

CORRECTION WITH GRACE

by

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Theme: Child discipline and correction must be shaped by the redemptive principles of the gospel.

How to Use These Resources: The following resources are designed for a 2 to 3-hour seminar for parents. Presenters may wish to spread the material over several shorter sessions. Adaptations can be made for use in parent support groups and home and school meetings. Numbers in parentheses (1), (2), (3) appear throughout the text as a reference to additional material in the **Seminar Illumination** section which may be helpful. Presenters should endeavor to incorporate local illustrations whenever possible. Use discretion with personal stories, secure the necessary permission, and maintain confidences.

In addition to the **Presentation Module** below, the following resources are included to support the seminar:

Agree-Disagree: This exercise serves to help warm up the group and to engender enthusiasm in the subject matter. It can also help to indicate some of the beliefs and presuppositions of the participants. One interesting way to use the exercise is to designate opposite sides of the meeting room as "Agree" and "Disagree." As the statements are read aloud, participants move back and forth in accordance with their responses. No explanations of the statements are given; any ambiguity within the statements are calculated to stimulate the learning process.

PRESENTATION MODULE

Introduction

A well-known proverb enjoins parents, "Withhold not correction from the child . . ." (Prov. 23:13 KJV). As we approach this important, but often controversial, topic, there are some important questions we should ask. (*Seminar leaders may invite participants to contribute any questions they may have about correction. Summarize the list incorporating the following questions.*)

What is correction? What do the Scripture passages mean? What is God's expectation of parents today? Is there a difference between correction and punishment? What purpose does correction serve? How do we implement it in our parenting? When is it appropriate? What are the best ways to correct a child? Is the type of correction advocated in the bible appropriate for today? Can correction be abusive? How can we know if our correction has been too much or too little? How can we reconcile the conflicting messages from parents, from friends, from the media about correction?

Making Disciples: Our Parenting Mission

(*As a lead-in to this section, seminar leaders may invite a brief discussion on the question: "What is our mission as parents?" Participants could respond verbally, or spend a few moments writing out their understanding of their parenting mission. Then share as a group.*)

Our mission is to help our children become responsible adults, acquainted with the Savior, and fully capable of choosing to love and serve the One who has saved them by His grace. We hope that they will actually embrace Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. But it is helpful to remember that this act of receiving Christ is their choice. Our responsibility is to lead them to Him, to invite them to follow Him. Jesus instructed His followers, "Go into all the world and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19). Whatever our work for God, helping our children become His disciples is our first responsibility.

As workers for God, our work is to begin with those nearest. It is to begin in our own home. There is no more important missionary field than this. (*Child Guidance*, p. 476)

The first consideration of the parents should be to work for the salvation of their children. (*Child Guidance*, p. 549)

Loving discipleship. Developing their capacities to be loving individuals constitutes a crucial aspect of our children's becoming Christ's disciples (Compare John 13:35). This calls for a parenting approach which cultivates love.

You may be evangelists in the home, ministers of grace to your children. (*Child Guidance*, p. 479)

Love must infuse all aspects of our life with our children. In no part of our parenting is it more important to remember our mission and the primacy of love than in the correction and discipline of our children.

Understanding and Influencing Children's Behaviour

He who seeks to transform humanity must himself understand humanity. (*Education*, p. 78).

Emphasis on shaping the child's behavior has been the focus of much that has been done in parent education through the years. Too often this behavior-driven focus has been narrow, neglecting to perceive the child as a complex person with spiritual, emotional, intellectual, social and physical needs. The biblical view of persons is a wholistic one which recognizes the dynamic connection between the outward behavior and the inner life of the person. Change in the inner life is reflected in outward behavior (cf. Luke 6:45). The greater objective of correction relates to the growth of the whole person, not just to changing behavior.

An important question to think about is, What does the child's behavior signify? Dr. Ruth Murdoch, a Seventh-day Adventist educator and child psychologist whose teaching influenced many parents and teachers, used to ask, "I wonder why the child does that?" An awareness that a child's behavior is purposeful, driven by needs and concerns within, will help put the behavior in perspective and enable us to define more clearly what kind of parental response will be most helpful for him. There are several ways in which parents demonstrate their understanding and exercise their influence over children's behavior.

