

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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Verbal Authority

The Bible tells us that children are to obey their parents. In our many travels Lars and I observe that few young parents have any idea that a child *can* be taught to obey. Some of them, alas, feel that it would damage their little egos to correct them. But God's word is clear: "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him." But how to begin?

A young couple asked me to help them learn to discipline their 10-month-old son. We met in a restaurant and, to my dismay, they brought the child with them. My heart sank for I had hoped they would leave him at home so that we might have uninterrupted conversation.

The child was put in a high chair (the kind without an attached tray) at one end of the table. His mother and father were on his right on one side of the table, I at his left. The couple chatted to me and another guest who was at my left. It did not take long before the baby grabbed his mother's fork. Without a word she took it from his hand. He looked around, then reached across her plate for her knife. She took it away. Next was the spoon. She said *nothing*, simply took it out of his hand. He cried, pouted, waited a short time, then reached for her water glass.

By this time the mother was exasperated and helpless. She called the waitress, asked for a glass of milk and some crackers for the child, while the adults read the menu and the child fussed. When he had finished with crackers and milk he began to eye my spoon. Slowly he moved his left hand toward it. I simply lowered my face to the level of his, looked him kindly in the eye, and said quietly, "Jeremy, no." He withdrew his hand at once and looked at his mother.

She was oblivious. It was evident that she did not understand verbal authority, supposing that the child was too young to *understand* since he was too young to *talk*. A child is usually farther ahead in understanding than most parents realize. Not once had she said no.

The meal progressed with some conversation and further grappings between mother and child. Every now and then the child eyed me, then finally began very slowly to move his hand once again toward my spoon. This time all I did was look him steadily in the eye. I said nothing. He looked away, pouted, and withdrew his hand.

Jeremy had never seen me before, but he recognized verbal authority. On his right were two helpless young parents, earnestly wanting to do right by their child (or they would not have asked for my help), yet never addressing him by name, never issuing the simple command "No." The interesting thing about the whole scene was that this baby clearly understood the authority on his left, and just as clearly understood that there was no such thing on his right. I am afraid the parents failed to see the lesson I had hoped to show them.

What infinite pains parents would avoid if they would only start early to teach children the meaning of *verbal* authority. As soon as a child can crawl, usually around seven or eight months, he will immediately begin to touch things he ought not to touch: books, the TV, knickknacks on the coffee table, etc. He will very likely make a beeline for the very thing he is to be taught not to touch. If parents "child proof" the house, putting everything out of the baby's reach, they are teaching him that he may touch anything *within* reach. What happens then when he goes to the grocery store or to his Aunt Susie's house? Disaster! "No" and "Come" must be taught at once. Note four things that will help:

1. Speak the child's name in a calm tone of voice.
2. Establish eye contact
3. Issue a one word command, "No" or "Come."
4. Do not repeat.

The initial lesson will require repetition. It might be wise simply to set aside a whole uninterrupted hour to teach the lesson. Think what infinite pains will be averted for the rest of his growing-up years if he learns thoroughly that Daddy and Mama mean exactly what they say, and they mean it the first time. But if a parent makes a habit of repeating commands, he is training the child to delay his obedience. My parents made it clear to us that delayed obedience would be treated as disobedience.

If the children are older and things seem to have gotten a bit out of hand I suggest that you call a family council. Gather everybody together and explain to the children that their parents have made some bad mistakes. Confess to them that you are very sorry about this, you realize that you have not created as happy a home as you want to have, but you have now learned some things and are going to start over. (Your children will be astonished that parents, too, have to learn things!) Then down on your knees, everyone! Pray for the Lord's forgiveness and ask Him to help you to be what mothers and fathers are supposed to be to their children, and to help the children to do what they ought to do, quickly and cheerfully. Perhaps you will ask each child to pray briefly.

The next step is to make it clear that you are going to *expect* your children to obey you. It is amazing what can result from a clear understanding of the expectations. Depending on the ages of the children, you might want to illustrate the necessity of obedience by referring to the coach of an athletic team—he calls the shots, the players do exactly what he says. If they don't, there's no game. Or point to traffic laws which make it possible for everybody to move in an orderly way, according to the speed laws, and on the right side of the street. If one person runs through a red light he could kill somebody.

Do not despair! Yes, you long to have a peaceful home and it seems that our adversary the devil is continually "walking about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). But we have a Mighty Fortress, a God who loves us and promises to help us. Things should be done in a Christian home "decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Drop Thy still dews of quietness
 Till all our strivings cease;
 Take from our souls the strain and stress;
 And let our *ordered* lives confess
 The beauty of Thy peace.

John Greenleaf Whittier

I know it is possible to have a peaceful home. My parents, who had six children, made it so. My friends Joe and Arlita Winston, parents of five and now grandparents of twenty-three, ordered their home in such a way as to eliminate chaos. Thousands have done it.

"Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-6).

