



Whatever Happened to
Discipline?

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Whatever Happened to Discipline?

In recent decades, family life in Western lands has changed dramatically. At one time, parents were in charge and children followed their lead. Now, in some households it seems to be the other way around. For example, consider the following scenarios, all of which are based on typical situations.



- While at the store with his mother, a four-year-old boy reaches out for a toy. His mother tries to dissuade him. “You have enough toys already, don’t you?” Too late, she realizes that she should *not* have ended on a question. “But I *want* it!” the boy whines. Fearing a tantrum—his usual ploy—Mom gives in.



- A five-year-old girl interrupts her father as he is talking to another adult. “I’m bored,” she announces. “I want to go home!” Her father stops mid-sentence, stoops down to his daughter, and asks in a soothing voice: “Just a few more minutes, Sweetie—OK?”



- Once again, 12-year-old James has been accused of shouting at his teacher. James’ father is upset—not at his son but at the teacher. “She’s always picking on you,” he says to James. “I’m going to report her to the school board!”

The preceding scenarios are imaginary, but they are hardly far-fetched. They illustrate a real problem that exists in homes where parents tolerate children’s rudeness, cave in to their demands, and “rescue” them from the consequences of their misconduct. “It is increasingly common to see parents relinquishing authority to young children,” says the book *The Narcissism Epidemic*. “Not that long ago, kids knew who the boss was—and it wasn’t them.”

Of course, many parents do strive to teach their children proper values, not only by setting a good example but also by giving firm but loving correction when needed. Nevertheless, parents who recognize the value of doing so are, as the book quoted earlier puts it, “swimming against the cultural tide.”

How did things get to this point? What ever happened to discipline?

Parental Authority Weakens

Some say that a weakening of parental authority began in the 1960’s, when so-called experts were urging parents to be more easygoing with their children. They said: ‘Be a friend, not an authority figure.’ ‘Praise is better than discipline.’ ‘Rather than correct the bad, catch your children in the act of doing good.’ Instead of striking a balance between commendation and correction, experts seemed to imply

that reprimanding children would damage their fragile emotions and cause them to resent their parents later in life.

Before long, experts were also heralding the virtues of self-esteem. It was as if the secret to good parenting was suddenly discovered, and it was simply this: *Make your children feel good about themselves.* Of course, it is important to instill confidence in children. But the self-esteem movement took things to an extreme. Experts told parents: ‘Avoid using negative words such as *no* and *bad*.’ ‘Keep telling your children that they are special and that they can be anything they want to be.’ It was as if *feeling* good was more important than *being* good.

In the end, some say that the self-esteem movement has done little more than make children feel entitled, as if the world owes them. It has also left many young ones “ill prepared for the inevitable criticism and occasional failure that is real life,” says the book *Generation Me*.

Teaching the Wrong Lessons?

Put yourself in the following situations.

- You are a ‘soccer mom.’ After school and on weekends, you ferry your son and daughter from one activity to another: skating lessons, piano lessons, soccer practice—anything to keep them active. ‘I’m exhausted,’ you say to yourself, ‘but my kids know that they are my life and that

I would do *anything* for them. Isn’t that what it takes to be a good mom?’

Consider: What lessons are your children *really* learning by having a mother who will wear herself out just to keep them involved? In time, might your children come to believe that adults—parents in particular—are here only to serve their children’s needs?

A better approach: Let your children see that you have needs too. This will teach them to have consideration for others—including you.

- You were raised by a harsh and critical father, so you have resolved to be the opposite with your children. At every opportunity you praise your two boys—even when they have done nothing at all that was praiseworthy. ‘It’s important to make them feel good

The self-esteem movement has done little more than make children feel entitled

One father quoted in that book put it this way: “There is no self-esteem movement in the work world. . . . If you present a bad report at the office, your boss isn’t going to say, ‘Hey, I like the color paper you chose.’ Setting kids up like this is doing them a tremendous disservice.”

Shifting Opinions

Over the decades, parenting practices have often reflected the ever-shifting opinions of humans. “Discipline keeps changing,” writes educator Ronald G. Morish. *“It reflects changes in our society.”** It is so easy for parents to be, as the Bible puts it, “tossed about as by waves and

* Italics ours; from the book *Secrets of Discipline: 12 Keys for Raising Responsible Children*.



carried here and there by every wind of teaching.”—Ephesians 4:14.

Clearly, the current wave of relaxed discipline has had negative effects. It has not only weakened parental authority but also left children without the guidance they need to make good choices and approach life with *genuine* confidence.

