

## Shaping The Will (part 2)

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### What breaks a child's spirit?

*"There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of the sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing"* (**Proverbs 12:18**). It is often what we say in the heat of the moment that causes the most damage to our relationships. It is always best to avoid saying things that can never be taken back – once the sword is thrust, the damage is done.

*"A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit"* (**Proverbs 15:4**). Our lack of discipline can be a source of great discouragement for our children. It is interesting to see from this verse the role that perversion can play in warping the spirit of another person, especially a child. When we say things that are immature, cowardly, inane, or foolish, we disturb them with things that just do not belong on the mind or lips of a mature, strong, responsible Christian (**Ephesians 5:3-5**). Not only that, but this verse reminds us that with the same mouth we can bring forth both words of healing and those which bring death (**James 3:9-10**).

*"A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones"* (**Proverbs 17:22**). If we remember the context, we find that the previous verse speaks of the heartache caused by a foolish child. The implication is, then, that the greatest source of a crushed spirit is trouble in the family. When we fill our homes with joy, love, laughter, respect, and patience, those attitudes pervade the spirit of a child. Fighting, bad tempers, and bitterness, however, can cause our children to dry up like a bone.

### Exasperation

*"Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart"* (**Colossians 3:19**). There is a big difference between being exasperated and just being upset. A child may not like the rules, or the consequences of disobedience, but if we have shaped the will and built up the spirit, they will eventually come to their senses and rationally think about the situation. *"Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time, as seemed best to them... All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness"* (**Hebrews 12:7-11**). Typically, this is seen in a child who at first is upset by his or her rules and boundaries, but eventually comes back to the parents with understanding and respect.

This is an invaluable step in a person's maturation process. Learning to accept the rules, even when they upset us, is a lesson that cannot be avoided forever. Nobody is so special that he or she is not accountable to the rules. "No, you cannot have your own way right now" is something we all need to hear at times.

### Provocation

*“And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).* There is an accountability that should come along with parenting – that is, we are not just given free rein of how we treat our children, but we are held to a divine standard. Provoking a child is a surefire way of breaking the spirit, and it also represents an immaturity and cruelty that very poorly reflects Christ. “Provoking” probably involves pushing their buttons on purpose, driving them too hard to succeed, forcing them to do activities or sports that bring them unhappiness, or taking out our anger on them because they are easy targets.

### **Encouraging the spirit**

Make sure your kids always know the truth, and that they are not forced to guess how you feel about them. Many people reflect on the relationships they had with their parents and wonder if they were ever proud!

- “I believe in you”
- “You are precious to us”
- “I am so glad that God answered my prayers and that He gave you to us”
- “You are a gift from God and an answer to our prayers”
- “You have given us so much joy”
- “You are so talented and gifted”