Jesus Christ has overcome the world. He can demolish the strongholds which the enemy may have established in your home. My great-grandfather, Henry Clay Trumbull, reared eight children. He wrote a book, *Hints on Child Training* (available from *Gateway To Joy*, 1-800-759-4JOY), in which he says, "It is a parent's privilege and it is a parent's duty to make his children, by God's blessing, to be

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and to do what they should be and do, rather than what they would like to be and do.”

Another excellent book is *To Train Up a Child*, by Michael and Debi Pearl (\$6.00 inc. postage. Make check payable to The Church at Cane Creek, 1000 Pearl Rd., Pleasantville, TN 37147).

Vance Havner, that delightful old Southern preacher, had a good definition of the discipline which works best with a small child: “the posterior application of superior force.”

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5,6). Be assured that I am praying for you. May the Lord give you His own peace, and the wisdom you need each day as you turn to Him for help.

One Summer Morning

It was very early. The sun had not risen, and the sea was palest mauve and silver. There was a solitary sailboat with one very tall, slim sail that looked like a shining spear. All was calm, and the little waves curled their white fringes slowly around the black rocks. One lone fisherman stood in his accustomed place near the edge of a great slab of granite. It is our usual habit to rise around five o'clock, and we can count on him to be there every summer morning, waiting, quietly waiting for that big striper that may win the prize offered by the city of Gloucester each year. Occasionally my quiet time is on the balcony and I am moved by a stanza of John Ellerton's hymn, “The Day Thou Gavest”—“As on each continent and island the dawn brings on another day, the voice of prayer is never silent, nor die the strains of praise away.” Isn't it a lovely thought that at every moment of every night and day someone is praying? And the prayers of all the saints, we are told in Revelation, ascend to God like incense. Imagine! An angel with a golden censer stands at the altar and the smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, goes up before God from the angel's hand.

Teach Us to Pray

Lord Jesus, Intercessor, O teach us how to pray:
Not wave-like, rising, falling, in fitful clouds of
spray.

The mighty tides of ocean a deeper secret know,
Their currents undefeated move whatever winds
may blow.

Lord Jesus, Intercessor, Creator of the sea,
Teach us the tide's great secret of quiet urgency.
Spindrift of words we ask not. But, Lord, we seek to
know

The conquering patience of the tides whatever
winds may blow.

Amy Carmichael

From an Over-the-Road Trucker

Jim Fry (one of a number of truckers who listen to *Gateway To Joy*) wrote: “I'm an over-the-road truck driver living in Ohio. The Lord is very good to my family, getting me home regularly to be with my wife and daughter. You did a program a little way back about God's timing of things. How true that is! To me things don't just happen. My wife says, ‘That's not *odd*—that's *God*.’ I hear you whenever I can, searching the stations. One week you talked about poems every day. Having never been much on poems, I listened anyway, just to get to hear you. (By the way—you and I talk a lot in my truck, we get along great, and are of course on a first name basis!) On Monday I picked you up again and you said this week would be another week of poems. The first thing I thought was, ‘Not another week of poems!’ As soon as I thought that you said you were sure there was a truck driver out there somewhere thinking, ‘Oh no, not another week of poems!’ I'm sure at that time the other motorists on the road were staring as I roared in laughter, slapping my knee. There are other times driving down the road straining to see through tears flowing like streams.”

Prayer

“O Lord, Strength of our life, be Thou, I entreat Thee, our Strength unto life eternal: our Strength when temptation assails us, for Thou art stronger than our strongest enemy; our Strength when we go down into the valley of the shadow of death, for the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. By Thy Rod and Thy Staff comfort us. Amen.”

Christina G. Rossetti (1830–1895)

My Gracious Lord

Thank You, O Divine Redeemer, that:
My hurt heart You have captivated!
My hard head You have penetrated!
My listless life You have renovated!
My sinning soul You have reinstated!
In the name of Your only-begotten Son and my
Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Beth Carpenter (a listener to *Gateway To Joy*)

“He has kept us hitherto. He will take care of us tomorrow. Either He will shield us from suffering or He will give us unfailing strength to bear it.”

St. Francis de Sales

Travel Schedule August – December 1998

August No engagements.

September 4-6 Tulsa, Okla., Christ in Youth, Tony Allmoslecher, (417)781-2273.

September 10-11 Taping for *Gateway To Joy*.

September 19 Myrtle Beach, S.C., Grand Strand Women's Day, Ruth Walker, (803)249-2312.

September 25-29 Toalmas, Hungary.

October 16 Grass Valley, Calif., Calvary Chapel, Vicki Sullivan, (916)268-2539.

October 17 Diamond Bar, Calif., Calvary Chapel, Golden Springs, (909)396-1884.

November 3-5 Asheville, N.C., The Cove, (704)298-2092.

November 7 Anderson, S.C., Family Life, Kit Coons, (864)225-2456.

November 13 Reading, Pa., ACTV, fall banquet, George Keitel, phone/fax (610) 378-1378.

November 16-17 Taping for *Gateway To Joy*.

December 29 Washington, D.C., Chinese Mission, David Chow, (717)687-8564.

December 30-31 Orlando, Fla., Campus Outreach Conference, (706)823-2460.

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