Is there a better way?

about themselves,’ you tell yourself. ‘If they feel special, they’ll have the confidence they need to succeed in life.’

Consider: What lessons are your sons *really* learning by receiving ‘empty praise’—praise that is doled out just to make them feel good? How might overemphasis on your boys’ self-esteem hurt them, both now and later in life?

A better approach: Be balanced. Do not be overly critical

of your children; at the same time, base your praise on actual effort.

- You are the mother of two girls, ages six and five. The older girl tends to be hotheaded. Just yesterday, in a flash of anger, she punched her little sister in the arm. You reflect on how you handled the situation. ‘I chose to reason with her rather than to reprimand her,’ you recall. ‘After all, won’t it damage my daughter if

I tell her that she was being *bad*?’

Consider: Is reasoning *alone* enough for a six-year-old? Is it really harmful to use the word “bad” to describe the act of hitting a sibling?

A better approach: Impose appropriate consequences for misbehavior. When administered in a loving manner, discipline will help your children learn to adjust their behavior.



Discipline That Works

UNDENIABLY, parenting is hard work. But holding back discipline when it is warranted makes the task even harder. Why? Because without discipline (1) children continue to be unruly, which exhausts the parents, and (2) parents give inconsistent direction, which confuses the children.

On the other hand, loving, balanced discipline can train a child's thinking and shape his moral character. It also helps children feel secure as they grow to responsible adulthood. But where can you find reliable guidance for disciplining your children?

The Value of Bible Principles

The publishers of this magazine, Jehovah's Witnesses, believe that the Bible is, as it claims to be, "beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for correcting, for disciplining." (2 Timothy 3:16, footnote) The Bible is far more than a mere parenting man-

ual; its principles provide realistic guidance for families. Consider some examples.

THE BIBLE SAYS: "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child."—Proverbs 22:15, footnote.

Although children can be delightfully thoughtful and kind, they are also inclined to do foolish things. Therefore, *children need discipline*. (Proverbs 13:24) Acknowledging that fact will help you fulfill your responsibility as a parent.

THE BIBLE SAYS: "Do not hold back discipline from a child."—Proverbs 23:13, footnote.

You need not fear that balanced discipline will damage your children or cause them to resent you later in life. When lovingly administered, discipline will help your children learn to accept correction humbly—a skill they will need even as adults.—Hebrews 12:11.

Be loving, consistent, and reasonable

THE BIBLE SAYS: “Whatever a person is sowing, this he will also reap.”—Galatians 6:7.

Parents naturally want to protect their children, and rightly so. Again, however, balance is needed. You do your children no favors by “rescuing” them from the consequences of their errors or by defending them when a teacher or another adult brings real misconduct to your attention. Instead, view those people as your allies. In so doing, you teach your child to respect authority—including yours.—Colossians 3:20.

THE BIBLE SAYS: “A child left unrestrained brings shame on his mother.”—Proverbs 29:15.

While parents should never be abusive, they also need to avoid the other extreme—that of being permissive. “Children of permissive parents have little sense that the adults in the house are the ones who are in charge,” says the book *The Price of Privilege*. If you do not assume your authority, your child may well assume that he is at the helm. Inevitably, he will make unwise choices that will cause him—and you—grief.—Proverbs 17:25; 29:21.

THE BIBLE SAYS: “A man will . . . stick to his wife, and the two will be one flesh.”—Matthew 19:5.

According to the Bible, a man and woman should be married before children are conceived and should still be together after the children are grown and gone. (Matthew 19:5, 6) In that sense, you are a spouse *first*—a parent *second*. If your priorities are reversed, however, your child could come to “think more of

himself than it is necessary to think.” (Romans 12:3) A “child-centered” family also weakens the marriage relationship.

Help for Parents

For you to accomplish your goal as a parent, your discipline should adhere to these principles.

Be loving. “Do not be provoking your children, so that they do not become downhearted.”—Colossians 3:21, footnote.

Be consistent. “Let your word ‘Yes’ mean yes, your ‘No,’ no.”—Matthew 5:37.

Be reasonable. “I will discipline you to the proper degree.”—Jeremiah 30:11.* ■

* For further information, visit jw.org. Look under BIBLE TEACHINGS > COUPLES & PARENTS, where you will find such articles as “Disciplining Children,” “How to Deal With Tantrums,” “Inculcate Moral Values in Your Children,” and “How to Discipline Your Teenager.”





