

Train Up Your Child (Proverbs 22:6)

Children are inherently foolish and pursue folly. Parents are called to train up their children to walk in wisdom and righteousness. To gain greater influence on their children, the parents must have a strong relationship both with God and their children.

INTRODUCTION

Families can get really frustrated with rearing their children. It can be a big headache to get kids to respond properly. Many times, it brings the worst out of parents. There seems to be a big battlefield when parents get home from their job. Some prefer working rather than to come home to all the turbulence. Parents' ears perk up when they get tips to raising up their children. In our study in the book of Proverbs, there are many guidelines on parenting.

Proverbs 22:6 is probably the best-known proverb on the rearing of children. It is probably one of the most quoted from the book of Proverbs. However, it is often misunderstood. It reads, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." This sounds like a great promise. However, some parents are disappointed because they tried their best to train up their children, but their kids have turned away.

We have learned that Proverbs are life principles that are general rules rather than unconditional promises. When parents fear God and seek His wisdom, and attempt to guide their children, those children have a very high probability of learning to make good decisions on their own. However, there will be some casualties. Some will rebel, but most will appreciate the solid training. When they are old, they will not depart from the training their parents have given to them. We need to understand that no matter how hard parents try to direct their child in the right way, the child has a choice to make on his own.

ILLUSTRATION: The Lord has blessed Ellie and I with two children. We trained and treated both the same way. However, my daughter grew up to love the Lord, but my son departed from God and the church after high school. I tried to persuade him to go back to church. Our conversation got shorter and shorter- until he did not want to talk to me anymore. I was trying to control him and the more I pushed, the more he pushed me away. I felt really ashamed about it and felt that I had failed as a parent. God convicted me that I needed to turn my son over to Him like Abraham with his son, Isaac. Instead of controlling him, I committed to rebuild our relationship in order to regain trust. I decided not to ask him about church and fellowship, but focused on his life and things that he was interested in. I wanted to make sure that I had a relationship with him so that I could be in position to influence him in the future.

[Before diving into Proverbs 22:6, I want to give you an overview of what the sermon outline is. There are four questions I want to answer today: 1) Why do children need to be trained? 2) Who is responsible for training the children? 3) What do the children need to be trained in? 4) How do we go about training our children? Let's look at the first question: Why do children need to be trained?]

A. Why do children need to be trained?

First, we need to understand the condition of the child. The word, "child" is used seven times in Proverbs (1:4; 7:7; 20:11; 22:6,15; 23:13; 29:15) as referring to youth or young adult. They are described as being foolish and ones who pursue folly. (Prov. 22:15) "Folly is

bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.” There is no need to teach a child to do foolish things. They do it automatically. They are inherently sinful. Without proper training, life will be difficult. If we leave them alone, they may go down a dangerous path.

As children grow, they go through many changes. As they move from a childhood to adulthood, life becomes messy. The young people need guidance and help. Too often parents pass that responsibility to the church or to the grandparents or to the school teachers. [Well, who is responsible in training the children? We see clearly through Scripture that parents are the primary faith influencer. The church only comes along side of the parents to equip them to disciple their children. Let’s look at what Scripture has to say.]

B. Who is responsible in training the children?

(Deut. 6:1-2,7) “These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life... Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” Parents are not only to be obedient to God’s Word, but they are to teach them to their children. (Eph. 6:4) “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” Parents are also to provide training and instruction for their children.

ILLUSTRATION: A very high percentage of church-raised kids fall away from their faith when they get to college. Some people blame the church not doing a good job. The reality is that the kids are only at church for a few hours a week, but are at home most of their childhood. Ultimately, the responsibility falls upon the parents. They are the primary faith influencers.

