

Training Your Children For Christ

by General William Booth

Edited and paraphrased by Martin Bennet

There are certain things that parents must do - indeed, that *only* parents can do - if their children are to become true servants of God. I don't want to hide the fact that what I'm setting before you will not be gained without considerable difficulty, carefulness, and work. However, nothing truly good or great is ever accomplished without trouble. I am certain that for every intense hour and patient effort this work demands, parents will be abundantly repaid if they succeed.

Things Parents Should Do

First, there are some things that must be done if you want to reach the great goal in the training of children - for them to love and serve God with a pure heart.

1. You must keep your goal constantly before your mind. Look it in the face and firmly determine to accomplish it. Don't let the seductive charms of the world or the temptations of the devil or the promptings of ease and pleasure turn you aside. Oh, fathers and mothers, you *must* make up your mind to do or die!

2. You must believe in the possibility of success. What you desire has been done with glorious results, and what parents have done before, parents can do again. Don't be deterred by the failures of others, though such failures are sadly too numerous. Say to yourselves in the face of the breakdowns, "Just because the children of some professing Christians haven't turned out well - even if some have gone bad altogether - that's no reason why ours should be lost. God has said, '*Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.*' (Proverbs 22 6) We believe Him, and we are going to do the training as well as we can, and trust Him to see to its success." Have faith in God, and He will come to your assistance.

3. Be a holy example. Create and confirm in the hearts of your children the assurance that you yourself are what you want them to become. Practice daily the same unselfish love and righteousness you ask from them. Without this, you will never accomplish the goals you have set your heart on.

4. Teach your children what real Christianity is. Make them understand it. Make them admire it. Explain it as soon as they can take it in. Base your teaching on the principles and examples in the Bible, especially in the life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ and the examples of His disciples, but don't limit it to them.

5. Help your children understand that everything you ask from them is right

and reasonable. Appeal to their judgment and conscience rather than to their feelings, although you must not neglect their hearts. It is important for them to understand you. Come down to the level of their capacity and intelligence.

6. You must make following Christ a part of your everyday life. Your children must feel that you are as religious at home as in meetings, on Mondays as on Sundays, in your work as on your knees. Without always talking at them about it, your faith in God should be the atmosphere of the house, so in that atmosphere they can "*live and move and have their being.*" (Acts 17:28)

7. You need to aim at a distinct experience of conversion in your children. A line divides the righteous from the wicked. God's own fingers have drawn that line. There is a moment when human beings, adults or children, cease to be the servants of the devil, and become the servants of God. That line and moment may be approached so gradually as to be crossed almost without notice. But with all who become the children of God, that moment *does* arrive and that line is crossed, and then they pass from darkness to light, from death to life. In other words, they are saved. You must aim at that distinct experience for your children. You must explain to them its nature and necessity as soon as they can understand. Pray for it in your own bedroom, and hand-in-hand with them also. Lead them to expect their own conversion, either at the meetings or at home. By-and-by you will have the joy of knowing the great change has actually taken place, and of hearing them testify to the fact: a joy which is nearer to the joys of the angels than any other that can come to a father's or mother's heart.

8. You must make your children kind. Don't allow cruelty of any sort in them. The lack of thought and sympathy for others, which is so painfully visible in the vast majority of people, is nothing more than a result of their early training in this area.

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They were practically encouraged - that is, they weren't corrected - in little acts of unkindness as toddlers. They pinched the kitten, frightened the bird, or threw down their toys for some tired mother or weary servant to pick up. By-and-by they pulled the legs off of spiders, threw rocks at dogs, and went into fits of pleasure in chasing some poor creature found wounded on their way from school. From that it was only a step to sneering at the beggar who asked for a piece of bread, or mocking the poor and the crippled.

And now, they are all around us in their thousands, never having a thought of kindness or a desire to do a kind thing that costs them any trouble or self-denial. Set your face against such things, and against the spirit which makes them possible.

9. Do everything you can to promote the health of your children. Their diet and exercise will affect them in adulthood.

10. Do all you can for the minds of your children. You want to make them wise and thoughtful. However poor and humble you may be, a simple education is within your reach. See that your children get it, and be sure to take interest yourself in what they learn.

11. Strive to make your children good workers. Give them a chance to contribute work around the house, in the garden, or in the workshop - something apart from their studies. Never let them be unoccupied. Keep them working or playing all through their wakeful hours. Idle hands are the devil's tools.

12. Rely on the Holy Spirit to bless all your efforts. You can depend on the promises in Scriptures that He will rejoice to help you.

13. Insist on obedience to all you ask. You must have this obedience or all your other efforts will be thrown away. It's impossible to overestimate its importance. Forming the habit of ready and willing submission to your will prepares them in forming the habit of obedience to God, which is more important than *anything* else.