A Visit to Honduras



HONDURAS means “Depths” in Spanish, a word Christopher Columbus may have used to describe the waters along this land’s Atlantic Coast. Some say that this is how Honduras was given its name.

Hondurans place high value on family loyalty and collaboration. For example, major decisions—such as those regarding household expenses or the education of children—are often made by both husband and wife.

Most Hondurans are mestizos, a blend of European and indigenous peoples. Some indigenous groups still remain, such as the Chortí. Other native Hondurans, such as the Garifuna, trace their ancestry elsewhere.

The Garifuna are descendants of Africans and Carib Indians who resided on St. Vincent island.



A Garifuna musician playing the hardwood drum

Ereba, a large, thin cake made from the cassava root



Lake Yojoa

The Honduran white bat is less than two inches (5 cm) long. It chews along the veins of plant leaves until the leaves droop, and then it roosts in this “tent”



FAST FACTS

Population: 8,111,000

Capital: Tegucigalpa

Government: Democratic republic

Language: Spanish

Climate: Subtropical, milder in the mountains

Land: Over 75 percent of the mainland is mountainous. There are also low coastal plains and islands

About the year 1797, the Garifuna arrived at Islas de la Bahía (Bay Islands). Later, they settled along the Caribbean Coast of the Central American mainland. From there the Garifuna eventually spread throughout other parts of Central and North America.

The Garifuna enjoy lively dances performed to the beat of hardwood drums. Their culture also includes brightly colored traditional garments, storytelling, and foods such as *ereba* (a large, thin cake made from cassava root).

There are some 400 congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Honduras. Meetings are held in Spanish as well as English, Garifuna, Honduras Sign Language, Mandarin Chinese, and Miskito. ■



How to Deal With Loneliness



THE CHALLENGE

“I had two girlfriends who would do things together and leave me out. I constantly heard about what a great time they had. One time I called my friend’s house while the other girl was there, and when someone else answered the phone, I could hear the two of them in the background, talking and laughing. I only got to *hear* the fun, which made me feel even *more* lonely than I already was!”—Maria.*

Have you ever felt left out and lonely? If so, the Bible has advice that can help you. First, though, consider a few things you should know about loneliness.

* Some names in this article have been changed.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Nearly everyone feels lonely at times. That includes people who seem to be popular. Why? Because often it is not the *quantity of friends* but the *quality of friendships* that determines whether a person feels lonely. Someone who seems popular could constantly be surrounded by people but have no real friends and therefore feel lonely.

Loneliness can be hazardous to your health. Researchers who analyzed the results of 148 studies concluded that low social interaction is a predictor of early death and that as a risk factor, it is “twice as harmful as obesity” and “equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.”

Loneliness can make you vulnerable. In fact, it could cause you to settle for anyone who would accept you as a friend. “When you’re lonely, you may be desperate for attention,” says a young man named Alan. “You could begin to think that *any* attention is better than *no* attention. And that can lead to trouble.”

Technology does not always cure loneliness. “I could text or e-mail a hundred people a day and still be incredibly lonely,” says a young woman named Natalie. A teenager named Tyler feels similarly. “Texting is like a snack, whereas face-to-face contact is like a meal,” he says. “Snacks are great, but you need a full meal to feel satisfied.”



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Assume the best. For example, suppose you go to a photo-sharing Web site and see pictures of your friends at a gathering to which you were not invited. At that moment, you have a choice—either to conclude that you were deliberately snubbed or to adopt a more positive outlook. Since you cannot know all the factors involved, why assume the worst? Instead, direct your energy toward thinking of a *better* explanation for your being excluded. Often, it is not the situation but your *outlook* that brings on feelings of loneliness.—*Bible principle: Proverbs 15:15.*

Avoid sweeping assertions. When you are lonely, you might think, ‘I *never* get invited anywhere’ or ‘People *always* avoid me.’ But those sweeping assertions will only make you sink deeper into the quicksand of loneliness. Such thoughts can create a vicious circle: You feel like an outcast, which makes you isolate yourself, which makes you lonely, which makes you feel like an outcast.—*Bible principle: Proverbs 18:1.*

Be willing to befriend those who are older than you. The Bible tells of the life of David, who was likely a teenager when he met Jonathan—a man 30 years older than he was. Despite their age difference, David and Jonathan became close friends. (1 Samuel 18:1) You could have the same thing happen in your life. “Recently, I’ve come to appreciate the value of having friends who are older than I am,” says 21-year-old Kiara. “I have some very dear friends *decades* older than I am, and I really appreciate their mature view of things and their stability.”—*Bible principle: Job 12:12.*

