

A biblical parental strategy for helping a disobedient child

Examine your heart.

1. Beware of the affect your emotional state can have on your child.

Is your child triggering frustration, anger, discouragement, depression in you and affecting your relationship with him or her? **You are not alone.** Parental frustration and emotional upset over a rebellious child is a universal issue described 19 times in the book of Proverbs. A child's rebelliousness, foolishness or disrespect causes parental grief (10:1), shame (29:15), disgrace (19:26), sorrow, (discouragement, depression) and loss of joy (17:21),

Parents must be aware that their emotional state shapes the way they relate to their child: their tone of voice, patience, affection and intimacy are all drastically, negatively impacted toward their child. Adults can sense when someone is bothered at them, children certainly can, and it has a significant affect. Every Christian parents' desire is for their child's relationship with God and themselves to be close, open and loving. Parental emotional frustration often sets a climate in the home that can tempt a child to disobey out of *their* frustration, hurt or anger towards their parent.

While the ultimate cause of a child's rebellion is their own sinful heart (Proverbs 29:15) a parent can exasperate this by their unloving manner of relating to them. God commands parents to be a guard for this (Ephesians 6:4). Every parent says they love their child. However, the real question is "Does my child *feel* loved by me? Am I relating to my child in a *loving manner*?" A child, just as an adult, knows they are loved not by inner feelings of the other person, but the manner in which that person is relating to them in words and actions.

God's love compels us to obey him (2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Matthew 22:37-39; 1 John 4:11,19) and a parent's love is the climate that helps a child obey them (Proverbs 13:24). Parents are commanded to display love to their child even under the stress of them rebelling or disrespecting them. This is how God loves us (1 John 4:9-10, 19; Romans 5:6-10).

2. Recognize if you have been acting unloving toward your child.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 describes practical ways to love a child, or anyone. After each description of love below evaluate whether you are relating in a loving manner to your child.

- **Patient.** Parent continues to express love and kindness even under the weight of the child's sinfulness. Is not quick to lash out. 13:4
- **Kind.** Seeks to say and do that which would encourage and bless the child. Kindness is compassion in action.
- **Not jealous.** Parent refuses to allow a heart of anger over what child is costing them emotionally or relationally. Refuses to be resentful of towards the child.
- **Does not brag and is not arrogant.** Parent refuses to be prideful, thinking only of their accomplishments, desires. Has your pride caused you to be demanding and retaliatory? Has it fueled your anger when they disobey?
- **Does not act unbecomingly.** Does not act rude, impolitely or inconsiderately, not considering how our words or acts will affect another.
- **Does not seek its own.** Not selfishly acting in a way only to please ourselves or do that which is most convenient. Not acting based on the motive of what would be easiest on us. Think of what is best for us before thinking of what is best for the child.
- **Is not provoked.** Does not lash out in anger, yell or quarrel. Is not 'touchy' or emotionally volatile.

- **Does not take into account a wrong suffered.** Does not hold grudges or bad feelings toward a child for their sinfulness. Does not take as personal offense the child's misbehavior.
- **Does not rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth.** Does not rehash the child's sin but rejoices in the truth of their being loved by God. Does not bring up past offenses against the child but spends time talking with them rejoicing in what they have done right and rejoicing in what God says is true. A parent must be focused on God's truth not the child's behavior.
- **Bears all things.** Never explodes. Remains patient and calm even when a child has offended them. They remember the Lord's forgiveness of them (Ephesians 4:31-32) and let love cover it (1 Pet. 4:8).
- **Believes all things.** Is not suspicious and doubting of a child's motives, knowing the Lord will reveal the truth in His time. (1 Cor. 4:5)
- **Hopes all things.** Looks at the bigger picture and long term promises of God to honor and use their faithful parenting for His glory and the good of the child. A parent has their hope fixed on God and therefore does not emotionally go up and down with the child's behavior.
- **Endures all things.** Willingly puts up and does not lash back or give up due to a child's misbehavior.
- Love listens to their heart, draws out their interests, concerns, likes, dislikes and feelings (James 1:19-21; Prov. 20:5).

Let Christ change your heart.

Confess to God your sin of being unloving to your child.

God wants to forgive and enable parents to display love to them. The first step to allowing God to do this, is confessing to Him the sin of being unloving towards your child (1 John 1:9). Rejoice in God's forgiveness; don't wallow in your failure! God is faithful to forgive you because Christ has paid the penalty for all your sins (1 John 2:1-2). Rejoice in His faithfulness to forgive and cleanse you (Psalm 32).

