DARE TO DISCIPLINE
BIBLE STUDY
ANSWERS TO YOUR TOUGHEST PARENTING QUESTIONS

DR. JAMES DOBSON
developed with Nic Allen

LifeWay Press®
Nashville, Tennessee
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Author Page

**DR. JAMES DOBSON** is the founder and president of Family Talk, a non-profit organization that produces his radio program, “Dr. James Dobson’s Family Talk.” He is the author of more than 50 books dedicated to the preservation of the family, including *The New Dare to Discipline; Love for a Lifetime; Life on the Edge; Love Must Be Tough; The New Strong-Willed Child; When God Doesn’t Make Sense; Bringing Up Boys; Bringing Up Girls; Head Over Heels;* and, most recently, *Dr. Dobson’s Handbook of Family Advice.*

Dr. Dobson served as an associate clinical professor of pediatrics at the University of Southern California School of Medicine for fourteen years and on the attending staff of Children’s Hospital of Los Angeles for seventeen years in the divisions of Child Development and Medical Genetics. He has been active in governmental affairs and has advised three U.S. presidents on family matters.

He earned his PhD from the University of Southern California (1967) in child development and holds eighteen honorary doctoral degrees. He was inducted in 2009 into the National Radio Hall of Fame.

Dr. Dobson and his wife, Shirley, reside in Colorado Springs, Colorado. They have two grown children, Danae and Ryan, and two grandchildren.

**NIC ALLEN** helped with the curriculum development of this study. After spending ten years in student ministry, Nic became the family and children’s pastor at Rolling Hills Community Church in Franklin, Tennessee. Nic has written for several LifeWay Bible studies, including *Courageous, Facing the Giants,* and *Flywheel.* Nic and his wife, Susan, have three children: Lillie Cate, Nora Blake, and Simon.
How to Use This Study

The four sessions of this study may be used weekly or during a weekend retreat. But we recommend that before you dig into this material, you watch the film, *Dare to Discipline* from the *Dr. James Dobson Presents: Building a Family Legacy* film series. This will lay the groundwork for your study.

This material has been written for a small-group experience, for you and your spouse, or for personal study.

An option to extend or conclude this study is for your group to view the film *Your Legacy* from the *Dr. James Dobson Presents: Building a Family Legacy* film series.

**CONNECT:** The purpose of the introductory section of each session invites and motivates you to connect with the topic of the session and others in your group.

**WATCH:** The study DVD contains four DVD clips which include introductions from Ryan Dobson and clips from a talk by Dr. James Dobson, based on the film and the accompanying book *The New Dare to Discipline* by Dr. Dobson (Tyndale Momentum; ISBN 978-1-4143-9135-9.)

**ENGAGE:** This section is the primary focus of each week’s group time. You and the other participants will further engage the truths of Scripture and discuss accompanying questions. This section will also include a Wrap Up portion, which concludes the group session and leads to the Reflect section.

**REFLECT:** This at-home study section helps you dig deeper into Scripture and apply the truths you’re learning. Go deeper each week by reading the suggested chapters in the book *The New Dare to Discipline* and completing the activities at the end of each session in this study.
Guidelines for Groups

While you can complete this study alone, you will benefit greatly from covering the material with your spouse or with the interaction of a Sunday school class or small group. Here are a few ways to cultivate a valuable experience as you engage in this study.

**PREPARATION:** To get the most out of each group time, read through the study each week and answer the questions so you’re ready to discuss the material. It will also be helpful for you and your group members to have copies of the book *The New Dare to Discipline* (ISBN 978-1-4143-9135-9). Read it in advance of the study to prepare, and encourage your members to read the corresponding chapters each week. In your group, don’t let one or two people shoulder the entire responsibility for conversation and participation. Everyone can pitch in and contribute.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** In the study, you will be prompted to share thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences. Accept others where they are without judgment. Many of the challenges discussed will be private. These should be kept in strict confidence by the group.

