

THOU SHALT TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY

BY ZACK M. GUESS

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The title of this article comes from Deuteronomy 6: 7. This is a subject that is very near to my heart, because Judy, my dear wife, and I had this as a goal when we first married, if the Lord blessed us with any children. As we courted we often talked of our desire to bring up our children in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Even then we loved the fact that “children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is His reward.” (Ps. 127: 3). In His gracious mercy, God has blessed us with twelve children, eleven of whom we have been blessed to rear, one being lost in infancy. Our youngest is thirteen. Five of our children are married. We have been blessed with eight grandchildren and one is on the way.

Rearing children Biblically is not easy, but it is God-honoring and is greatly rewarding. Nothing will make an individual realize his utter dependence on the Lord more than this blessed task. We can and must do the best we can, but the final word is “unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.” Every practical guideline that I give here must be constantly watered with prayer.

The expression “teach diligently” in our text comes from the Hebrew word *shawnan*, which has the basic meaning of “sharpen or whet.” This indicates that there is a need for shaping and molding the characters of our children, and for not letting them make their own decisions, go their own ways, and make up their own minds as to how to live. It is the God-mandated responsibility of the parents, especially the fathers, to do whatever it takes, on an ongoing and continual basis, to assure that their children are being brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. There must be a long-term commitment to this task and the very highest priorities of time, concern, and effort must be devoted to it. There must be absolute cooperation and the mutual commitment of both husband and wife.

The husband and his wife should regularly talk and pray together as they evaluate their children’s character development. They must recognize needs and deficiencies and devise practical strategies on how to train and lead their children in needed areas. Some of these strategies may involve certain Bible verses to discuss and memorize that teach proper behavior in specific areas. This drives the dad and mom to prayerful Bible study as they seek answers, not from the unbelieving world, but from the infallible and very practical Word of God. Here the father and mother complement each other. One may be aware of needs the other is oblivious to. Especially in the youngest years, the father must depend on his wife for much of this, because usually she spends many more hours with the young children than he does.

Regular family devotionals are a must. The family altar must be a prominent feature of every Christian home. Every family must devise their own way of doing this, but some things are absolutely necessary. The reading of Scripture and prayer should be regular features, with some of the prayers being specific requests. It is exciting to see the Lord answer prayer! This is a good time to memorize Scripture together. This is also a good time to make sure that our children are sound in doctrine. We should teach our children to be “set for the defence of the doctrine.” There is every wind of doctrine that is being constantly promulgated by radio, television, the internet, etc. Don’t take it for granted that your children are sound in doctrine just because they go to church and hear sermons. Question them, talk to them, do role playing in some of your devotionals, teaching your children how to defend the faith when confronted with controversial texts.

Also we must train our children to be sound in living. We must help them develop strength of character and to be able to withstand the many temptations they will be constantly facing. Prepare them for what to say and do when confronted with such temptations as pornography, immorality, immodest dress, drugs, alcohol, etc. They must be trained to “purpose in their hearts,” as Daniel did, before the fiery temptation comes. They must be Scripturally trained to almost instinctively do the right thing. They must be trained to stand alone, when tempted with the phrase “everybody is doing it.” This listing of things to be done should give each parent many ideas of how to conduct profitable family devotions.

We should be very careful who our children are around and who influences them. Peers have an immense influence on

children. We must make sure that our children are constantly around peers who reinforce our moral standards and our doctrinal beliefs. We have gone to the immense exertion of having our own one-room school and of doing home schooling just to make sure that our children were constantly exposed to the truth. We are missing the boat if our children's best friends don't come from like-minded family members and children from the church.

To properly train children we must be willing to change some things as they grow older. While they are very young they must be taught to respect and obey parental authority. As they mature we can allow them to do some decision making, whereas we had to make virtually all their decisions for them when they were younger. We can also give them more freedom to come and to go. However, I would like to give a very strong word of caution here. I believe that many parents make the mistake of giving too much freedom too soon. When our children come to college age, they face the most difficult challenges they have ever faced. This is certainly not the time for the parents to relax and think that their parenting days are over. Many young people who have been properly reared in Christian homes, make shipwreck of the faith and ruin their lives by making bad decisions in their late teens and early twenties. We have all seen some heartbreaking examples of this.

I personally believe that in most cases it is best for even older children to live at home until they are married. I am thankful that our children have enjoyed being at home so much that they have not wanted to leave home until they have been blessed with mates and have established homes of their own. In doing this they have lived in a wholesome atmosphere and have saved a lot of money. We have had two exceptions to this, but even then we made sure our children were in a wholesome Christian environment and we kept close tabs on them.

Parents be very alert to the world that your young adult children are facing. Don't become so self-absorbed by your busy schedule that you neglect at this crucial point one of the most important tasks that God has given you!

During the entire process of rearing children, it is absolutely necessary to maintain good communications with our children. While we parents must exercise our God-ordained authority, we must not be tyrants. We must be willing to listen to our children. We must show them affection and let them know how much we love them. We must spend time with them and build relationships with them. Josh McDowell once said, "**Rules**, without **Relationships**, leads to **Rebellion**." These are three **R's** that we parents do well to remember.

One of the best ways for fathers to develop relationships with their sons is to work together. I drew very close to my sons as we cut yards together. Teach the boys to work around the house as you do plumbing and other repairs.

It goes without saying that if we want to influence our children we must not be hypocrites. We cannot be among those who say, "Don't do as I do; do as I say do." We are not perfect and our children know that. However we must live consistent Christian lives before them, and be willing to admit and repent of our mistakes when we make them.

Dear parents, our task is great. It has been said that the family is the bull's eye on Satan's target. However "greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." What a responsibility to rear children for the Lord. But oh, what a great privilege!