



FAMILY ENRICHMENT/KINSHIP SUNDAY

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

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Lection – Hebrews 12:9-11 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 9) “Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? (v. 10) For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness. (v. 11) Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

I can still clearly hear those misunderstood words, “This is going to hurt me more than it’s going to hurt you.” Those were the last words I would hear before discipline was handed down for

doing something I knew I should not have done. Today those famous words are not spoken as often as they were when I was growing up. Today, as the rates of incarceration continue to climb for African American children and adults, we need to gain an understanding of how discipline or the lack thereof plays a significant role in whether one will be a positive contributor to society.

Discipline begins in the home and follows you for the rest of your life. According to the Committee for Children (2004), the purpose of discipline is “to encourage moral, physical, and intellectual development and a sense of responsibility in children. Ultimately, older children will do the right thing, not because they fear external reprisal, but because they have internalized a standard initially presented by parents and other caretakers. In learning to rely on their own resources rather than their parents, children gain self-confidence and a positive self-image.”¹

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Hebrews 12:9-11

Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

In my neighborhood everyone knew everything about everybody. On the occasion when I decided to respond to my math teacher, who was also my neighbor, in a way that was deemed disrespectful, I was disciplined right there in the classroom. While walking the five blocks from school to my home, I was greeted by adults who had already heard what I had done. Some adults verbally disciplined me and others just shook their head. Everyone knew that when I arrived home I would be disciplined. I learned a valuable lesson: being disrespectful to my teacher or any adult is not appropriate behavior for a child and can have long-lasting consequences. I had to see my math teacher every week day for the rest of the long school year, and when I did I always remembered what I had done.

As a kindergarten teacher, I had the opportunity to experience first-hand what it was like to have a child disrespect you. I watched some children be disciplined for their behavior while others went without any punishment of any type. Parental discipline made a positive difference in the behavior and attitude of the children in my classroom. Children who were not disciplined often repeated the behavior, not only in my classroom but in other school settings. Parental discipline helps us learn appropriate behavior in various settings, and these lessons are valuable assets to have on this journey called life.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

Discipline is a major theme in this text. It is important that we understand that discipline is a corrective action taken to put one back in right relationship with God, self, and community. One look at statistics and we can see that from the mid-twentieth century to the present our children have not developed and matured in the area of self-restraint or self-discipline. With increased high school dropout rates, crimes committed by youth and young adults, incarceration of teens, peer bullying, sexual promiscuity, and violent acts committed against parents by their children, it is not difficult to see that there is a deficit in self-discipline. Discipline is sorely needed because without discipline it is impossible for people to become productive members of society. Lack of discipline harms families, those who lead families, and society at large.

I believe that in our community and Western society in general, the downward spiral of discipline happened during the last 50 years. In our community, I believe that this was hastened as African American parents succumbed to the influences of Euro-American theories on how to rear children. Medical professionals such as Dr. Spock suggested to parents that rather than acting as the authority to administer discipline, the child should have an equal voice and the parent should consider accommodating the child's feelings and thoughts.² I believe that in many households where this occurred (generally speaking) children became more outspoken and defiant, exhibiting less moral restraint and increased contempt for authority. The behavior we see today in too many of our children, youth, and adults is a result of replacing God's directives about discipline with Dr. Spock-like discipline.

Through biblical teaching we learn that discipline is wrapped in love. Proverbs 13:24 emphasizes that when we love our children we are diligent in disciplining them. The model we follow is clearly articulated in Hebrews 12:5-6: "My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts." When we understand discipline in this manner, we see that it is administered by a parent who seeks to help the child become a better person. By using corrective discipline in love, a parent is often looking toward the future when a child will be required to exercise discipline in a variety of situations in the absence of the parent. The behavior of every generation is a direct reflection of how they were parented. Our Scripture speaks of what good discipline yields. Just as good discipline yields good fruit, improper or a lack of discipline yields discord, depression, and sin. We have only to look around to know that this is true. If we want to change what our families yield, the right type of discipline must be consistently applied.

