

## Four Tool Boxes for Parents

By Thomas Eglinton

A tradesman carries multiple tool boxes. This is probably mostly due to the fact that they have too many tools, and their tools are too oddly shaped, to fit into one box or bag. But let's imagine a particularly organised tradie. He would have a toolbox for his hand tools, one for his power tools and one for some other type of tools (you can tell I'm no tradie!).

Parenting is a little like this. We have multiple toolboxes full of different tools to use in different situations. Here are four parenting tool boxes I find in the Bible: Teaching, Training, Discipline and Example.

### TEACHING

God is interested in generational faithfulness. To this end, he instructed the Israelites very specifically in some of the things they should do with their children. It's a classic text but it sets an important foundation for our first toolbox.

In Deuteronomy 6:4-7 God tells the Israelites:

*4 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 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.*

After giving the sum of the commandments (You shall love the Lord your God...), God proceeds to tell the Israelites to teach their children. The way they are to do this is to talk to their kids about the commandments. And they are to talk to them about commandments all the time while they are doing all sorts of

normal things like washing dishes, driving down the road and going to bed.

Teaching is all about imparting knowledge. Our children need us to tell them information about God and about what God expects. At its most basic level this involves teaching the moral law (the Ten Commandments), teaching the bible story (Biblical Theology – The Biggest Story and The Garden, The Curtain and The Cross are excellent books to help do this) and teaching the gospel. As children get older this involves teaching catechisms and confessions, having children memorise Scripture and working through the implications of the gospel.

### TRAINING

But God doesn't just teach us information, he also trains us. Consider the following passage from Deuteronomy 18:

*9 "When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. 10 There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practises divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer 11 or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead,*

Now, you might wonder what this has to do with parenting. Let me re-work what God is saying into a parenting context:

When we get to the shops, you shall not do as you see other children do. There shall not be found among you anyone who throws a tantrum when I say that you can't have a bag of lollies, there shall not be among you anyone who runs away and there shall not be among you any grabbing things from the shelves.

God doesn't just teach Israel that they are not to worship idols in Deuteronomy 5 and then leave them to it as if to say 'well, I taught you well – you should be perfect now'. Instead, God spends a large portion of the rest of Deuteronomy giving specific situations and telling Israel how to respond correctly. He prepares them for what is coming in the promised land.

This is one aspect of training. We can give our children pre-emptive specific instruction to help them obey in the future. Tell them about what is going to happen at church – “we are going to church now where we will sing, pray and sit still and quietly while we listen to the sermon”. Tell them what is expected of them at the shops. Give them every opportunity for obedience.

We can also talk about what might happen in the future and what is expected of them. This is slightly more abstract. This could be talking to your 5-year-old about marriage. Talk about what do you look for in a spouse and what is expected of a wife. It could be talking to your 8-year-old about work and laziness. The father in Proverbs does this sort of training a lot.

Another aspect of training is to actually practice. Practice listening and obeying by giving simple instructions in the home and working on immediate cheerful obedience. Practise church with your children.

### DISCIPLINE

Toolbox number three is discipline. Discipline is what happens when disobedience happens. The writer of Hebrews tells us that God disciplines Christians. But he does this for a purpose – to 'yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness' (Heb. 12:5-11). This shows us that discipline is to be lovingly given in order to bring about repentance, forgiveness and restoration of relationship. Discipline is to be done in love by those who love to those who are loved.

Discipline also teaches that there is pain involved with sin. From an early age, children need to learn that sin = pain. Todd Friel says that “receiving temporary painful earthly consequence is a small picture of the eternally painful experience of not submitting to God” (*Reset for Parents*).

In our politically correct world it might not be viewed favourably

but it is important to see that the bible puts the rod firmly in this toolbox. (Proverbs 13:24, 19:18, 22:15, 23:13-14, 29:15-17). But what our PC world misses is that the rod is administered in a context of love with the purpose of repentance, forgiveness and restoration of relationship. With that in mind, we must not smack in anger and the process of disciplining a child must proceed to repentance (before God in prayer and before those who have been sinned against) and must end in restored relationship and affirmation of love. In my part of the world we call this last part kisses and cuddles and tickles.

### EXAMPLE

Hopefully you are still with me after that last toolbox. If so, things won't get any easier with this toolbox. You see, the thing about apples is that they don't fall far from the tree that bore them. The same is true of most fruits and, as it turns out, the same is true of children.

The last toolbox is you! You can teach all you want, but if you don't believe what you teach, neither will your children. You can train all you want, but if you don't practise what you preach, neither will your children. You can discipline all you want, but if you don't repent of your sins, it is not likely that your children will.

“The holiness of a minister's heart is not merely an ideal; it is absolutely necessary for his work to be effective. Holiness of life must be his consuming passion.” So says Joel Beeke in his book *Reformed Preaching*. The same must be said of parents. The most critical part of your parenting is your life. Holiness is not just an ideal in parenting; it is the most important thing you will do in raising your child. So, here is the fourth toolbox: love God and keep his commandments. Just in case that sounded too easy, try this as well: enjoy loving God and keeping His commandments. Show your kids that dying to self, repentance, praising and thanking God and pursuing righteousness is the good life.

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