. It produces degradation, condemnation, and shame. When humiliated, I may submit, but I don't do it willingly - rather I'm forced into subjugation.

This may bring a temporary peace but as soon as the child is old enough or strong enough to rebel and escape such subjugation and oppression he will do so with a vengeance. Humiliation may force obedience but it does nothing to develop internal self-control, which is the true goal of child training.

I don't believe humiliation is appropriate in child training, but humbling a stubborn will and teaching our kids the fear of the Lord is one of the kindest things we can do for them because ...

The reward of humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, honor and life.

Proverbs 22:4

A child who never masters his will and learns to humbly submit it to others remains a slave to his own insatiable drives, desires, emotions, and natural self-indulgence.

A second reason we don't want to spank our children publically is it actually makes it harder for them to come to a point of repentance and humility.

It's one thing to humble myself in front of a parent who loves me and takes no pleasure in spanking me. It's a totally different thing, much harder, to humble myself in front of peers, other onlookers or a sibling that is thoroughly enjoying the event.

Spanking our children publically - with an audience - can actually make them more resistant and strengthen their rebellion.

Don't create "safe to disobey zones"

But the fact that we don't spank our children in public can also present a problem. What do you do when you're about to check out at the grocery store and the little one launches into a full blown tantrum because you refuse to let him have the Super Frosted Sugar Bomb cereal he wants?

What about when you're in a restaurant with the grandparents and the little girl decides it's time to see if Mom's rules still apply in front of Grandpa?

We have to be sure our children don't believe there are "no-spank zones" where the rules don't apply. I know. I know. It's a real pain to leave the full shopping cart, complete with melting ice cream, in the aisle while you make a quick trip to the car or bathroom.

It's quite likely that Grandpa and Grandma may not feel the little angel deserved a spanking at the restaurant. After all, to us grandparents that sort of behavior is cute, "just being a kid," because we don't have to continually deal with the consequences of that strong will.

Yes, you may have to put the ice cream back a time or two. You may have to endure the disapproving glare of others but if you'll consistently remove yourself and your child from the public's eye and administer the appropriate consequences, you'll not have to do it very many times.

But you must do it every time. Kids are big gamblers. If they get away with it one out of five times, they're willing to bet this is that one time they can act up with no consequences. And behavior that is rewarded is behavior that will be repeated. If I get my way once, I'll try again and again just on the outside chance I may get away with it again.

Consistency is the key. Once our children know that the grocery store, the church, the restaurant, or the mall are not "safe no-spank zones," they will behave there just as well as they do anywhere else.

After the shredded note incident with Joel, he and I had a meeting later. Undoubtedly, the spanking he got that day was the most severe punishment I've ever given any of my kids. And while it's true he never did that again, to this day he says he doesn't regret "stickin' it to the man" by tearing up that note.

What's a dad to do?

4

When your child doesn't understand what he did wrong.

The young teacher looked a little frazzled when she appeared in the door of my office.

"I think one of the children in my class forged her mother's signature on a note I sent home."

Oh great. If she did, I was going to have to suspend the girl - a sweet little first grader!

I was principal of a K-12th grade Christian school. Previously this school used a discipline system that gave “demerits” for any act of misconduct. It just didn’t seem right to have the same consequence for lying, stealing, cheating, rebellion, and other sin issues that you have for chewing gum or being squirmy in class.

The rules are there for a reason, but nobody goes to hell for being tardy to class. So, in consultation with the staff, we implemented a policy that elevated sin and rebellion to a more serious offense. We used “demerits” for misbehavior (and merits for good behavior) but sin issues earned an immediate spanking or suspension from school.

I believe this one policy made a huge difference in the school, but it did have its awkward moments – like now when I might have to suspend a little first grader, the daughter of a friend.

The teacher sent the tiny criminal to my office. If I could just get her to confess, I could bend the rules, give some grace, and keep this simple.

“Are you sure your mommy signed this note?”

I silently prayed, “Please, please, please tell the truth.”
But no such luck.

“Yes, Mr. Malm, my mommy signed it.”

