

PARENTING THE YOUNGER YEARS: INFANCY TO EARLY CHILDHOOD

THE DIRTY DOZEN OF UNBIBLICAL PARENTING STRATEGIES¹

1. Permissiveness. Never telling your children No, Stop, or Don't do that.

Excuses for passive, permissive parenting:

- It's a stage; the child will outgrow it.
- They are so cute (when the child is behaving sinfully).
- He's just expressing his will.
- She is too young to obey.
- Psychological syndromes or disorders: Our child is ADHD, so the normal rules of attitude and behaviour don't apply.
- Assumed or transferred success: I've been successful in business or ministry; therefore, I'm sure to have good kids as well.

Biblical examples: Eli 1 Sam 3:13; David 1 Kings 1:5-6

2. Antagonist. Every conversation or instruction becomes a battle. By the time the children reach their teenage years, the battle often goes nuclear.

3. Positivist. Everything is directed toward building the child's self-esteem.

The Bible teaches that children are to esteem God by obeying His commands; the Bible teaches that children are to esteem their parents by honouring them. In short, the self-honouring of psychology puts the wrong person at the centre of the child's life. In the positivist approach, a child is entertained or coddled out of his bad behaviour or attitudes, rather than disciplined out of them.

4. Behaviourist. External conformity is good enough. If the outside of the cup is washed—if the child is externally presentable, respectful, and obedient—that's good enough. It is Pharisee parenting.

5. Distracted. A total lack of strategy due to parental busyness.

"Parents must involve themselves in their children's lives enough to insure that no other influence takes precedence."²

¹ Material below adapted from Joel James, unpublished course notes (Grace School of Ministry, 2026).

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *What the Bible Says about Parenting: Biblical Principles for Raising Godly Children* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 19.

6. Delegation. It's the church or school or day care's responsibility to raise them.

"God Himself has given the responsibility for raising children to parents—not to schoolteachers, peers, child-care workers, or other people outside the family—and therefore it is wrong for parents to attempt to unload that responsibility or shift the blame when things go wrong."³

7. Pharmaceutical. Drug them into manageability.

Drugging children into a robotic semi-coma with Ritalin or some other drug doesn't change their heart, but "parenting with a pill" takes a lot less time and effort than loving discipline and instruction.

Many parents confuse the descriptions of behaviour provided by such labels with a diagnosis. And thinking they are a diagnosis of an irreversible condition rather than merely a description of behaviour, they are left imagining that there are some children to whom the God-given commands to obey and honour don't apply.

8. Quality time. Bribe your kids with a few fun things amidst general neglect. Kids don't want quality time: they want you all the time.

9. Activity-driven parenting. The parents make sure their child is in—and has a leading role in—every club, concert, and contest available. This is supposedly for the good of the child, but more likely it is for the glory of the parent.

10. Emergency. Take action only when things get really bad.

11. Decibel discipline (i.e., yelling). We don't have to obey yet; Mommy isn't using her angry voice. Decibel discipline violates the principle expressed in 1 Timothy 3:4—keeping children under control "with all dignity."

12. Throw up your hands in despair. The child runs the home due to parental exhaustion. The war is over; the child has won. He is a half-metre-tall army of occupation that runs the home.

"One sure way to fill your life with misery is to abdicate the responsibility God has given you as a parent and a steward of the child He has graciously placed into your hands."⁴

³ Ibid., 19.

⁴ Ibid., 16.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF BIBLICAL PARENTING

Parenting in one sentence (based on Ephesians 6:1-3)—teach your children to obey with a respectful attitude.

Ephesians 6:1—

¹ **Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.**

The four assumptions behind Ephesians 6:1:

1. God deserves to be obeyed.
2. Children do not naturally do so.
3. It's dangerous to disobey God.
4. Parents are God's agents in the home to help children learn the dangers of disobeying Him and the blessings of obeying Him.

God's Two Basic Commands to Children

Although the commands of Ephesians 6:1-3 are given to children, clearly they are also given to parents, because it is the parents who help their young children glorify God by consistently obeying these two commands.

First command to children: Obey (6:1)

Parents make real, visible, and understandable the authority of the invisible God. Through their parents, children can see, touch, taste, and feel both God's justice and love. Through their parents they learn that God cannot be mocked—disobedience brings painful consequences—and that God is a gracious Forgiver.

