

Discipline and Training, Not Permissiveness

What athletes, Proverbs, and our heavenly Father teach us about raising young people

For whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights.

PROVERBS 3:12

AT A GLANCE

BIG IDEA	Great character is trained, not wished into being. Loving discipline, done with patience and the right motive, produces peace, hope, joy, self-control, and success.
SCRIPTURE	Proverbs 3:11-12; 4:11-12; 9:7-9; 19:18; 21:11, 15; 22:3, 6, 10; 27:12; 29:17, 21 · Hebrews 12:5-11 · Ephesians 6:4
BEST FOR	Parents, youth leaders, and volunteers; also useful for a parent night or a leader training
USE IT	Read it yourself first, then discuss the questions with your spouse, your leadership team, or a parents' small group

What athletes already know

If parents want a child to compete at a high level in today's sports, they know the child will need discipline, hard work, and some physical discomfort, often starting young. Natural ability matters, but it is the level of commitment to training that determines how good each young athlete becomes.

A child can't make that kind of commitment alone or create the right environment for it. The parents, together with a coach, have to count the cost: Are we willing to pay the price in time, energy, and consistency? Are we in this for the long haul? And every great athlete has to learn to persevere, to keep going without giving up. A good training program is at least as demanding on the coach as it is on the athlete.

Character works the same way

Developing great character is no easier than developing a great athlete. Easy wins don't build character. Steady progress through trials and difficulties is what shapes and refines a young person's heart (see Romans 5:3-4).

A SIMPLE DEFINITION

Discipline is training that develops self-control. It is not the same as punishment. The word *discipline* is related to *disciple*: a learner who is being trained.

God's motive in disciplining His children is always love and deep concern for the one being trained. Discipline was never meant to be revenge, or an outlet for an adult's frustration or embarrassment. Discipline with the wrong motive may change behavior for a moment, but it will never bring the right change of heart.

Young people learn self-discipline by first being disciplined by someone else. That is why discipline is such an important part of raising children and creating a healthy family. And, just like with the athlete, it is the parents who must decide they are willing to dedicate themselves to training their children. The results are worth it: peace, hope, joy, self-control, and success.

What Proverbs says about discipline

1. Discipline trains for success

Wisdom leads us "in right paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hindered, and when you run, you will not stumble" (Proverbs 4:11-12). "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (22:6). Training is about direction: setting a young person on a path they will keep walking long after they leave home.

2. Discipline is a sign of love

"My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; for whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights." **PROVERBS 3:11-12**

Hebrews quotes this passage and adds that God disciplines us "for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness" (Hebrews 12:10). Permissiveness can look like kindness, but it often means an adult has simply stopped caring enough to do the hard work.

3. Discipline can save a child from ruin

"Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction" (Proverbs 19:18). There is a window while children are young and teachable. And loving discipline teaches them what the wise already know: "A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; the simple pass on and are punished" (22:3; also 27:12).

4. Discipline exposes the heart

How a person responds to correction shows what is inside. "Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you" (9:8). Watch how your young people respond to correction. It tells you where their heart is and what to pray for.

5. Discipline is a lesson for others

"When the scoffer is punished, the simple is made wise" (21:11). Brothers, sisters, and whole youth groups learn from how consistent the adults are. "It is a joy for the just to do justice, but destruction will come to the workers of iniquity" (21:15).

6. Discipline brings joy and peace in the end

"Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave; yes, strife and reproach will cease" (22:10).

"Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul" (29:17). But "He who pampers his servant from childhood will have him as a son in the end" (29:21). Pampering now produces grief later; training now produces delight later.

LOVING DISCIPLINE IS NEVER ABUSE

Scripture also warns parents: "do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Discipline should be calm, consistent, proportionate, and explained, and it must never harm, humiliate, or frighten a child. If you are disciplining in anger, step away until you can do it in love. Youth leaders should always follow their church's child-safety policies.

A few practical habits

- **Decide in advance.** Agree with your spouse or team on expectations and consequences before the moment comes.
- **Train more than you correct.** Explain, model, and practice the right behavior. Praise progress.
- **Stay consistent.** Inconsistent discipline teaches kids to gamble. Consistent discipline teaches them to trust.
- **Connect consequences to the heart.** Ask, "What was going on inside you?" not just "What did you do?"
- **Restore the relationship.** Finish every correction with a hug, a prayer, or a clear "I love you, and we're good."

Hebrews says it honestly: "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11). Keep training. The harvest is coming.

DISCUSS TOGETHER

1. Where have you seen the athlete principle (commitment determines proficiency) prove true in your own life?
2. What is the difference between discipline and punishment? Which one are you more naturally inclined toward?
3. How can we tell if our motive in disciplining is love rather than frustration or embarrassment?
4. Which of the six truths from Proverbs is most encouraging to you right now? Which is most challenging?
5. What is one practical habit you want to start or strengthen this month?

TAKE IT HOME

This week, sit down with your spouse, co-leader, or a trusted friend and write down three character qualities you are training toward in the young people God has given you. Then choose one expectation and one consistent, loving consequence to practice together. Pray for the patience to keep training, even when it is hard.

Discipline is training that develops self-control, and love is always the motive.

From fifty years of youth ministry by **Ron Whittam**. Share freely with your students and leaders. · The Youth Ministry Living Room · qrprogramming.com/livingroom

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