



# BIBLICAL DISCIPLINE

A GUIDE FOR CHRISTIAN PARENTS

 FamilyFire

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# Introduction

Children are a gift from God. We receive them with great joy as well as a good dose of trepidation. We rejoice when our children excel and make us proud. Yet, at times our children frustrate us, or we feel ill-equipped to handle the parenting challenges before us. We all question from time to time if we are failing as parents. The truth is there are few simple answers in parenting and each child tests our limits in a different way. Navigating discipline is often uncomfortable for parents and children alike. We may feel pain in the moment, but it is not without purpose.

“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” ([Hebrews 12:11](#)).

We all want to see the fruit of righteousness sprout and flourish in the lives of our families. And for fruit to bloom, we need to cultivate conditions for growth, caring enough to redirect our children’s bad behavior and encourage their good behavior. Discipline is a necessary part of parenting. Through discipline, we show love to our children and cultivate their sense of belonging in the family of God.

“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” ([Hebrews 12:7-8](#)).

Administering discipline is not easy, but God equips us for what he calls us to do. God promises to provide us with wisdom when we ask him. And he even offers us grace for our parenting failures. He also blesses us with a community of faith to support and encourage us through difficulties. We at *Family Fire* would like to be a part of your support network and offer you this resource, filled with godly principles, to guide your approach to discipline.

We pray this resource will help you live into your calling as a parent and respond to conflict with God’s grace. Discipline is a messy yet necessary part of parenting that can leave us discouraged, but we are never alone. God walks faithfully with us through every challenge we face.

Grace & Peace,

*Deb & Steven Koster*

# Biblical Authority in Your Home

BY REV. DEB KOSTER

Who's in charge at home? We all have authorities in life to which we answer. Families are no different. Healthy families need a structure of authority. God cares about the flourishing of families and calls us to be accountable to one another in our roles. Consider the authority that God has set in place and evaluate how your family is embracing a biblical model of authority.

## Everyone answers to God's authority

Parents are never so above the law that they can behave in any way they choose. We are all accountable to God and we should live in obedience to God's word. [Psalm 47:7-8](#) says, "For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm! God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne." Children are a gift of God, on loan to us to raise them as citizens of his kingdom. As parents, we serve in obedience under God's authority. Our lives should reflect an obedience to God's commandments in all we do, especially parenting. Jesus said in Matthew that, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." There is freedom in recognizing that God is the ultimate source of authority in our families. He is in control, and we are called to lead in service to him.

## God has instituted authorities

In society, we expect one another to respect those in authority. Likewise, God calls us to model respect toward those he has commanded us to obey. [Romans 13:1](#) says, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." Parents have an opportunity to model respect for authority

*"Parents are never so above the law that they can behave in any way they choose."*

by how they live under the authority of the Church and the government. Following the law, acknowledging the image of God in our leaders, and resisting the urge to slander are all important aspects of modeling respect. However, God does not call us to submit to those who abuse or mistreat us. In fact, he calls us to stand in solidarity with those who have suffered under abuse of power. Protest can be appropriate, for all people are

under God's design, but it should still be respectful. The obedience and respect that we model for those in authority over us will be a healthy model for our children to follow.

## God places parents in charge

The Bible is clear. At home, parents are in charge, not children, and a parent's goal is to raise godly kids. Children are to answer to the authority of the parents. As [Ephesians 6:1](#) says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." As parents we need to accept the authority God has given us to shape our children into citizens of his kingdom. Our culture has made an idol out of childhood and pushes an ongoing temptation to defer to the wishes of our children. We love our children and desire that they would feel our affection. We are tempted to dote over children and try to provide them with every new opportunity. But as a parent defers to the desires of the child and makes the child's happiness, rather than their character, the focus of their parenting, children become entitled, expect others to serve them, and take on an authoritative role in the home. But this is not this system of authority God established for our homes. Parenting is not about meeting children's expectations. God placed parents in leadership in the home and we should not neglect that responsibility.

*"At home, parents are in charge, not children, and a parent's goal is to raise godly kids."*

## Be the parent: Accept the responsibility God has given you

Parents can feel helpless when a newborn is placed in their arms and entrusted to their care. We can feel

clueless about how to parent well when a child's behavior is baffling. And we may be driven by a desire to remain forever young and not act like our own parents. But that does not alter our call to be parents that embrace biblical authority.

We are the grownups in our families, and sometimes that's overwhelming, but there is help available. Reach out to other parents and lean on God in prayer for strength. Sometimes professional resources through Christian counseling centers can be very helpful, whether it's a weekend seminar or on-going counseling. God promises to give wisdom to those who seek it. [Proverbs 13:24](#) says, "Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him." When we embrace our authority and remain consistent in discipline, we demonstrate love to our children. It is within every parent's power to say "no" to things that distract our children from God and to set healthy limits. God places us in authority over our children and calls us to exercise that authority faithfully.

## Ignored responsibility is harmful

We harm kids when we do not serve them by leading. Children should have age-appropriate responsibilities and decision-making power, but they shouldn't be responsible for parenting siblings or be put in a position to carry burdens that are beyond their ability. Children should not be in charge of home finances or house rules; this is part of the parents' domain. It is appropriate for parents to take into consideration the needs of everyone in the home, but ultimately it is the adults who must be exercising decision-making authority. Indulgent parenting is harmful to children in that it gives them authority that is beyond their capabilities. Dependable structure provides the support that children need to succeed. Absent or neglectful parents often raise anxious and directionless kids. The brain of a child is still developing and it is ill prepared to see the consequences of their actions, so do not burden them with responsibilities that God did not intend for them.

## Wield authority with love

We neglect our role as parents when we leave our children without leadership and we abuse our role when we are harsh with our authority. It is important to allow opportunities for our children's voices to be heard. As [Ephesians 6:4](#) says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Overly authoritarian or abusive parenting is as destructive as indulgent or neglectful parenting. Parents who exercise authority

without love are too enamored with their own power. Our children should obey not just because we say so, but because they know that we love them and want what is in their best interest.