In the same way, God disciplines adults because God desires us to become all that we were created to be. As a child we may not like the discipline that we receive because we may see it as means to prevent us from achieving what we desired. It is only as we mature and reflect on our lives that we begin to understand the necessity of the discipline. We must learn from our past in order to create a better present and future. The discipline that we administer now will impact the behavior of future generations. If our children are to understand the necessity of discipline, it is important for parents and adults to share appropriate experiences we have had and their direct impact on our lives. Discipline in love along with understanding helps children develop respect for parents and authority figures. Without it, our families are not enriched; they and society are made so much poorer.

Celebration

This text teaches us that God loves us enough to discipline us so that we may become all that God desires. God cares for each and every one of us. We celebrate the results of discipline because it is meant for our good. Though we receive discipline, we know that weeping may endure for the night but joy will come in the morning.

Descriptive Details

The descriptive details of this passage include:

Sights: A family gathered around the dinner table where stories are shared about how parents intervened on behalf of their children through discipline; a worship service dedicated to sharing testimonies about how God has guided individuals through various circumstances and situations;

Sounds: An interchange of laughter and crying in response to the stories and testimonies being shared.

III. Other Material That Clergy and Others Can Use

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) represents over 6,900 child and adolescent psychiatrists who are physicians with at least five years of additional training beyond medical school in general (adult) and child and adolescent psychiatry. The following brief articles are provided by AACAP to assist families.

(A) Article on Providing Discipline for Children and Teens

DISCIPLINE Children and Teens

Helping a child to behave in an acceptable manner is a necessary part of raising the child well. Discipline varies at different ages. There is no one right way to raise children, but child and adolescent psychiatrists offer the following general guidelines:

Children generally want to please their parents. Wise parents can in their disciplining activities use children's desire to please. When parents show joy and approval for behaviors that please them, this reinforces good behavior in the child. When parents show disapproval of dangerous or unpleasant behaviors at the early stages, they are more likely to be successful when the child is older.

The way the parent corrects a child or adolescent for misbehavior should make sense to the youngster, and not be too strict that the child or adolescent cannot later feel the parent's love and good intentions. Children and adolescents can and do anger parents, and parents need good self-control when they are angry. Although a loud "no" may get the attention of a toddler heading for a street full of traffic, it does not quiet a crying baby. For older children, there should be clear expectations, agreed upon by both parents and clearly told to the child or adolescent.

In our mixed society, where cultures and parenting styles are varied, different families expect different behaviors from their children. One child may be allowed to come home at any time, while another child may have a strict curfew. When parents and children disagree about rules, an honest exchange of ideas may help them learn from each other. However, parents must be responsible for setting the family's rules and values.

Keeping unwanted behavior from happening in the first place is easier than stopping it later. It is better to put breakable or treasured objects out of the reach of toddlers than to punish them for breaking them. Parents should encourage curiosity but should direct it into activities like playing with puzzles, learning to use paints, or reading a book.

Changing a child's unwanted behaviors can help the child have the self-control needed to become responsible and considerate of others. Self-control does not happen automatically or suddenly. Infants and toddlers need parental guidance and support to begin the process of learning self-control. Self-control usually begins to show by age six. With parents guiding the process, self-control increases throughout the school years. Teenage experimentation and rebellion may occur, but most

youngsters pass through this period and become responsible adults—especially if they had good early training.

Families pass methods of discipline and what is expected of children from generation to generation. When discipline attempts are not successful, it is often helpful for someone outside the family to make useful suggestions on raising a child. Professionals trained in child growth and behavior can give information on the way children think and develop. They can also suggest different approaches to changing unwanted behavior. The patience of parents, and help from caring professionals, when necessary, will help smooth the way for children to learn and enjoy what society expects of them and what they can expect from themselves.