It was obvious she knew what she was saying wasn't true and that what she was doing was wrong. But still I just couldn't bring myself to let the heavy arm of justice come crashing down on her little head.

Maybe a little “fear of the Lord” (or fear of the infamous Principal's paddle) will help her.

“Sweetie, I'm going to have to call your mom and if she didn't sign it, I'm going to have to spank you real hard. Are you sure you're telling me the truth?”

Her big blue innocent eyes looked right into mine but like Gibraltar, she stood by her story.

“My mommy signed the paper, Mr. Malm.”

She was so sweet about it that it tore me up, but I had to let the hammer of justice – aka board of education - fall full force on this tiny first grader.

How could I be so sure she wasn't telling the truth?

I did call Mom to confirm but the dead give away was the signature itself – huge letters, scrawled in purple crayon said, “MOMMY”.

Spankings are appropriate for acts of rebellion.

Rebellion is when a child knows what's expected and chooses to put his or her will above your will.

A child can't accidentally rebel. They must know what's right, what's expected, and choose to do what they want to do instead of obeying the authority.

Making sure they knew what was expected was one reason I felt it was important before a child was punished – whether it be spanking or any other consequence for misbehavior – that they tell me why they were in trouble, what they did wrong. The Bible calls this confession – agreeing with God that what we have done is wrong.

The importance of confession

My youngest son, Jonathan, recently told me, *"I always hated it when you made us tell you what we did wrong. I would have rather you just punished me and gotten it over with."*

Confession humbles us. And that's exactly the purpose of spanking – to humble us, to cause us to submit our will to the will of another, first parents and then the Lord. Confession is powerful for a number of reasons.

It's a Biblical principle.

God's Word says we must confess – agree with him that our behavior is wrong – for His forgiveness to take effect in our lives.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. - 1 John 1:9

It ensures a child knows what they did wrong.

It's natural for kids to assume they're getting punished because we're mad at them. We may be mad, but any consequences they suffer should be a result of their behavior, not our feelings. Consequences come because they did wrong, not because they inconvenienced or irritated us.

And, when possible, we need to relate it to the heart issue problem, not just the outward manifestation – their bad actions. The bad actions are just a manifestation of the more important heart issue.

Often I had to explain it a couple of times before they got it.

"Why are you in trouble?"

"Because I made mom mad."

"No."

"Because I broke the washing machine."

"No. You're in trouble because you were being mean to the cat (heart issue) by putting it in the washing machine. Now what did you do wrong?"

"I was being mean to the cat."

The bad behavior – putting the cat in the washing machine – caused the washing machine to break and mom to get mad – all of which are bad things – but the punishment is based upon the heart issue – being mean to the cat.

The godly care for their animals, but the wicked are always cruel. - Proverbs 12:10

If we don't admit what we did wrong it's easy to later excuse our behavior and blame others.

"That cat always gets me in trouble."

"Mom loves her washing machine more than me."

Confessing our wrong makes us take personal responsibility for the consequences we are suffering and cleanses the soul.

If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us. 1 John 1:9

The final reason I took time to talk with the child before handing out any punishment –

It gave me time to cool down, figure out exactly what it was they did wrong – the heart issue rather than just the irritation it was to me – and listen to the Lord for wisdom about what would be an appropriate consequence.

Treating misbehavior - stupid kid stuff, childish irresponsibility - different than you treat sin turned out to be a great way to run a school. We saw a change in the school and I carried this principle over into my parenting years.

There were consequences for misbehavior but I didn't get too rattled by it unless there was sin involved. When it was a sin issue, it was a big deal around our house - because sin is a big deal to God.

Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the LORD." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.

Psalm 32:5

5

When your child is too old to spank.

As children show themselves more responsible we should switch from giving commands to giving counsel. Eventually counsel is all we'll be able to give because we won't be able to force compliance.

But I've seen that if we work to maintain mutual respect, our children will value and even seek our counsel long after they can reject our commands.

But at what age do we have to draw back? At what age are our children too old to spank?

I believe anytime we start a parenting question with, "At what age .." we're asking the wrong question. Because children mature differently, there's not one right answer.

