

balance must be struck, with understanding on all sides. A crying baby and disruptive toddler can be very off-putting, and yet, as soon as you dare let your children sit in the main meeting, it is surprising how understanding and accommodating most brethren and sisters are. It is equally wonderful how much of what goes on in the service your child remembers (19:13,14).

Conclusion

There is nothing that can quite prepare you for children, and neither do they come with an instruction manual as to how to deal with them. Yet

living your life around the things of the Truth, and applying the teachings and advice which we find in the Bible, will help us to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We pray that all of our young ones will learn to love the Lord their God, will learn to see Jesus as their Saviour and coming King, and embrace the promises and covenants as their own, so that as they grow they will be as blessed as we parents are: "Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in His commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed" (Ps. 112:1,2).

Setting the example

It's no good saying one thing and doing another. Mark and Mary Whittaker (Crewe, UK) remind us just how important it is to set the right standard, modelled on the pattern of Christ, as examples to our children. There is no place for hypocrisy. Setting a good example is one of the most powerful ways of teaching them what the Lord requires.

HOW MANY PARENTS can still remember the first time their baby repeated back to them the word 'Mummy' or 'Daddy'? Our child will have learned that first word by listening to us repeat it many times over, eventually working out how to mimic the example itself. We may not even have consciously taught the word, but the child has learnt to copy it nevertheless, thus illustrating just how powerful example is as a tool to teach others. Through much of our lives we continue to learn in this way—by copying the examples we observe in our parents and teachers, and later on in colleagues at work and brothers and sisters in the meeting.

Our Creator knows that this is what we are like, which is why He left the example of His own Son on record for us, a perfect life that we can strive to follow. And Jesus himself made sure that his example was noted by his disciples, as when he washed the disciples' feet: "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (Jno. 13:15).*

Paul also understood the power of a good example, and ensured that, wherever he preached the gospel, his behaviour was unimpeachable, a benchmark that others could live by: "Brethren,

join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern" (Phil. 3:17). Where he saw brothers and sisters setting a good example themselves, like the Thessalonians, he made sure that others took note of it: "And you became followers of us and of the Lord . . . so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe"

(1 Thess. 1:6,7).

By wanting to set the right example for our own children, then, we are following in the footsteps of our Master himself and his great apostle.

Taking responsibility

For parents in the Truth it's important to appreciate from the start that children are both a blessing from God and a responsibility—*our* responsibility—until they reach adulthood. If we want our children to grow up with a love for God and His Word then we have to realise that laying the foundation rests firmly with us, and we only get the one opportunity to influence our children positively. If we leave the influence over our children's spiritual development to child minders and the like, particularly in the early years, we cannot really claim to be discharging *our* responsibility as godly parents, nor is it likely to set the example we want for our children. What is it that we want our children to be soaking up like a sponge in those formative years: an example that we have control over (our own), or someone else's, over which we have no control?

* Scripture quotations from the NKJV.

The same principle holds true once children are at school. In those hours when they are with friends and teachers at school, it is unlikely that they will be influenced for good, which makes the few hours between home time and bedtime critical. It's our brief opportunity to re-establish a good example that they can follow, one that will counter anything picked up during the day.

Setting a consistent example

Consistency is critical when we are setting an example for our children. If our behaviour is not consistent then this will quickly be noted, even from an early age, and our ability to influence our children for good will correspondingly diminish. To them we will be no different from the Pharisees, who "say, and do not do" (Mt. 23:3). Our inconsistency will send out a message that what we are trying to teach isn't really that important after all.

This 'Do as I say and not as I do' method of example-setting is one that compromises the good that we try to instil into our children, because, if we don't personally follow what we teach, why should they? Think of the situation that David found himself in after his sin with Bath-sheba. His own poor example not only told his sons that they could behave as they liked, it also rendered David almost completely unable to deal with his sons when they did go off the rails. Do we want this sad process to be repeated in our own family?

Perhaps Paul had this particular issue in mind when he told the Corinthians that they were good at telling others what to do, but not so good when it came to setting an example that others could follow in practice. In 1 Corinthians 4:14,15 he says, "I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. *For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel*". Paul clearly saw a difference between an "instructor" and a "father". An instructor simply tells others what to do, whereas a father shows what others should do by setting the example first. This is why Paul continues in verse 16, "Therefore I urge you, *imitate me*".

It is the same for us as parents; the instruction of our children in God's ways will not work by simply telling them what to do, unless this is fully backed up in our lives by also doing what we instruct. Consistency between word and action is paramount.

