Train Up a Child...

Modeling Winning Behavior

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Course III – Unit 11, Lesson 2

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"If any person be in Christ, he is a new creature..."

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

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Modeling Winning Behavior

In this lesson we will look at how parents model winning behavior for their children. Before continuing, please write three or four sentences on what kind of behavior you model for your children. Write your thoughts on the enclosed **Response Sheet and then put it out of your sight until the end of this lesson.** Next, we recommend that you read the entire lesson through once without looking up any scriptures. **Finally, go back for a more in-depth study before completing the Response Sheet.**

I. Introduction

The old saying, "What you are doing is so loud I cannot hear what you are saying," illustrates the power of what we do over what we say!

II. Observational Learning

A. Modeling Is Teaching by Example

We learn by a variety of methods. Learning is neutral. It can be either good or bad. Also, each of us learns differently. Some people are more visually oriented, while others are more verbal or touching oriented. There is no one right way of learning. Whatever works best is the right way of learning.

In his research Albert Bandura showed that the best way to teach children is by modeling a certain behavior for them. Children are quick to pick up behavior modeled by adults. They only have to see it done once or twice before they will try to do it themselves.

Technically modeling is called "observational learning." The idea is that by observing, seeing someone do something, we learn to do the same thing.

This form of learning places a heavy burden on the person who is modeling a certain behavior. While a person is being observed, he or she must model the desired behavior perfectly. Unless, it is modeled correctly, the observer will not learn the desired behavior, but a perverted version.

Observational learning affects the observer's subconscious and therefore changes behavior. Bandura had a group of nursery children watch an adult perform a series of aggressively verbal and physical acts toward a large inflated doll. He then created some mild frustration in each child and placed him in a room alone with the doll. The children treated the doll the same way they had seen the adult treat it.

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Bandura then had another group of nursery children watch an adult sit in the same room with the doll and ignore it. He created some mild frustration in this group of children and then placed them in the room alone with the doll. Most of these children followed the model provided by the adult. They sat quietly and ignored the doll.

Learning by observing is one of the major objections to allowing children to watch the sex and violence shown at theaters and on television. Most psychologists believe that watching these movies motivates people to try to do the same thing in real life (John 13:15; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 2 Corinthians 3:2-3, 18; Philippians 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:9; 1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Peter 2:21; James 5:10 Jude 7).

B. Effects of Modeling

Modeling as a teaching tool is neutral. The behaviors that are modeled make it either good or bad. There are two major effects of modeling behavior. One, modeling may draw out socially acceptable responses that are already in the child's repertoire. A child might know that it is a good to help others. When he sees an adult help another person, it *reinforces* his tendency to help others.

Two, modeling teaches a child behavior that is socially unacceptable or deviant. If a child sees an adult hitting another person, especially if the adult is rewarded, he will most likely follow that example. If on the other hand, the adult is punished, there is a good chance that he will not follow the example of hitting someone else.

C. Three Approaches to Modeling

1. *Vicarious modeling*

   The child observes a person do something, but the child does not participate in the event. A child sees his father hit his mother. If the mother accepts being hit without trying to defend herself, the child, if a boy, learns that it is o.k. for a husband to hit his wife. If the child is girl, she learns that it is o.k. for her husband to hit her and that she must not defend herself. Although the child does not take part in hitting his mother, he has learned that it is o.k. to do so.

2. *Symbolic modeling*

   A child is shown a videotape or film of something of which he is afraid. A person in the film is shown doing the thing which the child fears without being hurt. If a child is afraid of puppies, the film could show another child enjoying playing with puppies.

3. *Participant modeling*

A child is taught to do something one step at a time. If the parent is trying to teach his child to dress himself, he might put on and button his shirt until the child has learned to do that. Then he will move to another article of clothing.

III. Modeling Winning Behavior

A. Differences in the Way We Copy Models

We all model behavior and principles for people with whom we come in contact. Others will either accept or reject the model we project. Whether or not we accept or reject another's example is determined by our personal principles and values.