“God calls his creatures to live under authority. He is our authority and has vested authority in people within the institutions he has established (home, church, state, and business). You must not be embarrassed to be authorities for your children. You exercise authority as God's agent. You may not direct your children for your own agenda or convenience. You must direct your children on God's behalf for their good.”⁵

“The most important lesson for a child to learn in this period [the first five years of life] is that HE IS AN INDIVIDUAL UNDER AUTHORITY.”⁶

Many parents, bombarded by our culture's constant questioning of legitimate, gracious parental authority, need to be reminded of the biblical truth that they are agents of God's gracious but just authority. This puts a sense of strength, purpose, and responsibility back into their parenting.

⁵ Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (2nd Edition) (Shepherd Press, 2003), xix.

⁶ Ibid., 155.

The benefit for children:

- They learn to submit to authority, one of the keys to a peaceful childhood and adult life.
- They are prepared for the gospel, realising that they are under God's rule, and need His grace because they so frequently violate His authority.

A qualifier: Parents are not merely drill sergeants or tight-lipped schoolmasters.

Martin Luther: "Spare the rod and spoil the child—that is true. But beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he has done well."

Applying the command, Children, obey your parents:

The Big Five of parenting small children:

1. No.
2. Stop.
3. Come.
4. Sit.
5. Quiet.

Small children don't need explanations, reasons, or parental homilies on the benefits of going to bed on time. They just need to learn that it's right for them to respond quickly and with a good attitude when their parents say No. Stop. Come. Sit. Quiet.

in the Lord

The sphere or circle in which a child obeys. Children obey within the sphere of or under the umbrella of God's authority. How children obey their parents is how they obey God.

for this is right

Children obey their parents, not because their parents pay the bills, can run faster, are physically stronger, can bribe them, manipulate them, out-manoeuvre them intellectually, or scare them with adult anger. Children are to obey just because it is foundationally, categorically, intrinsically right.

Ephesians 6:4—

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

Infants

Disciplining Infants

Just because babies cannot talk does not mean they cannot learn to listen and obey.

They are able to comprehend more than they can express verbally.

Therefore, parents need to train their children from infancy, starting with the most basic command—"no."

As you tell your baby no, use your voice to train them.

When they will not listen and obey, you will quickly discern their wilful disobedience.

Even from infancy, you must be diligent to discipline your child's sinful attitudes and actions.

This discipline includes "spanking" your baby.

"Spank with your hand, and before you ever give your baby a little 'pop,' 'pop' yourself on the back of your hand to make sure you are not using very much force. For babies, it usually is only one or two very light 'pops' with your fingers to the back of their hands or on their fat little thighs. You only want to startle them a little, but if they persist in disobedience or a sinful attitude, you may have to 'pop' their little hands a little bit harder."⁷

Especially as a first time parent, if you are ever in doubt, err on the side of mercy and give your baby the benefit of the doubt.

Many parents protest that their babies are too young to understand, but it is through your faithful and diligent discipline that they learn and come to understand.

If you're sinfully angry, do not spank your child no matter what age they are.

⁷ Martha Peace and Stuart Scott, *The Faithful Parent: A Biblical Guide to Raising a Family* (P&R Publishing, 2010), 45.

Instructing Infants

The child is never too young to begin the process of faithfully training them through biblical instruction.

Of course, this is going to look different for a baby then for an older child.

You can read books to your baby; you can sing songs to your baby; you can listen to music with your baby; you can set a good example for your baby of praying, especially before meals.

You can begin using basic instructions such as, “You need to obey with a happy heart.”

Is it easy when parents are tired to let the thoughts become sinful.

The following chart offers helpful examples of how to address our simple thoughts:⁸

Middle of the Night, Sinful Thoughts	Agape Love Thoughts
1. “I can’t take this any longer!”	1. “This is hard but God will give me the grace to endure as ‘love . . . endures all things.’” (1 Cor. 13:7; 10:13)
2. “I wish he had never been born!”	2. “He is a blessing from God. One way he is a blessing is to help me grow as a Christian. I am glad he was born.” (Ps. 127:3)
3. “Why is God doing this to me?”	3. “The Lord is testing me tonight and giving me a special opportunity to show love and to grow in God’s grace.” (James 1:2-3)
4. “This makes me so mad!”	4. “I chose to be mad. I am not forced by anyone else. Love is kind. I can show love to my baby by getting up and tenderly caring for her.” (1 Cor. 13:4)
5. “I’m too tired to give any more.”	5. “The faithful servant serves in the daytime or the night. I will pray and ask God to help me.” (Luke 17:7-10; Heb. 4:16)

Common Sense Tips

Make sure you get enough sleep, so go to bed early instead of staying up late.