Establishing authority and negotiating responsibilities in the home can be challenging, but God has established his model of authority to bless us. If parents and children are all fighting for control then the result is chaos. Following God's design brings us to a place of orderly function. 🔥



# How Can I Establish Discipline in My Home?

BY REV. DEB KOSTER

The process of helping our children discover their God given identity and learn how to follow the example of Jesus is called discipleship. Discipline is one way that we mentor our children to be disciples of Christ. You can tell by the closeness in spelling that discipling and discipline are related. Merriam-Webster defines discipline as, “training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character.” In short, discipline is the redirecting of bad behavior to curb our inner selfishness and guide us to behavior that recognizes how our actions impact one another.

Discipline involves giving guidance to our children and setting limits to show our love for them. [Proverbs 3:11-12](#) shows us that discipline flows out of love. “My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline, and do not

resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father disciplines the son he delights in.”

Conversely, it is not very loving to let our children rule the roost and never gain the necessary social skills for functioning in society. We want our kids to have respect for others so they can hold down a job and have healthy family relationships. These skills of engaging respectfully with authority and developing compassion for one another are learned first in the home. The home is the crucible for teaching our children to love God above all and our neighbor as ourselves ([Mark 12:30-31](#), [Matthew 22:37-39](#)).

## Be the example

As parents we set the example of what it looks like to live a life of faith. Children follow our passion for faith. Others will be drawn to faith when we live our faith in a genuine way. We can’t expect our kids to obey rules that we ourselves refuse to follow. If we expect our kids to use polite speech in our home than we should not utter curses from our own lips.

*“It is not very loving to let our children rule the roost and never gain the necessary social skills for functioning in society.”*



## Affirm the positives

Set a tone of thankfulness in your home. Complaining about things is far less effective than positive affirmation. Catch your children doing positive things and affirm them for their good behavior. Let them know that you love it when they've been good helpers or share nicely with their siblings. We can get into negative patterns of only scolding our children, which creates a critical environment. Affirmation changes the tone, offering encouragement and pointing children to the behavior that you desire for them.

## Establish clear guidelines

Make your expectations clear, don't leave your kids wondering what you mean. They should understand what the house rules are so they don't have to wonder where the boundaries lie. Establish rules for your house that reflect what God tells us is most important: loving him and loving one another. From the youngest of ages, faith engagement and loving respect for one another should be the guiding principles behind discipline in your household.

## Don't interfere with natural consequences

Too often we want to step in and rescue our kids when they forget their responsibilities. Natural conse-

quences can be great teachers. If your daughter forgets to set her alarm, she will be late for school, or if your son forgets his homework, he will get marked down on his grade. If we bail our kids out, we rob them of the opportunity to learn responsibility. It can be hard to see our kids flounder, but it is through these failures that lessons are learned. Offer empathy for the struggle they are experiencing, but allow them to learn from their mistakes.

## Follow through with what you say

When children cross the line, you need to follow through with consequences. Show that you love them enough to set limits, that you are willing to enforce the rules set for their benefit. Your words will carry more meaning when you back them up with action. Consistency is crucial for kids to understand that we mean what we say.

Proverbs 22:6 tells us to, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." This is not an all-encompassing promise, but rather a general truth. There are no guarantees that our kids will respond to our discipline and grow up to seek God and respect others. Not every child raised in faith will embrace truth, but the best chance they have is for us to train our children to walk in God's truth. Choose today to give your kids the loving discipline that they need to be disciples of Christ. 🔥

# Keys to Effective Discipline: Echoing the Gospel Rhythm of Grace

BY REV. DR. ROB TOORNSTRA

Have you ever wondered if you are disciplining your children effectively? Maybe you've asked yourself, "Am I being too strict? Too lenient? Am I overreacting to my child's behavior? How can I put a stop to their squabbling?" Discipline is never an easy part of parenting.

Christian parenting grows out of the idea that your home is the first place that your children will experience the gospel. Early on in the Bible, God establishes a pattern for parenting that is rooted in the story of his grace, and this rhythm echoes through Scripture. In [Deuteronomy 6:20-25](#), God instructs his people by saying,

In the future, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?" tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand...The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. And if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord

*"Your home is the first place that your children will experience the gospel."*

our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness (NIV)."

The pattern is clear—God's children were in trouble, and God, as the true and greatest parent, rescued them, and God called them to obey, as a response to his love. This pattern can shape our parenting as well, but how can we echo this rhythm? What might this look like?

## Sin is serious business

Parents need to establish and communicate clear boundaries for their children. In our home, for example, we limit the amount of screen-time that our kids may have in a day. We will usually give one warning if we notice one of our children pushing that limit. But if, after they have heard the warning, they ignore the rule, we intervene immediately. It is usually a mistake to offer re-

peated empty threats, or to brush off the disobedience of our children. It is vital for children to know that their parents love them enough to set—and enforce—limits to deal with their sins. It is not gracious to ignore the offense or rescue our children from the consequences of their behavior. It is an important principle that the consequence must fit the crime and we are called to follow God’s instruction to “...render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another...” ([Zechariah 7:9](#)). Therefore, at our house, misusing screen time will mean that mom takes the Kindle away for a few days. Leaving the backyard a mess means that dad will clean up the yard—but the toys will be gone until the guilty party has shown responsibility for the yard by weeding the flower beds. This approach to discipline establishes a connection between the action and the consequence, demonstrating the principle that sin can lead to destructive consequences for us.

## Confession, assurance

While it can be tempting to pour out anger on our kids (and I must admit to this mistake), discipline shouldn’t be vindictive. The gospel rhythm models both confession of sin and our assurance of salvation. After we explain what the consequences will be for our children’s actions, we should ask why they were given the consequence in the first place. This invites the child to be honest about their failures so that they can

*“While it can be tempting to pour out anger on our kids ..., discipline shouldn’t be vindictive.”*

experience our words of assurance. It’s so vital that we verbalize at least two things at this point.

First, children need to hear the words, “I forgive you,” from our mouths. This begins to shape an early experience of what it means to be forgiven.

Second, they need to be assured that we still love them. Children desperately need to know that our love for them is not based on their performance or obedience. The assurance of a parent’s love affords a great peace, even at a very young age.