Children are extremely susceptible to modeling by others. The younger the child, the more sensitive he is. The reason for this is that children do not have a large reservoir of knowledge and experience from which to draw.

Since a child's own principles and behaviors are still being formed, he is more likely to accept the total behavior being modeled. Also, the child will not question the behavior he sees; it is there; he accepts it. The older a child becomes and the more people to whom he is exposed, the more selective he will become.

Adults, on the other hand, have well developed concepts of principles and values. This does not mean that all adults have a well defined philosophy of life. Most adults if asked what their basic philosophy is, would have a hard time expressing it. We all have a philosophy, but we might not have thought enough about it to talk about it intelligently. Adults react according to their philosophy whether or not they can talk about it.

This means that adults are selective in what kinds of modeled behavior they accept or reject. Whereas a child accepts the total behavior being modeled, an adult will not. Normally, he will filter the behavior through the whole of his experiences, philosophy, and principles. Then he will choose parts of the modeled behavior. Those parts will usually be the ones that fit his personality (1 Corinthians 14:20).

There will, however, be times in which adults will reject their own experiences, philosophy, and principles for a different one being modeled. This usually occurs when a person is undergoing some traumatic event. It could be the death or near death of a loved one, his own near death, the destruction of his life's work, the loss of a job or a number of other life shattering events.

When such events happen, a person automatically tries to understand not only what happened, but why it happened. Was there something he did that caused it? Was

there something that he could have done that would have prevented it? At times like these we are touched at the very core of our being. It is a time we question our very reason for being. It is one of the defining points in our life. It is when we decide who we are, who we want to be, and how we are going there.

It is not an easy time. It is one of great emotional and physical struggle and change. It will either make us or break us. Our attitude determines the kind of person we become.

B. <u>We Model...</u>

1. *Relationships*

   Although the parents are the primary modeler, all people who come into contact with a child will influence his development. This is one reason it is important to monitor and control the different influences (adults, peers, television, books) to which a child is exposed. If we want our children to develop a well-balanced personality showing reverence to God, treating people with dignity, and respecting social and governmental institutions, we have to model that behavior for them.

   If we want our children to reverence and worship God, how do we model that behavior? We read the Bible, pray, attend church, associate with other Christians, and live a life style consistent with what the Bible teaches. A businessman cannot lie to and cheat his clients six days a week, then go to church Sunday and listen to a lesson on lying and stealing without creating confusion in his children. They will hear that God considers lying and stealing a sin. This knowledge might come from the preacher, the parents, or someone else. Parents might even reinforce it by telling their children that it is wrong. When a child is told that a certain thing is the right thing to do, but then sees his mother or father do the opposite, what is he learning? He is learning that God is unimportant and that we can choose ignore Him and do what we please. Instead of teaching reverence for God, we are teaching that God has no importance in our lives.

   The same applies when modeling relationships with people and institutions. If the parents do not live (model) what they are saying, their child will follow their example.

2. *Attitudes*

   Parents also model philosophies for living, attitudes, and values. This is not as dramatic as modeling actions, but it is still modeled. When a parent takes

responsibility for his actions, instead of trying to shift the blame to someone or something else, he is modeling a philosophy for living. He is teaching his children that they are responsible for what they do and say. If a parent receives too much change back from a sales clerk but does not return the excess, he is teaching his children the value of stealing. He might tell them that it is wrong to steal. When they see him not returning the excess money, they learn that it is o.k. to steal.

3. *Affection.*

Children learn to show love by watching their parents. If parents express love and affection as God meant for it to be, children will learn to love their parents, their brothers and sisters, and outsiders in a Christian way. If their parents say, "I love you," but argue and fight, the child learns a perverted way of showing affection. Affection is not hitting or screaming at someone; that is hate. Too often, in dysfunctional families the line between love and hate becomes so blurred that children do not know which is which.

