



# **Journey *to* Gentleness**

**One Mom's Experiences  
with "Child Training"**

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## The Promises of “Child Training”

My husband and I were not Christians when we met, nor during our lengthy engagement. We believed in God, though, and figured we'd start going to church when we had kids, because it would give them good values and a solid foundation. However, not a year into our marriage, my husband started listening to Evangelical Christian radio programs on his long commute to work. After hearing many exhortations related to the inspiration and authority of Scripture, he became convicted. One day, he came from work and dusted off his old King James Bible. With a resounding *thump*, he placed it on the table, saying, “If this is true, we’re going to live by it!” Somehow I knew that things would never be the same.

Almost immediately, we began attending a local Evangelical church, where Marc was involved in several Bible studies and mens’ groups. He grew spiritually by leaps and bounds, and in not too long I also had made a commitment to Christ. I “prayed the prayer” during an altar call, and began attending women’s groups and studying the Bible.

Eventually, a move into our first little house brought a change of churches. In our new home church, we became even more active. We were involved in a small group which included some very committed homeschoolers and we received excellent discipleship in that environment. I began teaching Sunday School, and there our first son was born.

By the time we were expecting our second child, we had moved, and changed churches, again. This time, we were attending a Pentecostal church, as we felt it was the most Biblically sound of the handful of churches in our small town. We were surprised that when we asked about membership in the church, we were told that they required adults to be baptized. None of the other churches we had attended had emphasized the importance of baptism. However, we were sincere believers and genuinely wanted to follow Christ, so of course it was not an issue. Marc had already been water-baptized in a Baptist church at age nine, but I had only been baptized as an infant in the Catholic church, so I was soon baptized and we became official church members. I taught Children’s Church, worked in the nursery, organized VBS, helped coordinate women’s meetings, and was generally very active in church life. I was also committed to personal time in God’s Word and in prayer and I felt that my walk with God continued to flourish.

Of course, at this point I was a young mother with two small children at home. I was not particularly prepared for parenting. My own mother’s example was a good one during my formative years, but my parents divorced when I was nine and she went back into the workforce. I believe I lost out on a lot of the very valuable training I probably would have received from her in both homemaking and parenting, had she been more available. So I largely struggled on my own through the daily ups and downs of mothering two little ones. I found myself often overwhelmed, particularly when our third child, a girl, arrived not 1-1/2 years after our second boy.

Being a Christian at that point for several years and sincerely committed to living the Word of God to the best of my ability, I was thus almost surprised to find myself so frustrated by my children. I loved them. I wanted the very best for them. I wanted to be the perfect mother! Why was it so hard? I found myself going through a seemingly unending cycle of trying and failing, trying and failing. Peppered throughout my children’s early years were periods of depression, through which I received little support and for which I felt a great sense of self-condemnation.

I’m not sure how we began receiving homeschooling “card packs” of promotional advertisements; I think it had something to do with our original small group and the ardent homeschooling families who always encouraged us and hoped we would take up the baton. In any case, one particular advertisement caught my eye during “one of those days.” It mentioned something about being an angry parent, and asked, *don’t you want to replace that*

*with JOY?* And of course I did! I wanted answers; I wanted change. And here was a book that promised all that. I ordered it immediately.

I read that book, and a couple more like it. Each one promised me that if I simply “trained” my children, we would have a joyful home atmosphere, I would be a happy Mom, and my children would be sweet and obedient. What parent doesn’t want to believe claims like that? Supported as they were by the Bible that I so earnestly sought to live by, I figured that God was on my side, too. Child training would be a success and our home life would change!

The books were filled with story upon story of the positive fruit of “training,” which typically involved using a small switch to guide a child’s behavior. The overall goal was achieving “instant obedience” to a parent’s commands, since once that submission to parental authority was complete, any other “issues” that arose would be easily conquered by a said parent. A child who learned to respect his parents during the “training” phase would, of course, submit to his parent’s godly wisdom and guidance during the more challenging teenage years, so of course the whole idea of teenage rebellion was just a myth.

I wanted what these books promised. I believed it was achievable. And so began the journey toward “child training.” It started innocently enough, and I had all good intentions. At first it seemed like quite a success, just like the books had promised. But I ran into some rather unexpected difficulties...

