

CHAPTER 1

To Train Up a Child

SWITCH YOUR KIDS

When you tell some parents they need to switch their children, they respond, “I would if I could find someone willing to trade.” I have had children in my house that were enough to give an electric wheat grinder a nervous breakdown. Their parents looked like escapees from a WWII Polish boxcar. Another hour with those kids and I would have been searching the yellow pages for discount vasectomies. While we tried to sit and talk, the children were constantly running in and out of doors, complaining of ill treatment from the others, begging to go or stay or eat, or demanding a toy that another child would not relinquish. The mother had to continually jump up and rescue some breakable object. She said, “No,” six hundred sixty-six times in the space of two hours. She spanked each child two or three times—usually with her hand on top of a diaper. Other than misaligning the child’s spine, it seemed to have had no effect.

When we speak of consistently rewarding every transgression with a switching (not a karate chop to the lower backbone), some mothers can only see themselves further brutalizing children for whom it will do no good. Their discipline is just “laying down a field of fire” to give themselves sufficient cover to get through to the next task. They have no hope of conquering the child’s will. They just desire to create enough diversion to accomplish their own mission.

Another mother walked into my house with her little ones and sat down to talk. She said to them, “Go out in the sunroom and play, and don’t bother Mama unless you need something.” For the next two hours we were not even aware the children were present—except when a little one came in holding herself saying, “Pee-pee, Mama.” They played together well, resolved their own conflicts, and didn’t expect attention when one of the girls turned the rocking horse over and got a knot on her head. They didn’t run in and out—they were told not to.

This mother did not spank her children while at my house, and

she did not need to rebuke them. She looked rested. When she called the children to go home, one asked, “Mama, can I stay and play with Shoshanna?” Mother answered, “No, not today. We have work to do at home.” As he lifted his arms, his mother picked him up. Hugging his mother’s neck, he said, “I love you, Mama.”

This young mother said to me, “My children want to please me. They try so hard to do everything I say. We have such fun together.” She is looking forward to having more children. They are the joy of her life.

By the grace of God and through the simple, Biblical principles found in these pages, with determination and an open heart, this mother has trained up children that bring her joy and honor.

OBEDIENCE TRAINING

Training does not necessarily require that the trainee be capable of reason; even mice and rats can be trained to respond to stimuli. Careful training can make a dog perfectly obedient. If a seeing-eye dog can be trained to reliably lead a blind man through the obstacles of a city street, shouldn’t a parent expect more out of an intelligent child? A dog can be trained not to touch a tasty morsel laid in front of him. Can’t a child be trained not to touch? A dog can be trained to come, stay, sit, be quiet, or fetch upon command. You may not have trained your dog that well, yet every day someone accomplishes it on the dumbest of mutts. Even a clumsy teenager can be trained to be an effective trainer in a dog obedience school.

If you wait until your dog is displaying unacceptable behavior before you rebuke (or kick) him, you will have a foot-shy mutt that is always sulking around to see what he can get away with before being screamed at. Where there is an absence of training, you can no more rebuke and whip a child into acceptable behavior than you can the family dog. No amount of discipline can make up for a lack of training.

Proper training always works with every child. To neglect training is to create miserable circumstances for you and your child. Out of ignorance many have bypassed training and expected discipline alone to effect proper behavior. It hasn’t worked.

“TENNN—HUTT!!”

When headstrong young men join the military, the first thing they are taught is to stand still. The many hours of close-order-drill are to teach and reinforce submission of the will. “Attention!” pronounced,

“TENNN—HUTT!!” is the beginning of all maneuvers. Just think of the relief that it would bring if by one command you could gain the absolute, concentrated attention of all your children. A sergeant can call his men to attention and then ignore them, without explanation, and they will continue to stand frozen in that position until they fall out unconscious. The maneuvers “Right flank, Left flank, Companeeey—Halt” have no value in war except that they condition the men to instant, unquestioning obedience.

