

Training Examples

STRIKING OUT

As my wife was counseling with a young mother, I watched most amazing scene unfold. The first of two children (a two-year), upon failing to get attention, picked up a plastic toy wrench and began to pound his mother's arm. Occasionally, he would reach up and poke her in the face. This was not new behavior. We had previously observed these "way of Cain" acts of violence perpetrated on the little brother as well as on the mother. On a previous day my wife observed him taking a tricycle wheel and slamming it down on his mother's foot. She would cry out, "Johnny (he name has been changed to protect the guilty mother.), that hurts Mother." And, in a whining voice, "Don't hurt your Mother." Wham!! Down goes the tricycle wheel on her foot again. "Stop it, at hurts!" I'll tell you what hurts. It hurts to see a mother abuse her child by doing nothing while her responses are making a criminal out of little Johnny.

Well, on this occasion it would turn out differently. As the talk continued, little Johnny got tired of assaulting his mother and turned on my wife. After the first blow, almost without diverting her eyes from the mother, and with no change of expression, she picked up a matching plastic toy. This was not to fight back, but to train. The mother is the one who would most benefit from what was about to occur. As little Johnny drove home the next blow, swiftly and with more than matching force, my wife struck. Such surprise! What is this little Johnny feels coming from his arm? Pain! And somehow it is associated with the striking of this toy. Again, Johnny strikes. Again, swift retribution (training really). Johnny is very tough; so, though he didn't cry, he pulled back his pained arm and examined it carefully. You could see the little mental computer working. As if to test his new theory, again, but with less force, he struck. The immediately returned blow was not diminished in strength. This time, I thought he would cry. No, after looking at his mother, as if to say, "What is this new thing?" he again, and with even less force, struck my wife on the arm. I was thinking, "She will lighten up this time and match his diminished intensity." Again, my wife struck, seemingly, with all the force she could possibly muster without standing for a wind-up.

Now you may wonder what the mother was doing all this time. Believe it or not, the two women had continued to talk, my wife, as if all was normal, the mother, with a facial expression divided between wonder and mild alarm. Johnny, tough enough for special forces, did one of those pained, crying faces covered by a forced smile. To my amazement, with one-fourth the original force, he again struck my wife. This time, her bottom came off the couch as she drew back to return the blow; and I heard a little karate like wheeze come from somewhere deep inside. I was hoping that Johnny was getting close to learning his lesson. The conversation had about died in anticipation of the outcome. Johnny must have had a Viking lineage, for he continued to trade blows about ten times. On Johnny's part, the blows got lighter and lighter until, after a short contemplative delay, he gave a little tap that was returned with a swift, forceful blow. He let the toy wrench lay limp in his hand while he studied my wife's face. I think he was puzzled by the relaxed non-threatening look. He was accustomed to being argued with and threatened. He had been trained to expect building antagonism to precede confrontation. My wife never even spoke to him, hardly looked at him, and gave a friendly smile when she did.

Well, he was a lot smarter than the cat who learned to keep his tail out from under the rocker. He turned away from my wife, shrugged his shoulders, bounced his legs, smiled, examined his arm and looked at the wrench still in his hand. I could see an idea come into his experimental little head. He turned to his mother and pounded her on the arm. As she rubbed her arm and cried, "Johnneeeee, that hurrrrrt!" my wife handed the wrench to her. The next time Johnny struck, the young mother courageously returned the blow. It only took two or three times to learn his lesson for good. The mother was the one being taught. If she remained consistent, Johnny would be forever broken of a tendency to be a bully.

Understand, the adults' use of the toy wrench was not a substitute for the rod. This was not discipline, but training. The child was cheerfully striking with the toy. Though frustrated, he was not angry or mean. Had that been the case, his medicine would have been the rod. The returned blows were teaching him that what he was doing was painful and undesirable. He was also being taught that there were others who could give it out better than he. Most little bullies are cured by meeting a bigger bully. Children learn not to pick up wasps by picking up one.

What is hard for some to believe is that the results of that encounter endeared my wife to little Johnny. He seems to love her dearly and demands to be picked up when she is near. Children are comfortable around someone who has control of their own emotions, and with whom they know their limitations. Since this experience and further counseling, the mother and the child are showing great improvement.

THE LITTLE FOXES SPOIL THE VINES

We just returned from having supper with some good neighbors. They are a fine young couple who are just beginning their family. They are kind parents, concerned to rear their children properly. They would never be guilty of abuse or neglect. Their children are their priority. But, as we sat talking, I was once again reminded that it is the little “insignificant” things that determine a child’s character.

