

Lesson 5: Discipleship in the Home — Parents, Children, and Formation

Wisdom begins at home. The fear of the Lord is first taught, modeled, and nurtured in the covenant household.



The Home as the Primary Classroom of Wisdom

“Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching” (Proverbs 1:8, ESV)

The book of Proverbs assumes that wisdom is learned, first and foremost, in the home. Before the sayings of Solomon address rulers or citizens, they speak to sons and daughters. Parental voices, especially the father’s, frame the entire first third of the book (**Proverbs 1-9**). The foundational setting for biblical discipleship is not the synagogue, not the palace, and not even the temple, but the family.

God designed the household as the ***first and central arena*** for forming a child’s moral and spiritual direction. Parental instruction is essential. From the earliest days, children are meant to be taught to fear the Lord, to walk in righteousness, and to reject the way of sinners (**Proverbs 1:10-19**).

The New Testament affirms this same pattern. Paul charges fathers to *“bring [your children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”* (**Ephesians 6:4**). This includes behavior, but it is not *merely* behavior management. It is gospel-shaped, Christ-exalting instruction that flows from a home where God’s Word is known, taught, and lived. We should *act* rightly because we *think and worship* rightly.

Discipleship does not begin on Sunday morning; it begins at the breakfast table, around the dinner table, in evening prayers, in daily correction, and in the quiet moments of shared life. Church elders are tasked with guarding doctrine and shepherding the flock, but parents are tasked with shaping souls from the very beginning. Parents are, so to speak, the elders of the home.

This includes a child’s education. In many Christian circles today, it is common, sometimes unquestioned, to outsource the intellectual and moral formation of children to secular institutions. But I hold to a minority opinion that Scripture places that responsibility squarely on parents. ***I recognize this is controversial. But it is a conviction I hold and I can disagree agreeably.*** That said, to hand over your child’s education to a system that denies God’s truth is to compromise the soil in which their worldview will grow, placing them in danger. As Voddie Baucham soberly warned:

“We cannot continue to send our children to Caesar for their education and be surprised when they come home as Romans.”¹

This is not a call to *isolate children from the world*, but to *prepare them for it*, not by mimicking its patterns, but by shaping them with God’s truth at every level: spiritual, moral, and intellectual. The goal is not merely to *protect*, but to *form*. Not to *shelter in fear*, but to *disciple in wisdom*. As Moses said:

“These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

The education of children is not *neutral*, and it is not *optional*. The home is the God-ordained classroom where sons and daughters learn to fear the Lord. ***Church life is vital.*** But the family, not the church, holds the ***first responsibility*** for raising their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

*God has designed the family as the first and central place for discipleship.
Church supports, but does not replace, the home.*

¹ Voddie T. Baucham Jr., *Family Driven Faith: Doing What It Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 202.

Father and Mother: Distinct but United Voices

From the opening lines of Proverbs, we see that the family is the primary institution God ordained for discipleship. Not the state, not the school, not even the church. The family. And within that family, God has established an order. The father is the head of the household, the one held accountable before God for the instruction, discipline, and direction of his family. The mother, likewise, is a vital and irreplaceable partner in this work. She is to be wise, nurturing, and active in teaching, but her authority flows under, not apart from, her husband's leadership.

This is what we mean when we speak of biblical patriarchy: the father's loving, sacrificial headship in the home. It is not tyranny or domination; it is responsibility. It is not about personal privilege, but personal accountability before God. Patriarchy is not a cultural artifact; it is the created order of God, embedded in the fabric of human life from Eden itself. Before sin entered the world, Adam was charged to work and keep the garden (Genesis 2:15) and to teach the command of God (Genesis 2:16-17). Eve was made as a "helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18), not lesser in value, but distinct in role. Together they were called to be fruitful, to multiply, and to fill the earth with image-bearers who would reflect God's glory. That is the first household, and it is unmistakably patriarchal in structure and covenantal in purpose.