Appreciate the benefits of solitude. Some people feel lonely as soon as they face a moment of privacy. But simply being alone need not make you feel lonely. For example, Jesus was sociable, but he also appreciated the value of solitude. (Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35) You can do the same. Instead of seeing your being alone as a disadvantage, use quiet time to reflect appreciatively on your blessings. That can make you an even more desirable friend to others.—Proverbs 13:20. ■

KEY SCRIPTURES

“All the days of the afflicted one are bad, but the one with a cheerful heart has a continual feast.”
—Proverbs 15:15.

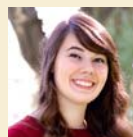
“Whoever isolates himself. . . rejects all practical wisdom.”
—Proverbs 18:1.

“Is not wisdom found among the aged, and does not understanding come with a long life?”—Job 12:12.



BO

“I think many young people are lonely but try to hide it. For example, if they text people or communicate through social networks, all those ‘friends’ aren’t really with them—and that can make a person feel lonely.”



ABIGAIL

“We all have friends who have moved or perhaps for some other reason lost contact with us. I find it’s good to keep in touch with them, even if they live far away. Just talking to an old friend can give you a tremendous boost.”



ANIMALS

In one way or another, nearly everyone's life is affected by animals.
Are we accountable for the way we treat them?

How should humans treat animals?

WHAT PEOPLE SAY Some people believe that animals may be used in any way that humans see fit. Others feel that animals should be treated in much the same way as humans are.

- One prominent animal-rights activist argued that animals should enjoy the “basic right not to be treated exclusively as resources or economic commodities.” He adds: “We should stop treating nonhuman animals as our property.”
- In what many view as an extreme case, billionaire Leona Helmsley left a \$12-million trust fund to her dog and willed that the dog's remains be placed next to hers after its death.

To think about: *How do you feel animals should be treated?*

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS The Creator of life, Jehovah God, told humans to “*have in subjection* the fish of the sea and the flying creatures of the heavens and every living creature that is moving on the earth.” (Genesis 1:28) It is reasonable to conclude, then, that God views humans as superior to animals.

This conclusion is reinforced by a significant statement made just before the scripture quoted earlier. The Bible says that “God went on to create the man in his image, in God's image he created him;

male and female he created them.”
—Genesis 1:27.

Because humans were created “in God's image,” we are unique in how we display godly qualities, such as wisdom, justice, and love. Humans also have an innate capacity for morality and spirituality. Animals lack such human abilities because they were not created “in God's image.” They are inferior and not intended to be treated in the *same* way as humans are.

Does this mean that humans have the right to mistreat animals? No.

- In his Law to the Israelites, God ensured that animals would be given rest, food, help when distressed, and protection from injury.—Exodus 23:4, 5; Deuteronomy 22:10; 25:4.

“Six days you are to do your work; but on the seventh day, you are to cease from your labor, in order that your bull and your donkey may rest.”—Exodus 23:12.



Is it wrong to kill animals?

WHAT PEOPLE SAY Some hunters and fishermen kill animals for sport, thrilling in the chase or the conquest. Others would agree with Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, who wrote that killing and eating animals is “simply immoral.”

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS God allows people to kill animals to protect human life or to provide clothing. (Exodus 21:28; Mark 1:6) The Bible also says that humans may kill animals for food. “Every moving animal that is alive may serve as food for you,” says Genesis 9:3. Even Jesus helped his disciples to catch fish that they later ate. —John 21:4-13.

Nevertheless, the Bible says that God “hates anyone who loves violence.” (Psalm 11:5) So it stands to reason that God does not want us to harm or kill animals merely for pleasure or for sport.

The Bible indicates that God places a high value on animal life.

- The Bible says that at the time of creation, “God went on to make the wild animals of the earth according to their

kinds and the domestic animals according to their kinds and all the creeping animals of the ground according to their kinds. *And God saw that it was good.*” —Genesis 1:25.

- The Bible says of Jehovah: “To the animals he gives food.” (Psalm 147:9) God created an ecosystem that provides more than enough adequate food and shelter for animals.
- King David of Israel said in prayer: “Man and beast you preserve, O Jehovah.” (Psalm 36:6) During the global Flood, for example, Jehovah preserved eight individuals and all kinds of animals before destroying the wicked people. —Genesis 6:19.

