As we begin this discussion of managing a classroom and keeping discipline, let us not forget that we do so with love, with the end goal of bringing a child to Christ and helping him grow in this new, Christian life. When discussing discipline, we, in no way, disregard the need a child has for attention, individualized instruction, rewards, etc. In fact, a teacher in a well-managed classroom will be able to provide all of the above and more, as she has more time, and an organized space to do so.

Another important note to make is that all techniques need to be adjusted according to the age of the child, the size of the classroom, and the intent of the activity. The younger the age, and bigger the group, the more tightly managed the classroom needs to be. As the students mature, the classroom becomes less restraining.

Let us begin by defining some terms. Classroom management is defined here as the ability of a teacher to organize the physical space of the classroom, time, children’s activity and teaching. Discipline then, is the use of different techniques to redirect children and bring them back to order.

Effective classroom management requires the following:

I. Preparation
   1) Prepare Your Classroom
   2) Prepare Your Lesson
   3) Prepare Your Materials

II. Training
   1) Develop a Classroom Routine
   2) Develop effective Classroom Rules

III. Discipline
   1) Why Discipline at All?
   2) How Do We Discipline?
   3) Teacher Tool Box
   4) Teacher Don’ts
I. Preparation is Key

Before we, as teachers, set out on disciplining children, we must do so first with ourselves. I estimate that a large percentage on discipline issues, perhaps 90% of them, can be eliminated if we first discipline ourselves.

If the teacher is completely prepared, he will feel in control of the situation and the children will feel a sense of safety in his classroom.

What must you prepared:
   1) Prepare Your Classroom
   2) Prepare Your Lesson
   3) Prepare Your Materials

1) PREPARE YOUR CLASSROOM

Prepare the physical space of your classroom. Make sure that the desks are arranged in such a way, as is (1) comfortable for the students to see, (2) is accessible to you, and (3) brings all attention to the lesson.

For example, the illustration to the right shows a classroom set-up in a ‘U’ formation, this is great set-up for a party, or a special discussion, but is impractical for teaching a lesson. Let’s take fifth grade students ‘C’ and ‘F’; they are sitting with their side to the teacher, but facing each other, it takes them extra effort to turn to the teacher and look toward the board; communicating with one another on the other hand is natural since they are in each other’s line of sight.

Take the illustration on the left; here the students are facing the teacher, but the teacher has no easy access to each student. Student F, for example, can potentially be doodling, texting or whatever else, with the teaching not anywhere close enough to see or intervene.
This illustration provides an example of a comfortable setting where all students are turned toward the teacher and are easily accessible to him; this set-up is usually the easiest to use in terms of classroom management.

The illustration on the right provides another variation of a set-up often used for younger grades. In this classroom tables instead of desks are used with the students sitting around the tables. The key to an effective use of this set-up is to have the children turn their chairs toward the teacher for the lesson, and toward their table for the art project, snack, etc.

**A few more notes on the classroom.** Make sure it is clean, neat, and inviting. Children mirror their surroundings, the more chaotic the room, the more chaotic they will be. Think through the storage areas, play area, and teacher desk; is each located in a comfortable place? Are the chairs pushed in? Is the floor clean? The air fresh? Well-lit?

Each of these things matter; they set the mood. Think about how Jesus chose where He spoke. The Sea of Galilee, the Mount of Beatitudes, a synagogue, the Temple, a garden; places that are beautiful and where He could be seen, and heard clearly.
2) PREPARE YOUR LESSON

One of the most difficult things to do as a teacher is preparing for the lesson. With great curriculum, natural talent, or the combination of both, it can very tempting to leave the planning to the last moment and rely on the “Spirit to give you what to say.” Yes, God’s word, is God’s word, and only He can truly speak to your students, but you need to be a ready vessel. There is a great saying, “God helps those who help themselves.” So, what is it that we need to prepare and how does this have anything to do with discipline?

When a teacher has thoroughly prepared, they have ‘lived through’ the lesson themselves, they are able to deliver it to the students as fresh and true. If a teacher is just speaking theory or has no idea what she is talking about, it is nearly impossible to engage the students with such a lesson. Have you spent time in the Word, on your knees? Are you interested in your own lesson? Is it something you practice in your life?

Is your lesson well prepared, written out, prayed through? Great! Now how you deliver the lesson matters as well. You may be saying all the right things but if the students are bored you will have discipline problems very quickly. Spend extra time thinking through how you can engage your class. Bring in fresh ideas. Switch up the order of the lesson occasionally. Bring in visuals. Provide hands on experiences. Perhaps a quick story, a game, or a song could help bring your lesson to life. Be careful though to not let your visuals, stories, and games take away from the lesson. Focus on the Truth and let everything else bring it out for the students.