Though the Bible doesn't give a specific age, I believe we can distill some principles from God's Word that will help us develop guidelines for transitioning from commands to counsel.

First of all, what God chose to not put in His Word is as significant as what He chose to put in. The Word is clear that a wise and loving parent will spank their children. But because it does not tell us at what specific age we should start or stop, we can infer that the age will be different with each child.

As the shepherd over our children, we need to "be sure we know the condition of our flocks" - Proverbs 27:23 - so we can care for each child based upon their own level of maturity and need.

Secondly, we can get guidance from Hebrew culture – the bar mitzvah (bat mitzvah for a girl). At age 13 a boy becomes a “son of the commandment” and is accountable for his actions. Girls become a daughter of the commandment usually at age 12. At that age they are subject to the law and accountable to God for their behavior as an adult would be.

While this aspect of Hebrew culture is not strictly Biblical, we see that at the age of twelve Jesus was aware of his calling and engaged the temple teachers in meaningful question and answer about the Scripture. (Luke 2) He was participating in activities reserved for adult members of the community.

So, we see each child will develop differently and needs to be treated as an individual. We also see that somewhere around twelve or thirteen, they should begin to assume adult responsibilities and incur adult consequences for misbehavior.

I can't remember spanking my children beyond the age of 11 or 12, but the possibility of a spanking remained on the table. If they behaved like a child there was still the option of treating them like one.

If we work diligently to train them as children, there should be no need for spanking them as young teens. But here are a few observations regarding the continuing training of teens and young adults.

Set your default to “Yes”.

It's much easier and safer to say “No” to our teen's requests. “No” means no risk, no mess, no fuss. But we cannot, nor should we try, to shelter our children from all risk and hurt.

God doesn't deal with us that way. In fact risk is essential to faith and every believer I know has experienced pain and disappointment in serving God. It's part of His growth process.

If we don't let our kids make some choices – even bad choices – when they are living at home under our loving watch how will they learn to make wise choices when we aren't around?

Obviously I'm not talking about standing back while they engage in blatant sin or dangerous behavior. But there are a lot of decisions we can let our kids make that aren't right or wrong, just decisions between good, better or best.

We can use these as teaching opportunities to give a few pointers then turn them loose to see how they do. They might surprise you – of course it might not be a pleasant surprise. But even when they make a wrong choice it's a chance for them to experience the inner voice of the Holy Spirit.

It's crucial they learn to hear His voice because you won't always be with them to guide them. But He said He would always be there.

How far do I let them go?

You've done this before. You know how it works. When they were learning to walk you watched anxiously as they toddled around and fell flat. You tried to keep them from major injury – hitting their eye on the edge of the coffee table.

But you knew they had to stumble, fall and even get a few bruises as part of the process. And all the time you were there encouraging them, "You can do it! Come on. Try again." That's exactly how we help them learn to walk into adult life.

Choose your battles.

Not every hill is worth dying on. Their hair style or color (or colors) may be hideous. Their clothes may look like they came from Clown University. Their moodiness may only be exceeded by their pimple count.

These are tough years for everybody. These are years when parents need to remember, "God looks on the heart". We too must learn to look past the outward awkwardness and look at their heart.

If the outward weirdness is not a reflection of inward rebellion then rejoice. Celebrate orange hair, black nail polish or a shaved head – on your daughter. (OK, gotta admit that would be tough to “celebrate,” but it’ll grow back so is this a hill worth dying on?) Plus, the fact that it doesn’t get a rise from you makes it a lot less appealing to your teen.

If we focus more on outward actions than inward attitudes we’re just training the next generation of Pharisees – whitewashed tombs that look good on the outside but inside are full of death and decay.
Matthew 23:27

Be like God. Look past the outward appearance and look at the heart. If they have a heart for God, all the other things will grow out, fall off, or eventually stabilize. Choose which hills are worth dying on and those are hills related to eternity and things of the heart.

Always ask God for wisdom.