Provide well for your child's needs. Sometimes what we call misbehavior arises from a child's unsatisfied physical needs or her needs for love, security, a sense of belonging, and freedom from fear, anxiety and loneliness. Needs will vary as the child develops. Tailor your expectations of the child to her developmental level. So-called misbehavior may actually be behavior that is appropriate to the child's age. Sensitivity to a child's development and better provision for her physical, emotional and social needs will often take care of the misbehavior. (1)

Keep parental feelings from defining misbehavior. Sometimes a child's behavior feels like misbehavior because it is annoying or inconvenient for us, causes us embarrassment, or seems to reflect on our parenting. Our tension, fatigue, stress, worry and anger, that are likely unrelated to the child, often color our responses toward him. A child should not have to carry the burden or the pain of our adult feelings. To be more objective, we need to find time and space to rest and let our feelings calm down, or to discuss our child's behavior with our spouse, another relative, a friend or a mental or medical health professional. We may discover that the child's misbehavior is a misperception brought about by our own needs.

Improve family system functioning. A child's misbehavior may reflect dynamics at work in the family system that are stressful or anxiety-producing. As surprising as it may seem, these sub-surface dynamics often result in children assuming difficult, even life-altering roles to help their families reduce conflict and maintain internal stability or equilibrium. (2) Studies have shown a linkage between children's behavior and conflict in their parents' relationship (Minuchin, Rosman & Baker, 1978). Improvement in marital and family functioning will likely have a positive effect on the behavior of our children. (3) Consult with a trained family counselor for help in this area.

Adopt a parenting style which provides both kindness and firmness. Studies of parenting and family management have identified the significance of two major factors: *support* and *control* (Balswick & Balswick, 1991; Flowers, 1992; Neff & Ratcliff, 1995). Each of these can be conceptualized on a continuum or scale with "high" and "low" on opposite ends. *Support* involves the degree to which parents respond to children and provide affection. High support represents high sensitivity and responsiveness to children's need for warmth and affection. Low support means these needs are ignored or hostility is shown. *Control* involves the degree to which parents exercise control over their children, with the continuum running from no control to high control.

If the two scales are made to bisect each other at right angles, four quadrants result, each representing a style of parenting characterized by the kind of support and control it exhibits (See Handout #1 *Four Parenting Styles*). The four styles are: *Neglectful* (little or no support, little or no structure), *Permissive* (support, but with laissez-faire control), *Authoritarian* (little or no support, dictatorial control), *Authoritative* (good support, appropriate limits). "Each of the parenting styles has been linked to definite consequences in the child's life. . . . Clearly the winner is the judicious combination of control and responsiveness with affection, the authoritative style of parenting" (Neff & Ratcliff, 1995, p. 67). (See Handout #2 *Authoritative Parenting* for a summary of the authoritative approach.)

Ellen White's concepts of kindness and firmness. The notions of support and control were long ago present in the counsel to parents given by Ellen G. White (See chapter "With Love and Firmness," *Child Guidance*, pp. 258-268). The concepts of kindness and firmness, which frequently appear in tandem, closely parallel the characteristics of the authoritative family management style described in modern parenting literature.

Children should not be left to wander away from the safe path marked out in God's Word. . . . *Kindly*, but *firmly*, with persevering, prayerful effort, their wrong desires should be restrained, their inclinations denied. (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 391 Emphasis supplied)

Let *kindness* be the law of the home and of the school. Let the children be taught to keep the law of the Lord, and let a *firm*, loving influence restrain them from evil. (*Child Guidance*, p. 259 Emphasis supplied)

In order to maintain . . . authority, it is not necessary to resort to harsh measures; a *firm*, steady hand and a *kindness* which convinces the child of your love will accomplish the purpose. (*Child Guidance*, p. 283 Emphasis supplied)

