

## **Introduction**

Some decades ago, the Duke of Windsor, after visiting the United States, declared, **"The thing that impresses me most about America is the way parents obey their children."** The Duke's statement, if it's true, teaches us something about many middle class American homes. They're topsy turvy and that's what I'm going to preach about today – topsy turvy homes. The wise man, Solomon, addresses just that issue in the verse we read, Proverbs 29:15.

## **Child-Centered Homes**

Notice the subject of this verse. It's **"a child who gets his own way."** We've all seen that haven't we? I saw a mother and her little son arguing over an action figure at Wall-mart. He wanted it, he said, to which she replied that he wasn't going to get it. I was standing in line fifteen minutes later right behind them and guess what? He got it. That's what Solomon has in mind here but on a continuing basis.

Psychologists and sociologists today have a term for that. It's **"child-centered home."** Homes are child-centered when the children, not the parents are running them. The parents aren't in control. The children are. What they want, not what is best, routinely directs what their parents decide and do.

Mark Kelly identifies some characteristics of child-centered homes. (1) No consequences: the child clearly misbehaves and the parents allow him to get away with it; (2) Manipulation: the child reacts in anger, clams-up, or cries to get what he wants; (3) Selfishness: the child gets whatever he wants (it is all about the child, not others); (4) Demanding: the child insists that things be done how and when he wants them done; (5) Priorities: the child becomes more important than a spouse; (6) Responsibilities: the child has no responsibilities (parents do it all for the child); (7) Communication: the child tells the parent what to do as if the child is equal or in charge; and (8) Never offended: the parents do

anything they can to NOT offend their child. He's right. Those are common characteristics of child-centered homes and any combination of them in your home may mean that it's child centered.

The truth is that many if not most middle class American homes are. In his book *Growing Up in America*, sociologist Tony Campolo asks, "**Who does rule the typical middle-class family?**" He goes on to write: "**The answer is, the children do. It is Kiddie City out there in the WASP suburbs of America. We have developed the first filio-centric (child-centered) family system in human history.**" He then cites a common complaint of teachers as proof of that. Children misbehave in their classes but more often than not, it does little good to tell their parents. They so "**control their parents,**" to quote Campolo, that the parents usually side with them and against the teachers.

The anecdotal evidence strongly suggests it's true. Many if not most American middle class homes are child-centered.

### The Consequences

But what's wrong with that, I've heard parents ask? Solomon tells us verse 15. Children whose desires rule the roost "**bring shame**" to their parents. He's saying that child-centered homes are detrimental to everyone involved including the parents, the children, and society as a whole. The consequences of children running homes are unhappy ones.

The word "**shame**" implies one of those. The children behave badly. Believing they're the center of the universe, they act like it. They habitually do two things. They pursue their will to the detriment of others. And they attack others when they oppose their will.

It isn't hard to figure out why they do. The Bible teaches that they were born with a fallen self-absorbed nature. Their child-centered homes then actually socialized them in that same direction, to be self-absorbed. It's a "**double-whammy**" as we say it and what it inevitably produces is this – undisciplined children and later adults who behave badly.

I remember parents at Barberton Friends Church whose children ran

their home. One Sunday morning, a church elder told their four year-old son to stop jumping on a narthex chair. I'll never forget what happened next. He stopped jumping on it, turned to the elder, spit on him, and returned to jumping on it. That's shameful behavior, the kind that verse 15 has in mind. It normally continues into adulthood, taking various forms like tongue-lashing, ignoring rules or laws, giving the silent treatment, cheating, slandering, insulting, deceiving, forcing, and more.

Leadership expert John Maxwell confirms that: **“Researchers have found that simply building children’s egos breeds many negative traits: indifference to excellence, inability to overcome adversity, and aggressiveness toward people who criticize them.”** Verse 15 takes that last trait, shameful behavior, to make its point. Child-centered homes produce children and later adults who behave badly.

### **Parent-Centered Homes**

What should our homes be then? The first line in verse 15 tells us. Solomon writes, **“The rod and reproof give wisdom.”** He’s referring of course to the rod and the reproof of parents, which implies what our homes should be, parent-centered. Leviticus 19:3 confirms that. God commands, **“Every one of you shall reverence his mother and father.”** The Bible uses the Hebrew word translated **“reverence”** exclusively of our response to God, except here. We should reverence only God – and our parents. Parents, in other words, have an authority over children that is like God’s authority over man.

The implication is clear. God wants our homes to be parent-centered. That means that the parents, not the children, are running them. The children aren’t in control. The parents are. What is best (the greater good), not what the children want, routinely directs what the parents decide and do.

