

Wait till your Father gets home!

Prov 13:24, 22:6, Eph 6:1-4

Friends, when I was younger I remember a TV show that was set in the 50's where the mother would always warn the kids when they were misbehaving "wait until your father gets home!"

Maybe you heard that line when you were a child.

Well things are a bit different today aren't they, the white anglo-saxon society of the 50's has changed into a multi-cultural mosaic and parenting and discipline methods have also been affected.

And nobody does a better job of describing that change and how its affected them than Comedian Russell Peters – watch this clip.

Friends, it so true isn't it? Canadian society certainly gives immigrants credit for being hardworking and thrifty, and we're glad that they are willing to take on the entry level jobs that those of us who have lived here a bit longer think are beneath

us, and we enjoy having a multicultural menu when we want to go out to eat...

but when it comes to things like parenting and raising children its easy to think that while they are probably loving parents – they don't have the benefit of being as educated as us and their parenting methods are a bit backwards and outdated and no where does that show up as much as in the fact that they would actually discipline their children by hitting them.

Because... those of us who are more educated and up to speed with the latest psychological research and parenting techniques know that hitting is never the answer and anyone who would suggest that there may be times when a good spanking, correctly administered can be helpful – is essentially advocating child abuse.

We might even say that corporal punishment only contributes to the breakdown of society because of how physical abuse has been identified as one of the root causes of so many social problems.

Any yet – I had friends like the one Russell Peters describes, bratty little white suburban kids who would lip off to their parents with no consequences – parents who were well educated, up to date on the latest psychology – and yet they couldn't... or wouldn't control or discipline their children and I saw the results.

They were angry and they at the root of the social problems in my middle-class suburban neighborhood: vandalism, graffiti, drug use, theft, violence...

So, whose parenting methods are backwards and are contributing to the breakdown of society – right?

And friends the concern over how disciplining children helps to form an orderly stable society, or contributes to its break down is not a new concern at all.

When Paul wrote his letter to the early Christians in the ancient city of Ephesus, Roman society was of the opinion, as was most of the ancient world; that strict discipline and corporal punishment administered by the head of the household was the

only way order and decency would prevail in society and keep civilization from crumbling.

They also believed it was important to appease the gods through performing rituals and offering sacrifices because this would secure the gods favor and avoid their anger –which could lead to a family's or city or even an empire's downfall.

So friends, imagine how radically different the message of the gospel was in this culture. A message which said – there is only one God, and He loves us and offers us forgiveness and grace and mercy for our sins through Jesus Christ instead of anger and punishment.

And if you took that message seriously and believed it... and were changed by it – then what did that mean for your day to day responsibilities as a parent – especially if you were the head of the house entrusted with keeping social order in your small corner of the society?

When your child did something wrong – instead of beating him, instead of shaming her, you would begin to see this as a

chance to reflect the way God had treated you in Jesus Christ- and offer your child grace and mercy and forgiveness.

You see friends, when we truly understand the gospel it works its way into every area of our life - into our parenting too. Hence the parable of the prodigal son.

However, this presented a problem within Roman society – Grace and mercy could be used as opportunities to get away with bad behavior.

So parents who showed grace and mercy to their children risked being seen as subversive to society, as contributing to its breakdown, because if their children were getting away with bad behavior, it was only a few steps away from the collapse of civilization

And this assumption is partially true – so we're back to my bratty little white friends whose parents couldn't control them, who simply let them get away with bad behavior and the whole community suffered because of it.

So friends - it's pretty easy to see that we're caught on the horns of a dilemma here, especially as Christian parents.

Because on the one hand we know that the way God deals with us in Christ is characterized by mercy and grace and forgiveness....but on the other hand letting kids get away with bad behavior, letting them do what they want without consequences and punishment, spoils them and hurts others.

These seem like opposite ends of the spectrum and I would guess most of us are not sure how to be a gracious Christian parent who models a loving gracious God to our kids... and at the same time enforce the rules to ensure that they don't turn out to be lawless hooligans.

But friends the good news is that the scriptures don't see grace and discipline as contradictory opposites.

