

Rod & Staff Parenting

By Lori Hatcher



“**T**hy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.” Who doesn’t recognize this verse from the beloved Psalm 23? I remember lying on my grandmother’s bed while she taught me to quote Psalm 23. She was not a Christian and had very little knowledge of the Bible, but she knew the 23rd Psalm. Thirty-five years later, I can still quote it. I believe this verse has both a challenge and an admonition for Christian parents who seek to raise children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Until this most recent study, I never noticed that the shepherd’s rod and staff were two different tools. Unsure of the difference between a rod and a staff, I did a word study. The Hebrew word for “rod” is *shebet*, defined as a stick for punishment. The Hebrew word for “staff,” however, is *matteh*. According to *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, “A shepherd’s staff was used to aid in climbing hills, as well as beating bushes and low brush in which the flock strayed and where snakes and reptiles abounded.”

If you are a Christian parent shepherding your family, one of the most effective tools available is God’s Word. It serves as both a rod—an instrument of punishment—as well as a staff—an instrument of correction, guidance, and protection. Sometimes Christians must say, “God’s Word says punishment will follow if you continue on this path.” Or, “I am going to punish you because you have broken this biblical principle” (fill in the blank).

As Christians, we quote chapter and verse as proof texts and teach our children to memorize, quote, and write the words. Sometimes, though, I fear, in our zeal to parent our children according to biblical standards, we

sometimes use God’s Word in primarily negative ways and fail to maximize its marvelous effectiveness for positive correction and guidance.

I believe a shepherd used his staff often and his rod on rare occasions (remember that I am equating the rod and staff with God’s Word). I believe our primary use of God’s Word in our children’s lives should be in positive ways. We should teach them verses about God’s goodness, about the blessings that are promised for those who obey and follow Him, and about how God’s Word is a lamp to their feet and a light to their paths. We should teach them how much God loves them, how He has a marvelous plan for them, and how His Word gives them principles to lead them into a right relationship with Himself and with others. We should use God’s Word to guide them into right choices, encourage them when they are persecuted for those right choices, and show them examples of men and women who followed God, even when it cost them something. While it is sometimes necessary (as in the case of the wayward sheep), to punish them with the rod, how sad it is if the only time our children encounter God’s Word is when we are quoting it to them as we punish them.

I want my children to love God’s Word. I want them to enjoy reading the Scriptures and having them read aloud. I want them to hunger for biblical truths and mine its treasures like gold. First, though, I have to convince them that there are treasures there—and not just medicine.

If you are a Christian parent, I encourage you to choose carefully how you present God’s precious Word to your children. If you tend to use it more as a rod and less like a staff, the first step may involve looking back into your own upbringing to see how God’s Word was presented to you. Second, be conscious of your tone and your direction each time you share scriptures with your children. Are you emphasizing the positive, or only the negative? Lastly, be sure *you* are spending time focusing on God’s goodness as you begin your time of Bible study with praise and thanksgiving.

God’s Word is a marvelous tool for both correction and instruction! Notice the final conclusion to Psalm 23: 4: “Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.” If we maintain the proper balance of correction, instruction, and guidance, God’s Word will be a comfort to our children.

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