As you teach always have a sense of urgency; there is no ‘free time’ in a well-managed classroom. Students are always involved, always with the teacher, always feeling like they are just a tad late. Make sure that you are so well prepared that that you are able to create a sense of urgency in your classroom. Students should walk into the classroom knowing that every second matters.

*Genesis 1:31* “God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.” Can someone say the same about your classroom? Is it ‘good’ or just ‘good enough’?
3) PREPARE YOUR MATERIALS

Very often teachers can have a great message for the students but their lack of preparation and attentiveness to detail take the attention away from the actual lesson. Perhaps the teacher has a great attention grabber via a short video clip, if he has not prepared the projector ahead of time, he will lose the students’ attention in the first minute he spends trying to plug everything in. Perhaps a teacher has a wonderful art project for the students; while she is trying to take out all of her supplies, the children’s attention has been lost.

How can this be prevented? Every teacher needs to think through every detail of her lesson. Lay the coloring sheets out in stacks corresponding to the rows. Set out all of the supplies on the table. Test all of the technology ahead of time. By doing this, you can stay engaged with the students every minute of the lesson.

But what if...

There are times of course, where things are out of our control; perhaps you are substituting for someone, the projector worked when you tested it but now it will not turn on, or maybe though you thought through everything, you just cannot find that bag you prepared. Be prepared for these moments; have something quick ready for the students to do.

If you are working with little ones, start singing a song with them as you are looking for something, if they are a bit older, have them recite scripture. You can have them discuss a question you ask in pairs or small groups. Or maybe give them each a sheet of paper and have them write or draw how they understand a verse you gave them.

Whatever it is you do, make sure the students are busy; if they are, you will diminish the likelihood of discipline issues. Are you bending over to get a book, keep talking to the students, are you passing out papers, keep them occupied. You must be present and in control of your class at every moment. Even if it is an activity like snack, an art project, or a group discussion; a good teacher continues to walk around, chat, help, etc. Never think that you can sit down and relax.
Training Precedes Restraining

You have a beautiful classroom, a well-prepared lesson, your materials are ready. Great job, you have prevented most of the issues, but your work is not done. Let me bring an illustration for you. Imagine a city; the buildings are ready, the flowers are planted, the stores are stocked. The roads are prepared as well, all lines painted, the pavement smooth, all the traffic lights and signs in place. We are now giving out cars to teens and letting them drive. What will happen? Chaos.

Before we can give out a car, we must first teach the teen to drive. First, we teach them the road signs, then the rules. We tell them about the gas pedal and the brake pedal. We show them the lights and windshield wipers. Finally, we teach them to drive, sitting beside them of course. As they gain experience, we take them on the main roads. In the end, a test is taken and only after which is the driver’s license given. As we drive, we have police monitoring the city and penalizing those who disobey the laws.

Some teachers prepare their classroom perfectly, teach the students good behavior but then, never enforce it. This is like a city without any police; crime will spread quickly. Other teachers prepare the classroom and police the children, but have never taught them the desired behavior; these are like cities with a tyrant over them; the students never know what to expect. The third group of teachers teach the desired behavior and attempt to police it, but they have never prepared the classroom, chaos ensues.

Let us talk about the third group of teachers; they have prepared the classroom, they have taught students the desired behavior, and they correct as needed consistently and gently.

Training requirements:

1) Develop a Classroom Routine
2) Develop effective Classroom Rules

1st Corinthians 14:33
“For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—
as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people.”
1) **Develop a Classroom Routine**

Sit down and think through your class time; write out a list of how you would like your class time to look. Remember God gave you the students, He gave you the time; make sure every moment is used for His glory.

- How do the students walk in the door?
- What do they do if they are early?
- What supplies are they expected to bring?
- What does your morning prayer routine look like? Can students share needs?
- If they have a question, how do they get your attention?
- How do they pass in their papers?
- How do they sit at their desk?
- Will you have a break time? What will it look like?
- How will class be ended?
- How is the classroom cleaned up at the end of class?

I would like to share some of the things I have been using in my classroom. When the students first come in, I greet them at the door and shake their hand. This ensures that I speak to every child. When you are able to establish a good connection with children they are more emotionally invested with you and are less likely to act out. If students feel that you do not care about them they will act out.

When students walk into the classroom I have something written on the board for them to do; perhaps to read a verse, to answer, a question. If these are younger students they may play with puzzles, color, or look at books as they are waiting. Once class begins students share their needs and praises by raising their hand; I teach them to summarize their need in one sentence and to say only one; this is not a show and tell time, don’t let students steal your precious time.