**RESPECT:** Participants must respect each other’s thoughts and opinions, providing a safe place for those insights to be shared without fear of judgment or unsolicited advice (including hints, sermons, instructions, and scriptural Band-Aids®). Take off your fix-it hat and leave it at the door, so you can just listen. If advice is requested, then it’s okay to lend your opinion, seasoned with grace and offered with love.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:** Each week, participants will be challenged in their intentional parenting of their children. Commit to supporting and encouraging each other during the sessions and praying for each other between meetings.
Have you ever stopped to consider all of the hats you wear as a parent?

There’s your coach’s hat for when you volunteer to take the literal role of soccer coach or batting instructor, but also the figurative one you wear when coaching your children to use things like the potty, kind words, or their bicycle hand brakes. There’s the EMT hat you wear when you become the medical first responder for all sorts of literal bumps and bruises, but also the figurative ones when your child experiences hurt feelings or a broken heart. There’s the chief executive officer hat you put on when managing the daily resources, finances, and scheduling it takes to run the conglomerate that is your child’s life.

This metaphor could go on way too long, but you get the idea. As a mom or dad of a child of any age, you take on an ever-growing set of enormous tasks. Consider the length of time any of these occupations requires: coach, EMT, CEO.

Before you became a parent, perhaps you were well prepared and you knew that one of the more important hats you would wear at each stage of your child’s development would be that of disciplinarian. More likely, however, you underestimated the amount of time involved wearing this particular hat. There is discipline to be incorporated into every decision you make, every incident you encounter, and every opportunity you are given as a parent. Unfortunately, discipline itself is a very misunderstood term.

Discipline is both a noun and a verb. As a noun, *discipline* is defined as “control that is gained by requiring that rules or orders be obeyed and punishing bad behavior.” As a verb, *discipline* is defined as “to punish (someone) as a way of making sure that rules or orders are obeyed.”

In some ways, we associate discipline, the noun, only with punishment. It’s so much more. You utilize discipline the verb in order to achieve discipline the noun. You must discipline your child so that
he or she will become disciplined. Both the noun and the verb are essential in parenting.

Today, true biblical discipline as is under attack. It’s an endangered species in the world of raising children. Modern philosophies, although sometimes empty and useless, tell you that disciplining according to God’s Word harms a child psychologically when the exact opposite is true. Rather, it’s the lack of biblical discipline that damages children.

Biblical precepts are timeless. There’s no truth expressed in Scripture that worked thousands of years ago that doesn’t work now. The inspired concepts in Scripture have been handed down from generation to generation and are just as valid for the twenty-first century as they were for our ancestors.

You’re participating in this study because you want to raise your kids well. To develop healthy children, you and I need to move from simply a desire to achieve the perfect balance between boundaries and blessings to intentionally exploring biblically-based practices founded in God’s Word.

The goal of this study is to expose you to the plan God establishes for you to discipline and disciple your children to be exactly who He designed them to be. You’ll also be equipped with tools to establish a plan for shaping the will of your child without breaking his or her spirit.

The Bible doesn’t give us one simple formula for raising perfect kids. We are sinful, and so are our children. What the Bible does offer, though, is fundamental guidelines for us as parents. Because each child is different, each exercise in discipline will be different. Consider this: two carpenters can be given the exact same tools and build wildly different pieces of furniture, both as beautiful as they are useful, but different nonetheless. The tools exposed by this study are exactly that, tools to use. It’s up to you, by the power of God, to create something beautiful and useful for Him. So let’s get to work!

2. Ibid.
BEFORE YOU BEGIN, take time to pray with your group. Ask God to teach the group how to be proactive, loving parents to their children just as He is to us.

Boundaries are everywhere. Countries have borders. Yards have fences. Boundaries keep people in and they also keep people out. Many might suppose that boundaries limit freedom. Consider, however, who is more free? The puppy who has a fenced yard in which to play with no threat of danger or the dog who was hit by a car because the gate was left open? Boundaries don’t limit our freedom. Boundaries protect our freedom.