As in the military, all maneuvers in the home begin with a call to attention. Three-fourths of all home discipline problems would be solved if you could instantly gain your child’s silence and unmoving attention. “TO THE REAR—MARCH” translated into family language would be: “Leave the room,” or, “Go to bed.” Without question they would turn and go. This is normal in the well-trained family.

“WHOA, HORSE”

We live in a horse and buggy community where someone is always training a new horse. When you get into a buggy to go down a narrow, winding, state highway filled with eighteen-wheelers and logging trucks, you must have a totally submissive horse. You cannot depend on whipping him into submission. One mistake and the young men will again be making several new pine boxes and digging six-foot deep holes in the orchard.

A horse is first trained to stand still and submit to being caught and handled. He must not fear the bridle or harness. He must stand still while thirteen children step in front of the iron wheels to climb into the buggy. When stopped at the end of a driveway, waiting for the traffic to clear, he must not exercise his will to step out in front of eighty thousand pounds of speeding truck.

Horse training involves preparing the horse to respond correctly in all future situations to which he will be exposed. This training is done in a controlled environment where circumstances are created to test and condition the horse’s responses. This is done by taking him through various paces. To train him to stop, as you hold the bridle and lead the horse, you say, “Whoa,” and then stop. Since you have a tight hold on the bridle, he must stop. After just a few times, the horse will stop at just your command.

The trainer establishes the tone of voice at which the horse is to respond. If you speak in a normal tone the horse will obey. If you

scream “Whoa!!” then in the future the horse will not stop unless the command is screamed the same way. One such farmer trained his horses with a wild, frantic bellow. Most of his neighbors, who speak quietly to their horses, find it difficult to control his horses because of their inability to raise their voices in vehemence.

SPEAK TO ME ONLY

I was logging with a fifteen-hundred-pound mule that sometimes wanted to run away with the log. In moments of stress (actually I was panic stricken), I found myself frantically YELLING commands. The owner would patiently caution me, “Speak quietly and calmly or he will pay no attention.” I never did learn the art of calmly saying, “Whoa” to a runaway mule pulling a twenty-five foot, white oak log with my foot hung in the trace chain. The point to remember is that animals learn to identify not only the sound but also the tone.

If you raise your voice when giving a command to your child, he will learn to associate your tone and sound level with your intention. If you have trained him to respond to a bellow, don’t blame him if he ignores your first thirteen “suggestions” while waiting for your fevered pitch to reach the point where he interprets it to be a real command.

TRAINING, NOT DISCIPLINE

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it (Prov. 22:6).” Train up—not beat up. Train up—not discipline up. Train up—not educate up. Train up—not “positive affirmation” up. Training is the most often missed element in child rearing. A child needs more than “obedience training,” but without it discipline is insufficient.

Parents should not wait until their child’s behavior becomes unacceptable before they commence training—which would be discipline. Training is not discipline. Discipline is a part of training but is insufficient in itself to effect proper behavior. Training is the conditioning of the child’s mind before the crisis arises. It is preparation for future, instant, unquestioning obedience. An athlete trains before he competes. Animals, including wild ones, are conditioned to respond to the trainer’s voice command.

The frustration parents experience results from their failure to train. Their problem is not “bad” children, just bad training. The “strong willed,” the hyperactive, the highly intelligent, and the easily bored all need training, and training is effective on all.

Understand, at this point we are not talking about producing godly children, just happy and obedient children. The principles for training young children to instantly obey can be applied by non-Christians as well as Christians. As children get older, the character and teaching of the trainer plays a more significant role.

TRAINING NOT TO TOUCH

There is a lot of satisfaction to be gained in training up a child. It is easy, yet challenging. When my children were able to crawl (in the case of one, roll) around the room, I set up training sessions.

