Loving Discipline:
Suggestions for a Well-Managed Classroom
by Kimberly Grimes

"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6, NIV). This is a proverb we hear often. It is one of those famous Bible verses we grow up hearing even before we are

> *"Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid" (Proverbs 12:1).*

adults, teachers, and parents. But how do we train a child in the way he or she should go? What is our part in God's promise that our children will not stray from God's ways? Scripture is filled with stories, commands, and proverbs stating the importance of loving discipline (Proverbs 12:1), respecting commands (Proverbs 13:13), and accepting instruction (Proverbs 19:20). The greatest commandment, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself, is based on a commandment of obedience. Every commandment written throughout Scripture is based upon the authority of God, meaning our obedience to Him is foundational in our Christian faith. As teachers and parents, training our children in His ways is a responsibility given to us by God. This is a high calling, and one that seems daunting at times. Directing a child to love discipline and accept instruction with a desire to obey is an achievable

goal. How can it be accomplished in the classroom? How do we manage a room full of children with different backgrounds, home lives, personalities, and needs? The answer is to expect obedience, instruct clearly, and ask for God's grace and wisdom.

As a fourth grade teacher, it often feels as if hundreds of things are pummeling me at once: students asking questions, papers being passed to and fro, parents' questions and concerns, and meetings to attend. Somewhere in the midst of the chaos I am required to teach my students to love knowledge and heed correction. How does it all get accomplished? Outlined below are suggestions that have helped me succeed in managing my classroom and students. These steps have alleviated discipline issues and enabled my students to love obedience and discipline.

Expect children to obey.

Children will meet the expectations you set for them. If you say something, but do not expect them to obey it, they will learn that they need not obey. If you expect them to obey always, with a good attitude, then they will rise to the occasion. However, your actions must follow your words. When you say, "Stop, look, and listen," expect your students to do exactly what you said. Do not give instructions or go onto

the next task until everyone has stopped, looked, and is listening. High expectations will allow children to gain the knowledge and discipline God requires.

Do not give instructions unless you have 100% attention and participation.

When giving instructions to students, do not speak unless all students are attentive to your instructions. If you are in the midst of a sentence, and one student begins talking or doing another task, stop mid-sentence. This immediately gets the attention of the whole class. They need to know you will not continue until all eyes and ears are focused on you. As soon as all students are listening, continue with the directions. The lack of focus of one child in your classroom should not be acceptable. One hundred percent of students' attention leads to 100% of students who learn.

Give clear instructions in multiple ways.

When explaining instructions to your class, express them verbally and then ask students to repeat what you said. As they restate your instructions, write the list of tasks on the board for students to refer to as they follow your instructions. Modeling a task while explaining it is also a great tool that will enable students to fully understand your instructions. As you state each step of the instructions, show students what it would look like to obey each step. Always choose at least two ways in which the instructions are given: verbally, through modeling, or in written form.

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Have a quiet signal.

A quiet signal is a tool which allows you to gain the attention of all your students at any time. Whether they are in the midst of an active project or are quietly writing a composition, the quiet signal is a signal you give students to which they respond. For example, the most useful signal for me is raised hands. When I raise my hand in the air, my students mimic me by raising their hands and looking at me. After instruction and practice at the beginning of the year, my students know that just raising their hands and continuing with their tasks is not the quiet signal. They must raise their hands, stop, look, and listen. This takes time and energy at the beginning of the year, but is worth the effort as the year progresses. There are many signals you can use aside from raised hands: turn the lights out, say "stop, look, listen," or use "ostrich." ("Ostrich" is a technique in which the teacher says "ostrich" and all students put their heads on their desks, just like ostriches put their heads in the ground.) Whatever signal you use, make sure you teach students the signal ahead of time and practice using it often. Expect all students to follow the signal and don't go on with instructions until you have 100% of the students' attention. When you really need the children's attention, the quiet signal will work like a charm!

Obtain organizational tools.

Learn, create, and use organizational tools and systems that keep you and your students well managed. Post the schedule on the board each day. Have a "turn-in" box for student work. Give students weekly jobs they are responsible for throughout the week. There are many useful tools that will keep your classroom organized and running smoothly. I have found that placing students in groups of four keeps my classroom functioning well. Within these groups I use a system known as "numbered heads." Numbered heads is a strategy in which each student in the group has an assigned number: 1, 2, 3, or 4. When I need papers turned in or collected, I ask one of the "numbers" to collect the papers for their group and turn them in to the turn-in box. This works well since only five or six students go to the box instead of 20 or 30 at a time. Any tool that helps your classroom run smoothly and efficiently will benefit your students' learning experience.

Implementing these suggestions all at once can be overwhelming. Start small and give yourself time to form patterns using these ideas. Focus on one step for one week and see how it goes. As you become more comfortable, apply another tool. This will create success and habit-forming behaviors. Don't expect to use all these suggestions at once and become the perfect classroom manager. Forming teaching habits takes practice. Also, be patient with your students. Take time to stop and require their attention, and don't be in a hurry to get through the lesson. Taking time to establish high expectations now will save time in the future. Although it may feel like everything is taking a long time to accomplish, it will be worth it!

The Bible is very clear when examining obedience and discipline, "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid" (Proverbs 12:1, NIV). As educators our goal is to instill knowledge, not stupidity. Obedient students create more learning opportunities in the classroom. By eliminating discipline issues with good classroom management, more attention can be given to the education we desire to provide. Children desire boundaries by which to function and work. They want to please and obey, and we must give them a classroom environment conducive to accomplishing those goals. One of my fourth graders said it best when he told his mother, "My teacher is very strict, but it's a good thing." Let us show God's love to our students by requiring obedience and cultivating discipline.