Confess to you child your sin of acting unloving.

Have you yelled, ridiculed, shamed or expressed your disgust, lashed out in anger or exasperated your child by moodiness or inconsistency in your expectations and consequences? Have you been spending time talking and relating positively to them or have you ignored them? Part of asking forgiveness is listening instead of talking and allowing the other person share how you made them feel when you sinned against them (James 1:19-21). The Bible says, "*the heart of a person is like a deep well. wise is he who can draw it out*" (Prov. 20:5). Here is a suggestion on how to do this: "Mom/dad just wants you to know I was wrong to . . . (yell at you, etc.). It must have bothered you when I did that. I know it would have bothered me. How did it make you feel when I (said or did . . .)? God is working on me and I will ask Him to help me to be a better mom/dad and not do this. Will you forgive me? Thanks. I love you."

Christ can transform the heart of any parent.

Effective parenting and discipline of a child is rooted in a parent's loving heart. How can a mom who is frustrated or angry genuinely have love and patience toward her child? It is a work only Christ can do. "*Apart from me you can do nothing*" (John 15:5). He promises anyone, who believes and trusts in Him, He will let them experience His Love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control (John 14:27; 15:10-11; 16:33; Galatians 5:22-24). This is called the fruit of the Spirit. Imagine what having that kind of heart would do for a parent! A frustrated parent could say with Paul the Apostle "*I can do all things (in loving my child) through Christ who strengthens me*" (Philippians 4:13).

Explain God's plan to your child.

1. God is our creator and has infinite wonderful love, wisdom and power and knows perfectly what is best for us. He says we should gladly love Him and do what He says and it will result in our joy (Deuteronomy 5:29; 6:5,24)
2. We all have a problem called sin, which means we are naturally selfish and want to follow our own desires rather than God's perfect ways (Romans 3:9-18).
3. To help children learn to respect and follow Him, He commands them to respect and follow their parents whom He put in authority over them. Therefore to disobey mom or dad is to disobey God. Eph. 6:1-2
4. God provided a way for children to be forgiven their sin and have a relationship with Him. He sent His Son, Jesus, to become human, die to pay the penalty for our sins and then rise from the dead. Anyone who admits they are guilty of breaking God's laws and turns from their sin of them trying to be lord and instead receive Jesus as their lord and savior will be forgiven, become God's child and Christ will come into their heart. (John 3:16; Romans 3:23-25; 6:23; 1 John 5:11-13).

Explain what obedience and respect looks like.

1. **Immediate, not delayed obedience.** Delayed obedience is disobedience. For example God commanded Israel to go into the promised land and he would overcome their enemies and help them. They refused, but later they decided to 'obey' in their own time and were judged for disobedience (Deuteronomy 1:26-46).
2. **Full not partial obedience.** An example is Saul, the king of Israel, only partially obeyed God's command. God said his partial obedience was disobedience and He was judged. (1 Samuel 15).
3. **Honor and respect not flippant disregard or arguing. Disrespect is treating a parent as if they had no authority or honor.** It is evident in tone of voice, facial expressions, yelling, talking back, lashing out in anger, etc. God commands a child to talk and act with respect and honor towards their parent (Ephesians 6:1-3). Parents therefore must not permit it and must explain consequences of this to their child.
4. Ask the child if they understand what obedience and respect look like and what disrespect looks like. Have them repeat it to you. **Put in writing the specific concrete expectations of obedience and respect have them sign it and post a copy** in their room.

Explain the consequences of disobedience and disrespect.

1. Decide the specific consequences for disrespect or disobedience. Have an increasing scale of consequences, with physical punishment (spanking) being the final one. Don't allow the child to disobey or disrespect you when they are being punished.
2. Discuss the consequences with the child and make sure they understand and agree with them. **Write down the specific consequences have them sign it and post it in their room.**

Implement the consequences

1. Calmly remind them they agreed to this. Show them the document. **Remind them that their consequences were their choice not yours.** Encourage them to let God change their heart and that you are doing this out of love for them (Proverbs 13:24).
2. **Don't change the consequences** in the heat of the moment.
3. **Use spanking** if rebellion and disrespect continue. Be specific on what this will look like.
4. **Don't fear the child's reaction and threats.** Remain calm, focusing on being obedient to, and trusting of the Lord (Proverbs 3:5-6; 22:15; 23:13; 29:15,17).
5. Don't threaten and warn of consequences, calmly **implement them.** To not do this undermines your authority, confuses the child and contradicts what God says about obedience.