If possible, the mother should take time to rest during the day so that she will not be overwhelmed with weariness.

It is the wife's responsibility to tell her husband when she needs help, since he cannot read her mind.

⁸ Peace and Scott, *The Faithful Parent*, 46.

Your baby needs to be trained to go to sleep and to stay asleep, though you will need to make a decision as parents as to *how* you do the training.

A schedule can be helpful, but you should never slavishly follow it.

Psalms 127:3-5—

³ **Behold, children are an inheritance of Yahweh, the fruit of the womb is a reward.**

⁴ **Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth.**

⁵ **How blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with enemies in the gate.**

Toddlers

Disciplining Toddlers

A two year-old or three year-old must be taught to obey the first time you give him an instruction.

First time obedience becomes an important standard for you to train your toddler in.

Ginger Hubbard offers parents great wisdom on this point in our book aptly titled, "Don't Make Me Count to Three!"

By this age, a child should be taught five essential commands:

1. No
2. Stop
3. Come
4. Sit
5. Quiet

The standard of obedience:

1. Obedience should be all the way

Saul's incomplete obedience in 1 Samuel 15

2. Obedience should be right away

Delayed obedience is disobedience

3. Obedience should be with a joyful heart

Philippians 2:14—

¹⁴ **Do all things without grumbling or disputing**

Along with these actions, you need to train your toddler in right attitudes.

When there were sinful attitudes, we are tempted to take the easy way that is frequently also the sinful way.

However, parents must realise that they have been providentially hindered by God and should stop whatever they are doing, if it all possible, and diligently discipline their toddler.

Proverbs 13:24—

²⁴ **He who holds back his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently.**

By this age, you should not be giving a little “pop” anymore but a proper spanking.

The spanking can be done either with your hand or another instrument.

The spank should be hard enough to sting but not hard enough to bruise or leave a lasting mark.

Again, it is essential that you do not discipline your child in anger.

Proverbs 22:15—

¹⁵ **Folly is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him.**

Proverbs 23:13-14—

¹³ **Do not withhold discipline from the child, although you strike him with the rod, he will not die.**

¹⁴ **You shall strike him with the rod and deliver his soul from Sheol.**

The Hebrew word for “rod” refers to a stick or rod used for correction or punishment.

“Note carefully that those verses expressly make corporal punishment—the rod—an essential part of parental discipline. When Solomon spoke of the rod, he employed a Hebrew term for a branch or a stick. Rods were used by shepherds as walking sticks, as instruments of defence, as standards of measurement, as tools to guide the sheep, and as implements of reproof to control wayward lambs.”⁹

The purpose of striking the child is to inflict pain, not injury.

The pain inflicted is designed not to injure the child, but to make the consequence of disobedience unforgettable.

⁹ MacArthur, *What the Bible Says about Parenting*, 84–85.
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Reasons that Spanking Does Not Work

1. Lack of Consistency

“It is not the severity of correction which will produce obedience; it is the certainty of correction which will bring about the desired result. Be consistent in your administration of discipline. Never, never, never issue a warning or a command without following it through.”¹⁰

2. Lack of Persistence

Some parents give the ride a couple of days, it becomes discouraged when the children are transformed of night, and they give up.

“When disobedience is met with uncomfortable consequences, they learn that God has built the principle of sowing and reaping into their world.”¹¹

Proverbs 3:5—

⁵ **Trust in Yahweh with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding.**

Galatians 6:9—

⁹ **And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.**

3. Lack of Effectiveness

4. Lack of Righteousness

James 1:20—

²⁰ **for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.**

When Not To Spank

1. Childish Behaviour

Childishness is not the same as foolishness

2. Inability to Perform

A child's failure to perform intellectually or athletically does not warrant a spanking.

¹⁰ Bruce A. Ray, *Withhold Not Correction* (P&R Publishing, 1978), 103.

¹¹ Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 111–112.