Instead of focusing on a false dilemma, the scripture is concerned with the issue of getting what we deserve. Proverbs 10:16 says *"The wages of the righteous is life, but the earnings of the wicked are sin and death."*

And Paul picks this up again in Romans 6:23 where he writes
*“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life
in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

What this teaches us as parents friends, is that we shouldn't be asking the question *“should I be strict with my kids, or should I be lenient with my kids?”* Instead we need to ask *“How does God step into our lives – into my life... to prevent me from getting what I deserve, and how can I do that for my children?”*

This doesn't necessarily mean that you are sparing them the consequences of their actions, but it gets to the heart of why you discipline your children – and it is what will help us to bring grace and discipline together as partners instead of opposites.

Now there can be many different reasons why we discipline – or don't discipline our kids.

We can discipline them because we are selfish... because we want their behavior to reflect well on us, to reflect that we're

good parents, to reflect our ability to exercise our authority – our power.

We can discipline them because we are full of regret...because we messed up and made bad decisions and we'll be damned if our kids are going to make the same mistakes as us, because we regret having them – we may resent them and if we have to be miserable, they're going to be miserable.

We can discipline them because we are idealistic...we've read all the parenting theory books, we've figured that the way to solve our social problems is through better parenting and we can't wait to show how we're going to get it right with our kids...

We can discipline our children for many different reasons.

But the scripture challenges us to discipline our children to prevent them from getting what they deserve – the wages of sin...death – because God has intervened in our lives and done this for us.

Here, in God's actions, we see it demonstrated how grace and discipline are not opposites –

Grace is God stepping in when we've done nothing to deserve being rescued from ourselves and saving us.

Discipline is God stepping in when done nothing to deserve being shown how to best display our gratitude and being shown how. Additionally God's discipline protects us from making further mistakes and hurting ourselves – that's grace.

So how can we parent in a manner that best reflects how God interacts with us?

Well the scriptures give us some advice in that manner – the verses in Proverbs this morning remind us of that it is wise not to abdicate our role in applying discipline to our children – remember Russell Peter's friend, he was an angry kid!

And they also point out the wisdom of making sure that the kind discipline we apply is appropriate to who are children are. "Train a child up in the way they should go..."

There is no one size fits all approach to the ways and means of correcting, guiding, motivating and rebuking a child.

I don't think I've ever needed to spank my daughter, she knew she had crossed the line if I had to raise my voice to her – that was enough.

However, when I was a young child – if I got wound up and out of control I didn't stop until my behind met the end of my mother's Tupperware soup ladle (*it had a flexibility that made it more whip-like when it was used as opposed to the stiffer traditional wooden spoon-* made it very effective!

Friends - Proverbs is full of wisdom like this with regards to parenting, and I encourage you to read it – (Parenting Group)

But wisdom can come from observing God's creation as well- after all He's the one who made it and when we observe it through a Christian worldview there is good wisdom to be found in all sorts of places.

So - interestingly enough it was a Jewish development psychologist, Diana Baumrind, who pioneered the description of parenting as being responsive to your children while placing demands or stipulations on them.

So according to this definition we see the follow kinds of parenting styles.

The parent who places no stipulations on their child, and is not responsive to them is a negligent parent.

A parent who places no stipulations on their child, and is highly responsive to them is an indulgent parent.

A parent who places stipulations on their child, and is not responsive to them is an authoritarian parent.

And a parent who places stipulations on their child and is highly responsive to them is an authoritative parent.

And friends, if we think about parenting in this way then the God revealed to us in the scriptures is the inspiration behind an authoritative parent.

Because God has always been very clear with us about who we are, and where our loyalty should lie and how we need to live to show that loyalty.

But He has also shown himself to be highly responsive to us – He became one of us in Jesus Christ so that He might change our sinful nature in order that we might become people who are enabled to be highly responsive to Him.

And He did this so we will not get what we deserve – the wages of sin...death.

So friends – let this be our motivation for how we discipline our children.

Its not about punishing them because we're angry, (though we may be) its not about shaming them because they've let us down, or embarrassed us (thought they might have) its not

about leaving them to deal with their own consequences
because we're so tired of dealing with the same issue time after
time...

It's about wisely intervening – being involved in their lives – in
unique, appropriate and effective ways.

It's about grace and discipline coming together in your
interaction with them, because you're motivated to accurately
represent to them how God deals with us in Jesus Christ.

That's why we discipline our children, so may God
give us the wisdom to do it most effectively with each child
that he's entrusted to us. Amen.