That’s a parent-centered home and the first line in verse 15 reveals the consequence. It’s wisdom. In the Book of Proverbs, **“wisdom”** refers to the art of living well. That’s what godly parent-centered homes

generally produce, children who as children and later adults live well. Going back to Maxwell's quote, by way of contrast, they're committed to excellence, have the ability to overcome adversity, and are loving and kind toward others. But there's more. Erik Erikson, who was one of the leaders in the field of child development studies, claimed that when children assume control of their own lives, they often become emotionally destabilized. His claim explains, by way of contrast, what children in parent-centered homes become - emotionally stabilized. Pulling all of that together, godly parent centered homes produce children and later adults who behave and live well.

### **Discipline Children**

So, let's make our homes parent-centered. The Book of Proverbs teaches us how to do just that. It's repeatedly exhorts parents to do two things: teach and discipline, the second of which is verse 15's concern. Parents need to discipline their children. Discipline, according to this verse, has two components or parts.

One is "**reproof.**" Reproof is the verbal component of discipline. To reprove is to condemn. Parents clearly define for their children what behaviors are righteous and sinful and which are beneficial and detrimental. They then tell them when they're acting sinfully or detrimentally that they are and why they are. They don't get angry and yell. They lovingly but firmly tell them they're doing wrong and why.

The second component of discipline, according to verse 15, is "**the rod.**" That refers to what we call corporeal punishment or spanking. Our current culture loathes spanking and roundly condemns it as violent and cruel. But God, in this verse and others, commends it.

He commends it, however, only when it's done rightly. Acclaimed Christian psychologist James Dobson establishes the following guidelines for spanking, which define "**rightly.**" First, it should be age appropriate, working best with 2 to 6 year-olds. Don't spank 10 year-olds. Second, it should never be done in anger. It's always sinful and scarring when it is.

Third, it should only be done for **“in your face”** (defiant) behaviors. Don't spank a child for **“reaching out”** behaviors or other innocent behaviors even if the milk is spilled or the vase broken as a result. And fourth, it shouldn't be the only or even primary tool of discipline. Use it in conjunction with other tools instead.

One of those is what we call time outs, which are appropriate for children 2 to 8. A good guide is one minute for each year of age. Don't allow the child to play during it and restart the time if he leaves it.

A third tool of discipline is what psychologist Ray Guarendi calls **“black out.”** This can be effective for children 18 months to 18 years. Parents provide numerous benefits to children: cell phones, television, computer games, transportation, money supply, and new clothes to name a few. In **“blackout,”** you shut down one or more of those that are meaningful to your child. You take it away for an age appropriate time like several hours for 2 year-olds, several days for 12 year-olds, or until they start cooperating and obeying for teenagers. The son of a nurse I know received a bad semester grade in social studies for not doing his homework. So, she took away his cell phone until he began doing his homework again. He began doing his homework again.

There's a fourth tool of discipline – natural consequences, for children 2 and over. You don't act to remove the cause and effect process in your child's behavior. So, if your son refuses to eat dinner, you allow him to go to bed without doing so. He'll be hungry enough the next morning to eat breakfast if you do.

A fifth tool of discipline is logical consequences. You impose a result on your child that's behavior related. Your 10 year-old son throws the baseball where you told him not to and breaks the window. So, you require him to pay for it with his Christmas or birthday gift money.

With these tools in combination, you're placing consequences on children's behavior in order to create character – in order to assist them in becoming functional people. That is discipline and please grasp what it implies. If you don't discipline them, they won't have character.

They'll become undisciplined people who behave badly instead.

That's the consequence of not disciplining them and it's ruinous. It's ruinous because society cannot stand and will not tolerate undisciplined people. So, someone will discipline your children. The issue isn't *if* they'll be disciplined because they will be. The issue is *who* will discipline them. If you don't, someone else, likely many someone else's, eventually will. It may be a principal, professor, bully, boss, policeman, spouse, or store manager to name a few. Whoever it is, be sure of this. Someone will discipline them. And they won't be as loving and kind as you would in doing it. If your five-year old talks mean and you discipline him, he gets a little spanking, time out, or 50 cent fine. But suppose you don't discipline him, and now he's twenty-five and talks mean. He may very well get fired, beaten up, or even arrested.

## **Conclusion**

A story I read sums it up well. A family was banned from a buffet restaurant that they frequented on a regular basis. Employees noticed the children wasting large amounts of food every visit. **"They take one bite and throw it away,"** a waitress complained, **"They take four egg rolls and crab ragoon, take one bite of an egg role and throw the rest away."** Their parents' reply was revealing: **"But the buffet is all you can eat. And you know kids. They take more than they want and then want something else."** The owner countered well. **"My restaurant is all you can eat,"** he said, **"Not all you can waste."**

Notice two things. First, the children got their own way to quote verse 15. The parents let them do what they wanted and they behaved badly as a result. They wasted food. Second, the restaurant's owner could not stand and did not tolerate them as a result. He kicked them out. The parents didn't discipline them. So, he did.

It's a lesson well learned. Your home is topsy turvy and thus, dysfunctional if it's child-centered. So get it right side up. Make it parent-centered. It'll be functional, happy and healthy, if you do.