3. Accidents.
4. Before Having All the Facts
5. While You Are Angry

When To Spank

“When does a child need a spanking? When you have given a directive that he has heard and is within his capacity to understand, and he has not obeyed without challenge, without excuse or without delay, he needs a spanking.”¹²

“You must not warn. You must not ask if they want to be spanked. If you do, you are training them to wait for the warning before they obey. Your children must understand that when you speak for the first time, you have spoken for the last time.”¹³

How To Spank

1. Take your child to a private place where he can be spoken with in privacy.

Discipline must not rob a child of his dignity. You should never discipline in front of the other children in the family; it is not a spectator activity. The object is not to humiliate the child. You show respect for him by giving him privacy.

2. Discuss with a child is done wrong and why it is your responsibility to spank him.

Physical discipline must be attached to specific, easily demonstrated issues. As your child’s conceptual understanding grows, you may sometimes correct for more general, attitudinal issues. The spanking should always address a specific attitude or incident. Never spank just for “general purposes” or because you’ve “had it.”

Secure an acknowledgment from the child of what he has done. This will often take some time. Many times children will want to avoid the spanking badly enough to lie about what they have done.

Remind him that the function of the spanking is not venting your frustration or because you are angry, but to train him in living righteously. The spanking must reflect your obedience to God’s directives and concern for the child’s good.

3. Guide the child and thinking through what he should have done.
4. Use the proper instrument as your spanker.
5. Let the child know how many spanks you will be administering.

¹² Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (2nd Edition) (Shepherd Press, 2003), 145.

¹³ Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 146.

You do not need to remove clothing, but you should adjust the spanking according to the clothing.

As children get older and more self-conscious you must be careful not to shame or embarrass them.

6. Spank as promptly after the offence as possible.
7. Administer the spanking in private.
8. Administer the rod to the child's bottom.
9. Take time for reconciliation.

After you have spanked, take the child up on your lap and hug him, telling him how much you love him, how much it grieves you to spank him, and how you hope that it will not be necessary again. This keeps the spanking referenced to restoration, not retribution.

At this point there should be complete restoration between you and your child. If he will not be restored to you, if he is mad at you, if he refuses to receive your affection, then something is wrong. In such cases, check two things:

Check your own spirit. Have you handled him roughly? Have you been out of control? Have you sinned against him in the way you have disciplined? If you have brought unholy anger on this holy mission, you must confess your sin and seek forgiveness and restoration.

Check his spirit. Is his anger a reflection of rejection of your discipline? Is he mad at you? Is he trying to punish you for what you have done? If so, the discipline session is not over.

10. Require the child to make restitution.

Hebrews 12:11—

¹¹ **And all discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful, but to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.**

Worldly Alternatives to Biblical Discipline

Bribery.

If you come with Mommy, I'll give you a sweetie.

Emotional manipulation by making threats you have no intention of keeping.

If you don't come with Mommy, I'll leave you at the park all night or Daddy won't like you if you don't do what I say.

Time outs.

Removing the rod from the rod—instruction without teeth.

Contracts.

If you obey me, I'll do something in return. Children should obey simply because it is right, not as a tit-for-tat exchange (Ephesians 6:1).

Extended anger.

Don't talk to me. I'm still angry at you for what you did this morning.

Punishments that punish the parent more than the child.

You can't play outside for a week!

The Folly of Gentle Parenting/ Peaceful (Permissive) Parenting¹⁴

It trains parents to raise children without shame, blame, or punishment.

It redefines the parent-child relationship as a partnership and treats discipline as a collaborative negotiation.

A firm parental hand is rejected as harsh, unloving, legalistic, or mean.

It is marketed (sometimes as "Christian") through podcasts, websites, books, apps, and seminars, and has become dominant among many young parents.

It sounds soft and loving but systematically undermines biblical teaching on sin, confession, repentance, consequences, and the fear of God.

Hebrews 12:5-11—

⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him;

⁶ For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He flogs every son whom He receives."

⁷ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

⁸ But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

⁹ Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them. Shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?

¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our benefit, so that we may share His holiness.

¹¹ And all discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful, but to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

¹⁴ <https://www.gracechurch.org/sermons/24698>

Instructing Toddlers

Ephesians 6:4—

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

“Discipline and instruction” presumably means something like “educational admonition” or “corrective instruction.”¹⁵

“Instruction”—to provide instruction as to correct behaviour and belief—‘to instruct, to teach.’¹⁶

In addition to teaching children to obey, you must teach them about God.

We live in a time of an abundance of resources to help parents teach their children about God:

- Bible stories
- Theology lessons
- Catechisms
- Stories dealing with heart issues
- Hymns and songs

As we instruct our toddlers, it is particularly important that we start teaching them about heart motives.

