

## **Loving but Firm** **Psalm 127:1-5**

We can all improve as parents by looking to God and to Scripture. The best parents are those who love and serve God. Though we are all imperfect and prone to mistakes, we can learn from God's word and start today being better parents. When we grow more like Christ, our family will see it. They will then appreciate your changes and will thank God. The closer we draw to God, the better opportunity our children will have to know the Lord.

Parents have different styles. Some parents believe in being permissive; while others think they ought to dominate their children. Still others neglect their children's greatest need – that is the need for love and guidance. Each of these parenting styles has serious consequences for children. Children do indeed live what they learn, and how parents deal with children will profoundly influence how a child sees and reacts to life.

**Permissive parents tend to be warm and supportive, but they are weak on establishing and enforcing rules and limits on their children.** They often let their children misbehave without consequences. We have all seen parents who when their children were being naughty did nothing to stop their behavior. Such a child can become a terror. He knows he can get away with such behavior. Since he has never been controlled by his parents, he has a hard time controlling himself, and following the leadership of others. **Proverbs 29:15** says, ***“The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.”*** And in **verse 17** we read, ***“Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.”***

God expects parents to give their children the rules and limits they need to keep them from hurting others. In **Deut. 32:46-47** Moses said, ***“Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.”*** They will learn to take God seriously when they learn to take their parents seriously. And this begins early in life.

Perhaps you remember the old priest Eli, who had two worthless sons, who did not know the Lord. These priests took a larger portion of the meat of the offering than they should have, and they were immoral with women. In **1 Sam. 2:22-25** Eli said

to them, ***“Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad. If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?” But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death.***”

When children refuse to listen to the voice of their parents early in life, they refuse to listen to other authorities as well. We must all learn to obey. Tragically, some children grow up thinking the rules don't apply to them. They most often, learn this from their parents. A disobedient child will defy his teachers, the police, his employers, and anyone else who tries to exercise authority over them. *The breakdown in authority in our society reflects the breakdown of authority in the home.* God says to Children in **Colossians 3:20**, ***“Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.”***

For the most part, children don't create problems; they reveal them. Parents who cannot discipline themselves often cannot discipline their children. If a father and mother are not under authority, they cannot exercise authority over others. It is only when parents submit to the Lord that they can exercise properly balanced spiritual and physical authority over their children. Children are the happiest when they feel secure, and this can only happen when they have parents who lovingly give them firm rules and guidelines to keep. They have a greater sense of identity and purpose in life. They see the value in doing what is right. Loving discipline blesses children.

God in **Hebrews 12:5-11** says, ***“And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant,***

*but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”*

**Second**, other parents tend to be too hard on their children without giving them the love and support that they need. They frequently give their children unbending rules with no explanation. And these children may get punished and not know or understand why. Some children grow up never able to satisfy or please their parents. And when parents expect more out of children than they are able to give, the child grows up feeling like a failure, and small in their own eyes. This harshness either leads the child to withdraw in fear or to rebel against their parents. Some become so angry at their parents, they reject anything that has to do with their parents. This can include their faith.

God speaks to fathers in **Col. 3:21**, *“Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged,” (ESV); “Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged,” (NLT)*. Too often parents automatically say no to their children, without listening carefully to their children and evaluating each request respectfully. Parents should encourage their children and not discourage them. Children need to learn limits, but they also need to learn that there are times and occasions where a change might need to occur, and be willing to make it. Discouraged children are fair prey for Satan and the world. And when a child does not get the love and encouragement it needs at home, the child will seek it elsewhere.

If a home is truly Christian, it is a place of encouragement. In such a home the child finds refuge from the battles of life, and can find the strength to fight the battles and carry the burdens of growing up. He finds a loving heart, a watching eye, a listening ear, and a helpful hand. In this kind of a home it is natural for a child to learn to trust Christ and want to live for him.

**Third**, some parents simply neglect their children. Perhaps the saddest phenomenon of our day is the *“absent father.”* More than forty percent of the children born in America are born to unwed mothers. Where are the fathers? Many children aren’t even aware of who the father is. Some dads are home, but are so busy with work that he is often unavailable to meet the needs of the children. It is of vital importance for the parents to spend time with their children. They need you. We need to understand that one of the best ways to spell love is “T-I-M-E.”

***Proverbs 4:1-9*** says, ***“My children, listen when your father corrects you. Pay attention and learn good judgment, for I am giving you good guidance. Don’t turn away from my instructions. For I, too, was once my father’s son, tenderly loved as my mother’s only child. My father taught me, “Take my words to heart. Follow my commands, and you will live. Get wisdom; develop good judgment. Don’t forget my words or turn away from them. Don’t turn your back on wisdom, for she will protect you. Love her, and she will guard you. Getting wisdom is the wisest thing you can do! And whatever else you do, develop good judgment. Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a graceful garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown” (NLT).***

Parents, our actions speak louder than our words. When we make time to train our children and help them to grow, they will appreciate it. Children learn values, morals, and priorities by observing how their parents act and how they react to everyday life. If parents show a deep love and respect for God, their children will soak in that spirit. But how can your child know how you love God, if you don’t tell and show them by spending time with them. The greatest blessing that you can bestow on your children is a deep heritage of love and respect for God.

Parents should listen and be patient as their children talk to them. A listening ear and a loving heart go together. Men, your children won’t evaluate you based on your ability to “father a child” *but on how you have raised them*. Life isn’t easy for children, especially Christian Children living in the world today. Their problems might seem small to you, but they are huge to them! Christian parents must listen carefully, share their feelings and frustrations of their children, pray with them, and seek to encourage them. Make your home the happiest place on earth for them.

Loving and firm parents usually have clearly defined rules and limits. They expect their children to mind instructions. They take the time to tell their children why they make these limits and give a clear warning when a child has gone too far. They are not afraid to discipline their child appropriately for misbehavior, because they know the value of discipline. They also give support and encouragement to their children. They show physical affection and spend time with their kids. The loving and firm provides a healthy and balanced combination of control and compassion.

A child blessed with such parents *usually listens* to his parents and all authorities. He learns to love and believe in God. He learns to communicate with his parents and find the help that he needs in difficult times. He knows right from wrong and the underlying reasons why. And from this foundation, he learns self-control.

It's true! Loving parents who spiritually train their children give them the key to a happy and meaningful life. **Proverbs 3:13-18** says, ***“Joyful is the person who finds wisdom, the one who gains understanding. For wisdom is more profitable than silver, and her wages are better than gold. Wisdom is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. She offers you long life in her right hand, and riches and honor in her left. She will guide you down delightful paths; all her ways are satisfying. Wisdom is a tree of life to those who embrace her; happy are those who hold her tightly.”***

Loving and serving God is the most critical thing you can do for your family's sake. Loving and serving God will lead you to become better fathers and mothers, better spouses, and a better brother or sister. Love your family, care for their needs, listen to them, support them, and guide them as a faithful and loving spouse and parent. Know this, you must walk the walk, as well as talk the talk. When you live close to God, you will open the way for your children to live close to God as well. If you live a worldly, careless life, don't be surprised if your children follow your ways, instead of your teaching.

There is no substitute for being a genuine Christian. We cannot fool our children.

Won't you give your heart to the Lord, trust him, repent of your sins, confess his name, and be baptized so that your sins will be forgiven? Remember this, ***“If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15-17).*** ***“This world is passing away – but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”***