During singing time and Scripture recitation all students stand. As I teach a lesson the students need to take notes in older grades or sit with their hands folded in younger grades. If papers are passed out, I teach students to take one and pass down. If they are passed in, I teach them to pass them in rows.

Think through your lesson, write out your routine and train your students to follow it. This may take a few lessons until they remember what you expect of them; but only after you have clearly trained them can you even begin to enforce any of it.
All of these small details ensure that students know what is expected of them creates an orderly classroom. For some progressively minded teachers this may sound like cruelty, but I can testify with all confidence that a loving but well managed classroom allows for the teacher to bring in more variety, games, and various activities. The students are able to listen, and therefore hear the Word of God. Jesus, Paul, Moses, and others spoke to people when they were orderly; we do not read anywhere that Jesus would yell over the crowd and try to argue with them.

Think about how particular God was about His people Israel. See the image to the right, this is how God told them, adults and children, to walk and camp. God didn’t just let Levi mix with Judah; each had their own place. When Jesus fed the five thousand, he told them to sit in rows. When David organized a choir he had very specific shifts. As we can see, God is a God of order and beauty; make sure your classroom reflects God’s character.

2) Develop Effective Classroom Rules

We have told the children what we expect them to do; now it’s time to set some boundaries and tell them what they may not do. Create three to five clear rules for your classroom. Make sure they are tangible, clear, and enforceable. A rule like, “Respect the teacher” may be difficult to enforce as respect is an inner attitude that is difficult to see; a child may be outwardly perfect yet disrespect the teacher in their heart. If the rule is too vague you may have a difficult time explaining it to students, if too specific, you leave too may loopholes.

The three rules that have helped me in my classes are: (1) Ask to speak, (2) Ask to move, and (3) Eyes on the teacher. These rules cover all communication during the lesson, students stay in their seat as directed, and having their eyes on the teacher allows the teacher to eliminate doodling, cell phones, etc.

During discussions I will put a ‘D’ on the board signifying that this is a time when they do not need to raise their hand but may speak freely. This allows me to be flexible; keep order while teaching, but allow for discussions, games, and activities.
Students Learning

Classroom Management and Discipline

**Discipline: Restraining With Love**

Why discipline the children at all? Many believe that we need to just allow the children to learn from their mistakes. Others say that if we force our students to conform we will break all creativity in them. Still others believe it is up to God to work in their hearts; if restrain students, we are only causing to follow law, not live according to grace. But what does the Bible tell us?

- *Proverbs 22:6* – “Train up a child in the way he should go…”
- *Proverbs 13:24* – “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.”
- *Proverbs 23:13* – “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.”
- *Proverbs 22:15* – “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.”
- *Proverbs 29:17* – “Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.”
- *Proverbs 29:15* – “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.”
- *Proverbs 22:1* – “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.”
- *Hebrews 12:11* – “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

These passages and others give us a clear picture of God’s view of discipline: it is essential. Of course, as teachers it is not our place to use the ‘rod,’ but it most definitely is our place to correct and rebuke students as needed.

**This section focuses on:**

1) Why Discipline at All?
2) How Do We Discipline?
3) Teacher Tool Box
4) Teacher Don’ts
1) Why Discipline at All?

First, discipline teaches students to obey authority in general. If a student learns to obey his parents, to obey his teacher, to obey the pastors, then he can learn to obey God as well. If the classroom is chaotic and students are given free reign, is it not hypocritical to tell them they need to obey God?

An excellent example of this is a woman named Beka Horton. (You may listen to her story at Abeka.com “Character Training.”) Beka grew up in a single-parent home with her mother. Beka’s mother worked long hours to provide for her but still managed to bring up her daughter to be a diligent student and a respectful, polite child. She was not afraid to use the rod on her daughter and followed the principles written in Proverbs even though they did not go to church or read the Bible. For the summer Beka was sent to family friends, her mother always telling her that she must obey them just as much as she obeyed her mom.

One summer morning as Beka lay in bed she began to think about the future. She was now thirteen years old and in just a few years she would need to provide for herself and live alone. At the moment her mother provided direction and support, who would do that for her when she is an adult? It had to be someone stronger, bigger, and wiser than mom. Suddenly she remembered that once she had heard that God exists; He must be the One. It was a Sunday morning. Beka got up, walked to the nearest church and gave her life to Christ. Later she and her husband opened a small school which over the years has expanded to 2,000 students, a university of 4,000 students, and a textbook publishing company which supplies Christian schools all over the world.