The little three-year-old boy was between us playing with a little rubber bathtub type animal. He apparently discovered there was still some water in it, so he held the rubber goat over the table and began to squeeze. To the delight of everyone, and especially the boy, the goat began to relieve itself on the coffee table. After a good laugh, the mother went to the kitchen for a towel.

When she attempted to wipe it up, the little fellow said, “No,” and tried to prevent her from removing his water puddle. She easily brushed him aside and wiped the puddle away. He gasped an angry and frustrated protest, threw himself on the couch and cried. The cry was not loud and did not last five seconds before he jerked around with protruded lip to see what other entertainment was available. It was all over in ten seconds.

The conversation resumed as he performed the first of a series of deliberate transgressions. He climbed onto the coffee table—which is always off limits—and then sought out other expressions of defiance. After about the fifth command, he would cease and go to the next transgression. The conversation continued with only an occasional lapse while he was being rebuked. This is exactly the kind of issue that demands concentrated training and discipline. To ignore it, as they did, is to waste your child.

What did the child learn? He learned that his mother is bigger than he and can force her will upon him. This will result in his enforcing his will upon his younger brother. He learned that he does not have to exercise self-control. Anything that he is big enough to accomplish is fair game. The anger that was allowed to seethe in his heart led to rebellion. Though the parents were unaware of it, his subsequent actions were the product of his defiled heart.

THE PROPER RESPONSE

The proper response would have gone something like this:

“Johnny, here is a rag, clean up your mess.” “No, I don’t ‘wanna’.” And he continues to dabble in the water, sort of rocking back and forth with one shoulder and the chin down, not too earnestly involved in the water, yet waiting to see if the mother is going to let him be. Rebellion is in his heart; but he faces a superior power, so he hesitates. She again says, “Johnny, clean the water up now.” (With my children, one command is all they would get.) *If* he again hesitates, she goes for her switch. If he hurriedly attempts to avert a switching by cleaning the water, it will make no difference. She returns with the switch, and sitting in front of him, says, “Johnny, told you to wipe up the water, and you hesitated, therefore I air going to have to spank you so you will not hesitate the next time Mama wants her boy to grow up to be wise like Daddy, so I air going to help you to remember to obey. Lean over the couch. Pul you hands down. Now, don’t move or I will have to give you more licks.”

She then administers about ten slow, patient licks on his bare legs. He cries in pain. If he continues to show defiance by jerking around and defending himself, or by expressing anger, then she will wait a moment and again lecture him and again spank him. When it is obvious he is totally broken, she will hand him the rag and very calmly say, “Johnny, clean up your mess.” He should very contritely wipe up the water. To test and reinforce this moment of surrender, give him another command. “Johnny, go over and put your toys all back in the box.” Or, “Johnny, pick up all the dirty clothes and put them in the basket.” After three or four faithfully performed acts of obedience, brag on how “smart” a helper he is. For the rest of the day, he will be happy and compliant. The transformation is unbelievable.

You have just witnessed the potential making of a peaceful home and of an emotionally stable and obedient child. If you are faithful to guard against and reward every infraction, whether in attitude or action, in just a few days you will have a perfectly obedient and cheerful child.

I DON’T HAVE THE TIME

Now, I know exactly what some of you are thinking. “But, I am pushed to the limit now. I don’t have the time to watch and guard against every transgression.” If you have duties outside the home that prevent you from properly rearing your children, give them back to the Devil. I mean that, even if they are church activities. If you have children your first calling is that of a parent. If, on the other hand, you are over-extended because of a chaotic household, then you cannot afford to do other than be faithful in discipline, for you need the rest it will bring.

Just yesterday, a young mother of small children came to the house and told my wife this story.

“This morning, as I was sitting at the sewing machine, my son [four years old] came to me and said, ‘Mother, I love you so much.’ I stopped sewing, looked at the earnest expression on his face, and said, ‘I’m glad you love me, for I love you too. You are such a fine boy.’ As I attempted to turn back to the sewing, he said, ‘Do you

know why I love you so much?’ ‘No, why do you love me so?’ ‘Because, you make me bring in firewood and do what you say.’ This mother always looks fresh and rested. I know this sounds pretentious, but it is the absolute truth. Even a four-year-old can compare himself with other children and appreciate his parents’ guidance.

A SWITCH AT NAP TIME SAVES MINE

When your baby is tired and sleepy enough to become irritable, don’t reinforce irritability by allowing the cause and effect to continue. Put the little one to sleep. But what of the grouch who would rather complain than sleep? Get tough. Be firm with him. Never put him down and then allow him to get up. If, after putting him down, you remember he just woke up, do not reward his complaining by allowing him to get up. For the sake of consistency in training, you must follow through. He may not be able to sleep, but he can be trained to lie there quietly. He will very quickly come to know that any time he is laid down there is no alternative but to stay put. To get up is to be on the firing line and get switched back down. It will become as easy as putting a rag doll to bed. Those who are MOSTLY consistent must use the switch too often. Those who are ALWAYS consistent come to almost never need the switch.

