

Giving Your Child the Winning Edge

By

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Introduction

- Every parent wants their children to grow up as happy and successful adults
- Every parent wants to give their children the winning edge in a highly competitive world
- But there are the right ways and the wrong ways of equipping our children for the future
- The wrong ways include: pampering the children, giving them the best money can buy, or nagging them to study hard in order to enter a prestigious profession
- They are wrong ways not only because they are ineffective, but also because they often produce the opposite results
- Today, I want to focus on the right ways of giving children the winning edge

The best gifts that parents can give to their children

When our children were still in high school, we told them that the ultimate objectives of our parenting efforts are threefold:

1. **A good education** so that they can develop their potentials and make a decent living
2. **A good character** so that they become good citizens and contribute to the community and society.
3. **A strong faith in Christ** so that they can know God's will and experience God's blessings as they go through life

Why are these three gifts the best treasures?

- These three treasures will stay with our children, even when parents are no longer with them
- These three gifts are general-purpose tools, which will serve them well in all life situations
- No one can take these gifts away from them
- Too much money, too much love can spoil our children, but there is no such thing as too much education, too much character or too much faith

What is a good education?

- It is more than going to a prestigious university
- It is more than entering a prestigious profession
- It is more than receiving a degree with high earning potentials
- It is more than the acquisition of knowledge and skills
- A good education is just right for your children – an education that capitalizes on their strengths and natural talents
- A good education teaches students how to think cohesively, communicate clearly, and make decisions responsibly
- A good education develops the whole person

Character education

- Good character is based on the practice and internalization of good habits
- Character always matters – integrity is one’s best currency
- Character has to do with the quality of a person – what kind of person one is rather than what one does for a living
- Children receive their character education at home through their relationships with parents and modeling their parents’ behavior
- They learn gentleness, kindness and all other virtues through immersion in a home environment that is gentle and kind
- They do not learn virtues simply from listening to sermons or parental lectures; they learn through interactions, observations and often through overcoming difficulties

A strong faith in Christ

- We cannot instill faith through indoctrination or coercion
- We can instill faith through modeling and providing a home environment where children can experience God's love and grace through their parents
- Faith needs to be internalized – allow children to know and experience God at their own pace
- Don't play God – Parents should allow sufficient space for God to work through His plan in children's lives

Be a Servant-Leader

How do we instill Christian values, nurture moral character and develop Christian faith in our children?

The simple answer is that parents need to act as a leader – the kind of leader that can influence and inspire the children for a life time.

The basic principles of parental leadership include: leading by example and creating a positive home environment.

Contemporary parents need to reclaim their authority and learn how to be good leaders at home.

We all want to be better parents and we want the best for our children. We need to re-discover the foundational truth that children need adult leadership to guide, support and mentor them.

Characteristics of servant-leaders

According to the servant-leadership model, parents have the heart to love and serve, but also possess the authority and competence to inspire and influence.

Standing firm on the foundation of servant-leadership, parents are more likely to succeed in raising healthy, happy, and responsible children, who will become future servant-leaders.

What makes this model unique is the belief that at its deepest level, parenting is about **what you are** in relating to your children, rather than **what you do** to your children

The challenge of parenting is not about how to control children; it is more about how to mentor them and develop their potentials.

After all is said and done, **who you are as a person** matters more than **what skills you have** in terms of effective parenting.

Why discipline is not enough

What comes to your mind, when you think about discipline?

Proverbs 13:24 “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.”

The rod in the bible is a symbol of gentle guidance and protection, such as the rod used by a loving Shepherd to keep the sheep from going astray

Traditional parenting emphasis is on control and obedience.

But time has changed, and can not turn back the clock

Kids are more independent, more risk taking, and less respectful of authority

Parents need to be aware of the following:

(1) The super parent syndrome (Leman, 2000)

I own my children, I am the judge and jury, I would not allow my children to fail; I am the boss – what I say goes. (p. 109)

(2) Limits of power and control

Authoritarian control leads to resistance, rebellion, resentment, lying, compliance, escaping, bullying, etc.

Children are not dogs or robots

God did not create robots; He has given us free will.

We don't want treat children like dogs and send them to boot camps for obedience training; perfectly obedient children can't survive in the real world.

Parents should not try to compel obedience, but command respect and inspire love.

Love based obedience is better than fear based obedience

(3) Discipline is about boundary setting and responsibility

All human beings need to learn their boundaries, such as speed limits, or one-way streets; they are truly free only within certain boundaries, responsible for the consequences of violating these boundaries. These are important lessons of discipline.

(4) “Parent, discipline thyself”

Parents who live an undisciplined life, who have little self-control, will have problem disciplining their own children.

(5) True discipline is disciple-making

True discipline is not about reward and punishment, not about shouting, threatening.

It is about making disciples of our children – they are to learn from us as our disciples.

(6) Disciple-making requires a disciple-maker -- a leader.

“Discipline is not something you pass down to your children. Discipline is how you live your life”
(Leman)

Discipline is not enough without disciple-making.