Name rules, boundaries, or limits that were present in your home when you were growing up.

Did you push back against those boundaries? Why or why not?

Do you feel like those boundaries were arbitrary and/or controlling, or for your own benefit?

The truth about children is that they thrive in situations where they know and understand limits. Children claim their sense of security from appropriate limits. The fact that they often push those limits isn’t always an indication that they don’t like boundaries or that rules are bad. There are times when a child, because of his inborn nature, will clench his little fists and dare his parents to accept his challenges. He isn’t motivated by frustration or inner hostility, as it’s often supposed. He merely wants to know where the boundaries lie and who’s available to enforce them.
WATCH

WATCH CLIP 1 from the study DVD and answer the following questions:

Other than the anger that was mentioned, what do you use to motivate your children to obey?

What does losing control look like for you?

Some parents determine that it’s best not to enforce too many rules or set too many limits for their children. They may be under the assumption that those rules could be seen as an effort to control their children in a totalitarian way. In part, this could be due to their own desire to parent in a way that is different than how they were parented. Instead of being an effort to obtain authoritative control over children, discipline is your best attempt to implant self-control in them. These parents may be under the impression that limits will stifle the energy, creativity, and the unique personality of their child. Instead, boundaries provide the proper foundation for every unique part of a child to thrive and grow in healthy ways.

Looking back now, how do you feel about the overall sense of boundaries (how they were determined, communicated, and enforced) in your home growing up?

How do you set those same boundaries? Have you avoided setting boundaries? If so, why?

Let’s examine what the Bible says about boundaries and limits concerning discipline in the home. Without a biblical rationale for discipline, all the tips and ideas probably won’t work. Unless you know the “why” of discipline, the “how” won’t matter. The “why” is what maintains strong motivation and resolve when the “how” proves difficult.
CONTINUE YOUR GROUP TIME with this discussion guide.

The design of a family according to the very Word of God includes parents. A man and woman become one flesh (see Gen. 2:24) and together are fruitful. They multiply (see Gen. 1:28) by the birth of children. Then Scripture instructs this man and woman about their role as parents.


What do these verses explain as the responsibility of parents to children regarding faith?

Verse 4 is known as the Shema. It’s the declaration of faith for God’s people Israel and the recognition of the oneness of God. This dimension of God’s character is given further credibility when the first of the Commandments is an admonition to put no other gods before Him. Deuteronomy 6:5 explains how people are to respond to this God—with love. When parents respond to God in love, they teach their children to reproduce that love of God in the next generation. Multiplying is more than producing children. It’s also producing faith in children.

What do verses 1-3 tell us about God’s expectation for His people?

God’s people were to keep His statutes and commands (verse 2) and follow them (verse 3). In verse 6, when God says, “these words,” the reader can assume that God means all of the commands and statutes that He communicated in His law and above that, the expectation that people heed those words in an attitude of worship toward Him.

In verses 1-3, God tells His people to keep His commands. In verse 5, God tells His people they are to love Him completely. Jesus blends the two together in John 14:15 saying, “If you love Me, you will keep My commands.” Love and obedience are the closest of friends. And God’s design for parents is a loving, obedient relationship with their children.
What does it look like to love God and to obey His Word completely?

**READ** Ephesians 6:4.

What does this verse say about the purpose of parental discipline?

Limits and boundaries are an effort to train and teach. Godly discipline is a necessary part of teaching children to obey the Lord. God expects parents to obey His commands and to teach children to do the same.

**READ** Ephesians 6:1-3.

What is God’s expectation for children?

Ephesians 6:3 clarifies the difference between the 5th Commandment in the Decalogue (the only one of the Ten Commandments that comes with a promise) and the preceding commands.

According to verse 3, what is the reason for children to be obedient to their parents?

How does that reason fit with what God told His people in Deuteronomy 6:3?