Try it yourself. Place an appealing object where they can reach it, maybe in a “No-No” corner or on the apple juice table (another name for the coffee table). When they spy it and make a dive for it, in a calm voice say, “No, don’t touch that.” Since they are already familiar with the word “No,” they will pause, look at you in wonder and then turn around and grab it. Switch their hand once and simultaneously say, “No.” Remember, you are not disciplining, you are training. One spat with a little switch is enough. They will again pull back their hand and consider the relationship between the object, their desire, the command, and the little reinforcing pain. It may take several times, but if you are consistent, they will learn to consistently obey, even in your absence.

PLANT YOUR TREE IN THE MIDST OF THE GARDEN

When God wanted to “train” his first two children not to touch, He did not place the forbidden object out of their reach. Instead, He placed the “*tree of knowledge of good and evil*” in the “*midst of the garden (Gen.3:3)*.” Since it was in the middle of the garden, they would be exposed to its temptation more often. God’s purpose was not to save the tree, but rather, to train the couple.

Note the name of the tree was not just “knowledge of evil,” but, “*knowledge of good and evil*.” By exercising their wills not to eat, they would have learned the meaning of “*good*” as well as “*evil*.” Eating the tree was not the only way in which they could come to knowledge of good and evil, but it was a forbidden shortcut.

By placing a forbidden object within reach of the children, and then enforcing your command to not touch it, every time the children pass the ‘No-No’ object (their “tree of knowledge of good and evil”), they are gaining knowledge of **good and evil** from the standpoint of an overcomer. As with Adam and Eve in the garden, the object and the touching of it is, in itself, of no consequence; but the attachment of a

command to it makes it a moral “factory” where character is produced. By your enforcement, your children are learning about moral government, duty, responsibility, and, in the event of failure, accountability, rewards, and punishment. In the here and now, they are also learning not to touch, which makes a child’s social life a lot more pleasant.

It just takes a few minutes to train a child not to touch a given object. Most children can be brought into complete and joyous subjection in just three days. Thereafter, if you continue to be faithful, the children will remain happy and obedient. By obedient, I mean you will never need to tell them twice. If you expect to receive instant obedience, and you train them to that end, you will be successful. It will take extra time to train, but once the children are in general subjection, the time saved will be extraordinary. Some people say, “Child-proof your home.” I say, “Home-proof your child.”

TOUCHY SITUATIONS

Have you ever been the victim of tiny, inquisitive hands? A very young child, not yet walking, is keen on wanting to grab any object of interest. There is no fault in this, but sometimes it can be annoying. When you are holding a baby and he keeps pulling off your glasses, you cannot explain to him the impropriety of such socially crude behavior. The little tot is not yet moved by fear of rejection. So, do you try to restrain him where he can’t get to your face? No, you train him not to touch. Once you train an infant to respond to the command “No,” then you will have control in every area where you can give a command.

Set up training situations. For example, using your glasses as bait, place the child where he can easily reach them. Look him squarely in the eye. When he reaches out to grab them, don’t pull back; don’t defend yourself. Calmly say, “No.” If anything, lower your voice; don’t raise it. Don’t sound more serious than usual. Remember you are establishing a vocal pattern to be used the rest of his youth. If he reaches out to touch your glasses, again say, “No,” and accompany your command with minor pain. He will pull his hand back and try to comprehend the association of grabbing the glasses with the pain. (I usually just thumped their little hand with my index finger. I have never known a child to cry from this. They don’t even know that I did it. They think that it was the glasses, or perhaps the “No” itself that caused their pain.) Inevitably, he will return to the bait to test his new theory. Sure enough, the glasses again cause pain and the pain is accompanied with a quiet, little “No.” It may take one or two more tries for him to give up his

career as glasses snatcher, but he will.

Through this process, the child will associate the pain with the word “No.” There comes a time when your word alone is sufficient to gain obedience.

Through this kind of early training you can stop him from assaulting his mother with a bottle held by the nipple. The same holds true for hair and beard pulling. You name it; the infant can be trained to obey. Do you want to wrestle with him through his entire youth, nagging him into compliance, threatening, placing things out of reach, fearing what he might get into next? Wouldn’t it be better to take a little time to train him? If nothing else, training will result in saving you time.