## Renewal

When I finish disciplining my children, I will often ask them, “do you know why I have to discipline you?” The answer will vary in a given situation, but the idea is the same. Just as God wanted his children to thrive in the Promised Land, I too, want my children to flourish. Not only do I want to keep them physically safe, but I also want them to learn the skills that they will need to do well in their lives. I want them to learn to interact well with others, to be responsible for their actions, to demonstrate love, and to care for others. So, even as I correct them, I also call them to something better, which is grounded in the assurance of my love for them that I have already given them.

This pattern of discipline echoes the gospel rhythm of grace. Your children will experience the heartbeat of the gospel when you effectively discipline them, calling them to confess their mistakes and leading them to obedience grounded in the assurance of your love. Your home then becomes a place where God’s grace is not only taught, but echoed and lived! 🔥

# Discipline vs. Punishment: Why One Is Better Than the Other

BY REV. DEB KOSTER

Your child has blatantly disobeyed. You are angry and you want to ensure that their bad behavior does not continue. What should you do? How can you inspire better behavior? Should you punish the bad behavior or discipline your child to motivate better behavior? Wait, aren't punishment and discipline the same thing? Punishment and discipline may seem similar, and sometimes we use the terms interchangeably, but in actuality they are distinctly different approaches to correction. Though they both seek to stop bad behavior from repeating, punishment and discipline are quite different.

## What are the differences?

Put simply, punishment looks back at past bad behavior and seeks to exact justice or retribution. A child is spanked for disobedience, a son's mouth is washed out with soap for lying, a teen is grounded for staying out past curfew. At its best, punishment creates negative experiences that deter children from repeating bad behavior. At its worst, punishment is merely revenge.

Discipline differs from punishment in that it is less concerned with demanding justice or enacting penalty

for past behavior and more concerned with trying to shape and encourage good behavior in the future. A discipline approach to parenting may look like punishment at times when a parent allows children to experience painful, corrective consequences, but the motivation behind the correction is always discipleship and restoration.

*“Discipline differs from punishment in that it is less concerned with demanding justice or enacting penalty for past behavior and more concerned with trying to shape and encourage good behavior in the future.”*

## Paying the cost

Christ Jesus died for the atonement of all of our sins. As Christians, we recognize that Jesus has already paid the cost for the sins our children have and will commit. As parents, it is not our role to demand satisfaction for our children's sins. Vengeance is the Lord's. Instead, our focus should be on discipline—cultivating future good behavior and restoration of relationship.

This does not mean that discipline is void of negative consequences. Poor choices often have direct and naturally unpleasant consequences, from apologies to be made or messes to be cleaned up. Removing privileges may serve to remind a child that they are required to treat one another respectfully. Additional chores can guide children to remember to respect others by cleaning up behind themselves. When a child is tempted to throw a toy again they will hopefully remember how that toy was taken away when they did not care for their belongings the last time. Negative consequences should always be linked to the bad behavior to motivate better behavior going forward. When a child sits on the time-out bench to calm down and think about their bad choice it may look like a punishment, but using the time to reflect on who was hurt by their choice and discerning how to make amends is an important aspect of the discipline process.

However, any corrective measures are less about retribution for past behavior and more about restoring relationships between the offender, the offended, and the wider community. Discipline seeks to cultivate healthier behaviors going forward. It begins with conversation. It is important to talk with your child and to help them recognize their bad choices. It is also important to help children cultivate empathy by discussing the hurt their actions inflicted on others. Discipline conversations focus on helping children see their error and guiding them to a more empathetic response. Finally, discipline ends with your child making amends for the harm they may have caused others. Restoration of relationship is always the end goal of discipline.

## Discipline is work

It is easier, and often faster, to inflict a punishment for bad behavior than to discipline. The process of discipline is more involved. A discipline-focused approach seeks to understand the situation fully in order to make wise decisions about what restitution is needed to achieve restoration. A discipline approach recognizes that children learn best from the natural consequences of their actions. Discipline is concerned with what consequences a child should experience in order to inspire them to make better choices going forward. As parents, we should empathize with the painfulness of our children's consequences, but we shouldn't rescue our kids from experiencing them. When disciplining, we shouldn't withhold our love, but instead hold our children close—we should love them even when their choices upset us.

*“A discipline-focused approach seeks to understand the situation fully.”*

## Emotions

Punishment is reactive. It comes from a place of anger and frustration. When our children don't heed our wisdom, we are naturally hurt. It is exasperating to repeatedly bump up against the same lousy behavior. When our children ignore our rules or advice, it is tempting to react in anger. In frustration, it's natural to want to demand obedience or assert our power and authority by punishing a child's behavior. But punishment offers only negative consequences. It utilizes guilt and fear to motivate behavior. Punishment is really about the punisher—by lashing out we find a release for our frustration. Discipline, in contrast, requires that we set aside our frustration to lovingly focus on the child, to help them cultivate better understanding and thus better relational behavior moving forward.

*“Discipline, in contrast, requires that we set aside our frustration to lovingly focus on the child...”*

## Results

Both punishment and discipline can change a child's behavior in the short term, but they have very different long-term consequences. Because punishment is rooted in guilt and fear, the motivation for compliance is not to become a better person, but to avoid harm. When the punisher is out of the child's range of influence, the motivation for the child to obey disappears. Living in fear can also fracture parent-child relationships and leave lifelong scars. There is no restorative justice when our

relationship with our child is crippled by an unhealthy yielding of authority.

Discipline in contrast is done in the context of love. It fosters relationships and inspires an internalization of values. Discipline by design cultivates our character. [Hebrews 12:11](#) states, “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.”

Punishment may be the simple response to disobedience, but its value is short-lived. It is worth the effort to invest in discipline to nurture our children into lives of discipleship. Discipline requires us to restrain our anger and lean into the relationship, investing in our child's character. So when a child disobeys, refrain from punishment and dig deeper to uproot the bad behavior and cultivate discipleship. 🔥

# Parenting With the Grain: Embracing Your Child's Gifts and Passions

BY DR. ROBERT RITZEMA

When Lucas married Jessica, he believed he could make a difference in the lives of her two sons, ages 9 and 7. He was an athlete and thought he could turn them from sedentary video-gamers into active, energetic boys. Conner, the younger boy, liked the wrestling, basket-shooting, and biking that Lucas introduced, but older brother, Joshua, resisted. Lucas began teasing Joshua about his flaccid arms and stomach. Eventually, he remarked that Joshua was lazy and weak. Joshua remained silent, but after one such episode, he tearfully blurted out to Jessica that he couldn't stand Lucas and wished he would just leave.