(*Illustration: On a flip chart or chalkboard draw a pathway that begins in the foreground and stretches into the background. Write the words "Path of Parenting" on this pathway. Write "Kindness" on one side of the pathway and "Firmness" on the other. The experience of parenting is bounded by these two concepts. Effective parenting integrates the characteristics of both and avoids the extremes in either direction. Many parents find that the path for them winds along unevenly at times, sometimes zig-zagging between the poles of kindness and firmness. What is important is that parents continually monitor themselves and endeavor to correct their course in harmony with these guiding principles. The parents' acts of monitoring and correcting their parenting style can, in fact, become an example to their children about the process of correction in our lives.*)

It seems clear from the writings of Ellen G. White that a home in which the principles of kindness and firmness are present has a built-in mechanism for correction. With the two great twin principles of justice and mercy in operation (*Child Guidance*, p. 261, 262), correction is an on-going, integrated process, beyond which few, if any, supplementary measures of specific "correction" will be necessary.

Correction: Helping Children with Their Sinful Desires and Inclinations

There are likely to be some times, however, when children exhibit such traits as self-centeredness, unkindness toward others, and disobedience toward authority despite the best efforts of parents to meet their needs and to implement a parenting style that is loving, kind and firm. Ellen G. White

speaks of some children demonstrating "hatred of restraint," "love of indulgence" and "indifference to things of eternity." These, she adds, "must be carefully dealt with" (*Child Guidance*, p. 250).

Children have a sinful nature. Children are younger members of the human family and they participate in the sinful condition that is common to the human race (Rom. 3:23). We take the side of Scripture and part company with popular psychology's notion that children possess an innate capacity for right behavior. Rather, they possess an inclination in their nature which, without help, they cannot resist. With this nature the child must cope from his earliest years.

The result of the eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is manifest in every man's experience. *There is in his nature a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, he cannot resist.* To withstand this force, to attain that ideal which in his inmost soul he accepts as alone worthy, he can find help in but one power. That power is Christ. Co-operation with that power is man's greatest need. (*Education*, p. 29 Emphasis supplied)

Children are precious. While they are fallen human beings, they are nevertheless very valuable to God. "Children," says the Psalmist, "are a heritage from the Lord" (Ps. 127:3 NKJV). (4) Christ loves children. While on earth He identified closely with them, bade them come to Him, elevated their faith as the standard for entrance into His Kingdom, and issued a severe warning to anyone who would cause their feet to stumble (Matt. 18:3; 19:14; Mark 9:37-42; Luke 18:16).

Children are the heritage of the Lord, and we are answerable to Him for our management of His property. (*The Adventist Home*, p. 159)

Remember that your sons and daughters are younger members of God's family. He has committed them to your care, to train and educate for heaven. (*The Adventist Home*, p. 161)

Christ placed such a high estimate upon your children that He gave His life for them. Treat them as the purchase of His blood. Patiently and firmly train them for Him. Discipline with love and forbearance. (*The Adventist Home*, p. 279)

An act of committed love. From both the human and divine standpoints correction is presented in Scripture as an act of committed love. "The ones I love, I correct and discipline . . ." (Rev. 3:19 Modern Language; cf. Proverbs 13:24). Every effort must be made to make this vital link between correction and love in our parenting. Permissive parents often have difficulty appreciating this aspect of love. (5)

Recovering fallen image bearers. Crabb (1987) speaks of human beings as being "fallen image bearers." Sinful, yes. Precious, yes. Still bearing God's image. Still the object of His great recovery project. Ellen G. White conveys this same idea in her description of the lost coin in Jesus' parable (Luke 15:8, 9).