God’s motivation behind His desire for obedience is for our benefit. How generous is He, at the establishment of His relationship with the Hebrew nation, to tell them what is best for them!

You’ve certainly heard the phrase, “I want what is best for my kids.” As a good parent, you’ve likely said that phrase a time or two. The issue
with that phrase isn’t the intent behind it, but instead the meaning of just one word within it. 

**Best.**

What is best and who decides that?

Check what the world says is best for your kids?

- Education
- Well-rounded life
- Opportunities

□□

- Popularity
- Friends
- Other: ______________________

Obedience to the Lord leads to what is best for you. And the best for your children is to live in submission to you, as you submit to the Lord.

**READ** Hebrews 12:5-11.

How are love and discipline tied together in this verse?

Discipline is what’s best for your children. Discipline underscores your love for them. Disciplinary action isn’t an assault on parental love; it’s the proof of it. Appropriate punishment isn’t something parents do to a beloved child; it’s something that’s done for them.

You demonstrate your love for God when you obey Him. You show love for your children when you call them to obey you. You even prove your love for them when you punish them in response to their disobedience.

Again, boundaries don’t limit your freedom. They protect it. Setting proper boundaries is among the best things you can do for them. And yes, this is difficult at times—for you and for your child. (See Heb. 12:11.) We all would likely prefer an easier way, but it wouldn’t be the best way. The reason behind setting limits and disciplining your children is that you love them and it’s what is best for them. With this as your proper motivation, you can stick to the hard task of godly discipline, because you know that in the end, it leads to more joy in parenting.
THIS WEEK’S INSIGHTS

• Boundaries are for your good and the good of your children.
• Consistent, godly discipline is what is best for your children.
• Discipline is an indication of God’s love for you just as obedience is an indication of your love for Him.

Considering the age of your children, how can you best communicate your reason for disciplining them this week?

How can you best help them know why discipline is an important part of your love for God and for them?

WRAP UP

PRAY TOGETHER asking God to reveal ways to set boundaries for your children in order to show them love. Ask Him to shape your heart to discipline them in this Godlike way.

Dear Father, who disciplines His children out of love, thank You. Thank You for the moments of discipline and pruning in our lives. Help us obey You as a demonstration of our love for You. Help us call our children to obedience as an expression of our love for them. We cannot raise them apart from Your divine leading so we trust in You. Amen.
**THE FAITH BEHIND DISCIPLINE**

First, the goal of parenting is passing faith on to your children.

**READ** Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

Consider all of the moments you have throughout the week to teach your children about God. Do you leverage every opportunity available? How so or why not?

When do you spend the most time helping your children focus on God and learn biblical truth?

Consider the following chart and the opportunities you have throughout the day to be a teacher, friend, coach, or counselor. What are other ways you might wear those hats to accomplish the accompanying goals?1

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<td>Formal Discussion</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Establish Values</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drive Time</td>
<td>Informal Dialogue</td>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>Interpret Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bed Time</td>
<td>Intimate Conversation</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>Build Intimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning Time</td>
<td>Encouraging Words</td>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>Instill Purpose</td>
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1. *Dare to Discipline*
When we spend time with our children—having fun and enjoying laughter and joy together—savoring moments of love and closeness, they will likely be tempted to test the limits. Many confrontations can be avoided by building a trusting relationship with kids and thereby helping them want to cooperate at home.

In the context of a week filled with school, work, church, and extracurricular activities, when do you have the most concentrated quality time with your kids?

Here are a couple of tips on how you can create more of this quality time with your children:

**TIP 1.** If you’re too busy to create these quality experiences, evaluate your time commitments and consider what you could cut out in order to refocus your family energy on Christ and one another. If there’s nothing you can give up, consider how you might leverage the time you spend doing other things to create more fun and more teachable moments along the way.

**TIP 2.** Don’t get caught up worrying about the overall quantity of time. There’s a misconception that an increase in the quantity of time you spend with your kids automatically improves the quality of that time. It’s not enough to spend an increasing amount of time with them if that time is not strategic or meaningful.