Why love is not enough

- Love is the nutrient that feeds the soul - Without love, children just wither away as the Romania orphans.
- Secure attachment is essential for healthy development
- “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son.” John 3:16
- God’s love is the best model for parental love. God’s love is unconditional and sacrificial, but God also corrects us when we go astray.
- Unconditional love versus conditional approval (Some parents threaten their children: If you keep on crying, I will ask the policeman to take you away.)
 - You may love your children to death -- Be careful, too much love can be bad for your children

- Prov. 19:18 “Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death”
- “I refuse to raise a brat”

“The surest way to raise a brat is to overindulge, overgratify and overprotect” (Henner & Sharon)

Harmful effects of pampering

- A spoiled brat is an unhappy, unhealthy child
- Pampering makes children weak, wimpy and self-centred
- Pampering turns them into demanding, aggressive and angry children
- Pampering makes them feel insecure physically and emotionally
- “Overprotection pushes a child down”
- “Over-responsible parents produce irresponsible children”

Why do parents pamper their children?

Wimpy parents (afraid of hurting children’s self-esteem) are too loving, too kind, and too understanding.

Feel guilty for not having time for their children

Lack confidence, competence and energy to discipline

Want their children to be happy – However, the meaning of our existence should not be for the happiness of our children. Then our children become our idols. Put children first can be counter-productive. (For one thing, children may take you for granted; secondly, you may fail your own mission in life).

Child-centred approach does not work in the classroom or home. We cannot let children set the agenda or control our lives.

Why parental skills are not enough

- It depends on who is using the skills
- Firm request won't work without authority and respect
- I-messages are ineffectual without a relationship
- There are limits to natural and logical consequences

- Treating children as our equal reduces parenting effectiveness -- Children do not have the mental capacity, nor the experience.

Prov.20:23 “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child”

By relinquishing our authority, we reduce our effectiveness as parents.

Skill is not the key to successful parenting

Leadership is the missing link in effective parenting

- Who is in the driver’s seat?
- Who is in charge of your household?
- Can you say, “I have authority over my children and
and
- I am the undisputed leader of my home?”
- Many families are chaotic, because there is no parental leadership.

- In many families, the baby is in charge, because whenever he cries, the mother will drop everything to hold him.
- A two-year old is in charge, because everyone is afraid that he may throw a temper tantrum if he does not have his way.

Need to reclaim parental authority

You may have lost a lot of grounds, and given up your authority and responsibility.

Willing to take the leadership and exercise your authority – This is the important first step towards effective parenting

Dobson: define reasonable boundaries and enforce them with confident decisiveness. This is what a parent must be prepared to do as a leader.

The responsibility and authority rest with parents -- God and society have placed parents in position of authority, Child need parental leadership to guide, support and mentor them.

Parents need to be authoritative, but not authoritarian

What children really need

- Belonging, a significant role in the family,
- Acceptance, unconditional love, and a secure attachment
- Want to please their parents, and want parents to be proud of them.
- Children are willing to yield to the loving authority of their parents.
- “Loving authority is the glue that holds social order together” (Dobson)
- Loving parental leadership is healthy for children
- “Parental presence” means order and security

Characteristics of effective parental leadership

- Command attention, respect and inspire
- (I cannot compel you to pay attention, but I must be able to command your attention and respect. I cannot force you to follow my ideas, but I can inspire you and convince you.)
- Have a clear sense of meaning and purpose
- Are honest, straightforward and trustworthy
- Must have high ethics and moral authority
- Are fair-minded and open-minded – children hate to be treated unfairly

- Are willing to listen to your children – learn how to listen actively and patiently
- Are caring, sensitive, supportive and understanding
- Are decisive and courageous
- Have the competence and confidence to succeed
- Have the ambition to learn and grow continuously
- Need to create circumstances within which you can stand firm

How you can develop your parental leadership

- Must be willing to lead
- Reclaim parental authority
- Exercise parental authority on a daily basis
- There is no vacation, no holiday for parental leadership
- Not the authority of command and control, but the authority of love and higher purpose.
- There is little chance of abuse of power, when parents exercise the power of inspiration, the power of encouragement
- Develop your leadership potential – learn your weaknesses and strengths, acquire new skills.

- Think as a leader -- Develop the mind of a leader (Leadership is an attitude, a belief. A way of looking at yourself, your family and your children)
- Act as a leader -- Walk like a leader, carry yourself as a leader, with decisiveness, confidence, and courage
- Demonstrate your competence and inspire confidence

Take a larger view of parenting.

- Leadership is every parent's business, and every parent's challenge. You can not be an effective parent, unless you are willing to learn to think and act as a leader at home.
- You can make a difference, but you must believe that a leader lives in you.
- "The quest for leadership is first an inner quest to discover who you are. Through self development comes the confidence to lead." (Kouzes and Posner)
- Decide on your mission statement as a parental leader. I have given our three-fold mission statement as a parent in the beginning of my talk. What is your mission statement?

Effective parental leadership is always gentle but firm

- When parents are effective leaders, they no longer need resort to shouting, threatening and nagging.
- Their leadership provides a model for children how to handle conflict and disagreement
- They can speak softly because their words demand attention and respect
- “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Proverbs 15:1
- When parents are effective leaders, they can create a home environment where children can develop their Christian virtues and faith.