Clearly, Jehovah approves of his animal creation, and he expects humans to treat animals with due regard. ■

“The righteous one takes care of his domestic animals.”

—Proverbs 12:10.





DO YOU USE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY WISELY?

Jenni is hooked on a video game. "I'm playing it for eight hours a day now," she says, "and it's become a real problem."

Dennis tried to go seven days without his electronic devices and Internet access. He lasted just 40 hours.

Jenni and Dennis are not teenagers. Jenni, a mother of four, is 40 years old. Dennis is 49.

DO YOU use digital technology?* Many would answer yes, and for good reason. Electronic devices play a prominent and

* In this article, the term "digital technology" refers to electronic devices that access or transmit digital data, including e-mails, phone calls, text messages, videos, music, games, and photos.

useful role in employment, social life, and entertainment.

However, like Jenni and Dennis, many people seem overly attached to some uses of technology. For example, 20-year-old Nicole says: "I hate to say it, but my cell phone and I are best buddies. I make sure it's close by at all times. I go crazy if I'm in an area with no cell coverage, and after half an hour, I can't wait to be able to check my messages again. It's a little ridiculous!"

Some people even check a device for messages and updates through the night. They may experience withdrawal symptoms when they are separated from their digital companion. Some researchers

describe this type of behavior as an *addiction*—whether to digital technology in general or more specifically to the Internet or a particular device, such as a smartphone. Others hesitate to use the term “addiction” and prefer to describe such behavior as problematic, compulsive, or obsessive.

Regardless of what it is called, unwise use of digital technology can be a problem. In some cases, it has created a barrier between family members. For example, a 20-year-old girl laments: “My father doesn’t know about anything going on in my life anymore. He sits in the living room and writes e-mails while he is talking to me. He can’t put his phone down. My dad probably cares about me, but sometimes it just doesn’t seem that he does.”

“Digital Detox”

To help deal with misuse of technology, lands such as China, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States have established “digital detox” centers, where a person is denied access to the Internet and digital devices for several days. For example, consider Brett, a young adult who says that at one point he was playing an online game for up to 16 hours a day. “Whenever I went online, it really was like getting high on a drug,” he says. By the time Brett checked himself into a digital detox center, he was unemployed, had neglected his hygiene, and had lost his friends. How can you prevent such a sad outcome?

ASSESS YOUR USE OF TECHNOLOGY. Determine the impact that technology has on your

life. Ask yourself such questions as the following:

- Do I become unduly agitated, perhaps even temperamental, when I cannot access the Internet or use my electronic device?
- Do I keep using the Internet or device long after the predetermined time I have set to stop?
- Am I losing needed sleep because I cannot stop checking for incoming messages?
- Is my use of technology causing me to neglect my family? Would my family members agree with my answer to this question?

If your use of technology is causing you to neglect “the more important things”—including your family and other responsibilities—now is the time to make changes. (Philippians 1:10) How?

LEARN TO SET REASONABLE LIMITS. Too much of even a good thing can be harmful. So whether you use digital technology for business or for pleasure, limit how long you will do so, and then stick to that limit.

Tip: Why not enlist the help of a family member or a friend? The Bible says: “Two are better than one, . . . for if one of them falls, the other can help his partner up.”—Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10.

As new devices make it easier and faster to access and transmit data, the unwise use of technology will no doubt grow. But do not let attraction lead to “addiction.” By “making the best use of your time,” you can avoid misusing digital technology.—Ephesians 5:16. ■



The Function of Cat Whiskers



DOMESTIC cats are mostly nocturnal. Whiskers apparently help them to identify nearby objects and catch prey, particularly after dusk.

Consider: Cats' whiskers are attached to tissues that have multiple nerve endings. These nerves are sensitive to even the slightest movement of air. As a result, cats can detect nearby objects without seeing them—obviously an advantage in the dark.

Since whiskers are sensitive to pressure, cats use them to determine the position and movement of an object or of prey. Whiskers also help cats to measure the width of an opening before they attempt to go through it. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* acknowledges that “the functions of the whiskers (vibrissae) are only partially understood; however, it is known that, if they are cut off, the cat is temporarily incapacitated.”

Scientists are designing robots equipped with sensors that mimic cat whiskers to help the robots navigate around obstacles. These sensors, called e-whiskers, “should have a wide range of applications for advanced robotics, human-machine user interfaces, and biological applications,” says Ali Javey, a faculty scientist at the University of California, Berkeley.

What do you think? Did the function of cat whiskers come about by evolution? Or was it designed? ■