I know a mother who must call a baby-sitter every time she takes a shower. You should be able to take a nap and expect to find the house in order when you awake.

OBEDIENCE TRAINING—BITING BABIES

One particularly painful experience of nursing mothers is the biting baby. My wife did not waste time finding a cure. When the baby bit, she pulled hair (an alternative has to be sought for bald-headed babies). Understand, the baby is not being punished, just conditioned. A baby learns not to stick his finger in his eyes or bite his tongue through the negative associations accompanying it. It requires no understanding or reasoning. Somewhere in the brain, that information is unconsciously stored. After biting two or three times, and experiencing pain in association with each bite, the child programs that information away for his own comfort. The biting habit is cured before it starts. This is not discipline. It is obedience training.

OBEDIENCE TRAINING—BOWLS AND BABIES

The mother clumsily holds her cereal bowl at arm’s length as she wrestles her infant for supremacy. When she places the bowl out of the baby’s reach, he is taught that it is off limits only if it is out of reach. To train him, place the bowl within easy reach. When he reaches for it, say, “No,” and thump his hand. He will pull his hand back, momentarily look alarmed, and then reach again. Repeat the action of saying, “No” in a calm voice, and thump his hand. After several times, you will be able to eat in peace.

After several occasions of responding to a thump and the word “No,” the voice command alone soon becomes sufficient to direct the

child's behavior. Again, keep in mind, the baby is not being punished, just conditioned. The thump is not a substitute rod. It is reinforcement to obedience training.

COME WHEN I CALL YOU

One father tells of his training sessions with each new toddler. He sets aside an evening for "booty" camp, which is a boot camp for toddlers. The child of ten to twelve months is left alone to become deeply interested in a toy or some delightful object. From across the room or just inside another room, the father calls the child. If the child ignores the call, the father goes to him and explains the necessity of immediately coming when called, and then leads him through the steps of obedience by walking him over to the place from which he was called.

He is returned to the toy and left alone long enough to again become engrossed. The father calls again. If the child ignores the call, the father gives additional explanation and a repeat of the practiced walk. The parent, having assured himself that the child understands what is expected of him, goes back to call again. This time if the child does not respond immediately, the father administers one or two swats with a switch and then continues the exercise until the child readily responds to his summons. Thereafter, until the child leaves home, the parent can expect the child to drop everything and come when called. As long as parents remain consistent, the child will consistently obey. This "obedience training" is conducted with quiet patience. The spanking is not punishment. It is to give weight to your words.

NEVER TOO YOUNG TO TRAIN

A newborn soon needs training. Parents that put off training until their child is old enough to discuss issues or receive explanations will find he has become a terror long before he understands the meaning of the word.

As a mother attempts to lower her child into the crib, he stiffens, takes a deep breath, and bellows. The battle for control has begun in earnest. Someone is going to be conditioned. Either the tenderhearted mother will cave in to the child's self-centered demands (training the child to get his way by crying) or he will be allowed to cry (thus learning that crying is counterproductive). Crying because of genuine physical need is the infant's only voice to the outside world, but crying in order to manipulate others into constant servitude should never be

rewarded. Otherwise, you will reinforce the child's growing self-centeredness, which will eventually become socially intolerable.

STEPS TO OBEDIENCE

One of our girls, who developed mobility early, had a fascination with crawling up stairs. At five months she was too unknowing to be punished for disobedience. But for her own good we attempted to train her not to climb the stairs by coordinating the voice command of "No" with little spats on her bare legs. The switch was a twelve-inch long, one-eighth-inch diameter sprig from a willow tree.

Such was her fascination with climbing, that she continued to climb, ignoring the spankings. Spanking is supposed to work, but it seemed that at her young age her little brain couldn't maintain the association. So I laid the switch on the bottom step. We later observed her crawl to the stairs and start the ascent, only to halt at the first step and stare at the switch. She backed off and never again attempted to climb the stairs, even after the switch was removed.