It is the parents that are to train their children. The word translated “Train” means “dedicate.” In the four other times this word is used, it is dedicating a structure to God. “Train” up is to dedicate a child that has completed something important. It may refer to the initiation of the young man into adulthood. There are many important principles of lives that a young man needs to learn before adulthood. Training is necessary to prepare the child for future responsibilities. Its root word for “train” is “to narrow”. The word suggests a picture of cattle being guided into a narrow entry of the pen. There is a particular direction and goal to pursue.

ILLUSTRATION: My Medicare insurance informed me this month that I have free gym membership at YMCA. I met with a trainer, who guided me to use different machines to strengthen my physical well being. Similarly, children need a trainer to guide them to strengthen their emotional and spiritual well being. Parents are the primary spiritual trainers. [This leads us to the next question. What do the children need to be trained in?]

C. What do the children need to be trained in?

Again going back to v.6, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” The word “way” is used repeatedly throughout Proverbs to indicate a chosen path of life. There are two contrasting paths: First, the path of wisdom and

righteousness that leads to life and second, the path of wickedness and foolishness that leads to death. (Prov. 10:25) “The fool finds pleasure in evil conduct, but a man of understanding delights in wisdom.” One can choose to follow their natural nature, which is foolishness and folly or to choose to follow wisdom. (Prov. 9:10) “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” Wisdom begins with learning to fear God. God needs to be integrated into our lives. We fear God by being at awe of Him. We revere Him. The best way to teach our children to fear God is for us to fear God. We need to show our children that we trust God during good and bad times because God is in total control.

All of us want the best for our children. We take them to Kumon, piano lessons, and dancing lessons. Our children are the most privileged kids around. In spite of all these wonderful skills imparted to them, what supersedes all of them are spiritual truths-for they will last for eternity. In the Deut. 6:1-2 that we read earlier, we were commanded to teach God’s Word and His commands to our children. In order for our children to value Scripture, we as parents need to value the Bible. May we read it together and discuss what principles we can apply to our lives. [Now that we have answered the question what do the children need to be trained in. Let’s go on to answering how should children be trained?]

D. How should children be trained?

1. Start Early

First, it is imperative to start this training as early as possible. When there is lack of training, the child will automatically pursue folly and develop bad habits. The longer we allow bad habits to grow, the more difficult it is to break those bad habits. Therefore, when a child starts training early, he/she will develop good foundational habits to build their life on. Studies show that a child develops most of their personality and habits during the first six years of their life. We can choose to pay the cost in the front end by starting training early and then enjoy peace in the long run or choose to procrastinate in the training in the front end and pay a great price in the long run.

[A second way we can train our children is to develop good relationship through intentional communication.]

2. Develop Good Relationship through Intentional Communication

In order to train well, the parents need to be in position of influence. The key to influence is meaningful relationship with our child. I learned from Josh McDowell, “Rules without Relationship will end in Rebellion.” It is not wise to set up a bunch of rules without relationship.

The key to meaningful relationship is good communication. The key to good communication is listening. One of the most common complaints from young people is that their parents do not listen to them nor understand them. When we listen, may we seek to understand from our child’s perspective, particularly when he is a teenager. Instead of lecturing, parents must be gentle in encouraging their children to discuss their own ideas and beliefs, no matter how off base they may sound. After they speak, tell them what you heard. Understanding does not mean that you agree with your child. However, it communicates that you care about their point of view. Through time, they will feel more comfortable to share from their heart. If we do not have good communication, it is difficult to guide and teach our children. Let us read Deut. 6:7,

“Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

Let us look for opportunity throughout the day to connect with our children to build relationships and to be in position to teach them. Training in general needs to be intentional. Relationship with our children does not happen automatically. We need to take the initiative to go to them with an attitude of giving them value. Parents should not try to have a particular agenda. It is all too common for an adolescent to assume something is wrong any time a parent calls their name. Just get together for no specific purpose other than to talk. You might say, “Hey, Paul, I am going to the store to pick up some milk. Why don’t you come with me so we can talk?” These invitations should be done regularly. At the same time, look for teachable moments to bring up life principles organically. After watching a movie with your child, discuss any application for life. Draw out any biblical principle as applicable.