## Be aware you have a vision for your child

It is good for parents to encourage positive change in their children's lives—like helping their children be more active or engaged with the world around them. However, effective parenting takes into account a child's natural inclinations. Parents (or, as with Lucas, stepparents) often have a vision of what activities or

*“As parents, we need to ask if our vision for our child fits the child's temperament, talents, and interests, or does it fit our own?”*

interests are best for children in their care and may encourage the child to pursue them. As parents, we need to ask if our vision for our child fits the child's temperament, talents, and interests, or does it fit our own? When the child resists, parents may be tempted to ramp up pressure, possibly to the point of manipulating or denigrating the child.

## Think about where your vision comes from

What's the origin of the vision we have for our children's lives? It can come from cultural standards



of what constitutes a good life. We may derive it from our understanding of what God wants us humans to be like. We might base it on the character strengths of someone we particularly admire. It can be an expanded version of some quality we've noted in the child. Or it may represent something we wanted (or still want) to become ourselves.

Lucas' vision came from the last of these sources. As a child he had been sedentary and uncoordinated. Some of his more athletic peers teased him when he didn't perform well in childhood games. Around age 10, he had a Little League coach who took a particular interest in improving Lucas' athletic prowess. He spent long hours with Lucas, developing his skills. Lucas was grateful for this help. Unfortunately, the coach also talked incessantly about the importance of being tough and of competing fiercely. He made critical comments when Lucas' efforts weren't up to his standards. Lucas internalized the coach's emphasis on toughness. He was proud of his improved performance in games. At the same time, he inwardly feared that if he didn't push himself constantly he would lose the gains he had made. As an adult, he still took a great deal of pride in his success at competitive sports. His relationship with the coach and subsequent athletic accomplishments greatly influenced the vision he formulated for Conner and Joshua.


## Consider what your child is already good at

The writer of Proverbs advises parents to "train a child in the way he should go" ([Proverbs 22:6](#)). To some extent, this means developing qualities that every person needs in order to flourish—qualities like honesty, responsibility, and kindness. There are so many qualities whose value is uncertain, though. Does every child need to be gregarious? Orderly? Assertive? Genteel? Athletic? Had Lucas observed Conner and Joshua carefully,

he would have noticed that Conner was already more physically active than Joshua, and that Joshua particularly liked reading and learning. Conner was ready for Lucas' sports regimen. Joshua wasn't receptive, but he might have been drawn away from video games and into activity by reading about birds, trees, and insects, and then going with Lucas on nature hikes to observe the things his books had taught him.

## Avoid manipulation, denigration, and teasing

The danger in trying to change a child's behavior is, of course, pushing a child to be someone they are not, and doing so in a negative way. [Ephesians 6:4](#) cautions, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." You can create inviting opportunities for a child, plan group adventures, set boundaries around unhealthy behaviors, and generally encourage kids to develop their gifts. It is less healthy to demand kids develop gifts they don't have, and then to ridicule, belittle, withhold approval, and call them names when they resist or fail to live up to expectations.

Wood carvers carefully examine the wood before starting to cut, looking at the run of the grain. As they carve, they work with the grain, rather than against it. Similarly, we can either parent with the grain of a child's natural inclinations, or against it. When we parent with the grain, children more readily recognize and appreciate their strengths, and the parent-child relationship develops more effectively and harmoniously. 

*"We can either parent with the grain of a child's natural inclinations, or against it."*

# Should I Spank My Child?

BY REV. DEB KOSTER

Tantrums, defiance, and blatant disobedience from your child are behaviors that merit discipline. What is the most effective way to redirect your child's behavior? Is spanking a biblically sanctioned approach to discipline? Many parents wrestle with questions like these as they discern the best way to discipline their child.

## Biblical grounds

When supporting their position, proponents of spanking often cite biblical evidence like [Proverbs 13:24](#), "Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him" or [Proverbs 23:13-14](#), "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol." These biblical verses show us the importance of discipline. Discipline is one of the ways that we show love to our children. We do it because we care enough to confront and redirect our children's bad behavior. These texts make clear that discipline is an essential component of nurturing our children and they show how discipline can guide children to righteousness or at least curtail some destructive behavior. But the Bible does not prescribe spanking as the only way to discipline. So, should we spank? Is spanking the best way to accomplish discipline? And what are the challenges of using spanking as a means of discipline?

## Spanking provides only short-lived benefits

Spanking typically provides immediate results. When we spank a child who threw a toy at a sibling, the child does tend to immediately obey and refrain from throwing the toy again. However, obedience produced by spanking rarely changes a child's behavior over the long haul, because the obedience is motivated by fear, not understanding and remorse. When spanked, a child changes their behavior because they fear being hit again, not because of any internal motivation to change. Spanking may be effective for short-term results where the consequences are high. Swatting a toddler on the backside to keep them from going into traffic or giving a slap on a hand about to touch the hot stove may be effective ways to keep a child safe until they are more capable of understanding danger. If you are only interested in the short-term result there is merit

*"Obedience produced by spanking rarely changes a child's behavior over the long haul."*

in a spanking. However, in the long term, it is important for parents to allow their children to experience the natural consequences of their actions. This creates a link between their bad behavior and the negative consequences and it internally motivates children to change their behavior.

## Spanking can cause confusion

Children who experience natural consequences connect their behaviors with the results of their actions and begin to internalize better choices. In contrast, when parents step in and spank, the child's focus moves off their behavior and onto the parent. Often, children will become angry at a parent for inflicting pain. They lose the connection between their behavior and its consequences because the pain they experience comes from outside of the situation instead of from within it. It is hard for children to see the love behind a spanking; to a child it looks and feels like violence.