## Control and Anger

At first I almost enjoyed the child training process. I didn't do it "by the book," but I tried to be consistent; after all, consistency was the key. All the books said that you simply couldn't let your child "win" a confrontation. If you *commanded* your child, you had to follow through until they obeyed, otherwise they would learn that you were not to be taken seriously! Any parent who lost out on a training opportunity would put the success of the whole endeavor at risk. That thought made me nervous, because I didn't want any more failures.

I'm sure I'm not the only "Type A" parent out there. I found that my desire for control fit in quite nicely with this particular child training philosophy. Unfortunately, over time I found that my desire for control in the parenting process often conflicted with my children's self-will and self-expression. Now, instead of getting frustrated with their childishness and misbehavior, I found myself getting angry over their blatant disobedience. Had the atmosphere of our home changed so little? Where was the fulfillment of the child training promises?

Ahh, yes, they all *did* say something about not undertaking to "train" a child if you found yourself responding in anger. A good warning, and certainly to be heeded. I knew the wisdom of that, but for as often as I struggled with anger, I couldn't imagine "losing" all of those child-training battles! So I made sure I won the battle, if at all possible. However, I soon learned why the expression goes, *win the battle and lose the war*.

I began to lose sight of my real objective: loving, nurturing, and training my children (in a Biblically healthy way). My old sin nature warped and twisted things such that I was less concerned about that and more concerned with doing this "child training" thing just right. The elusive goal of "instantly obedient" children drove me, and I struggled with self-doubt when they didn't seem to get it. What was I doing wrong? Or was there something wrong with them?

As a result of "child training," we eventually had, overall, good kids and a good family, but I wouldn't say we were really *joyful*, and I desperately wanted that. Isn't that what Jesus promised—that in Him we would have abundant joy? All of the books, too, had promised *joy* as a result of child training, and yet we had fallen short of that goal—and I realized that I wanted that more than I wanted obedient children.

Any success that we achieved in our parenting, I felt, was largely due to my husband's consistency. He was firm but fair in his expectations, and he didn't take things as personally as I did. He could correct the children and assume the matter settled. He enjoyed our time as a family and was committed to relationship-building, which we both knew was just as important as "child training." However, as I was the one in the parenting trenches on a day-to-day basis, I responded much more emotionally when things went wrong. I was less consistent and more apt to become angry. And when I responded to the children in anger, there were ripple effects of negativity that reached out in every direction. Eventually, I came to admit that this was the very root of our lack of joy and any sense of parenting failure I felt.

Part of the reason this was so was because, even though I was a Christian, my past was filled with negative examples and strongholds in behavior that I simply could not overcome. I tended to be harsh in my communication and critical in my perceptions, because that's how my parents generally were. Rather than provide a gentle correction, I was apt to yell or, at the very least, lecture and nag. As our family size increased I felt more and more pressure to perform, and I transferred that to my children. These were the things I needed to overcome, *not* my children's disobedience or self-will, like the books implied.

Plain and simple, any problems with "child training" or any deficiencies I sensed in our family, weren't due to any one of a hundred excuses I could fabricate. The problem was *me*. My anger, my inability to consistently respond to my children with the love and grace that they needed, and my *sin*. I won't say that "child training" in itself is bad, or its goals unachievable. Some people can, and do, do it "right" and raise good kids and have happy families. However, because of my personal shortcomings and struggles, I knew I needed to find a better

way of implementing some of those good principles. God, in His goodness and graciousness, showed me the way.

## The Role of Repentance and its Ongoing Work

It was surprisingly simple, actually, what changed me. It was the Holy Spirit, and a revelation that I desperately needed. It was about repentance.

You see, I had “prayed the prayer” many years ago. I had sincerely committed to following Christ. But other than an encouragement to be baptized when we became members of our local church, I hadn’t really understood true conversion, and being “born again.” Jesus said we must be born of water and the Spirit. Baptism is an element of true conversion, but a necessary precursor to baptism is repentance; in fact, it is referred to as a “baptism of repentance” (see, for example, Mark 1:4 and Acts 19:4). This is what I had missed out on when I responded to the altar call.

No one told me that being sorry for my sins, and wanting a better life in the Lord, did not constitute *repentance*. In 2 Corinthians 7, the Apostle Paul makes a distinction between worldly sorrow over sin, and the godly sorrow that leads to repentance. Repentance is, quite simply, a change of mind and heart that leads to changed behavior. Not having understood that or completely experienced it, of course I still struggled with sin. Much of the change in my behavior was the result of my own effort rather than the work of the Holy Spirit.

