

The Lord Is My Shepherd, But Who Is Going to Help Me Care for These Kids?



As a single parent do you ever wonder how you are going to survive? You love the Lord and you believe the Lord is your shepherd, but do you wonder how all of this shepherd stuff fits into your life right now? This study will help you define your role as a single parent. It will assist you in discovering the truths in God's Word that will help you parent your children.

by Linda Ranson Jacobs

Based on Psalm 23:1–6; 139:13–16

The Lord is my shepherd, but what am I to do with these kids?

Psalm 23:1–6:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

As single parents, this psalm can lend comfort to our hectic lives. What goes through your mind when you think about ...

The peace of lying in green pastures.

The comfort of God being over us, in charge of us.

The security of God as our own Shepherd.

That He guides us in right paths and right ways.

That He meets all of our needs (e.g., food, shelter, comfort).

Psalm 23:4 “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your _____ and your _____, they comfort me.”

The rod was used to fight off wild beasts of the field; the staff was used to guide the sheep along a crooked path. On the end of the staff

was a crook, and it was used to pull the sheep back to safety. The rod and staff comforted the sheep because it meant the shepherd was there. The shepherd made sure they were protected and guided. (Taken from *God's Psychiatry* by Charles Allen.)

If we take this line of thinking and apply it to our situation as parents, and if we can think of ourselves as the shepherd and our discipline and guidance as the rod and staff, then we can realize that our children are comforted and feel secure with us as parents.

Have you ever wondered if ...

You are too lenient?

You are too strict?

You are too inconsistent?

Write about a time you were too lenient, too strict or too inconsistent.

Did you like how your children responded to your actions?

Did you like how you handled the particular situation?

What Is Discipline?

The word *discipline* comes from the same word as *disciple*. If you look up *discipline* in Webster's dictionary, it refers you to *disciple*.

Discipline is ...

Helping a child learn to get along with family and friends in our society.

Teaching a child to learn to behave in an agreeable way and to learn what the Bible says about how he or she is to act.

Encouraging a child to learn self-control so that the child wants to do what is right because of how he or she feels under his skin, not just to avoid getting caught.

In the Bible, the disciples helped, taught and encouraged the early Christians. Think of yourself as discipling your children.

Physical punishment does not create respect. Many times it creates fear. Fear is not respect.

1 John 4:18: "There is no fear in _____. But perfect _____ drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in _____."

Children in single parent homes need guidance and help. I'm not saying there should not be consequences for their actions. There should be consequences that are agreed upon in advance. Many people use physical punishment without the child ever knowing what it was he or she was supposed to be doing. Teach your children what you want them to do. Children don't automatically know what they are supposed to be doing in each of the two homes where they live.

**Do You Know Your Child
As God Knows You?**

Psalm 139:1-4, 13:

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD ... For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

How well does God know you?

Do you know your child as well as God knows you?

Do you know when your child rises or sleeps or who your child's friends are?

Name some of your child's friends.

Do you know how your child is feeling about different things?

List some of those feelings.

Are you familiar with all of your child's ways? What do you know about your child and how your child thinks about different things?

Do you know your child well enough to know what he or she is going to say? In other words, what is on your child's tongue?

**How Do I Do This
Parenting Thing Alone?**

2 Chronicles 1:10: "Give me _____ and _____, that I may lead this people."

Use the Step Back parenting method. When something happens, STOP, THINK AND STEP BACK and take a deep breath from the diaphragm. Literally make yourself take a "step back." It is a physical movement that can help you take the time you need to think. Taking a deep breath will send oxygenated blood to your brain and help you think clearly.

Think of a time when the outcome would have been different if you had taken the time to Stop, Think and Step Back. Write out how things might have been different.

Commit to telling a trusted friend about how you are going to work on using the Step Back method of parenting your children. Write the name of a trusted friend you are going to share with this week about using the Step Back method of parenting.