Sin distorted this order, but it did not cause nor erase it. Patriarchy is not a result of the Fall. In the fallen world, men often abuse authority and women often resist it, but redemption restores God's good design. Christ is the true and better Adam, who loves His bride, the Church, and gives Himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25). The Christian father is not a passive facilitator, but the ruler of his household, charged by God to exercise real authority, enforce real standards, and reflect the real kingship of Christ in word and deed. This is sometimes called "servant leadership", which is accurate when rightly understood. But we must not let the "servant" part obscure the real leadership being exercised. Biblical headship is both strong and sacrificial; marked by love, but not diminished by it.

Paul commands fathers to "bring [your children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). That command is not given to mothers, grandparents, or institutions; it is given to fathers. This does not exclude mothers but establishes the order of responsibility. The father bears the covenantal charge. The mother assists him faithfully, exercising wisdom and tenderness in teaching and nurturing her children. She is not a silent bystander but an active, essential voice in their moral formation. Her "teaching" (Proverbs 1:8; 6:20) is precious, illuminating, and enduring. Godly mothers teach truth. Consider the examples Scripture gives:

- King Lemuel's mother taught him to rule righteously and avoid indulgence (Proverbs 31:1-9).
- Lois and Eunice, Timothy's grandmother and mother, grounded him in the sacred writings that would make him wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15).

These examples remind us that maternal instruction is powerful and spiritually significant. Their voices matter. Their words endure.

A faithful household, then, is not an egalitarian partnership but a harmonious hierarchy: the father leads, the mother helps and teaches under his leadership, and the children honor and obey both (Proverbs 1:8; Ephesians 6:1-3). When this order is embraced, the home reflects the glory of Christ and His Church. When it is rejected, disorder follows. Our culture despises patriarchy because it despises authority. But Christians must not conform to this age. God's design for the home is not up for revision.

Patriarchy: affirms that the husband and father is the God-ordained head of the home, bearing covenantal responsibility for the spiritual, moral, and practical leadership of the family. The wife functions as a helper (Genesis 2:18), nurturer (Titus 2:4-5), and teacher of children (Proverbs 1:8; 6:20), working under and alongside her husband's headship. This is the consistent pattern of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

Complementarianism: affirms that men and women are equal in value and dignity before God but are given distinct roles in the home and church. While this view rightly preserves male headship, it is often framed defensively, emphasizing what women cannot do, and is increasingly vague or diluted in practice.

Egalitarianism: teaches that men and women are interchangeable in role, denying that headship and submission are part of God's good design. It holds that leadership in the home and church should be based on gifting, not gender. This view distorts the created order and undermines biblical authority.

This structure is not oppressive; rather, it is protective. A husband's headship shields his wife and children under his care. A mother's submission strengthens her husband's leadership and provides stability for her children. Together they form a unified front of truth and grace. Discipleship in the home depends on that unity. Parents must not contradict or undermine one another but speak with one voice, rooted in Scripture, displaying to their children what it means to live under joyful obedience to God's authority. Deuteronomy 6 gives the pattern:

"You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." (Deuteronomy 6:7)

This command assumes a father-led home where both parents participate, saturating daily life with God's Word. It is covenantal instruction, passed from one generation to the next through the faithful order God has established.

Biblical discipleship in the home honors the distinct yet cooperative roles of father and mother, with the father as the shepherd-leader, and the mother as a wise and faithful guide under his care.

Training the Heart, Not Just the Habits

"My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways." (Proverbs 23:26)

Raising children in the fear of the Lord involves far more than behavior correction. Proverbs doesn't aim at managing outward conduct; it aims at shaping inward character. The wise parent does not settle for raising children who obey rules. Instead, they long to shepherd their child toward loving what is good, hating what is evil, and fearing the Lord from the heart. Incidentally, one whose heart is trained unto wisdom will also be one who obeys God's law from the heart, not merely to avoid punishment.

Scripture never divorces outward action from inward affection. Proverbs 4:23 says, *"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."* The heart is the control center of the person, where desires are formed, where loyalties are established, where wisdom or folly takes root. Parental discipline, then, must aim deeper than behavior management. It must aim for the heart.