Conscious and unconscious example setting

There are many positive things that we can consciously do with our children all through their childhood that will set a good example for them:

- Doing Bible readings daily, for this is the clearest signal to our children that we consider God's message to be important in our lives, every day. For younger children a Bible story at bedtime can be the start of this process, which becomes a more mature discussion of a real passage of Scripture as children grow older.
- Praying together, both at meal times and at the end of the day, to show our reliance upon God and thankfulness for what He gives us.
- Attendance at meetings and ecclesial events. Our own involvement in the ecclesia sends a strong message to our offspring about what part the ecclesial family plays in our lives—whether it is what our lives revolve around or just a fringe activity.
- Considering the language we use. It's not just a case of 'not swearing in front of the kids', but whether we deliberately avoid words and phrases that are at odds with our profession of trying to follow the Lord Jesus.

In reality, of course, before we became parents these activities should have been very much a part of our life since baptism as disciples of Christ. However, by including our children in such activities as Bible reading, prayers and ecclesial events from the earliest opportunity, we help to establish these as natural and important parts of life, both theirs and ours.

However, the conscious example we set by doing these things with our children each day is only half the story. Our whole lifestyle and focus provides an unconscious example for our offspring, which will either reinforce the message of the things we do consciously, or undermine it.

For example, when reading together we may teach our children all about the way that disciples of Jesus should behave—turning the other cheek, esteeming others better than ourselves, etc.—and then completely undermine these teachings by behaving aggressively at the wheel of our car, or by being critical of brothers and sisters in front of the children. Or perhaps we talk a lot about the importance of the ecclesia and the family, but deny this in practice by the priority we put upon work, schooling our children and self when dividing up our time.

To turn to the positive side, we may, for example, quite unconsciously show our children what forgiveness is really about simply by the way that we treat others who wrong us (including one another within the family).

These are simple illustrations, but it may well be that the unconscious example we provide for our children actually has a greater influence on their spiritual development than all the things we make a deliberate point of teaching and doing with them.

Peter had this in mind, not in relation to bringing up children, but concerning the conversion of unbelieving spouses. In 1 Peter 3:1,2 he says, "Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, *without a word*, may be won by the conduct

of their wives, *when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear*".

Surely the exhortation for all parents from this is to make sure that the things we do deliberately and consciously to set a good example for our children are complemented by the rest of our daily life. Our example comes through in *everything* we do and say, not just the bits where we make a point of setting a benchmark. And whatever is seen, heard and registered by our children will be copied in their own lives more swiftly than we might ever imagine—the good and the bad.

If we ourselves, therefore, are being "imitators of God as dear children" (Eph. 5:1), then we know that our own dear children in turn will have a good standard to imitate as we bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Discipline

Every parent knows how necessary discipline is, but how best to give it? Chris and Chris Furniss (Redditch, UK), well aware of the current debates in politics and child psychology, walk us through the subject with the Scriptures as the guide. The passages from Proverbs which speak of the rod seem clear enough—but is the rod literal or metaphorical? The authors are wisely careful not to be prescriptive, while showing that there are many different forms of discipline, and that different children need to be handled in different ways. Parents must take personal responsibility for applying the Scriptural principles, and must pray for wisdom to discharge their duties after the pattern of their all-wise Father in heaven.

THE ONLINE etymology dictionary says that the word 'discipline' "comes from the Latin *disciplina*, 'instruction given to a disciple', from *discipulus*". In the Greek it is linked to the word for 'teaching'. If we accept this as our working definition of the word it becomes clear that a follower of Christ, a disciple, needs to be disciplined (taught how) to follow his or her Lord. As parents with the duty to "bring [our children] up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4), we must provide the right sort of discipline too.

The problem comes when we try to decide on what the 'right sort' of discipline is. It becomes even more difficult when we factor in social attitudes and expectations that have changed drastically in the last few decades. Add in the increasing focus on human rights, including the rights of children, and the legislation that has been passed in some countries restricting very carefully the use of physical punishments, and the whole subject can become a real headache.

Looking at the principles

WE will leave aside the issue of legislation for the present and look at the Scriptural principles involved. Let's begin at that passage

in Ephesians quoted above and examine the three key thoughts, "bring up", "nurture" and "admonition". The three words in the Greek are *ektrephō*, *paideia* and *nouthesia*.

"Bring . . . up"

The RV, the Amplified Bible and Young's Literal translations of the Greek *ektrephō* imply a particular kind of upbringing, using words like 'nurture', 'nourish' and 'tenderly'. And that is the starting point; a relationship, as the context makes quite clear. Set against the backdrop of the first