EXCESSIVE DISCIPLINE

Disciplinary actions can become excessive and oppressive if you set aside the tool of training and depend on discipline alone to do the training. I observed a proud, stern father, ruling his children with a firm hand, and making sure everyone knew it. His rod was swift to fall, especially in the presence of company. His children trembled in his presence, fearing to incur his displeasure. I wondered why, if he was so firm and faithful to gain obedience, he had not achieved it before entering the public arena. I was impressed, but not in the way he hoped.

Except where the very smallest children are concerned, training at home almost entirely eliminates the need for public discipline. Yet, should the need arise in public, be discreet with your discipline and then go home and train so that you will not be placed in that difficult situation again.

TRAINING THE ORNERY AMISH BOY

As I sat talking with a local Amish fellow, a typical child training session developed. The twelve-month-old boy, sitting on his father's lap, suddenly developed a compulsion to slide to the floor. Due to the cold floor, the father directed the child to stay in his lap. The child stiffened and threw his arms up to lessen the father's grip and facilitate his slide to the floor. The father spoke to him in the German language

(which I did not understand) and firmly placed him back in the sitting position. The child made dissenting noises and continued his attempt to dismount his father's lap. The father then spanked the child and spoke what I assumed to be reproofing words. Seeing his mother across the room, the child began to cry and reach for her. This was understandable in any language. It was obvious that the child felt there would be more liberty with his mother.

At this point, I became highly interested in the proceedings. The child was attempting to go around the chain of command. Most fathers would have been glad to pass the troublesome child to his mother. If the child had been permitted to initiate the transfer, he would have been the one doing the training, not the parents. Mothers often run to their children in this situation, because they crave the gratification of being needed. But this mother was more concerned for her child's training than for her own sentiment. She appeared not to hear the child's plea.

The father then turned the child to face away from his mother. The determined fellow immediately understood that the battle lines had been drawn. He expressed his will to dominate by throwing his leg back over to the other side to face his mother. The father spanked the leg the child turned toward his mother and again spoke to him.

Now the battle was in full array. Someone was going to submit his will to the other. Either the father would confirm that this one-year-old could rule his parents, or the parents would confirm their authority. Everyone's happiness was at stake—as well as the soul of the child. The father was wise enough to know this was a test of authority. This episode had crossed over from “obedience training” to “discipline for attitude.”

During the following forty-five minutes, the child shifted his legs fifteen times, and received a spanking each time. The father was as calm as a lazy porch swing on a Sunday afternoon. There was no hastiness or anger in his response. He did not take the disobedience personally. He had trained many horses and mules and knew the value of patient perseverance. In the end, the twelve-month-old submitted his will to his father, sat as he was placed, and became content—even cheerful.

Some will say, “But I couldn't take it emotionally.” Sometimes it is difficult and trying to set aside your feelings for the sake of child training. It does involve emotional sacrifice. Yet, what is love but giv-

ing? When we know it will work to the temporal and eternal good of the child, it is a joy instead of a sacrifice.

If you know yourself to be angry or impatient, you may be carrying guilt that prevents you from being aggressive in disciplining your child. You may fear that your discipline is an act of your ego to dominate. You must deal with your own impurities for the sake of the child, for if he doesn't receive consistent and forceful training, he will greatly suffer.

BE ASSURED OF TWO THINGS

First, almost every small child will have at least one time in his young life when he will rebel against authority and take hold of the reins. This stubbornness is profound—amazing—a wonder that one so young could be so dedicated and persevering in rebellion. It is the kind of determination you would expect to find in a hardened revolutionary facing enemy indoctrination classes. Parents that are trained to expect it, and are prepared to persevere, will nonetheless stand in awe at the strength of the small child's will.

Second, if you are consistent in training, this attempt at total dominance will come only once in a child's life. If you win the confrontation, the child wins at the game of character development. If you weaken and allow the child to dominate, the child loses everything but his will to dominate. You must persevere for the sake of the child.