The coin, though lying among dust and rubbish, is *a piece of silver still*. Its owner seeks it because it is of value. So every soul, however degraded by sin, is in God's sight accounted precious. As the coin bears the image and superscription of the reigning power, so man at his creation bore the image and superscription of God; and *though now marred and dim through the influence of sin, the traces of this inscription remain upon every soul*. God desires to recover that soul and to retrace upon it His own image in righteousness and holiness. (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 194 Emphasis supplied)

In correcting their children, parents are given a small, but significant part to play in the divine rescue plan for their children. Rightly understood, correction is not punitive, nor an expression of power and authority of one over another, but a process whereby loving parents, who have come to recognize the strength of the sinful bent in their nature and have found their only help in Christ, may guide their children's footsteps in His direction also. The process of kind and firm correction helps children become aware of their nature, of their profound need to change in order to rightly respect themselves and others and to participate in community. Correction shows them how to change, enlists their will on the side of change, and empowers them to do so.

Correction also seeks to spare children from long-term irreversible effects of wrong choices and habits. Loving parents correct their children, restrain and guide them in an external way through their vulnerable, formative years until at last those restraints are internalized and the growing youth of his or her own volition trusts in God and cooperates with the divine plan for growth and maturity. As adults, we never outgrow our need for certain types of correction, but our parents no longer play the part they once did during our formative years.

(Illustration: When transplanting a young tree, horticulturalists and landscapers typically provide external supports to guide the tree and protect its against destructive forces until it grows stronger. Those restraints are then removed, lest they inhibit further growth.)

Three Forms of Correction

Verbal correction. The Biblical word for this type of correction is translated as "rebuke" (Ps. 39:11; Luke 17:2). Verbal correction confronts the individual in an honest, yet caring and compassionate way to communicate to him the seriousness of his error. As in all forms of correction, caring must be evident. Voice tones and body language must convey this caring.

This kind of correction may occur through quiet conversation, through a letter (1 Corinthians 4:14, 15; 4:21; 2 Timothy 3:16), the right use of a question, ("What do you think will happen if this continues to take place?" "Have you thought about how this will affect your future?") or through a Bible story or other character-building story. Nathan used a parable when sent by God to correct David (2 Sam. 12). King David was corrected in a dramatic way by the power of Nathan's story. Jesus used parables frequently, not only to instruct and to teach, but also to correct.

In parables He rebuked the hypocrisy and wicked works of those who occupied high positions, and in figurative language clothed truth of so cutting a character that had it been spoken in direct denunciation, they would not have listened to His words, and would speedily have put an end to His ministry. . . . He made truth so clear that error was manifested, and the honest in heart were profited by His lessons. (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 22)

How will you successfully educate your children? Not by scolding for it will do no good. Talk to your children as if you had confidence in their intelligence. Deal with them kindly, tenderly, lovingly. Tell them what God would have them to do. (*Child Guidance*, p. 33)

Some methods of communicating parental concerns with children entail less risk to the relationship than others. Framing the concern as an "I" message will often be sufficient to bring about a corrective response. "When you stay out beyond the time you promised to be home I get anxious about your safety." "When all the buttons on Daddy's calculator are pushed at once I get frustrated because it won't be in working order when I need it." "When you talk to your friends during the worship service in church I'm annoyed because I'm unable to concentrate."

Experiential correction. This approach allows the individual to be corrected by experiencing the consequences of his or her choices (Luke 15:11-32).

Help him [the child] to see that all things are under law, and that disobedience leads, in the end, to disaster and suffering. When God says "Thou shalt not," He in love warns us of the consequences of disobedience, in order to save us from harm and loss. (*Education*, p. 287)

Natural consequences. Consequences may be considered in two categories: *natural* and *logical* (Dreikurs, 1964). *Natural* consequences are those that come about because of the natural order of things, events which may be expected to occur if there is no interference. Table 1 on Handout # 3 *Natural and Logical Consequences* provides examples of natural consequences.

The responsibilities of the parent, if natural consequences are to be effective, include (1) making the child aware of the consequences, (2) allowing the child the freedom of choice, and (3) guarding against the child being placed in situations where the choices are too weighty for him, or where a wrong choice would affect the child's safety or unduly harm his health (A responsible parent would not allow a child to experience the consequences of playing in a street where there is busy automobile traffic). Parental threats are to be avoided that will make the experience of choice appear as punitive. If the parent cannot release the decision into the child's hands, then the benefits of experiential correction break down and the child does not grow in responsibility.