The infant is not reasoning and reflecting on the best way to get his will. The first time he finds dissatisfaction in being laid down, the whimpering comes naturally. If the child’s response is rewarded, you can expect a repeat of the whimpering. If the child is again rewarded, the response of whining is further reinforced. The parent’s caving-in to the child’s demand is training the child to act the role of “brat.” Since this whining and crying to get his way is eventually going to lead to the mother being annoyed with the child, it is better, regardless of the mother’s feelings, to break this tendency before it gets rooted and becomes a personality habit.

Just think! A child who never begs, whines or cries for anything! We have raised five whineless children. Think of the convenience of being able to lay your children down and say, “Nap time,” and then lie down yourself, knowing that they will all still be quietly in bed when you wake.

OBEDIENCE

One mother, while reading, was being pulled on by her whining twelve-month-old daughter. When the mother came to the part (above) about not allowing a child to whine (“If they are tired put them to bed.”), she decided to apply what she was reading. She put her daughter down and told her to go to sleep. The sleepy child responded by crying in protest. Following the book’s instructions, she spanked the child and told her to stop crying and go to sleep. The child had previously been trained to spend an hour intermittently crying and getting up, only to be fussed at and laid back down. Nevertheless, the spanking subdued the crying and caused her to lie still. The mother continued her reading, and after a while she looked up to see that the child had very quietly slipped to the floor to browse through a book. The mother smiled at how sweet and quiet the child was. Without interruption, she continued her reading.

Reading further, she contemplated the fact that the child had not obeyed. “But she is being so good and is not bothering me,” the mother thought. She then realized the issue was not whether the child was bothering her, but whether or not she was learning to obey. She rightly concluded that by allowing the child to quietly sit on the floor at the foot of her bed, where she would eventually go to sleep, she was effectively training the child to be in rebellion to the rule of law. Out of love for her child, the mother inconvenienced herself and shattered the quiet solitude by spanking the child and again telling her to stay in the bed and go to sleep. An hour later the waking child was cheerful.

THREE-YEAR-OLD MOTHER

The other day at our house, a three-year-old little girl was playing with dolls. (Let me interject: All children’s dolls should be BABY dolls, not “Barbie” dolls. The fantasy arising from playing with baby dolls causes the child to role-play mother. The fantasy arising from Barbie dolls causes a child to role-play a sex goddess. “As a [child] *thinketh in his heart so is he* (Prov. 23:7). This little girl was role-playing mother. Up until about a year ago, she was disobedient and spoiled. After some counseling, the parents straightened up on their training and discipline. Today she is an ideal little girl, always obedient and cheerful. What was interesting is the role she assumed with her baby. In her imagination the baby started crying after being given a command. She scolded her baby, turned her over and spanked her. She then spoke comforting, reassuring words and praised her baby for being good. She perfectly mimicked the loving, patient tone and firmness of her own mother.

As we sneaked a peek at the proceedings, she continued her “mother practice” session. Several situations arose with her rag baby which she promptly and firmly dealt with like an old pro. In fact, I could not have handled the make-believe situations any better. She told the screaming child (a rag doll). “No! That’s not nice. You can’t have it now. Stop your dying. SWITCH, SWITCH. If you don’t stop crying, Mama will have to spank you again. SWITCH, SWITCH, SWITCH. OK, stop crying now. That’s better. Now see if you can play happily.”

Here is a three-year-old “mother” already prepared to rear happy obedient children. She knows exactly what to

expect from her mother. And, what is further amazing, she knows exactly what her mother expects from her. She disciplined her baby doll for attitudes, not actions. This three-year-old little girl is a near finished product. The battle is won. As long as the parents consistently maintain what they have already instilled, the child will never be anything but a blessing and help.

BEGGARS CAN'T BE CHOOSERS

A child should NEVER whine and beg. This is an easy habit to break. Never reward a beggar, and the beggar will go away. In our house, the one sure way of not getting your desire was to beg or whine. We went out of our way to not reward a begging child. If we had purchased a treat for the children, and one of them became impatient and whined for it or asked twice, he was certain to be excluded, even if it meant watching the other children eat the ice-cream he had begged for. If I was preparing to pick up a small child and he whined to be picked up, then I did not pick him up until he became distracted—even though it meant inconvenience for me.