(B) Article on Adolescent Development

ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT Middle School and Early High School Years

Parents are often worried or confused by changes in their teenagers. The following information should help parents understand this phase of development. Each teenager is an individual with a unique personality and special interests, likes, and dislikes. However, there are also numerous developmental issues that everyone faces during the adolescent years. The normal feelings and behaviors of the middle school and early high school adolescent are described below.

Movement Towards Independence

- Struggle with sense of identity
- Feeling awkward or strange about one's self and one's body
- Focus on self, alternating between high expectations and poor self-concept
- Interests and clothing style influenced by peer group
- Moodiness
- Improved ability to use speech to express one's self
- Realization that parents are not perfect; identification of their faults
- Less overt affection shown to parents, with occasional rudeness
- Complaints that parents interfere with independence
- Tendency to return to childish behavior, particularly when stressed

Future Interests and Cognitive Changes

- Mostly interested in present, limited thoughts of future
- Intellectual interests expand and gain in importance
- Greater ability to do work (physical, mental, emotional)

Sexuality

- Display shyness, blushing, and modesty
- Girls develop physically sooner than boys
- Increased interest in the opposite sex
- Movement toward heterosexuality with fears of homosexuality
- Concerns regarding physical and sexual attractiveness to others
- Frequently changing relationships
- Worries about being normal

Morals, Values, and Self-Direction

- Rule and limit testing
- Capacity for abstract thought
- Development of ideals and selection of role models
- More consistent evidence of conscience
- Experimentation with sex and drugs (cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana)

Teenagers do vary slightly from the above descriptions, but the feelings and behaviors are, in general, considered normal for each stage of adolescence

C. Article on Children and Television

CHILDREN AND WATCHING TV

Television viewing is a major activity and influence on children and adolescents. Children in the United States watch an average of three to four hours of television a day. By the time of high school graduation, they will have spent more time watching television than they have in the classroom. While television can entertain, inform, and keep our children company, it may also influence them in undesirable ways.

Time spent watching television takes away from important activities such as reading, school work, playing, family interaction, and social development. Children also learn information from television that may be inappropriate or incorrect. They often cannot tell the difference between the fantasy presented on television versus reality. They are influenced by the thousands of commercials seen each year, many of which are for alcohol, junk food (candy and sugared cereal), fast foods, and toys. Children who watch a lot of television are likely to:

- Have lower grades in school
- Read fewer books
- Exercise less
- Be overweight

Violence, sexuality, race and gender stereotypes, and drug and alcohol abuse are common themes of television programs. Impressionable young people may assume that what they see on television is typical, safe, and acceptable. As a result, television also exposes children to behaviors and attitudes that may be overwhelming and difficult to understand.

Active parenting can ensure that children have a positive experience with television. Parents can help by:

- Viewing programs with your children
- Selecting developmentally appropriate shows
- Placing limits on the amount of television viewing (per day and per week)
- Turn off the TV during family meals and study time
- Turn off shows you don't feel are appropriate for your child

In addition, parents can help by doing the following: don't allow children to watch long blocks of TV, but help them select individual programs. Choose shows that meet the developmental needs of your child. Children's shows on public TV are appropriate, but soap operas, adult sitcoms, and adult talk shows are not. Set certain periods when the television will be off. Study times are for learning, not for sitting in front of the TV doing homework. Meal times are a good time for family members to talk with each other, not

for watching television.

Encourage discussions with your children about what they are seeing as you watch shows with them. Point out positive behavior, such as cooperation, friendship, and concern for others. While watching, make connections to history, books, places of interest, and personal events. Talk about your personal and family values as they relate to the show. Ask children to compare what they are watching with real events. Talk about the realistic consequences of violence. Discuss the role of advertising and its influence on buying. Encourage your child to be involved in hobbies, sports, and peers. With proper guidance, your child can learn to use television in a healthy and positive way. **MAKE TV VIEWING AN ACTIVE PROCESS FOR CHILD AND PARENT!**

(D) Article on Children Online

CHILDREN ONLINE

Computers have traditionally been trusted by both children and adults as reliable and accurate sources of information. The rapid growth of online services and Internet access has added a new dimension to modern computing. Through a computer modem and phone line children now have access to an almost endless supply of information and opportunity for interaction. However, there can be real risks and dangers for an unsupervised child.