Settle it, therefore, from the first vision of your infant child, from the first kiss you impress upon its little cheek, that, before all else, you will create in this young soul the habit of obedience. How do we do this?

The Habit Of Obedience

1. Begin early. "Unless you get the dye into the wool, it will be hard work to get it into the cloth." It's astonishing how soon the infant in its mother's arms can be taught that it must do her will, and not its own.

2. Don't give too many commands. But take the trouble to make sure they obey your commands, or the commands you permit others to give on your behalf. How often parents tell their children to do this or that, without even waiting to see, or apparently caring, whether their wishes are carried out! This inevitably leads children to think it doesn't matter whether they obey at all.

3. Be careful that every command given is within your child's ability to carry out. It's cruel to ask children to do what is beyond their power, and yet, I'm afraid many parents are thoughtlessly addicted to the practice. They would never dream of requiring their children to carry a huge suitcase they couldn't lift, or read in a language they hadn't learned - but they will require a little child to sit motionless and silent for an hour; or forbid it crying when it has pain; or insist upon its going to sleep when it is excited - requirements far beyond its ability, if not actually impossible. Be tender and considerate in the commands you give your children.

4. Be careful that your orders are good and lawful; otherwise, how can you insist they obey you?

5. Be careful that your commands are understood. Some people talk quickly, others don't take the time to explain their wishes. This is especially important when you ask your children to do something out of the ordinary. In those cases it's wise to ask "Do you understand me?" particularly if your child shows any hesitancy in obeying you.

6. Be sure to show your child, in a way he can understand, your strong disapproval of all disobedience. You cannot pass disobedience by without notice. To do so is one of the surest methods of cursing your child for the present and the future. In a very real sense, you are teaching them what their heavenly Father thinks of disobedience.

7. Give suitable punishment to your children when they disobey. It's not likely that you will be favored with children so truthful and obedient as never to need punishment. Therefore, it's important that you have the right idea on the subject of punishment.

Things Parents Should *Not* Do

1. You must *never* set things that are earthly and temporary above things that are heavenly and eternal. If you do, you can't complain if your children grow up to prefer the world and its charms, to following Christ in a life of holiness and self-denial. Don't *ever* allow things that produce the impression on your children's minds that making money or pleasing ungodly people or winning the praise of men or gratifying themselves or *anything* else of the kind is, or can ever be, of greater value than pleasing God.

2. Don't fool yourself into believing that if your children are left to themselves, they will naturally develop into the godly, holy, self-sacrificing characters you desire - and then be disappointed if they turn out to be little devils, or grow up to be very much like big ones.

If children don't actually bring evil natures into the world with them, they certainly acquire selfish and naughty hearts very soon after their arrival here. You need to recognize that fact, and to face it with courage and faith, not only for their sakes, but for your own. Remember the terrible condemnation which God pronounced against Eli, the High Priest, in this matter-He said, *"I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them."* (1 Samuel 3:13)

3. Don't expect that children who possess any backbone of resolution and energy will be likely to submit their wills, first to their parents and then to God, without a great deal of patient and persevering effort on your part. There will be exceptions to this rule. Samuel seems to have been of strong character, yet he didn't apparently oppose God's purpose; Josiah was another, Timothy another. I have known some myself. Be that as it may, if you want all your children for the King, whether their natures are pliable or unyielding, you must expect to take trouble for their salvation, and let nothing keep you from persevering.

4. Don't expect your children to be so naive that they won't see beneath the cloak of a false Christianity, especially if they find it in their own home. And don't think that after they discover its unreality, they won't despise it. Don't be surprised if when they see such hypocrisy, they make it an excuse for neglecting, if not positively disbelieving, in Christ altogether.

5. Don't expect your children to be any better in character and conduct than the example set before them - by you, by their own friends, or by those they spend time with. If you allow them to associate with halfhearted church goers, with worldly Pharisees, or backsliders, then don't be surprised if they are cursed by those examples, and driven from God and true Christianity. Children are likely to suffer more harm by staying one day in the house of some make-believe follower of Christ than they would spending a month in a tavern, where they'd be on their guard because they knew the devil reigned there.

6. Don't contaminate the love of beauty, which exists in the hearts of all children, through the destructive vice of vanity. You will do this if you give them a taste for expensive clothes, fancy hair styles, and wearing all kinds of other adornments. And if you fill them with the childish conceit that they have prettier faces or figures than others around them, don't wonder if they should, in later years, be drawn into the world by the attractions of its fashions and empty show.

7. Don't fill your children's minds with the idea of their supposed superiority, mental or otherwise, over their friends, schoolmates, and others around them, and then be surprised when they go out into life as unhappy slaves of an ambition to climb above everyone else, which will alone be enough to destroy all their real peace of mind.