Logical consequences. In situations where natural consequences would be unacceptable, then a reasonable substitute must be found, i.e. a *logical* consequence. Examples are shown in Table 2, Handout #3 Natural and Logical Consequences.

Natural consequences represent the pressure of reality without any specific action by parents and are always effective. In contrast, logical consequences cannot be applied in a power struggle except with extreme caution because they usually deteriorate into punitive acts of retaliation. For this reason, natural consequences are always beneficial but logical consequences may backfire. (Dreikurs, 1964, p. 84)

Do not remove consequences. In experiential correction, the child is being taught by the natural and logical order of things to reason from cause to effect and to shape his behavior accordingly. Such a process will undoubtedly involve some level of pain to the child. This is where parents must be supportive, but not undo the lesson that is being learned. Avoid making the pain worse by saying, "I told you so!" Avoid relieving the pain by removing the consequences. (6) The experiencing of consequences by the child occurs within the context of a loving relationship with his parents. Correction should never imply the possibility of a loss of this relationship.

[Illustration: Note the response of the father of the prodigal (Luke 15) upon the return of his son. There was no scolding ("I told you so!") or interrogation ("Where have you been?") or lecture ("You should have listened to me."). The father welcomed him home before he had a chance to say he was sorry. He didn't need to be told the error of his way; he had learned a lesson that words could never convey. He had "come to himself" (vs. 17). Correction had done its work. Also, the returned son had to live with the consequences of his experience. (7)]

(Small group exercise: For practice using experiential correction, distribute Handout #4: Consider the Consequences.)

Physical correction. Scriptural references to a manner of correction of youth which is physical are very few and occur in only one biblical book (Proverbs 13:24; 22:15; 23:13, 14; 29:15). The "rod" (Heb. *shebet*) was the stick or staff of the shepherd (Lev. 27:32; Ps. 23:4; Micah 7:14). Typical references to the use of the *shebet* refer to the discipline of slaves (Ex. 21:20), as a metaphor for God's promise to David that He would, if necessary, chasten the royal heirs of David (2 Sam. 7:14), Messianic judgment on the nations (Ps. 2:9), and more generally an instrument of war or execution literally or figuratively (Ps. 89:32; Lam. 3:1; Micah 5:1).

Corporal correction of youth was apparently practiced during bible times, but the weight of Scripture reflects the importance of talking with a child, reasoning with him, and allowing him to be corrected by the consequences of his choices. Physical correction of children as it has typically been practiced may result in compliance, but frequently generates hostile emotions within the child. Christ's warning not to offend the little ones (Mark 9:42) and Paul's counsel, "Fathers do not exasperate your children . . ." (Eph. 6:4) stand as counsel to parents to avoid treatment of offspring which create emotional problems for them.

Spanking and abuse. The use of corporal correction today has stirred much controversy. James Dobson (1973), who supports the use of spanking in child discipline, nevertheless sees a linkage between spanking and abusive beatings. Speaking of the abuse that can occur when parents use spanking, he stresses the importance of parents being in emotional control. "The beatings are rarely premeditated; they may occur when an ordinary spanking gets out of hand, or when an emotionally

disturbed parent loses control" (p. 59). This potential for abuse in the use of corporal punishment has led many parent educators to advocate a turning from the practice of spanking altogether (Dreikurs & Cassel, 1972; McGinnis & McGinnis, 1990). McGinnis and McGinnis (1990), for example, believe that "nonviolent discipline" is logically consistent with their concept of nonviolent child-raising. They use reasoning, natural and logical consequences, time out/cooling off periods, and the discussion forum of a regular family council to handle issues of correction.