You may envision such a rule being enforced in your house to the tune of constant wailings of injustice. The very thought of it may make you feel like a tyrant. If you gave it a 99% consistent try, you would not be satisfied with the results. If a child ever gets his way through begging or whining, he will try it ten times until it works again. If the experience proves to be counterproductive, he will soon stop wasting his energy in fruitless whining. When beggars can't choose, they choose not to beg.

THE HARD WAY

For two years after our first child, my wife was unable to conceive; when she finally did, she had a miscarriage. After three years, the little fellow whose name we had picked out five years earlier was finally born. Our first son! My wife was ever so possessive. By the age of one, he was so attached to her that I had to submit a request well in advance if I wanted to spend some time with her. We were in no danger of having any more children. He could not be left with a baby sitter unless she was blessed with deafness. I didn't know much about children, and thought this was just a stage that would run its course. A friend who had more experience as a father was the one to show us different.

I guess the men just had all they could take of this two-year-old with the umbilical cord still attached. My wife was the child's willing slave until that fateful day in April. I can still see my friend walking up to the car where we were unloading at a church outing. With the other conspirators shadowed in the background, he came up to my wife, reached out, swept Gabriel away and said, "I'll take him," and was gone.

I couldn't understand what he wanted with that bucking, screaming, desperate kid who was reaching back over his shoulder pleading with his mother to rescue him. His accomplices closed in behind him as if to prevent any rescue. I supposed the misguided fellows would soon want to return him like one would want to return a cold to its donor.

To my wife it was the opposite of giving birth. She was being weaned. After a couple of hours the "trainer" came back around with a new Gabriel, laughing and enjoying the men's company. He didn't run to his mother or resume his crying.

To our amazement, from that moment on the umbilical cord was dried up, and we had a little boy whose world was larger than his mother's arms. Ha! And I had my wife back! The next boy was soon on the way, and did not come to be an extension of his mother's self-image.

AS THE WHEEL TURNS

When my wife baby-sits for the saints, it is always understood to be on the condition we have full liberty to discipline and train. We try to be realistic and use discretion in determining what can be effectively accomplished in the time allotted. We consider the child's trust in us, his or her acquaintance with our technique, the parent's sensitivity and the child's emotional state.

On one occasion, Deb was keeping a mixed group of about ten children and babies, all from four different families attending a seminar. A couple's first child, about fifteen months old, was highly overindulged and showed it. He had been trained to expect constant catering and pacifying. As a result, he was a most demanding individual. He was missing his "mother-servant," and was "complaineey"—not just the: "I'm sad and lonesome, won't someone love me?" His crying said: "I'm mad as all get out. Things are not going my way. Where is my Mama anyway? I'm going to make everyone pay for this treatment. This will be a night they will not want to repeat. I'll see to it."

The children were all placed at the table for a snack. After a couple of minutes, the little fellow began to pout. He didn't like the entree or the company. He got down and began to complain. Giving him more leeway than we would have one of our own, my wife handed him a potato chip in which he had previously shown delight. True to his attitude, he defiantly threw it on the floor.

My ever patient wife, who was also quite busy, picked him up and placed him in a big, soft chair, handing to him

a brightly colored roller-skate. She took a moment to show him what fun it was to hold it upside down and turn the wheels. "See, turn the wheels," she said. With defiance, he turned his face away. This otherwise sweet child had developed (rather the parents had developed) a selfish and rebellious spirit. If left to himself, he will "*bring his mother to shame*." My wife always had a special fondness for this child, and it hurt her to see him developing such a nasty attitude. She decided it was showdown time. She ignored the other children, who were happily investigating and rearranging everything on the table, and quickly obtained her switch (twelve inches long and about the diameter of a small noodle). She again placed the skate in front of him and gently and playfully said, "Turn the wheel." Again, he defiantly turned his head away whimpering. She again demonstrated the fun of rolling the wheel and repeated the command. Again, defiance.

This time, being assured he fully understood it to be a command, she placed his hand on the wheels, repeated the command, and when no obedience followed, she switched his leg. Again, in a mild but firm voice she commanded him to turn the wheel. Self-will dies hard. My wife brought other children over to demonstrate the fun of wheel turning. Pulling his hand as far from the skate as possible, he covered his right hand with his left— apparently to reinforce his resolve, or to demonstrate it.

After about ten acts of stubborn defiance, followed by ten switchings, he surrendered his will to one higher than himself. In rolling the wheel, he did what every accountable human being must do—he humbled himself before the "highest" and admitted that his interests are not paramount. After one begrudged roll, my wife turned to other chores.

A few minutes later she noticed he was turning the wheels and laughing with the other children—with whom he had previously shown only disdain. The surly attitude was all gone. In its place was contentment, thankfulness and a fellowship with his peers. The "rod" had lived up to its Biblical promise. When the parents were informed of the transformation, they intensified their training program.

