

## How to Disciple Your Children

By Dr. David A. DeWitt

- *As a parent, how can you disciple your child?*
- *What's the difference between discipling teens and discipling young children?*
- *What can I expect to be the result of discipling my children?*

**Definition:** Biblical discipleship is intentionally impacting the life of someone in the direction of Christlikeness. So it is

Intentional  
Impacting  
Personal  
Christlike

### The Basics of Discipleship

Developed in the Concepts' Short Topic entitled "Seven Principles of Biblical Discipleship," the basics of biblical discipleship:

- (1) Is being there in-the-flesh
- (2) Is reproductive--not just productive
- (3) Invites personal discovery
- (4) Reasons, persuades, and gives evidence
- (5) Counts the cost
- (6) Is giving

#### (1) **Be with them.**

Discipleship is incarnational. It can only be done in-the-flesh. It cannot be done at a distance. It cannot be done taking your children to a Christian school, Sunday school, or youth program. It can only be done by you being physically with them. Quality time can *only* be purchased with quantity. A photographer once told me, "The secret to taking top-quality pictures is to take a lot of pictures." Quality only comes from quantity. Discipleship is done *when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up* (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). This is especially true with teenagers (Proverbs 5:1-2).

*Governing the activities of teens has nothing to do with discipling them.*

#### (2) **Do things which they can reproduce.**

The point of discipling our children is for them to take ownership of the truth about God. The goal is not to keep them occupied with something safe. Entertainment, for example, is generally not aimed at reproduction. If our discipleship amounts to Christian entertainment (whether it be videos, puppet shows or youth group leaders), it will probably not transfer to our children. We don't tend to reproduce entertainment because it appears to require a specific talent or is simply beyond our interest. Just because I am entertained by a symphony orchestra does not mean I want to play the violin. What children are able to reproduce are the moral and theological values we live by (Deuteronomy 6:1-2).

#### (3) **Create a context which encourages discovering truth**

The difference between parenting and discipling is

*Parenting sets boundaries--discipleship encourages discovery.*

Children need both. But divorce ends parenting. In the Bible, parenting is never outside the context of marriage. A divorced single parent should not try to parent their children except in the basic sense of physical safety. But they can and should discipline their children. Even though they cannot be a complete parent without being married to the child's mother or father (death of a spouse being an exception), they can be a friend and hence a discipler who provides a context for discovering biblical moral righteousness. With married parents, the child is required to keep the boundaries they set but the parents are required to create a context where learning godly values can be discovered (Proverbs 22:6; Colossians 3:21).

**(4) Explain your actions.**

Another difference between parenting and discipling is

**Parenting disciplines--discipleship explains.**

Children need both. Kids are little bundles of chaos who need discipline. Only parents married to a child's mother or father will have much success at that. But discipleship reasons, explains, and gives evidence (Isaiah 1:8; Proverbs 2:11-14; Acts 17:1-4; 18:4; 19:8-10). Paul told fathers to bring up their children *in the discipline and instruction of the Lord* (Ephesians 6:4). You can train your dog by discipline without instruction but you cannot disciple your children that way. Of course small children are not always capable of understanding. But,

**If you can't justify your actions to your teenagers, they are probably not justifiable.**

**(5) Make them a priority.**

We should never make our children a priority over God or our spouse. It's unbiblical and will not lead to the discipleship of our children, anyway. But we must be willing to pay the cost of making our children a priority over our job, our social agenda, our church, our in-laws, parents, and hobbies.

**The cost of discipleship is time.**

The time required to disciple your teens is even greater because with young children, they join your schedule. With teenagers, you join their schedule.

Jesus said, *no one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God* (Luke 9:61-62). His illustration is a one-horse plow which will veer off to the side very quickly if you don't give it your full attention. You cannot use a one-horse plow, or disciple your children, if you plan to be sidetracked by a lot of other interests.

**(6) Give to them, expecting nothing in return.**

Paul told us, *God loves a cheerful giver* (2 Corinthians 9:7). The main thing which keeps giving from being cheerful is when we expect a return thinking our children will pay us back with respect, gratitude, or accomplishments we can be proud of. When paybacks are omitted from our giving motive, we are free to enjoy giving by itself. Many parents express that they love their children but don't seem to enjoy them. They want to "get away from them for awhile" or they can't wait for them to grow up so they can do all those things they really want to do. This attitude is easily picked up by children and tends to eliminate discipleship. We might ask ourselves how we would feel if God felt that way about us.

**(7) Teach them they belong to God.**

Just like your money and your possessions, your children don't belong to you. They were given to you by God to be a caretaker in their lives for a little while (Psalm 127:3-5). Your job is to give them an eternal perspective. I'd like to suggest that the odds are about 90% that

**If your kids have an eternal perspective, they'll probably make it.  
If they don't, they won't.**

Godly men and women come from boys and girls who have an eternal perspective on life (1 Corinthians 1:18, 21).

## Questions and Answers

**Q:** *As a parent, how can you disciple your child?*  
**A:** By exercising the seven basics listed here.

**Q:** *What's the difference between discipling teens and discipling young children?*

**A:** Young children listen to what you say. Teens watch what you do.

**Q:** *What can I expect to be the result of discipling my children?*

**A:** Let me answer that with three observations:

- (1) Almost everyone who has a good discipler turns out to be a good man or woman.
- (2) Good people will not usually pass on their goodness to others unless they specifically disciple them.
- (3) If good people do not disciple their children, those children will probably follow bad people or bad influences.