

## "As heavy fighting continues..."

Just four small words  
A line on a page  
Easily passed over and  
forgotten.

*Pause and look behind  
the words:*

Mortars fired into the air  
Mud brick houses  
flattened and destroyed,  
Each one a home  
sheltering a family.  
A home destroyed, its  
members fled or killed.  
Picture the few pitiful  
belongings left behind,  
Destroyed with the  
crumbling walls.

Guns firing bullets  
Small yet lethal—  
wounding, maiming,  
killing.

Two young boys sent to  
the river for the family's  
water.

Only one returns. The  
other? A target for a  
stray bullet,  
His body left on the path;  
a statistic

Added to the growing  
number of "those killed."  
Whilst at home a mother  
grieves the loss of a  
second son.

—Pauline Wager, Chad

## In Focus

Phyllis Kilbourn

**T**he remark is often heard that children are the church of tomorrow or of the future. If, however, the children are not made a part of the church of today, they most likely will not become the church of tomorrow either. It is quickly evident that many children, whether in crisis or not, have failed to receive spiritual nurture from loving, caring adults. They have not been provided with a ladder of hope to rise above their situations. In any kind of intervention planning, prevention is viewed as much easier than restoration. Raising a spiritually healthy child is much easier than restoring "children in crisis to children in Christ."

Proper training of a child is necessary not only for the welfare of that child but also for peace and harmony in the home. Children are given to us as "God's best gifts." He intends for us to enjoy them, not just endure them! Only as parent-child relationships are kept healthy and helpful, can parents provide the spiritual nurture vital to the development of their children's relationship to Christ. Parents must instill foundational beliefs and values into their children through solid home training.

Training is not merely telling, nor teaching, nor commanding. It is something far higher than all these. It is not only telling a child what to do, but showing him or her how to do it and seeing that it is done. Training also involves not only helping a child distinguish right from wrong but

also helping him or her respond to right by personal choice.

The chief tool in accomplishing such spiritual training is discipline—not punishment! We all know that every child must experience discipline and the child knows it, too! To not discipline a child is one of the most unloving, uncaring things a parent can do. Through discipline children learn their boundaries and find security within them. The nature of parents' discipline, however, should be such that a child is left knowing that it stems from their love and care for the child.

Discipline also must be consistently practiced. Habitually reacting and responding rightly is a vital element of training. Consistency not only reinforces the need for obedience but also prepares a child, when developmentally ready, to respond from principles planted in the heart. Habit always precedes a principled lifestyle.

Godly discipline not only provides the needed healthy environment for training in the home, school and society but also models how God deals with His children. Three vital lessons a child can have modeled for him or her through parental training and discipline are: God's unconditional love, His forgiveness and His willingness to restore to give a second chance.

Mixing love with discipline is a fundamental rule of good parenting. Too often, as Mary Ellen aptly points out in her article that follows, a parents' response to a child's misbehavior is frustration and anger that only instills fear and resentment within a child. Discipline has as

*(concluded on page 4)*



# Parenting—an exercise in humility and love

Mary Ellen Schreiber

**S**he is such a terrible child. I don't know what to do with her. She is driving me crazy." These words came from my neighbor. Every day since we moved into the neighborhood we could hear Claudia, our neighbor's daughter screaming. "She makes everyone angry. The other day she walked over her brother's freshly washed clothes," her mother continued.

Consequently, mother beat her. That's why Claudia screams. The beatings did not change Claudia. Obviously something in her upbringing was faulty. Perhaps she was spoiled when she was tiny, as so many children are. Rather than taking her misbehavior seriously when she was very young, people probably laughed at her. Was it too late for Claudia?

"Why don't you let me take Claudia to Sunday school. Jesus can change her heart." Sunday morning she was ready and so were her brothers! As Jesus changed her heart, He changed her behavior too. Another happy part of the story is that Claudia's mother is now attending a Bible study.

So, the moral of the story is: Let your children do whatever they want. Spoil them thoroughly. Later, when they receive Christ, all will be well. Is this what the Bible teaches us? Absolutely not! "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it," says the Book of Proverbs.

How do we "train" a child? What does this admonition mean?

It means that we need to pray for the child, teach the child Biblical truths and take the child to church and Sunday school. Those things are part of training. However, "training" goes much deeper than these actions.