The cat that is prevented from coming into the house most of the time, but occasionally breaks through the barrier, will take the occasional success as impetus to always try to get in. However, if he is consistently kept out (100% of the time), he will lose the will to come in, even when the door is left open. You may kick him, slam the door on his tail, and throw him sixty feet, but if you occasionally allow him to stay in long enough to eat scraps off the floor or sleep on the couch, he will forever take the risk of running the gauntlet to get in. Your abuse may make him sufficiently wary to obey while you remain on guard, but he will still bolt through the door when he sees the opportunity.

On the other hand, dogs can be trained either to come in or stay out on command. The key again is consistency. If the dog learns through conditioning (consistent behavior on the part of the trainer) that he will never be allowed to violate his master's command, he will always obey. If parents carefully and consistently train up their children, their performance will be superior to that of a well-trained, seeing-eye dog.

NEGATIVE TRAINING

How many times have you observed children in the grocery store arena? A devious little kid sits up in the command seat of the shopping cart exercising his “childhood rights” to unlimited self-indulgence. The parent, fearfully but hopelessly, steers around the tempting “trees of knowledge of good and evil.” Too late! The child spies the object of his unbridled lust. The battle is on. The child will either get what he wants or make his parent miserable. Either way, he conquers.

PURCHASED COMPLIANCE

One father proudly told of how he fearlessly overcame by promising the child ice cream if he would only wait until they left the store. Such compromises will only affirm the child in his commitment to terrorist tactics. You are not gaining control of the child; he is gaining control of you. All children are trained, some carelessly or negligently, and some, with varied degrees of forethought. All parental responses are conditioning the child’s behavior, and are, therefore, training.

Parents who purchase compliance through promise of reward are turning their child into a racketeer, paid for protection. The child becomes the Mafia or union boss, and you take the role of intimidated businessman. If you are bargaining with a terrorist for one more day’s reprieve from anguish, may you then strike a favorable deal, but if you are training up a child, you need to reconsider your methods. Allowing yourself to be intimidated into compromise will turn your child into a psychological bully.

DID YOU HEAR WHAT I SAID?

I observed a father tell his small boy not to touch a particular object. Having been trained to ignore mild commands, the child picked it up anyway. With irritation in his voice, the father demanded, “Give it to me.” The child pretended not to hear. With anger, “Did you hear me? (Of course he did.) Hand it to Daddy.” With mounting anger, “Johnnieeee, give it to Daddy, NOW!!” Finally, another decibel higher—hasty—angry—threatening, “JOHNNY!! Am I going to have to SPANK YOU?” By this time the father was aware of his embarrassing tone. He calmed his voice, and in an attempt to bring it to a conclusion, he leaned way out and extended his hand, making it easier for Johnny to comply. Because of his father’s angry voice and burning eyes, Johnny assumed the temporary posture of, “Oh well, there will be another day.”

But, instead of handing the object to the humbled, groping father, he held it in his general direction but down close to his body, forcing the father to advance even farther to retrieve it. The father, looking like a poor peasant receiving alms from some condescending royalty, submitted to the child's humiliation and reached to retrieve the object. And then, in a display of weakness, the father placed it out of the child's reach.

What did Johnny learn from this episode? He had his conviction reinforced that it is never necessary to obey a command the first, second, third, or even fourth time. No one expects him to. He has learned that it is permissible to grab anything within reach and to continue possessing it until the heat gets too great. He has learned not to respect authority, just strength (the day will come when he will be the stronger one). By the father's example, he has learned how to use anger. By the father's advance to take the object from his hand, he has learned how to "get in the last shot" and maintain his defiance. That father was effectively training his small child to be a rebel.

What has the father learned? He has learned that little Johnny is just a "strong-willed" child; that children go through unpleasant stages; that it is sometimes a very miserable and embarrassing thing to be a parent; that one has to watch a kid every minute and put things out of his reach; that the only things kids understand are force and anger. All of which are false. The father is reaping the harvest of his failure to train.