

Train Up a Child

May 13, 14, 2017

Opening

Two years ago this coming November, Sheila and I woke up to a surprising sight in our front yard. During the night, someone joy riding in Milan had plowed through our row of arborvitae trees and narrowly missed hitting our front porch. The culprit was eventually tracked down, no big deal, no one was hurt...except our arborvitae. Three of them were pretty done for. So with the insurance money, we decided to start over with smaller trees and took out the rest of them.

So we bought small arborvitae from a local home improvement store, and was pleased to see that there was a money back guarantee. Well, of the 20-something trees we bought, about 9 of them didn't make it. It could have been our lack of a green thumb or whatever, but the store took them back this last month, gave us our money back, no questions asked.

Aren't guarantees wonderful? Yes they are.

But when it comes to parenting, there are no guarantees.

Speaking on raising children is a fearful thing for a pastor. There was a time when I was a parenting expert. I could tell you exactly how you should go about raising children...I had all the answers.

Then I had children.

Someone has suggested this progression for a pastor's titles for sermons on child raising:

"Ten Rules for Raising Godly Kids"

"Ten Guidelines for Raising Good Kids"

"Five Principles for Raising Kids"

“Three Suggestions for Surviving Parenthood”

Notice they get less and less emphatic and confident?

Well, Sheila and I survived parenthood. Barely. How our boys survived without permanent scarring, I don't know...you will have to ask them about that. And now we're into grandparenting...but still do some parenting as well. ;)

I know not everyone here is a parent. That Mother's Day can be a painful time for some. But the task of discipling children and students is for all of us.

As parents, we faced all parents' primary concerns –Will my kids turn out ok? Will they make wise decisions? Will they be healthy: physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally?

As we continue in our Context series, today we will look at a well-known but widely misunderstood Bible verse.

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6

As parents, we read this verse and we hope all we are doing or all we did is or was enough. We pray that our failures as parents didn't mess them up too much.

Imagine with me two sets of parents –

Joe and Jill are godly parents, that go to church regularly, and have raised their children in the church. They have tried to be a good example of Christ followers to their three children. Two of their grown children are also Christ followers and seem to be doing well in their Christian walk. But one of their children has turned away from God.

Joe and Jill look at Proverbs 22:6 and they feel guilt. They see their wayward child as proof that they have failed as a parent.

Bob and Barb are also Christian parents, that dedicated themselves to raising their children to follow God as well. However, of their two children, one has totally turned their back on God. But Bob and Barb have hope. After all, God has promised that because they taught this child Biblical truth in the early years, they for sure will return to God...someday.

So...the same verse is a source of guilt and a source of hope. What's up with that?

The misinterpretation of this verse has been called a "Devastating Myth" because

-It burdens parents with unwarranted guilt

-It gives parents unfounded hope

--It fosters foolish pride – parents taking the credit for how their child turned out

The myth is basically that God promises that a good and godly home equals good and godly kids.

So what IS this proverb teaching?

I. The Proverb of Probability

Someone has called this a "proverb of probability". Let's look first at the nature of the book of Proverbs.

The book of Proverbs is Hebrew poetry. It is made up of poetic allusion and metaphors. It is wisdom literature. The theme of Proverbs can be found in Proverbs 1:7: *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

Two possible paths in life are often spoken of in Proverbs: The way of wisdom and life and the way of folly and death.

The word "Proverb" means "to be like". So this book is full of comparisons between common things and complicated, abstract truth. The nature of a

proverb is for us to read it, scratch our head, and say “Hmmm.” We are supposed to puzzle them out, think them through.

Proverbs are “divine guidelines and wise observations”. They are observations about how life generally works: what USUALLY happens, but not what ALWAYS happens. In fact, many observations in the book of Proverbs are far from universal:

--the righteous are not always honored

--The wicked sometimes succeed

--The diligent can lose it all

--The lazy can strike it rich.

These are principles, not promises. God’s promises are absolute – it’s a done deal. You can take it to the bank.

So what do we have here in this proverb? Someone has explained it this way:

“Solomon’s wisdom is that if we do all we can to raise our children in the Christian faith, the PROBABILITY is that they will remain in the faith once they grow older.”