## Training begins with the trainer

What kind of a model should the trainer be? A 300 lb. "couch potato" would have a hard time telling a distance runner what diet and program of exercise to follow. He needs to get in shape himself. If we want to train our children we need to start by being in shape spiritually ourselves. Do we read the Bible daily? Do we live a life of prayer? Are we serving the Lord? Are we living a holy life and doing God's will?

When our lives as parents are in good spiritual order we can begin talking to our children about spiritual truths. As we live out each of these areas of our spiritual lives and apply them to the children, we begin "training" our children.

When our children were newborns they joined our family devotional time. By the time they were one year old we were reading a tiny children's devotional book to them and singing and praying with them. We continued this

practise consistently, after supper, every day of their lives.

Children need to be taught the Word on a level understandable to them. I've noticed that many of our church members and church leaders would dedicate one or two days of the week to family devotions. Perhaps to make up for the infrequency, these "devotions" tend to become mini church services. Father reads a long passage and preaches on it. The service lasts so long, including a long prayer, that the children fall asleep before it's over!

A better idea is to use a children's devotional book or read a short passage of scripture. If scripture reading is long, heavy and uninteresting the children will receive a similar impression of God's Word. "That's not for me. It's for Dad and Mom." The text could be read ahead of time and be told as a story or acted out. The children can act out the story, too. In this way the Word of God becomes a living thing.

## A good imagination helpful

Story telling is part of African culture. At weddings, births, and funerals a story teller is hired to come and sing the history of the family or clan. Young children in our host country of Cote d'Ivoire have phenomenal memories and love to repeat. What an open door to implant the precious Word of God! Maybe Mom and Dad will



even learn a few new verses as they teach the children!

We need our imagination to aid us in finding many different ways of teaching God's Word and prayer. We used to divide the world into seven areas and pray for one each day: Latin and South America on Monday; Europe on Tuesday; Africa on Wednesday; Asia on Thursday; the Middle East (Muslims) on Friday; the Islands on Saturday; and America and Canada on Sunday. We used prayer cards as often as possible. This practise helps the child gain a world vision.

## When is the best time to begin training?

Is any child too small or too young to be taught the Word of God? When do we start inculcating God's truths and principles into tiny minds and hearts? When a baby is born into a Muslim family, the father or a religious leader takes the child and whispers into his ear the Muslim creed. These words are the first the child hears.

Can he understand? We do not yet know how much an infant can understand. Scientists tell us that a baby in the womb can hear his mother's voice. If she is angry, he hears her. If she laughs, he can tell. Why not start talking to him before he is born by singing him songs and praying out loud for him? That is early training! It would certainly be better than words like, "I wish I could get rid of this baby. He's ruining my plans and lifestyle. I'll find a way to destroy him." How sweet for him to hear that he is loved and wanted because God gave him to you.

As I sat in church last year and glanced out the windows I

noticed that flocks of little children were gamboling over the lawn distracting everyone. Or they were invading the other Sunday school classes and disturbing the teachers and students. Why were they not in a class of their own? Nothing was planned for them.

Could they learn? Between the ages of two and six, they were not even in school yet! If they were too young for school were they too young for Sunday school too? We decided to try a nursery class. We determined it would not be a babysitting service. It would be a learning situation. With the help of a few young people from church and students from the Bible school we began teaching these little ones. What a blessing to see tiny tots memorizing scripture and reciting it before their parents in church. The applause was deafening.

Yes, very tiny ones can learn. The Lord directed us as we sought to teach these little ones on their own level. We used clay from the swamp behind the church, chalk

on the ground and African games. It's a different culture and things are learned differently in Africa. The temptation to import all our materials and methods was very real. But if we had to leave, would the teachers, without our materials, feel that they could no longer do it "like the missionaries did it"? We chose and developed indigenous methods and materials that conveyed the same truths. Children are worth the effort!