Most online services give children resources such as encyclopedias, current events coverage, and access to libraries and other valuable material. They can also play games and communicate with friends. The ability to “click” from one area to another appeals to a child’s natural impulsivity and curiosity and needs for immediate gratification or feedback.

Most parents teach their children not to talk with strangers, not to open the door if they are home alone, and not to give out information on the telephone to unknown callers. Most parents also monitor where their children go, who they play with, and what TV shows, books, or magazines they are exposed to. However, many parents don’t realize that **the same level of guidance and supervision must be provided for a child’s online experience.**

Parents cannot assume that their child will be protected by the supervision or regulation provided by the online services. Most “chat rooms” or “news groups” are completely unsupervised. Because of the anonymous nature of the “screen name,” children who communicate with others in these areas will not know if they are “talking” with another child or a child predator pretending to be a child or teen. Unlike the mail and visitors that a parent sees a child receive at home, e-mail or “chat room” activity is not seen by parents. Unfortunately, there can be serious consequences to children who have been persuaded to give personal information, (e.g. name, passwords, phone number, address) or have agreed to meet someone in person.

Some of the other risks or problems include:

- children accessing areas that are inappropriate or overwhelming;
- online information that promotes hate, violence, and pornography;
- children being misled and bombarded with intense advertising;
- children being invited to register for prizes or to join a club when they are providing personal or household information to an unknown source; and
- hours spent online is time lost from developing real social skills.

In order to make a child’s online experience more safe and educational, parents should:

- limit the amount of time a child spends online and “surfing the web”;
- teach a child that talking to “screen names” in a “chat room” is the same as talking with strangers;
- teach a child never to give out any personal identifying information to another individual or website online;
- teach a child to never agree to actually meet someone they have met online;
- never give a child credit card numbers or passwords that will enable online purchases or access to inappropriate services or sites;
- remind a child that not everything they see or read online is true;
- make use of the parental control features offered with your online service, or obtain commercially available software programs, to restrict access to “chat lines,” news groups, and inappropriate websites;
- provide for an e-mail address only if a child is mature enough to manage it, and plan to periodically monitor the child’s e-mail and online activity;
- teach a child to use the same courtesy in communicating with others online as they would if speaking in person—i.e. no vulgar or profane language, no name calling, etc.; and
- insist that a child follow the same guidelines at other computers that they might have access to, such as those at school, libraries, or friends’ homes.

Parents should remember that communicating online does not prepare children for real interpersonal relationships. Spending time with a child initially exploring an online service and periodically participating with a child in the online experience gives parents an opportunity to monitor and supervise the activity. It is also an opportunity to learn together.

E. A Helpful Book

Sridhar, put the book cover to the left across from the book.

Stevenson, Howard, Gwendolyn Davis and Saburah Abdul-Kabir. Stickin’ To, Watchin’ Over, and Gettin’ With: An African American Parent’s Guide to Discipline. Jossey Bass Publishers, 2001. The authors suggest a trifold approach to discipline: showing love and affection, being involved with children and community, and providing correction and accountability. Addressing preschoolers, school-age children, preadolescents, and teenagers, the authors clearly explain how to help children deal with racism and how parenting is different for African Americans.

Notes

1. “Child Discipline.” Online location:
<http://www.americanhumane.org/children/stop-child-abuse/factsheets/child-discipline.html>
2. Spock, Benjamin McLane. Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care. London, UK: Hodder Publishing, 1946.