Love is one of the basic human relationships. There is a big difference between love and lust. Both are emotions and can be expressed in physical ways. The difference is that love is a giving relationship wanting whatever is in the best interest of the one who is loved. Lust, on the other hand, is a taking relationship. The taker cares only about himself. He cares nothing about the object of his lust. Whether a child learns love or lust happens extremely early in life (2 King 11:21-12:2; 2 Chronicles 25:1-2, 26:1-5, 27:1-2; Proverbs 1:1-7).

4. *Reactions*

Children learn how to react to different events by watching how their parents react when they are in similar situations. If the parent's first reaction is always to fly into a rage when something does not please him, the child also will do it. If the parent becomes overly emotional when someone hurts his feelings, the child also will do it. If the parent handles a crisis in a calm, mature manner, the child will also.

5. *Ambitions*

Parents model ambition and purpose to their children. When parents just drift through life without any clear cut goal or purpose, their children normally also will do the same. If the parent's ambition is to get enough money to buy the next bottle of alcohol or fix of drugs, the child learns that personal gratification is the most important thing in life. If the parent's ambition is to make a million dollars, the child will learn that money is the most important thing in life. If a parent's ambition is to serve God, the child learns to serve God.

IV. When To Model

A. Start Early

We should start modeling behavior and principles for our children the day they are born! Some studies have shown that children as young as one day old imitate adults' facial expressions. Also, infants have very good memories. Some memories last for only a few seconds, but others are kept for a lifetime. Some research even indicates that a child can learn and be influenced in the womb. Should this frighten you as parents? Yes, it should. From the earliest moments of their lives, you are setting an example for your children. What kind of example is it?

Children are never too young to learn. Queen Elizabeth I of England could speak, read, write in English, French, and Latin when she was only four. That's unusual, for us today, but not for noble and rich children then. Children are going to learn something; it is your responsibility as a parent to decide what they learn. God says to teach them His ways (Deuteronomy 6:7; Joshua 8:35; Psalm 34:11, 78:4-8).

Infants and young children are highly receptive to learning. Most of our learning takes place within the first few years of life. Most of this learning occurs by following the examples (modeling) of parents. It is a nonverbal interaction between the parent and child. When verbal teaching is present, it is usually to reinforce or explain the nonverbal modeling.

Children imitate their parents for several reasons. They are with their parents more than other people. Because they are around their parents most of the time, they depend on them and trust them.

B. Effective Modeling Is Based On...

People, especially children, model their thoughts and behavior on people they trust. This trust is based on the model's prestige, status, and competence. To a child, this usually means his parents. Think of the people upon whom you have modeled some of your behavior. Are they uneducated, low status people? Of course not. Our models are well-known respected members of society.

When we follow someone's example we try to create or strengthen our similarity between us and the person we chose to imitate. An effective modeler is one who has desirable characteristics—the more the better. The characteristics can be physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual.

An effective modeler is one who is consistent in his words and deeds. It is the principle of practicing what you preach. If a modeler's actions are inconsistent with

his words, he creates confusion. Usually, when this happens, children will imitate the actions instead of the words.

An effective modeler is one who causes positive reinforcement. When he continues to think and act in a positive way, he is reinforcing his own actions and thoughts. Also, he is causing positive reinforcement in the child. The more the child sees an action modeled, the more the child will want to imitate that action.

V. Conclusion

When parents model winning behavior and attitudes they are doing it with love. They want their children to be the best people they can be (Deuteronomy 6:7). In modeling winning behavior they are giving part of themselves to their children.

Winning behavior is more than just wanting your children to be financially or socially successful. It is wanting your children to be successful in their relationship with God (Proverbs 22:6; Joel 1:3; John 21:15; Acts 2:38-39; 1 Timothy 3:4-5).

Now, please start over and study the lesson and the related scriptures. **When you finish your in-depth study, return to the enclosed Response Sheet and write your answers to the study questions about this lesson.**