This is not merely a shift in tone; it is a shift in goal. We are not simply trying to raise well-mannered kids. We are aiming to raise worshippers, children who will one day fear the Lord not because we told them to, but because they see Him as worthy. Good habits matter. Manners matter. But without the fear of the Lord, without salvation, our children will simply go to Hell with good manners. *"My son, give me your heart..." (Proverbs 23:26a)* is a plea that transcends rule-keeping. It calls for relationship. The wise father doesn't just want compliance; he wants communion.

The Necessity of Discipline

Proverbs speaks plainly about discipline, not as a cultural relic, but as God's appointed means of forming wisdom in the hearts of sinners. *"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (Proverbs 29:15).* The phrase *"left to himself"* should chill us. Children do not drift toward righteousness. Nor do we. Refusing to discipline a child effectively forsakes his soul.

Proverbs 13:24 declares, *"Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him."* Notice the contrast: to withhold discipline is not love; it is hatred masquerading as kindness. The world equates discipline with cruelty, but Scripture says the opposite. Love that refuses to correct is not love at all. Real love steps in, restrains evil, and teaches obedience through consistent, measured consequences. Corporal punishment, rightly applied, is not abuse but a physical symbol of moral reality: that sin brings pain, rebellion has cost, and authority carries weight. The rod is not about venting anger; it is about reinforcing truth. When wielded in love, under control, and in proportion, it communicates what words alone cannot. It connects disobedience to consequence, and consequence to repentance. Corporal punishment is not optional, but a biblical requirement.

Hebrews 12:6 reminds us, “*the Lord disciplines the one He loves*”. God’s discipline is neither harsh nor arbitrary; it is the means by which He trains His children for holiness. Earthly parents, therefore, imitate divine love when they correct promptly, calmly, and consistently.

The home that never disciplines teaches that sin carries no cost and authority carries no weight.

The home that disciplines in anger teaches that authority is cruel and arbitrary.

The home that disciplines wisely teaches the Law and Gospel in their proper place.

Balancing Law and Gospel

As usual, there are ditches on both sides of this road. One danger is the moralistic home, where rules are enforced but the gospel is absent, where children behave but do not believe. The other danger is the permissive home, where love is spoken but never enforced, where children are affirmed but not formed. Both fail to train the heart. True discipleship brings together loving instruction and firm correction, applied with consistency, patience, and prayer. The home must be full of both truth and tenderness, both law and gospel, both spanking and hugs.

Parents must also be vigilant not to outsource heart-formation. No school, Christian or otherwise, can do what parents are called to do. The church can support and equip, but it cannot replace the daily shepherding of a child’s thoughts, words, responses, fears, and affections. This is the work of a wise household: watching the child’s soul as well as their behavior.

And make no mistake: this is spiritual warfare. The world is actively catechizing our children, teaching them to follow their hearts, redefine truth, and treat sin as freedom. If we are not training their hearts to fear the Lord, the enemy will gladly train them to do the opposite.

But the good news is you are not alone. God is the One who ultimately changes hearts. Parents plant. Parents water. But God gives the growth. (**1 Corinthians 3:6**) You are called to be faithful, not omnipotent. Raise your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and then entrust their hearts to the Lord of the harvest.

Discipline aims to shape children into worshipers, not just well-behaved people.
It forms their loves and loyalties.

Christ, the Perfect Son and the Pattern for Families

“And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them... And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.” (Luke 2:51–52)

Jesus Christ is not only the Wisdom of God (**1 Corinthians 1:30**), He is also the perfect Son. He honored His earthly parents, submitted to their instruction, and grew in wisdom, not only as God in the flesh, but as a true child of the covenant.

Where Adam failed, Christ obeyed.

Where Israel rebelled, Christ fulfilled.

He models perfect sonship and secures salvation for all who trust in Him.

This gives parents both a pattern and a promise.

The pattern: Parents are to raise their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, calling them to follow Christ, the true Wise One. The home should echo His truth, reflect His love, teach His gospel.

The promise: No parent perfectly fulfills their role. No child perfectly obeys. But Christ has done both. He is the perfect Son for all wayward children and the faithful Savior for all faltering parents. Our ultimate hope is not in the success of our parenting, but in the sufficiency of our Savior.

Christ is both our example and our atonement. He fulfills all righteousness, and
He gives grace to parents and children who fall short.