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**THE LOVING AUTHORITY BEHIND DISCIPLINE**

**READ** Hebrews 12:5-11 and Proverbs 3:11-12.

Effective parenting is one of the toughest jobs you’ll ever have. Godly parenting is rarely promoted as being easy, but instead very challenging. Facing those challenges with courage and resolve is always worth it.
According to Hebrews 12:10, what’s the difference between the discipline of an earthly father and God the Father?

According to verse 11, what’s the desired outcome of godly discipline?

One of your discipline goals should be that your children will be obedient to God. You have to ask yourself if your motivation for having obedient children is wrapped up more in what is convenient for you or what is pleasing to God and therefore best for them.

Tedd Tripp gives this warning in his book *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*:

Parenting goals are often no more noble than immediate comfort and convenience. When parents require obedience because they feel under pressure, obedience of children is reduced to parental convenience.³

There are many moments when being a disciplinarian will be very difficult. Not only is it difficult because it’s painful for the very kids you would die for, but it’s also challenging because it requires time, thought, energy, and commitment. You don’t wake up in the morning, glance at your schedule for the day, and notice specifically calendared moments to discipline your children. You likely don’t plan for moments of disobedience. They usually pop up unexpectedly. This means you need to be ready when they occur.

Generally speaking, your children came with an inborn propensity for disobedience. By their very sinful nature, they’ll disobey when you have time to respond immediately and when you’re busy and would rather not bother. Even when it’s inconvenient, you must be prepared to invoke appropriate consequences and teach important lessons when your children give you reason.
Why did God specifically choose Abraham and what was Abraham set apart to do regarding his children?

Generally speaking, do you find the culture of the parents in your sphere of community to be more disciplinarian or more permissive in nature? How does that impact your parenting?

Children thrive best in an atmosphere of love, undergirded by reasonable, consistent discipline. You’re in charge. There must be no confusion about the authority in your child’s life. You don’t exercise this control to yield power, achieve status, or manipulate them. You’re an extension of God in their life directing them toward what is right, holy, and pleasing to Him. If you’re committed to your own obedience to God’s call, you gladly accept this authority. This comes from the overwhelming love you feel for your child, and out of your strong desire to do what’s best for them.

Failing to discipline your children is abdicating the role and responsibility God has given you as a parent. It’s as if you are willfully rejecting His specific plan for your life in favor of your own comfort and ease.

**PARENT CHALLENGE**

**INTERVIEW YOUR KIDS.** Ask them about discipline. Use the following questions as a guide.

- How do you feel when we correct you when you’re disobedient?
- Do you understand why we punish you for breaking rules?
- Do you understand our guidelines and what we expect from you, or are you sometimes surprised by the things we correct?
- Do you understand how our correction means we love you, or do you feel like we’re angry and love you less when you’re disciplined?
ARTICULATE YOUR THOUGHTS. Complete the following sentences and consider how you might use them to better explain expectations and discipline to your children. All of your reasons should give preference to God and His Word about what is best for your children.

• I choose to discipline you because …
• I choose to discipline you because …
• I choose to discipline you because …

MAKE IT A MEMORY. Post these verses in a prominent place. Use them as reminders of your call, your place, and your purpose as a parent.

• Genesis 18:19
• Ephesians 6:4
• Hebrews 12:11
• Proverbs 3:11-12

PERSONAL REFLECTION

You set boundaries for a reason. The discipline you use when boundaries are inevitably crossed, is vital to raising godly children. Commit yourself to consistent, biblically-centered discipline for the purpose of training them to follow God and passing faith to the next generation.

Compose a list in the space below of all the goals you might seek to accomplish in disciplining your children.

Read Hebrews 12:10 and Proverbs 3:11-12 one more time. What do each of these passages confirm about the genuine goal of godly discipline?

2. Ibid.