We want them to learn happy obedience.

We want them to learn about respect.

We want them to learn kindness and the selfless consideration of others.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7—

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind, is not jealous, does not brag, is not puffed up;

⁵ it does not act unbecomingly, does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered;

⁶ it does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;

⁷ it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

It is at this age that you can teach your toddler to sit quietly and keep himself busy.

Toddlers need to see your joy in the Lord and your join in them.

Teach your little one to cheerfully do good deeds like helping with chores.

Parents should express their delight in helping others.

¹⁵ Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 425.

¹⁶ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 414.

Preschoolers

2 Timothy 3:14-15—

¹⁴ **But you, continue in the things you learned and became convinced of, knowing from whom you learned them,**

¹⁵ **and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.**

By the time a child is four or five years old, you should be coaching them and how to honour you with their tone of voice, the way they look at you, or with their words.

You can train your preschooler to speak graciously in both what they say and how they say it.

As your little one matures, allow them the opportunity to correct themselves so that a change in attitude or a change in behaviour does not always need to result in a spanking.

These are fundamental years where there should be a lot of teaching, explaining what they're doing right as well as wrong, and correcting the wrong.

Therefore you should be careful about what you expose your child to.

The preschooler will learn from television, movies, books, as well as friends and family that they spend time with.

This age you can really emphasise the importance of listening as a function of obeying.

Train your child to listen quietly and attentively to Bible stories which then have the added benefit of instructing them about the Lord.

This age is also appropriate time to teach your child about what is going on inside of their heart.

As a parent, you are responsible to train your child not to entertain your child. A preschooler should be able to keep themselves busy for significant periods of time without breaking established house rules.

The Gumnazo Principle can be illustrated by the example of a blacksmith who is training an apprentice. Apprenticeships are not as popular today as they were during the early days of our nation when Benjamin Franklin, for example, served as an apprentice for his older brother. Then, it was not uncommon for the apprentice to live with, be provided for, and be subject to the master craftsman. An apprenticeship was a thorough, intense training that usually lasted for seven years. Basically, it was training by practice, practice and more practice, until the apprentice got it right. The master craftsman would likely first explain and demonstrate the equipment. Then he would allow the apprentice to observe him going through the entire process of making a horseshoe from lighting the forge to shoeing the horse's hoof with the finished product, explaining each procedure in great detail. After a number of observations, the master craftsman would allow the apprentice to help with some of the procedure. Instructing him, the master would allow the apprentice to try the procedure. He would correct him on the spot should he make a mistake, *and require him to do it again until he got it right*. The master may have stood behind his apprentice, holding or gripping his hands over the hands of the apprentice, as they would hold the iron in the fire until the iron had just the right glow of red. Then, *hand in hand*, the master craftsman and the apprentice would quickly bring the iron to the anvil; and *hand in hand*, the master would demonstrate to the apprentice just where to hammer the iron and just how hard to strike it. Then, he would put it back into the fire and so on until the horseshoe was complete. After a few exercises of this hands-on training, the master would be ready to allow the apprentice to try the procedure by himself. Still standing behind his student, he would observe the apprentice's work, noticing every detail of workmanship. Then, as soon as a mistake was made, *immediately* he might say, "No, this way." *Again grasping the hand* of the apprentice, he would show him precisely *how to correct his mistake*. That's The Gumnazo Principle in action!

Imagine what it would be like if the master craftsman had simply explained the procedure one time, and when the apprentice made his first mistake, the master said, "Wrong! No dinner for you tonight. You'd better improve tomorrow."

"That would be cruel, unmerciful, and a violation of education," you say.

Yet that is the way many Christian parents "discipline" their children. "That was disrespectful!" they say, as they cruelly slap the child across the face with the backside of a hand, while feeling good about the fact that they identified exactly what the child did wrong—being disrespectful.

The Gumnazo Principle maintains that you haven't disciplined a child properly until you have brought him to the point of repentance by requiring him to practice the biblical alternative to sinful behaviour. This would involve not just asking forgiveness for the disrespect, not just identifying the sin by name (two essential steps in biblical discipline); but also by responding with a respectful alternative to the disrespect using the appropriate words, tone of voice, and non-verbal communication.¹⁷

¹⁷ Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger: Practical Help for the Prevention and Cure of Anger in Children* (Calvary Press Publishing, 1997), 64–66.