

4. Discipling Children (1Q 2014—Discipleship)

Biblical material: Ps. 127:3–5; Deut. 6:6, 7; Luke 2:40–52; Matt. 18:1–6, 10–14; 21:16; Mark 10:13–16.

Quotes

- A Christian understanding of the world sees a child’s character not as genetically determined but as shaped to a significant degree by parental discipleship and discipline. *Russell Moore*
- Let us live not only to serve God ourselves; let us live to help our children and their children live for God. *Dillon Burroughs*
- Discipling our children is not about teaching them to behave in a way that won’t embarrass us. We’re working toward something much more important than that. We’re actually raising our children with a view toward leading them to trust and to follow Christ. *Voddie T. Baucham Jr*
- It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men. *Frederick Douglass*
- No man or woman ever had a nobler challenge or a higher privilege than to bring up a child for God, and whenever we slight that privilege or neglect that ministry for anything else, we live to mourn it heartache and grief. *Vance Havner*
- Children have more need of models than of critics. *Joseph Joubert*
- One of the greatest means of grace in the life of a child is the biblical implementation of discipline. *Al Martin*

Questions

Why are children so often forgotten? In what way are Jesus’ disciples to be like little children? Why did Jesus so clearly affirm children? How does this reflect God’s values and principles? In our discipling of children, what is our primary motive? How can we best share the good news across the generations?

Bible summary

Ps. 127:3–5 reminds us that children are a heritage, a blessing from the Lord. We are told to teach children God’s commands (Deut. 6:6, 7). Luke records concerning Jesus, “The child grew strong, and was very wise. God’s blessing was with him.” (Luke 2:40 FBV). Matthew records a wonderful teaching of Jesus: “Around that time the disciples came to Jesus, and asked, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ Jesus called over a small child. He stood the child in front of them. ‘I tell you the truth, unless you change the way you think and become like little children, you won’t ever enter the kingdom of heaven. But whoever humbles themselves and becomes like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever accepts a little child like this in my name accepts me. But anyone who makes one of these little ones who trust in me sin, it would be better for them to have a large millstone tied around their neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea.’” Matt. 18:1–6 FBV.

Jesus continued his illustration and told his hearers not to look down on these little ones, and that the Father does not wish any of them to be lost. Matt. 18:10–14. The religious leaders were offended at the children’s praise of Jesus, but Jesus commended them (Matt. 18: 21:15, 16). Jesus blessed the children brought to him (Mark 10:13–16).

Comment

Matthew 18:1-6 reveals the truth about the experience of discipleship. It is not a question of worldly power, or of social position, or of human respect. It's all about acting with the beauty, kindness, and transparency of little children. Jesus' concept of discipleship is based on his own nature—one of humility. This should teach us much about the way to disciple children—not in authoritarian ways, but humbly and lovingly being an example of the way we live for Christ.

With all its recognized challenges, being a Christian parent is meant to bring happiness and love and togetherness. Even when things go wrong, badly wrong, you as parent should always believe that this is a most important aspect of your life, and not abandon your responsibilities. For ultimately a new person is in the making, and your child has the same choices and responsibilities you have as a human being. You cannot force their choices, and “only by love is love awakened.”

Recognizing this, your role as parent is to help make wise decisions by providing a safe, educational, happy environment where your child can grow and develop to be the best person he or she can be. You will want to share what is important to you, your values and beliefs, but know that they cannot be imposed. As the word education indicates, it is *leading* and not *imposing*.

As a parent you cannot rely on your principles to be maintained by others. Peer pressures will affect your child, and lead them in directions that you would not wish. This should not lead you to become over-protective, but you need to understand the situation. More than ever before an effective and loving role model is vital for your child's development and security.

Mixed messages are the curse of modern society. You are encouraged to live for yourself, to have fun, to accept all the instant gratification of sexual pleasure, recreational drugs, material possessions and so on. Yet you are also required to be a success in every area of life and a model to your family! It doesn't take a genius to see how incompatible such ideas are. Parenting has to face these confused ideas and help children see reality and how to handle life today.

Ellen White Comments

The highest education is that which will teach our children and youth the science of Christianity, which will give them an experimental knowledge of God's ways, and will impart to them the lessons that Christ gave to His disciples of the paternal character of God. {CG 296-7}

Teach the children that they must have a new heart; that new tastes must be created, new motives inspired. They must have help from Christ; they must become acquainted with the character of God as revealed in His Word. {CG 515}

There is a daily suppression of God's truth for the theories and false doctrines of human origin. There are plans and movements being set on foot to enslave the consciences of those who would be loyal to God. The lawmaking powers will be against God's commandment-keeping people. Every soul will be tested. Oh that we would as a people be wise for ourselves and by precept and example impart that wisdom to our children. {1MR 48}

Teach your children to love truth because it is truth... {AH 186}