*“Children who experience natural consequences connect their behaviors with the results of their actions and begin to internalize better choices.”*

## Spanking can fracture relationships

Spanking can undermine the trust and love in the parent-child relationship and instill distrust and fear. Ephesians 6 instructs children to be obedient, but it also cautions parents not to make children angry and exasperated. If a parent offers empathy for the conse-

*“It is hard for children to see the love behind a spanking; to a child it looks and feels like violence.”*

quences a child must endure then they remain outside of the conflict rather than at the center of it, as when they spank. Other forms of discipline allow parents to be empathetic about the consequences their child will experience. Removing privileges, setting limits, reflecting on the bad choice, and requiring making amends are all options available for parents to redirect behavior. A parent can say “I am sure it is disappointing to lose your computer privileges” or “I know it is no fun to sit on the time-out bench and think about your bad choice.” These expressions of empathy show solidarity with the child and clearly reflects the parent's love and care.

## Spanking can become abusive

Spanking has the potential to evolve into physical abuse. Spanking can too often become an impulsive lashing out of anger by a frustrated parent. Striking a child offers a release of the parent's pent-up anger and it can be easy for self-control to fall away as emotions take over. This can make it difficult for an angry parent to know when to stop. When we spank, we can be tempted to discipline out of rage rather than reason.

## Other forms of discipline are more effective

Discipline is necessary for guiding our children, but not all forms of discipline are equal. It makes sense that we would want to use the most effective means to discipline our children and avoid causing unnecessary harm in the process. Establishing consequences for dis-

obedience is a very effective way to help children make the mental link between their behavior and its effects. Removing privileges as a means of discipline protects the parent-child relationship. When children are warned in advance what the consequences will be, then they begin to recognize the results of their actions when they occur. "If you don't clean up your room, then we will remove some of the toys, so that you don't have such a hard time keeping it clean." "If you can't get your homework assignments turned in, then we will help you clear your calendar to make time for school work." Experiencing these consequences can effectively guide children to make better choices without risking harm to them or to our relationship with them. It is our role as parents to guide our children. "Train up a child in the way he

should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it" ([Proverbs 22:6](#)).

Children will test the limits of what is acceptable or unacceptable to determine when a parent will actually follow through with consequences. It is how they discern their boundaries and discover their place in the world. It is our role as parents to exercise effective discipline to guide children to choose wisely moving forward. So as you decide whether or not to spank, consider the options available and choose the best way to redirect your child's bad behavior. Spanking may be effective in the short term, but remember that our role as parents is to lovingly think long term about how our approach to discipline will empower our children to make good decisions for life! 🔥

# To Yell or Not to Yell?

BY REV. DEB KOSTER

Looking back now, it seems like a trivial thing to lose my cool over. My children had lost the caps to a brand-new pack of markers. They were oblivious to the importance of caps for keeping markers from drying out. I walked into the room to see the color of uncovered markers bleeding into my children's clothes and the carpet under their feet. I did not correct them firmly with authority, instead I just exploded in anger, yelling at top volume. I recall the fear in my children's eyes as I lost my cool. Looking at their frightened faces, I knew that my unrestrained volume had crossed a line. What had caused me to lose it?

## Why we yell

Not all of us had healthy models of communication growing up. Maybe one of your parents yelled constantly or a particular adult in your life, perhaps a teacher or coach, was always quick to rebuke you in anger. Whatever the case, we tend to naturally default back to whatever form of communication was modeled for us when we were young—it's our "normal." The truth is, we tend to emulate our parents' behavior unless we learn differently.

Some parents yell because they see it as their parental right. Too often, I see shining examples of this

parenting approach at the grocery store. That one parent seems determined to demonstrate their authority by modulating their voice to whatever volume gains the obedience of their child. Often, this kind of yelling is anchored in the pride. The parent yells as a way to demand the respect they believe they deserve.

Sometimes parents yell as a way to release emotions. When I responded by yelling at my kids, it was because I was furious. Clothes and carpet were getting damaged and it felt like my children were being disrespectful and negligent with the gift that I had given to them. I was angry, and I wasn't shy about venting that rage at my children. But as I thought about why I had responded with such an angry outburst, I had to be honest with myself that I chose to yell as an act of selfishness. I released my emotions without regard for the discipline, much less the feelings, of the children under my care. Sometimes out of exhaustion and frustration, our selfish nature wins out—but that doesn't make it right.

*"Sometimes out of exhaustion and frustration, our selfish nature wins out—but that doesn't make it right."*

## When is yelling allowed?

Shouting in scripture is most often associated with praise, not rage. In [Psalm 100](#), we read “Shout with joy to the Lord, all the earth,” not “shout with rage at all the earth!” The kind of yelling talked about in scripture is generally related to thanksgiving and worship. Of course, we might raise our voice to warn a child about to do something dangerous. There are certainly instances when someone gives another person a deserved sharp rebuke. But yelling at one another in anger is not a practice that receives blessing from God. We should be firm in redirecting a child who speaks disrespectfully or lashes out in anger. A firm correction can nip bad behavior in the bud, but it must always be spoken in the

*“In Matthew 15:18, Jesus warns about harboring and venting anger...”*

context of love. In [Matthew 15:18](#), Jesus warns about harboring and venting anger, “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.” Our tongues can be dangerous if they are unchecked. And yelling can become a destructive habit, even when it’s not yielding helpful results.

## What if they started it?

Scripture does not give us permission to respond to anger with anger. Scripture encourages us to love those who hurt us and to pray for those who mistreat us ([Matthew 5:44](#)). As much as it depends on us, we are to live in peace with others ([Romans 12:18](#)). Rather than responding with hostility and yelling, God calls us to show love even to those whose behavior disappoints us. This includes, first and foremost, our children. Matthew 5 makes it clear that we are not to retaliate, but instead go the extra mile in demonstrating grace.

## How does Scripture recommend we respond?

Scripture has a lot to say about how we should respond to others. Regarding our volume, Scripture recommends we respond by default with a quiet or soft answer. [Proverbs 15:1](#) says “a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Having a calm answer requires that we respond thoughtfully instead of simply reacting in the moment. Scripture allows for anger—some injustices deserve our anger—but God instructs us to not sin when we get angry ([Ephesians 4:26](#)). Anger can easily lead us into trouble if we let it go unchecked.

Scripture also speaks to the rate of our response. “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God” ([James 1:19-20](#)).