Did I spend a dozen years as a Christian without really being “saved?” I wouldn’t quite say that, and I wouldn’t say that God and His Spirit weren’t at work in my life all that time. I would use the expression that is found in several places in Scripture: I was “*being saved*.” And of course, as this is an ongoing process, I would say the same is still true. What has changed, since I have come to truly repent, is my heart toward God and toward my children. What has changed is the fact that I’m no longer trying to control the process of my sanctification *or* the outcome of my parenting. I’m learning to trust God and I deeply desire to honor him with a walk of righteousness and holiness. And when I fail, my response is not anger or depression or self-condemnation, it’s simply *repentance*. I get up and dust myself off and press on toward the goal.

As a result of spiritual understanding and change, I find myself gentler in my communication, more realistic in my expectations, and more loving over all. I’m less concerned with appearances and outcomes and more concerned with heart-issues. (While I’m sure I would have always said that this was true, my actual experience probably inclined more toward external motivators.)

I still try to train my children well. I still use a small switch on the back side of my little ones when I know they will understand that better than my words. But gentle, proactive training (with words, example, and learning by doing), is still what I rely on over the long-haul, and I trust in God’s faithfulness as we “seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness.” I know that just as I fail, my children will, too. We have learned, and continue to learn, how to walk in God’s grace together. Not a false sense of grace that permits us to live how we want, but true grace that teaches us to deny all that which is ungodly and seek to please our Heavenly Father (see Titus 2:11-14).

What true repentance has given me is a more sensitive heart toward God and an ear more inclined to the soft voice of the Holy Spirit. I still stumble in many ways, but I am quick to repent and to seek forgiveness. I’m also striving more and more to grow in Christlike character—particularly love, which is “the greatest of these” (1 Corinthians 13). And I see the fruit of that in the joy that our family has experienced over the years now since I have understood what it means to do what Jesus said: *Repent*, and *follow me*.

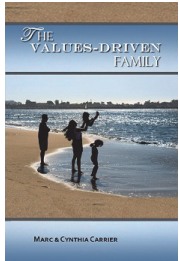
So is there anything wrong with any of those “child training” methods? No, not necessarily. As I said, I do believe that many people have used, and do use, them successfully. But if you struggle with your sin nature in some of the ways that I did, you may not see the results you want and in fact, the seeds you sow may, in due time, reap a harvest you do not expect or desire. I pray that my testimony in this little ebook will cause you to

examine yourself and allow the Holy Spirit to draw you ever closer to the God who loves you and the Savior who has redeemed you from the way of sin by His blood.

## Additional Resources



**FREE ebooks:** *The Kingdom Expansion Series* and “*We Still Sin, Right?*” by Marc Carrier. These, and other freebies, available at <http://valuesdrivenfamily.com/freebies/>.



*The Values-Driven Family* by Marc and Cynthia Carrier.

Revised and updated since its original publication in 2006, this book designed to assist you in meeting the everyday challenges of parenting. It covers the basics, like positive and proactive child training, encouragement, and discipline. It also includes successful strategies for budgeting and scheduling or routine-building, since these are often areas of stress. Unique to *VDF* is the application of successful project management concepts to the “family project”: risk management, team-building, and iterative parenting.

More than a cookie-cutter approach, *The Values-Driven Family* helps you to focus on the things that are of greatest value to God. It’s full of encouragement, Biblical guidance, and practical tools for family-building that you won’t find anywhere else!



*Home Sweet Home: Creating a Joyful Home Atmosphere* by Cynthia Carrier.

Cynthia Carrier shares some of the secrets to maintaining a home atmosphere that glorifies God. This goes beyond the practical; it isn’t “five steps,” “four P’s,” or some fancy acronym to help you remember what to do. Instead, you’ll get right to the heart of the issues that hinder you from experiencing God’s best in your home.

Available at [www.ValuesDrivenFamily.com](http://www.ValuesDrivenFamily.com), [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com), or [http://www.curreclick.com/index.php?manufacturers\\_id=470](http://www.curreclick.com/index.php?manufacturers_id=470).

*Emotional Wellness Audio Set* by Cynthia Carrier.

This series of four audio workshop recordings addresses the issues of depression, discouragement, and emotional imbalance that are often ignored in the Christian community. You’ll find both truth and encouragement to help you if these are your areas of need. For more information, visit <http://valuesdrivenfamily.com/emotions/>.