

Five Smooth Stones of Parenting

In Goliath, David faced what seemed an indomitable foe. David's goal was not so much to kill the giant as to protect the children and honor of God. He took five smooth stones from the brook to achieve his purpose. In the pervasive humanism of our society, parents face what appears to be an equally unconquerable giant who is determined to destroy their children. They have five stones with which to protect them.

Purpose

"A child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (Proverbs 29.15). Consequently, Wisdom says, *"Train up a child in the way he should go..." (Proverbs 22.6).* This requires first determining "the way he should go," then pointing the child in that direction. For Christians one direction supersedes all others: eternal life in heaven via Christlikeness on earth. Scores of agencies with different goals challenge us for control of our children. My father used to say, *"I will not let the schools take my children away from me."* Today there are many additional threats: TV, internet, video games, ipods, scouts, sports, neighbors, etc. These must be constantly monitored and controlled.

Parents of good children are often told, *"You are just lucky."* No, good children are not the product of luck, but of purpose—relentlessly, sacrificially and pro-actively pursued.

Training

"Bring them up in the training...of the Lord" (Ephesians 6.4). Training a plant requires knowing where you want it to go and then patiently bending it, pruning it, and perhaps even tying it. Training an animal involves knowing what you want it to do, using force at first, then patiently guiding, correcting, and finally rewarding and punishing. In both instances, training means establishing authority and maintaining control. Training children begins with example and sometime physical force, then guidance, correction, and eventually reward and punishment when the child understands what is expected. Above all, it means establishing the parents' authority and letting the child know who is in control. This must begin very early. Once willful rebellion is tolerated, a wrong direction is established and the necessary "bending, pruning, and tying" become all the more difficult. The mother of John and Charles Wesley described good discipline as *"shaping the will without breaking the spirit."* This agrees with the Spirit's counsel: *"Do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up..." (Ephesians 6.4).*

Instruction

"Bring them up in the...admonition (instruction - NASB) of the Lord" (Ephesians 6.4). Unlike plants and animals children can be admonished and instructed. This, also, parents must do. The very intellect that enables children to be instructed also enables them to exercise their free will as they grow older. Parental control constantly diminishes, and unless God's control is established, their lives will be out of control. God's control is established by teaching them the scriptures. Long after Timothy was beyond the control of mother and grandmother, their faith dwelt in him (**II Timothy 1.5**). How was this accomplished? Paul reminded Timothy, *"From*

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childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus” (II Timothy 3.15). Faith in older children is the result of early instruction in righteousness. Parents should take advantage of the classes offered by the church, but this is not enough—they must teach their children personally. A mother once told me of overhearing her husband saying to their young infant in the crib, *“Let me tell you about Jesus.”* Not surprisingly, that young infant is now a godly young teenager.

Affection

Training and instruction must be administered with love—a love that *“suffers long and is kind,”* that *“does not behave rudely,”* and above all, *“does not seek its own”* (I Corinthians 13.4-5). Children will forgive many mistakes if they can always be sure of their parents’ love. *“Love will cover a multitude of sins”* (I Peter 4.8). Affection without firmness is disastrous, but equally disastrous is firmness without affection.

Prayer

David did not attribute his defeat of Goliath to the stone, to his sling or to his skill. *“The battle,”* he said, *“is the Lord’s”* (I Samuel 17.47). So it is with the training of our children. God is concerned with the outcome and we are servants whom He has entrusted with our little ones. We must pray daily for the wisdom that He has promised to supply (James 1.5) and for His providence to overrule our inevitable mistakes. And when our children have become what we hoped for, we have no ground for boasting, only for the humble exclamation, *“to God be the glory!”*

David succeeded, using only one stone; parents will need all five.

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