Beka’s mother taught her obedience to authority. Because of this, it was easy for Beka to submit to God. We do the same when we train and restrain students.

The second reason that we discipline students is to train in them a Christ-like character. The Bible states in Hebrews 12:11 – “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” We must remember that all people, our students included, are born sinful. Seeds of good character need to be planted and trained in them.

Though this has been mentioned, I must add once again, that as we train and discipline students, we do so with love remembering that they are God’s children given to us for just a few hours a week. We never discipline with anger, vengefulness, or cruelty; but gently yet firmly as a shepherd would with his sheep.
2) How Do We Discipline?

You have trained the students in the classroom routines, you have clearly stated the rules, you begin class and a few students chat to one another as you are teaching the lesson, or perhaps someone decides to pull out their phone, and the four-year-old runs to the toys. What can you do? “Nip the problem in the bud.” Before a tree can bear fruit it first buds, then blossoms, and only then brings the fruit. If you break of the bud, there will be no fruit. In your classroom if you stop the first student who steps outside the bounds, you are nipping the problem in the bud, if you ignore it, other students will catch on very quickly.

As a teacher one of the most difficult things to do is to pay attention to every instance of disobedience; it is so much easier to ignore. Every teacher must remember though, that God has placed a responsibility on them to discipline the students. Before we discuss how specifically this can be done, remember that if you discipline occasionally or only when too many students disobey, your students will see you as unjust and unpredictable.

Another note to take is that though you discipline every time, you do not need to discipline in exactly the same way every time or with every student. There is a saying that, “There is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequal people.” Let’s look in the Bible; when the nation of Israel sinned God continually forgave them, when Moses sinned once, he lost the privilege of coming into the Promised Land. Why? People have different relationships; you can expect more from one than another.

3) The Teacher Tool Box

Many teachers develop a very specific plan of what they will do; first offense is a warning, second the student has time-out, third the student changes seats, etc. This kind of approach is ineffective and limiting. What if a student is always chatting with one specific friend, change her seat before the lesson begins; but a system listed above does not allow you to, you must go through the warning and time-out first. This is like using a hammer to stir tea and then to paint a painting. We wouldn’t do that would we, we would use a tea spoon to stir our tea, and a paintbrush to paint a picture.
Working with students is similar, have a toolbox of different approaches and adjust to the situation. Always use the least distracting tool so that you can continue teaching if possible, but still discipline effectively. Here is a list of the tools I use beginning from the least distracting to the most serious. Most of the time I do not need to use anything past the third point, the rest are only as needed.

**Teacher Tools:**

- The “teacher look”
- Quiet down
- Stand by student (remove object if needed)
- Say their name/ask question
- Tell child to stand/ move seats
- Tell child to stand outside (in your view): Have firm talk with child
- Take away privileges; match behavior to punishment
- Talk with parents/ keep after class
- In extreme cases ask administration for help

The “teacher look” is simply a stern stare into the eyes of the misbehaving child; you can continue teaching as you send a silent message to the student. If the student is not looking at you, just quiet down for a few seconds; most children will look up to see why it got quiet. Invading the child’s personal space by standing by them; all chatting, doodling, and anything else will stop just from your presence.

Sometimes students are simply distracted; say their name to bring them back in. If blatant disobedience continues, have the student stand or have a stern talk with them. If necessary, take away a privilege, perhaps talk to parents if this is effective and in extreme cases, involve administration.

4) **Teacher Don’ts**

Teachers often fall into mistakes that cause them to lose credibility and respect in the eyes of the students. No matter what is going on a teacher should never lose his temper, stomp, snap, yell, or speak in a disrespectful way to the children. Don’t ‘shush’ the children, use rude language, threaten a child, and definitely never become physical with a child. Be careful to not show anger or disgust with a child, but be stern yet calm and loving.
On the opposite side of the coin, don’t beg the children to listen to you; you are the authority, use it. Don’t rely on another teacher or the administration; the children may listen to you because you are threatening with another person, but they are not doing it for you. Don’t bring up the past or compare a child to their siblings or family. All of these things irritate children and are not effective long term even if they work once or twice. Finally, don’t take it personally; the child is usually acting out because they are not yet born again, or maybe their sinful nature is showing through, continue working and do not give up.

Effective Teachers...

Effective teachers prepare, prepare, and prepare some more. All things, the classroom, the materials, and their lesson have been prepared. They develop good classroom procedures and rules and train their students in them. These teachers are consistent in their discipline and always seek to ‘nip the problem in the bud.’ They love their children and discipline them consistently. Finally these teachers rely on God to grow the seeds they have sown into their life.