Making a commitment and then carrying out this commitment will help you feel better about single parenting. After sharing with a friend your commitment, come back to this page and place a check mark next to this commitment.

☐ Make a commitment to tell your children you are praying about how you will be parenting them as a single parent. After telling your children, come back to this page and place a check mark next to this commitment.

Another parenting tip is to steer away from negative comments and work toward using positive motivation with your children. Many times when a child's brain hears negative comments, his or her brain only reacts to the negative part. "Don't run in the house" turns around in the brain to say, "RUN in the house."

Use positive motivation. Some tips for positive motivation:

- Inspire your child at any age toward his or her best effort.
- Spend time together.
- Give choices. Example: "Do you want to set the table before dinner or clean up the table after dinner?"
- Describe their actions, such as, "You put the dirty dishes in the dishwasher. That was helpful."
- Use the words "You did it" after a child accomplishes a task.
- Use incentives. Example: "If you finish your homework before dinner, we will have time to read a story together before bed."

Think of a successful single parent that you know. What makes him or her successful?

Parenting becomes simpler if we take time to realize that we can pattern our parenting skills after the best parent of all, our heavenly Father. Think about how God parents us.

- He sets boundaries.
- He gives us guidelines.
- He provides laws with consequences.
- And yet He doesn't force us to believe in Him.
- He doesn't even force us to obey His laws.
- He allows us to choose.

The consequences are pretty severe for many of the laws we break, but He still allows us to make our own choices.

Another way to teach your children is through the use of boundaries and guidelines. To help you understand the why of boundaries, let's take a little trip. Let's say we have to go to an appointment. We leave the house in plenty of time. Now there are two different routes that we can take. Each road is a dark stretch of a country road. It is nighttime, and we are alone. Just as we leave the house, it begins to rain.

The first road has clearly defined lanes marked with bright stripes. When the road becomes narrow with deep culverts and ditches on the side, there are guardrails and wide shoulders along the side. There are signs indicating sharp curves. There are clearly marked no passing zones when needed. As you are traveling along, you notice speed limit signs telling you to slow down and giving you an idea of how fast you can safely travel. You notice a sign ahead indicating there is an intersection coming up with a traffic light, and you may have to stop. Then you notice street signs telling you where you are.

The second road is quite different. This road has a faded centerline, and you are not exactly sure where your side of the road begins and ends. As your car climbs the hill, you suspect that there are steep ditches along the side of the road, but you don't see any guardrails.

There are no shoulders along the side of the road, just steep cliffs. As the road narrows and curves, you look for traffic signs indicating when the next curve will appear, but you only see faded unrecognizable signs. There's no warning sign of an up-and-coming intersection. There are no posted speed limits.

Which road will you choose to travel? Which road will be the safest road to travel? Why? The brightly marked lanes are boundaries. The guardrails are boundaries that keep us from going over the edge into a steep cliff. Speed limits give us boundaries as to what speed we can travel. No passing zones give us clear boundaries to keep us safe and the other cars safe. We choose to travel the road with boundaries because we feel safe; we have clear expectations of what's to come and where we are going.

The same holds true for children. They need boundaries:

- To feel safe
- To have clear expectations of what's to come
- To know what's expected of them (in each household)
- To know where they are going

Children from single parent families, in particular, need us as parents to set clear boundaries. Many times our children have to follow different sets of rules, our rules and the rules at the other parent's home. We cannot control what takes place at the other home but we can take control at our own home. Now please notice I didn't say that we control the children. I said we can take control in our homes. There is a difference. We control our own selves; you can try to control your child, but no one can truly control another person, not even his or her own child.

As part of our boundaries discussion, let me ask you a question. What do you want for your child when he or she becomes an adult? Have you thought that far ahead? Stephen Covey in the Franklin Covey "What Matters Most" seminar says that "Dreams are long range goals with a plan."

What are your dreams for your child?

What are your plans?

You the parent are responsible for the long-range goals for your child. Are you making any long-range goals for yourself or your child?