Ellen White urged great parental restraint in the matter of physical correction. She placed numerous conditions around it. Such correction was to be a last resort after milder measures of correction had been exhausted. It was to be done in love, after a period of prayer by the parent, and when the parent was free from anger. Afterward there was to be a period of restoration and joint prayer with the child. Even then, her estimate was, "Frequently one such correction will be enough for a lifetime . . ." (*Child Guidance*, p. 250). (8)

(Share "*Guidelines for Correction*," *Handout #5*)

A Final Word

The work of correction is a delicate process. Hastiness, over-reaction, heavily laden emotions— all complicate the process. Frequently we replicate with our own children what has long been ingrained in us from the modeling in the homes in which we grew up. This represents an area in which growth is needed ourselves. "Be what you wish your children to be," wrote Ellen G. White (*Child Guidance*, p. 278). As they see us more willing to bear rebuke for our mistakes, to graciously accept correction when it is needed, deep impressions are made upon them; we offer them a positive model with staying power far beyond our words.

Seminar Illumination

One (1): Some parents do not understand their children and are not really acquainted with them. There is often a great distance between parents and children. If the parents would enter more fully into the feelings of their children and draw out what is on their hearts, it would have a beneficial influence upon them. (*The Adventist Home*, p. 190)

Two (2): Among the roles children may assume are the *hero*, who shoulders the responsibility for maintaining the system's integrity and preserving its positive image, the *mascot*, who seeks by clowning to distract the family from its internal pain, and the *scapegoat*, who draws the blame for system difficulties to himself or herself and achieves a kind of harmony among others because their focus has shifted to the scapegoat's misbehavior.

Three (3): A mother wondered why her primary and junior-aged sons fought more when their father was home than when he was working. In a subsequent interview with both parents, a look at their marital relationship revealed that their communication was poor, they were often in conflict, and had virtually no private couple life. As they described the typical scenario of fighting between the sons they were helped to see their family system in predictable action: (1) fighting upsets and angers dad; (2) dad administers discipline; (3) boys appeal to mother for help; (4) mother approaches father to discuss the boys' needs; (5) boys play contentedly nearby while father and mother are together and talking. It was suggested that an intentional improvement in the parents' relationship that was visible to the sons would likely lead to improved behavior on the children's part. The need to enact a scenario to bring mother and father together will have been reduced.

Four (4): The word *heritage* signifies an inheritance given, not according to hereditary right, but according to the willing desire of the giver. Every new child born into a Christian home is a gracious gift from God, a lovely legacy from the Lord entrusted to our care to be loved, cherished, provided for and properly molded for his glory. (Strauss, 1975, p. 17)

Five (5): No parent or teacher who has at heart the well-being of those under his care will compromise with the stubborn self-will that defies authority or resorts to subterfuge or evasion in order to escape obedience. It is not love but sentimentalism that palters with wrongdoing, seeks by coaxing or bribes to secure compliance, and finally accepts some substitute in place of the thing required. (*Education*, p. 290)

Six (6): We do not have the right to assume the responsibilities of our children, nor do we have the right to take the consequences of their acts. These belong to them. (Dreikurs, 1964, p. 77)

Seven (7): Correction was the result of a process that included losing an inheritance, the pain of starvation, and the ashes of riotous living. He was home and loved and sheltered, but his inheritance was gone—the natural consequences of sinful living. His father did not re-parcel the estate and give him a portion of his brother's inheritance; he had to live with the consequences of his behavior. (Narramore, 1979, pp. 72, 73)

Eight (8): A child is not a horse or a dog to be ordered about according to your imperious will, or to be controlled under all circumstances by a stick or whip, or by blows with the hand. Some children are so vicious in their tempers that the infliction of pain is necessary, but very many cases are made much worse by this manner of discipline. (*Child Guidance*, p. 251, 252)

Whipping may be necessary when other resorts fail, yet she [mother] should not use the rod if it is possible to avoid doing so. But if milder measures prove insufficient, punishment that will bring the child to its senses should in love be administered. Frequently one such correction will be enough for a lifetime, to show the child that he does not hold the lines of control. (*Child Guidance*, p. 250)

Frequently . . . [parents] cannot properly control their children because of their own impatience, neither can they teach them the right way. Perhaps they take hold of them roughly and give them an impatient blow. I have said that to shake a child would shake two evil spirits in, while it would shake one out. If a child is wrong, to shake it only makes it worse. It will not subdue it. (*2 Testimonies*, p. 365)

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