Patience and self-control are gifts of the Holy Spirit that God longs to cultivate in our lives; these gifts are the opposite of short-temperedness. Further, we are warned in [James 4](#) about the damage that the tongue is capable of inflicting when used in anger. These warnings should make us pause and think; to seek the Spirit’s guidance in order to respond wisely.

## The effectiveness of yelling

My children’s behavior deserved discipline, but my choice to yell was an ineffective way to redirect their behavior. I made them afraid, but I did not help them find the marker caps or help them understand the importance of caring for their things. Scripture tells parents not to exasperate their children ([Ephesians 6:4](#)). I am sure that my anger exasperated my children that day as much as their behavior exasperated me. My yelling replaced love with fear as the central emotion of my children experienced from me in that moment. Repeated yelling can erode the parent-child relationship altogether because relationship can’t thrive on a foun-

*“My yelling replaced love with fear as the central emotion of my children experienced from me in that moment.”*

dition of fear and anger. Love in contrast builds a solid foundation for the future and protects the relationship that is necessary for effective parenting and discipline.

## Find your voice

Giving up yelling doesn't mean you should be passive or timid in your parenting. Any episode of the “Supernanny” TV show will point out the importance of being clear and direct with our children and following through with consequences. Parents are given authority by God to speak into their children's lives and guide them toward making wise decisions. However, we should speak the truth that our children need to hear within the context of love ([Ephesians 4:15](#)) because, in the context of love, our words can actually be heard and understood. We all have days when we lose our patience and fall short of the grace that God calls us to model. Out of exhaustion and exasperation we lose self-control, but God forgives us when we fall short, and his spirit equips us to start again. 🔥



# Establishing Discipline in a Blended Family Home

BY REV. DEB KOSTER

When blended families come together, they face unique challenges. One U.S. study showed the divorce rate among blended families to be 60-75%, well above the 45% national average. In many ways this reflects the fact that blended families are not starting fresh but they are forced to build from the brokenness that preceded their marriage. Couples entering a second or third marriage often have unfinished business, hurt and pain brought in from previous relationships. The added stress of blending a new family undoubtedly impacts the high divorce rate among blended family couples as well.

When families blend into a new one, they must mesh different sets of traditions and parenting styles, and this often happens under a pressure cooker of emotions. While attempting to build a better future, many still grieve past losses. Marriage is tricky by itself; it is exponentially more difficult when trying to build relationships with and lovingly co-parent new children. The transition will take time and will likely be fraught with missteps and mistakes, but here are five tips to help you navigate parenting in blended families:

## 1. Establish a united front and work together

As in any family, there needs to be excellent communication between parents. When you disagree, do so behind closed doors, not in front of the kids. Parents should always support each other in front of the kids. Make sure to always follow through with the consequences you have established together for your children. When one parent rescues their child from discipline rather than implementing the consequences that you as co-parents have established together, it can undermine both your relationship with your spouse and the child.

## 2. Have the biological parent take the lead in discipline

Children will more readily accept rules established and reinforced by the biological parent because they already have an established loving relationship with them. It is difficult to make and

enforce rules outside the context of a relationship. The step-parent should be empowered to act as parent and intervene when needed, but as much as possible allow the biological parent to take the lead with discipline. Having the biological parent handle discipline will limit the child's ability to vilify the step-parent as the bad guy. It is also important to have the step-parent take time to invest in the children and their interests so that trust can be built. Building a loving relationship with step children will allow step-parents to play a more active role in parenting moving forward.

However, having the biological parent lead in discipline doesn't mean that step-parents are not involved. Biological parents need to be aware of their own biases. Often, biological parents can have an unhealthy, enmeshed relationship with their children. Parents who are too close to their kids can endanger their marriage by supporting their kids over their spouse. So, make sure to invite your spouse into the discipline discussion. While you may be the one to communicate and enforce discipline with your children, your spouse is there to give you both advice and support.

### 3. Be consistent in discipline

Parents need to be on the same page about how they are going to handle discipline before they attempt to blend their families. Discipline should be discussed prior to entering into a relationship together in order to assure that you have compatible parenting philosophies. If one parent is strict and the other is a pushover, work out a compromise so that all of the children have the consistency they need to feel secure. Establish, clearly communicate, and enforce age appropriate rules for all of the kids in your family. If the rules are always changing, children never know where they stand, and this can produce anxiety. Consistently communicated and enforced boundaries

are particularly important for children traveling between homes.

### 4. Prayer is essential

Prayer is always an essential ingredient in any successful relationship. Prayer is a powerful tool for impacting our families. Prayer helps us turn over to God the things that we are unable to change. God can soften hearts, build bridges, and impact things outside of our control. We free ourselves when we give God control. Couples who pray together significantly reduce their risk of divorce. Praying together for your children will unite your heart with that of your spouse. We are blessed when we can share the concerns on our hearts with God and with one another.

### 5. Seek support

Seeking support from a trained counselor can help you manage the unique challenges found in blended families. Caring for the building of new bonds, grieving the past losses, and helping children navigate life between two homes can be eased with the resources of a trained guide. Couples should seek support early on in the relationship before unhealthy patterns are burned into the fibers of the relationship. Everyone in a blended family enters the marriage with baggage from previous relationships and would benefit from professional guidance. Listen to your children and step-children's concerns about the new family structure. [SmartStepfamilies.com](http://SmartStepfamilies.com) has great resources for couples or small groups to read together and find encouragement for the journey.

Many of the rules for parenting in a blended family are essentially the same as in any other family (unity, consistency, prayer, support), but the complexity of blended relationships require extra care, intentionality, and thoughtful implementation. 🔥

# 5 Don'ts of Family Rule Making

BY KIM SULLIVAN

You've set a curfew for your teenage daughter and every time she goes out she seems to have a wonderful excuse as to why she is late. You've set a dating standard for your home, and yet your son seems to want to debate why it doesn't apply to his current situation. Perhaps you have an adult child living at home who challenges your decision to make church attendance a requirement for living in your home. Whatever the case may be, it seems like children will challenge standards, whether big or small, almost before you are able to set them. How can we navigate this inevitable parenting challenge and how do we know if and when we should reassess our family rules?