8. Don't allow your boys to think that they're more important or of greater value than their sisters, and then be surprised if they grow up to look down on and domineer over women generally, and to treat their own mother or their wives as if they belonged to an inferior race. This false idea of superiority, if planted in a boy's heart, will in later life produce the spirit of real tyranny.

9. Don't instill, or allow anybody else to instill into the hearts of your girls the idea that marriage is the chief end of life. If you do, don't be surprised if they get engaged to the first empty, useless fool they come across.

10. Don't pamper or spoil your children, making them whiny or complaining, and then be surprised if they grow up to be a nuisance to themselves and a torment to everybody around them unless they're allowed to have their own way, or continuously waited upon and amused. (*Proverbs 29:15*)

11. Don't encourage selfishness in your children. In their infancy, children are ordinarily carried away by the desire for self-gratification. Your first business is to lead them in the opposite direction, to make them forget and deny themselves and delight in serving others.

12. Parents shouldn't discuss or argue about the conduct or character of their children while in the children's presence, and then be surprised if they take sides with the father or mother, depending on whose ideas are the most favorable to their selfishness.

13. Don't make favorites among your children, and then be surprised that those who are not the chosen ones should grow up with a sense of injustice festering in their hearts, which will very likely make them forget all the love you have ever given them.

14. Don't let your children have their own way or give them what they want merely for the sake of peace, or any other reason whatever, when it's opposed to your own judgment of what is best for them. If you do, you can't be surprised when they argue with you, contradict you to your face, ridicule your wishes and opinions behind your back, and at last (to your

shame and their own undoing) disregard you altogether. Never forget that it's written of your Savior Himself, that in His childhood *"He continued in subjection to them"* - His parents. (*Luke 2:51*)

This article was adapted from chapters 22 and 23 of "Love, Marriage, and Home" by William Booth, published in 1902.

Punishing Your Child

1. Before punishing a child, be sure he is guilty of the deed. Nothing can be more painful to the parent or more harmful to a child than discovering that a punishment was not deserved.
2. Also, before punishing, be sure that the deed was done deliberately. If the child wasn't aware he was doing wrong, or didn't intend to do the deed, then it was an accident, in which case punishment is not deserved.
3. If you're satisfied that they deserve punishing, do it right away. The sooner the penalty follows the misdeed, the more effective it will be.
4. The punishment given must be, as nearly as possible, the kind that will produce repentance. Two goals should be before every parent in carrying out this painful task:

When you punish your child, your aim should be to bring him to repentance. You want him to realize his naughtiness, to see that wrongdoing makes misery, to be sorry for his sin, and to decide that he will never do the evil thing again.

When he does a wrong thing, his conscience will tell him that he ought to suffer for it. When a painful punishment is the natural out come of wrong conduct, then wrong-doing and suffering will be closely associated in his heart. You should strengthen that conviction, so that in later life he will know that if he lives and dies in sin, hell will be his rightful end.

5. Punishment, painful so that it will be remembered, should be as short as the offense requires. This is in favor of the occasional use of the rod. A gentle spanking will be remembered, but will not unnecessarily prolong the suffering. (*Proverbs 23:13-14*)
6. Be careful that you never harm your child's health. It's possible to damage a child for a lifetime by too severe or long-lasting pain. However naughty, disobedient, or cruel children may act, justice must always be tempered with mercy.
7. When telling your child to obey you, avoid drawn out conflicts. From some strange motive, there is occasionally a blank refusal by a child to obey a direct command. If he doesn't obey you in a reasonable amount of time, an immediate spanking is the best thing. The unfortunate course adopted by many parents is to try to force the child to obey, no matter how long it takes, and under such circumstances a regular battle between the wills of the parent and the child is a common experience.

William Booth (1829-912) founded The Salvation Army with his wife Catherine in 1865, in their home country of England. As a zealous evangelist, his passion for the lost was especially for those who were outcasts of the established church. His whole life can be summed up in his own words, "Go for souls, and go for the worst!"

Even though William and Catherine were heavily involved in evangelism and helping the poor, they never forgot the importance of training up their own eight children in the ways of the Lord. The children learned early in life that they were expected to obey their parents and that life was no game. One son said, "None of us grew up slackers; none of us played with life."

While the Booth home was well disciplined, it was also affectionate, and in the early days William was often found wrestling the children on their floor, or letting the little girls play with his hair as he read a book. Emma, speaking about her mother said, "She was the light of our lives, the inspiration of our childhood, the ideal of our ambitions, the repository of our confidences, the guardian angel of our souls, and the beacon of our lives as we sailed earth's sea towards the same blissful Harbor in which she has dropped anchor forever "

William and Catherine Booth dedicated their children to the same work God called them to - loving a lost and hurting world to Jesus. They were not disappointed by the results. All their children were workers in God's Kingdom, taking the Gospel to many nations including India, France, Switzerland, and the United States.

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