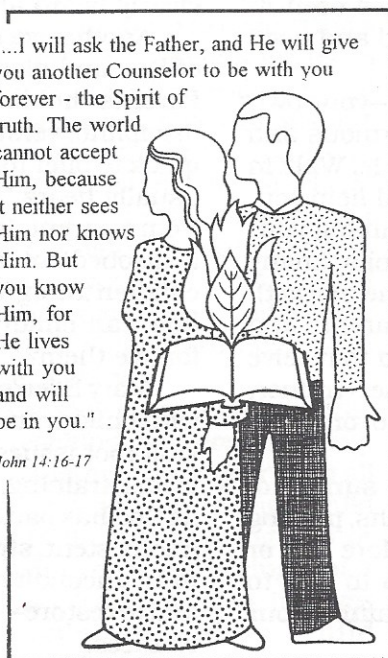
## The twin trainers—love and discipline

Training a child involves love and discipline. Is love a reward for good behavior and discipline for bad behavior? Does God love us when He corrects us? Love is continual. In its true sense (not just spanking) discipline is also continual. It's not something we turn on and off like a water tap. For that reason we cannot rely on our human reasoning to decide when and how we are to love or discipline. We must have God's constant, day-by-day, moment-by-moment guidance. This necessity requires us to walk in humility and prayer. If we think of ourselves only as the "boss" or the "king" and everyone is there to serve us, we'll miss one of the greatest truths we can teach our children—servanthood. Jesus came down and made himself "little" to show us God's love. As we stoop down and teach our children God's love we will be training them as God would have us train them.

Often I have seen children scatter in fear when fathers and mothers enter the courtyard. They should be running to their parents in love.

"...I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever - the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you."

John 14:16-17





The most common and abusive action I see leveled against children is hollering. Parents screaming at their children does nothing but harden their hearts. Remember in the Nov/Dec '97 issue of *Barnabas* we talked about the mother who was running after her child with a stick and screaming at him? How would she feel if she were being chased and hollered at? Humiliated, ashamed, discouraged and hurt. Children are people. They are not our possessions to treat as we see fit.

Treating with respect is the proper way to train a child. Take him around a corner, or into a quiet room, and speak to him. If it's necessary to spank him, do it there. When a child is treated with respect he or she will be more likely to respect others.

## Children must choose, too

We have had both encouraging and discouraging results in training children during our work in Africa. Some young people have grown up to bring glory and praise to God and others have brought heartache and disappointment. Did we fail to train them properly? In some cases the answer is "Yes."

In other cases it was a simple matter of choice on their part. In the final analysis, when the training has been done in faith and love, the child must decide which way he will follow.

Do children have wills of their own? Can they be led of the Spirit as adults can? We have seen in many instances how God has led, called and used children.

Take courage as you train children—your own or other peoples' children. It is an enormous and challenging calling but God is on your side. Walk in faith and humility and He will guide and help you. Learn to look to Him for guidance in training your children. Yes, we can learn from books (many excellent ones on child training are on the market), from other church leaders, from our parents and grandparents. But first and last we need to receive our instruction from the Great Teacher-trainer, Jesus, who knows our children as no one else knows them.

We have only begun to scratch the surface of what training means. Teaching Bible truths, praying with your child and living a holy life before him or her is a good beginning. Now it is up to you to humbly seek God for deeper truths on training your child for Him.

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its goal to train and reform. Children need to be reassured that their parents not only love them but will always be there to encourage and support them. As children experience a parents' unconditional love for them, it becomes much easier for them to accept God's unconditional love. In his book *Inspire Your Kids to Greatness*, Jerry Johnston states, "Love has two sides: the soft side (hugs) and the hard side (reproof/discipline). Developing both sides results in emotional balance. Love does not breed hostility; it instills hope."

Discipline spawns hope because when it is carried out without anger, and in a spirit of love, parents are telling their children they want better things for them experiencing things in life that will bring them joy, peace and happiness, not frustration, anger and other negative feelings. Expressions of love following discipline are essential and reassuring to a child.

One of the best ways to accomplish the healthy weaving together of love and discipline is by practicing the rule of second chances. When children sin or make mistakes, have problems or conflicts, they must know they can begin again, start over, and have another chance to succeed at their endeavors. How vital is this truth to our daily walk with God! Here the message of God's grace can be clearly heard and absorbed.

Another way to accomplish the weaving together of love and discipline is by practicing forgiveness. Parents holding a harsh, judgmental view of discipline, versus a position of training, are not so quick to offer forgiveness to an erring child. A child usually hears "I love you" and "I forgive you" first from a parent. If parents refuse to forgive a child for a disobedient act or are too proud to ask their children to forgive them when the situation demands, how can children be led to believe that God will forgive them?

Mary Ellen's article, written from her experiences with child training in Africa, details and reinforces vital root issues that demonstrate the necessity of loving, training, nurturing and disciplining children as God has patterned. Such training is built around a consistent, structured plan that is strongly rooted in an unconditional love that always seeks to forgive and to restore—a plan that always allows for second chances.