## 1. Don't communicate standards hastily

If, in the moment, we are constantly setting new rules or drastically changing them, our families won't take us seriously when we set a new standard. Kids will think, "I'll wait and see if this blows over," or "If I apply some pressure on this standard, it will surely break." To avoid this, set aside time to pray with your spouse and talk to peers and those with experience regarding family rules before coming to a determination of what is right for your household. Try to anticipate objections that your

*"When we wait on God for an appointed time, we can clearly communicate our family rules with meekness, gentleness, and kindness."*

children might present when you communicate the standard. This way, you will be prepared to calmly and objectively respond to any arguments rather than reacting. More often than not, when I've blurted out a standard without thinking about how best to communicate it, I've come across as judgmental and arrogant. However, when we wait on God for an appointed time, we can clearly communicate our family rules with meekness, gentleness, and kindness. [Psalm 25:9](#) reminds, "He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way."

## 2. Don't keep your kids in the dark

Whenever possible, give your children a reason for why you are establishing a new standard in

*“By providing the facts that led you to your decision, you are teaching them how to set standards for their own lives and future families.”*

your homes. Explaining why the rule is necessary is essential to your family. This is especially true if you have tweens, teens, and college-aged children. By providing the facts that led you to your decision, you are teaching them how to set standards for their own lives and future families. Your children may not agree with your reasoning, but they will know that your rule comes from a place of love and care for them.

### 3. Don't be surprised when they resist

“Rules are made to be broken,” so the popular adage goes. Certain personalities resist standards and rules just because they exist. Just as it is wise for you to wait for the proper time and way to communicate, it is wise for you to allow your kids time to react negatively before you react to them. Flesh doesn't like to be told what to do. Remember, you've already taken some time to reflect on the standard, so allow them a little time to digest it. This does not mean you are not to enforce the new rule, but rather give them time to work on their attitude about it.

### 4. Don't be moved by your kids' reactions

Your children may be upset about your decision for some time, but that doesn't make your standard incorrect. Assuming you've prayed and sought godly counsel, it is unlikely that you've made a wrong choice. Parents love to please their children. However, pleasing our children isn't our mandate. In fact, children pleasing their parents is a more biblical response. You are called to lead and that can make you unpopular at times. In the end, you must walk in the confidence that God is directing you as the parent to lead your family on a godly path. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” ([Proverbs 3:5-6](#)).

### 5. Don't give up, stand firm

Your children, and those around you, are watching to see if you will stand by your convictions. The world is crying out for those who live by what they say they believe. In the end, your children will respect you for your resolve. “If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace” ([Exodus 18:23](#), NIV).

Setting and living by standards is a powerful way to share your convictions with your family. Whether they end up agreeing with those convictions and standards or not, the respect and admiration they will eventually have for you—for sticking to your guns—will benefit all. 🔥

# When Your Child Rebels

BY KIM SULLIVAN

Every parent fears the moment when their young adult child makes a life choice completely contrary to the standards you have raised them to acknowledge. Maybe they've moved in with someone they've only recently started dating or they declare that they are officially abandoning their faith and are leaving the Church. It can often feel like your children are flaunting their decision at every opportunity. You may feel hurt and betrayed, and maybe even a little foolish. How would Christ want you to respond?

For whatever reason, it seems common that our children test our reactions to situations. Will we lose our cool? Turn our backs on them? Will we ignore confrontation and choose our relationship with them even over the standards we have set for our family? Here are some thoughts on how to react when your child makes a poor choice.

## Lead with love

Many times our kids either consciously or subconsciously push our buttons just to see how we will react. If they fear losing you, they may unconsciously try to push you away before you get the chance to leave them. Getting angry only allows them to justify their behavior and feeds into their feelings that you don't

understand what they are going through. So keep calm and promise you will always love them.

This isn't to say that you are not allowed to have strong emotions over the decisions they may make. On the contrary, Jesus teaches us about the shepherd whose heart so broke for his one lost sheep that he left the other ninety-nine to retrieve him. Even though the frightened and confused sheep may try to bite or kick the rescuing hand, love compels the shepherd to press on. Further, the shepherd isn't afraid to use his staff to draw a lost lamb back to the fold. Firm confrontation may very well be necessary in situations like this, but it must be love that motivates every conversation and consequence, not anger. It is the love of God, not the anger of others that draws all people to repent.

*"It is the love of God, not the anger of others that draws all people to repent."*

## Set limits

There may be situations and times when we have to momentarily change our fellowship with our children. Although our relationship with our Heavenly Father is

not altered by our sin, our fellowship can be. For instance, if an adult child is living completely recklessly and bringing total disorder to a family's home, you may have to ask them to leave if they are not compliant with the law of the land (both literally and figuratively!). When limits are set in love the child has the opportunity to observe your priorities, rather than your rejection, and recognize how your priorities are grounded in your relationship with Christ.

## Stand by your beliefs

There is a relationship in our life that is even more important than our relationship with our children, our relationship with our Heavenly Father. The world around us is watching our reaction to see if we really believe what we say that we believe, and this includes our children. Standing by our beliefs, even while those we love most challenge those beliefs, speaks loud and clear about our commitment to our Heavenly Father. After all, how can we expect our children to obey or honor our advice, against that of their peers, if we change our standards

*“How can we expect our children to obey or honor our advice, against that of their peers, if we change our standards in order to avoid confronting them?”*

in order to avoid confronting them? If we are unwilling to obey God, how can we expect them to resist the pressures of society? [Romans 12:2](#) states that we are not to conform to this world. What better way to walk that out before our family than to face their opposition to biblical standards?

## Anoint them in prayer

[James 5:16](#) tells us that the prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective. There is precious little influence that we can have over another person's choices, but we can team up with God in prayer. Our God loves our child even more than we do. He can do beyond what we could ask or imagine. Turn every anxiety for your child into a prayer for their relationship with their Heavenly Father. Pray God's promises over your child and hold God accountable to fulfill them. Trust that God who began a good work in them will carry it on to completion!

The reality is that everyone is looking for something to live for, something that is worth dying for. If we can not even risk relationships with our loved ones in order to remain faithful to God and his requirements, than we are not living what we say we believe. The Holy Spirit leads us as parents, and gives us wisdom and peace when family storms hit. Remain faithful to him and loving in your relationship with your child. You may be the only glimpse of Christ they see, so respond with his grace. In doing so, you will be serving your family to the highest degree. 🔥



# Recommended Parenting Books

**1, 2, 3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2-12**, by Thomas Phelan.

Helps parents to set limits around bad behavior and offers a concise method for following through with appropriate consequences.