For a long time I literally couldn't think that far ahead. I was busy just trying to survive. My first prayer when I became single was, "God don't let Julie get pregnant and don't let Brian get into drugs." Julie was 12, and Brian was 8 years old. I bought into all the hype about children from broken homes. As long as I took that line of thinking, my children were doomed. I found myself thinking, "Why try? They're from a broken home. They don't have a chance."

Then I realized that I, their mother, was training them just as you are training your child right now. There is no one else. You are a single parent. Jane Nelson in her book *Positive Discipline for the Single Parent* says,

It's a myth that children living with single parents are automatically more deprived than children living with two parents. It could even be more harmful for children to live with parents who stay together "for

the sake of the children.” These parents can’t really hide their anger, bitterness, resentments, or despair, and their children may never learn anything about loving, healthy relationships. Many happy, successful people have been raised by divorced parents, widows, or widowers—or even in orphanages. It is not the circumstances of life, but the way we perceive those circumstances that has the greatest impact. Each person decides whether challenges will be stumbling blocks or stepping-stones to joy and success.

The Bible says in Proverbs 22:6, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”

What does this scripture mean to you?

In order to train a child, you need to look ahead. Ask yourself these questions:

What road signs or boundaries am I putting out for my children?

What’s the direction I want them to go?

What am I doing to point them in that direction?

How am I preparing them for the bumps and detours that are waiting down the road for them?

What are their boundaries?

Let’s go back to the question we asked a few minutes ago and rephrase it a little. What is it that you really want for your children?

When they are adults, what character traits and qualities do you want them to have?

Do you want them to grow up to be healthy, happy, contributing adults to the society they live in?

We have to start today. We have to change our understanding and the patterns in their brains. You are parenting alone now. New schedules, new rules, new boundaries have to be put into place. Meet with your children and together put your rules on paper so everyone will know up front what the rules are. Write out the consequences for infractions. For example, if one of your rules is for the children to get themselves up with their own alarm clock, then buy them an alarm clock. Then write out a rule that says, “If you don’t get up when your alarm goes off and I have to come to your room and get you out of bed, then you will go to bed fifteen minutes earlier that night.” Your child will know up front what the consequence is going to be. Stick to your rule. If the child groans and moans and you end up getting him or her up, hold fast to the part that says the child will go to bed early that night. Be lovingly firm!

Did the shepherd let the sheep wander off when they were on the high cliffs? No, he gently tapped them with his rod to guide them along the crooked path. If the sheep did fall off the side of the mountain, the shepherd

took his crook and pulled them back up to the path to join the rest of the sheep. I can imagine the shepherd pulling the sheep back to the path and reaching down to gently pat the sheep on the head, using a reassuring tone to let the sheep know it was okay and was back in the folds of the loving arms of the shepherd. The shepherd might have picked the sheep up and carried it on his shoulders for a distance until the sheep calmed down.

Go back and read the entire 23rd Psalm. You will see God is a caring shepherd and the sheep could depend on Him for their safety. The shepherd made them lie down in green pastures so they could sleep. Sheep didn't know when to sleep, but the shepherd knew. In other words, there was no choice. He provided the place for them to rest. The shepherd guided them to quiet waters to drink. If he had led them to swift and turbulent waters, the sheep would have drowned as they drank, but the Shepherd took them to quiet waters. The shepherd took care of their needs. He comforted them, corrected them, gave them safety, and protected them from their enemies. Are you doing all of that for your child?

Who is going to help you raise your children? The shepherd. It's all right there in His Word. Read it. Digest it. Ponder and think on it. Then act using God's Word to raise your children in the Lord.

Children associate good effective discipline with love. The sheep follow the shepherd who protects and guides them, who cares for them and keeps them out of harm's way. Can we not do that for our own children? Can we do any less than be their shepherd?

John 10:27: "My sheep _____ to my voice; I _____ them and they _____ me."

Pick up those little lambs and carry them.

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