God knows your child. God loves your child more than you ever could. God has a plan for your child. So, even though your default is yes, there may be times you sense a “No” from the Lord. In that case you don’t have to give 50 reasons why or argue. “I don’t sense it’s something I can let you do. I don’t understand it. I would like to say ‘yes’ but I’m

uneasy about it and I have to say 'no' because, just like you, I'm going to give account to God for my obedience."

Sometimes you may even sense a "no" from God when it's an OK activity. "*Others may. You cannot,*" is a phrase I followed from early in my walk with the Lord and shared with my kids. God knows our personal weaknesses and sometimes will tell us to stay away from activities that would be OK for others but would feed a weakness in us.

Sometimes others may – it's a harmless activity for others – but you may not.

*If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.
James 1:5*

Conclusion

Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish them with the rod, they will not die. Punish them with the rod and save them from death.

Proverbs 23:13, 14

This passage makes it clear that a “rod” needs to be something that cannot seriously harm a child. If a spanking injures your child you’re not following a Biblical pattern.

As already stated, the purpose of spanking is to produce repentance and obedience, not to inflict injury or even necessarily pain.

In my observation, parents who refuse the tool of physical spanking often resort to emotionally beating their child with a tongue lashing. They scold, nag, and threaten. They badger, berate, and manipulate in their attempts to plead for obedience.

Sticks and stones may break my bones but words hurt just as surely and even more deeply.

How much wiser we are if we simply follow the directions the Creator of our children gave us on how to train them and prepare them for eternity.

Remember, we were not issued practice children. These are the real thing. We only have one chance to do this right. Dare we risk rejecting God's wisdom on how to do it while we try some experimental method that contradicts His instructions?

Here is some additional wisdom and counsel He offers us parents.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. - Ephesians 6:4

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away. - Proverbs 22:15

The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son. ... For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.

*No discipline is enjoyable while it's happening-it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained by it.
- Hebrews 12:6-8, 11*

A rod and a reprimand impart wisdom, but a child left undisciplined disgraces its mother. Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire. - Proverbs 29: 15, 17

I close with a Facebook post from my daughter talking about my oldest granddaughter, Adiya. I hope it will encourage you when you get worn out and begin to wonder if this parenting thing will ever be worth all the energy and pain it requires.

Mine were all much older than five before I saw such fruit but it did come and it was all worth the effort. So carry on. With God at your side you can do this.

The most encouraging thing I've heard today came from my 5 year-old. "You know what? I'm thankful that you spank me. Because the Apostle Paul told us to give thanks in everything, even for the bad stuff, because it's pointing us towards God."

OUR CHILDREN
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR
RICHARD MALM

Rick is a pastor, missionary, parent, grandparent and husband to Jana for over 40 years.

He had a challenging experience when he was 25 years old that gave him a head start on parenting. He suddenly found himself parenting 220 K-12th grade students as principal of a Christian school.

Over the next few years he listened and learned from parents and teachers but more importantly he also scoured the Bible to discover the Lord's principles for training godly children.

In this book, he shares some of the principles he learned through that experience and that helped him to raise his own three children who are all currently married and actively serving the Lord.

For more help in parenting
check out his blog:
www.NoPerfectParents.com

Order additional copies of *Spare the Rod* from
Amazon.com

SPARE THE ROD

The Bible clearly endorses spanking but isn't that rather barbaric for our modern society? Doesn't spanking our children teach them that violence is an appropriate way to solve problems? Other critics even say spanking is child abuse.

But is it possible that spanking, when done within Biblical guidelines, is actually a controlled act of love that helps a child escape slavery to his own selfishness, unrestrained emotions and unbridled self-will?

Spare the Rod looks at five times it's not appropriate to spank our children. But while doing so it also provides guidelines for when it is appropriate and examines the heart attitude with which parents should approach it.

If you've had questions about this controversial form of discipline you definitely need to spare the rod and take a few moments to read Spare the Rod.

Rick Malm is a pastor, missionary, Christian educator, parent, grandparent and husband to Jana for over 40 years. Together they have three grown children and three precious granddaughters. He is founder of Commission To Every Nation (www.cten.org), an interdenominational missions organization. He holds a Masters Degree in Educational Administration and blogs about parenting at www.NoPerfectParents.com.