May we be flexible with time and place when our child wants to talk with us. He/She might choose times that are not convenient for their parents. But be available, those times do not come around regularly. Most of the time, your child is not ready to talk when you are. When we talk with our child, enter into their world. Find out their interest and passion. Encourage them to tell you about it. Find common areas to talk about. Share specifically why you value them. What you appreciate about them. Good communication is the key to building lasting relationships. When there is good relationship, the child will be more open to listen to our teaching and advice.

The church recognizes the importance of intimate communication. Unfortunately, our devices or phones have distracted us from meaningful relationships. I want to invite all of you to join the all-church Campaign entitled Connected3D, this six weeks campaign will teach us to replace negative technology habits with healthy patterns; may we learn to control our devices instead of having our devices control us.

After the worship service, we will be distributing a Campaign packet for every family. In it is a letter that challenges us to participate. There is also a guide that explains the purpose; in addition, an accountability contract for families and an accountability contract for singles and couples without kids are enclosed. There are also suggested activities in the packet. The church also will provide additional resources in the HCC website to help us fulfill our commitment. Please take the accountability contract and make a commitment to as many goals as you feel led to. Find an accountability partner that will hold you accountable; it may be your family member or classmate or small group member. Bring your contract to your small group to discuss. In the middle of the campaign on Friday, February 21st, we will have a special technology and family workshop led by Mr. Frank, who will show us how to best integrate technology into our daily life. Please mark that on your calendar and join us.

[A third suggestion to how should children be trained is model for your children.]

3. Model for Your Children

Lessons that we teach our child are more caught than taught. Our children are constantly watching us in what we say and what we do. One of the best ways to teach our children to love God is for us to love God. Whatever we want our child to learn, we

need to display it regularly to them. Our actions speak louder than our words. Children learn values, morals, and priorities by observing how their parents act and react every day. When we value God's Word by having regular devotion and prayer, our children will be motivated to follow also. When we face difficulties in life and turn to the Lord in a consistent way, our child will probably do likewise. (Prov. 2:20, TLB) "Follow the steps of the godly instead, and stay on the right path."

[A fourth suggestion to how should children be trained is discipline your children.]

4. Discipline Your Children (Prov. 3:11-12)

(Prov. 3:11-12) "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in." (Prov. 13:24) "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him."

Discipline your child means to hold them accountable to their decisions. Set up boundaries. Teach them that if they stay within these guardrails, then they will be safe. But if they go out of it, then they will get in trouble. Children need to experience consequences. When they do something wrong, they have to be held responsible for it. Too often parents tend to be over-protective and not allow them to experience pain. Make sure rules are clear and not make too many rules. When we set them, it is imperative to follow through with it consistently. If we do not do that, it will only confuse the child. Remember the principle: "Rules without Relationship will result in rebellion." May we discipline or correct out of love and not out of anger or revenge.

Conclusion: I mentioned my son turned away from the Lord after he went to college. I am thankful to the Lord for watching over him. Several years back, I was talking to him over the phone when he said casually that he met his friend at West Houston Chinese Church last Sunday. I said, "Were you at church last Sunday?" He replied, "Yes, I have been going to church the last couple of months." I could barely hold back my enthusiasm. I told him calmly, "Oh, that is good." But inside, I was jumping up and down praising God. I am glad I did not get in the way of God by pushing my son away. Now, he has three children of his own and is a devoted follower of Christ. My heart melts as I see my son reading the Bible and teaching his children about God. Proverbs 22:6, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

May we be obedient to the Lord by accepting the call to be the primary faith influencer for our children. They do pursue folly and God has mandated parents to guide them to walk in wisdom and righteousness. But before we can influence our child, we need to have a strong relationship with our child so that he/she will listen to us. In addition, it is most critical that we model for them what it means to love God and trust in Him.