**Parenting with Love and Logic: Teaching Children Responsibility**, by Foster W. Cline.

Presents the importance of children experiencing the natural consequences of behavior to cultivate obedience.

**Effective Parenting in a Defective World: How to Raise Children Who Stand out from the Crowd**, by Chip Ingram.

A helpful tool for navigating the challenges of discipline to cultivate healthier behavior.

**Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids**, by Kara Powell and Chap Clark.

An insightful book with guidance for mentoring relationships to water seeds of faith in your child.

**Have a New Kid by Friday: How to Change Your Child's Attitude, Behavior & Character in 5 Days**, by Kevin Leman.

Help to unlearn bad behaviors by applying consistent limits and encouraging good behavior.

**Praying Circles Around your Children**, by Mark Batterson.

A guide for praying for your children to make wise choices related to fundamental life lessons and to claim God and his promises.

**Boundaries with Kids: When to Say Yes, When to Say No, to Help Your Children Gain Control of Their Lives**, by

John Townsend.

Highlights how boundaries show us what we can control, who we are, and how to empathize for the struggles of others.

**Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family**, by Paul David Tripp.

Encouragement that our kids belong to God more than they do us and he loves them perfectly.

**Six Ways to Keep the "Little" in Your Girl: Guiding Your Daughter from Her Tweens to Her Teens**, by Dannah Gresh.

Helps moms raise daughters who are confident, grace-filled, and strong in faith.

**Six Ways to Keep the Good in Your Boy: Guiding Your Son from His Tweens to His Teens**, by Dannah Gresh.

Encouragement for moms of boys to help sons grow up honest and responsible.



# Authors



**Rev. Deb Koster**

Deb Koster is a producer, writer, and speaker for Family Fire. After over 20 years as a Registered Nurse, she followed her passion for family ministry and completed a Master of Divinity degree. She has since been ordained as a pastor in the Christian Reformed Church. Deb and her husband, Steven, enjoy leading marriage retreats and family seminars to encourage people in their most intimate relationships. Deb is the mother of three amazing young adults, and lives with Steven in Grand Rapids, MI.



**Kim Sullivan**

Kim Sullivan is the executive director of Love INC of Tinley Park, IL, a non-profit service organization that brings together local churches, volunteers, and community agencies to help people in need. Kim believes that her relationship with Christ is the most important thing in her life. Jesus is all that matters and she is very grateful to be His girl. Kim loves finding the extraordinary in the ordinary and finding lessons in unexpected places. Kim has been married to Steve, her best friend and biggest supporter, since 2000 and together they have reared a happy blended household of five.



**Rev. Dr. Rob Toornstra**

Rob Toornstra has pastored a church in Salem Oregon for the past ten years. He has been married to Amy for fifteen years, and together, they are enjoying the adventure of raising two girls and one boy. For fun, Rob enjoys cooking, reading, aviation, and geocaching. He is the author of "Naked and Unashamed: How the Good News of Jesus Transforms Intimacy" (Doulos, 2014).



**Dr. Robert J Ritzema,  
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Bob Ritzema is a clinical psychologist, having received his doctorate from Kent State University. He has worked for over 25 years as a psychotherapist and more than 10 years as a college professor. He retired from Methodist University in 2012 to return to his hometown of Grand Rapids, Michigan in order to assist his parents. He currently works part-time at Psychology Associates of Grand Rapids and worships at Monroe Community Church. He has two sons and three grandchildren.



## About Family Fire

*Family Fire* is a Christian ministry committed to fanning the flames of the Holy Spirit in our family relationships. *Family Fire* hosts an active Facebook community ([facebook.com/familyfire](https://www.facebook.com/familyfire)) and offers a library of deeper resources on our website ([familyfire.com](https://www.familyfire.com)). We also offer live teaching events such as marriage and parenting retreats. Together we explore spiritual, emotional, and physical intimacy and how we should live as members of a Spirit-fed family.

Romans 8:14-17 tells us, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”



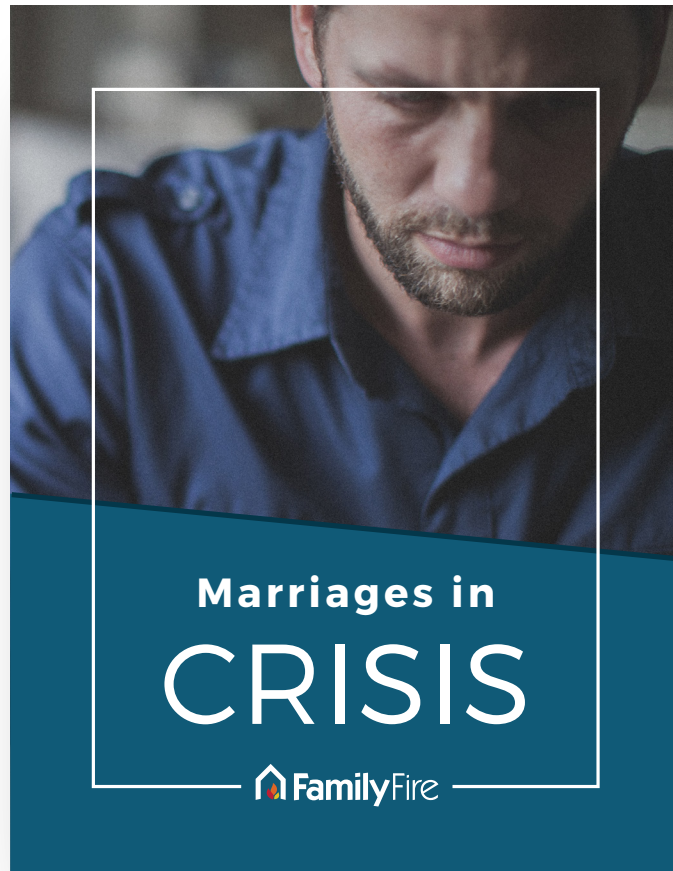
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