So, what is the process that Solomon suggests?

II. The Process of Parenting

Bible scholars disagree as to the tone of this verse. Our natural expectation is that this is good advice with a good result: If you raise up your child in a godly way they will be a godly adult. But there are some Bible scholars who ask if it could be an ironic warning about letting a child go their own way. Richard Clifford, in his commentary on proverbs, reads it this way:

“Let a boy do what he wants, and he will become a self-willed adult incapable of change! Raise him in accordance with his wayward heart, and he will stay wayward.”

Interesting. But for today, let's look at it as a positive – good advice for a good result – probably. In most cases. But not all the time. No guarantees.

The verse starts out “Train up a child...”

The word “train” in the Hebrew has three ideas associated with it:

1. To DEDICATE. This is used 3 other times in scripture in reference to houses or buildings. The idea is a service of dedication or to inaugurate. It is an intentional commitment and consecration of our children. It is an intentional, sustained, God-dependent shepherding of our children's hearts as they grow into adulthood. The idea is one of setting their trajectory – pointing them in the right direction. Getting them started on the right path.

This is the kind of training we see in Ephesians 6:4 where fathers are instructed to not provoke their children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. To “bring up” carries the idea of “nurture, nourish, provide for with care that nourishes, feeds, or trains.” This kind of training promotes healthy growth and development.

2. Train can also be “to THROTTLE”. Now, I know what you are thinking...but not that kind of throttle. This means “to make narrow” or to discipline. The idea is to hedge them in with external controls. An example would be a bit or a rope in a horse's mouth. A horse person would explain to us that the bit doesn't control the horse, but it is a point of contact that the rider has with the animal. It is used to direct a horse's natural desire to run, but to do so in a safe and useful manner. The idea is to use external controls with a child until they have matured and have internal controls that will guide their behavior.
3. There is also the idea of INSTRUCTING OR INTRODUCING someone to something. So as we train our children, our desire is to create an appetite within them for God. We cannot force feed Biblical principles to our children. We must find ways to stimulate their appetite for spiritual things.

Illustration: National Geographic Documentary – Otters have to be trained to swim.

We must prioritize the training of our children, to raising up a godly generation. And that translates: Time, consistency, intentionality.

The verse goes on...“in the way he should go.”

Some very smart people, like Bible teacher Chuck Swindoll, have said that this means we should seek to train and disciple our kids in a way that aligns with their unique personality and giftedness. The child is compared to a wooden bow, and that you must work with the bent of the bow, or you may risk breaking it. Ray Stedman puts it this way: “God has written a mystery into every child, and the parents must discover that ‘way’.”

This is a wonderful parenting concept: parents observing and knowing their children’s physical, spiritual and emotional needs and adjusting their training and discipline to best suit each child. Because we all know: what works with one kid won’t necessarily work with another kid! One size does not fit all when it comes to child rearing.

But I’m thinking this is about pointing your child in the right way – toward things of God.

The word translated “way” here almost always refers to the “Way of the Lord”. It is totally consistent with the nature of Proverbs to say that this verse is a warning against letting a child develop according to their OWN way, instead of the way of God or the way of the wise. When the word “way” is used in Proverbs, it’s about a 50/50 split between it being used in a negative context or a positive context.

In fact, as parents, our great objective is helping our child to choose the right way in life. Proverbs teaches there are two ways: God’s way and the way of the world. Proverbs 10:29 tells us “The way of the Lord is a stronghold to the blameless.”

The bottom line is that they are all little sinners. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked – who can understand it.”

III. This is a photo of our youngest granddaughter, little Evie Louise. Cute as all get out. But when she doesn't get what she wants...watch out! She takes after her grandpa...Joel.

The natural way of a child is the way without wisdom. Away from God. If we leave kids to follow their own way, the chance that they will follow Jesus is slim. We have to teach them everything else: to make their bed, brush their teeth, say please and thank you, to flush, and to be a good citizen. We intentionally teach those things...how much more must we intentionally teach them to follow Jesus?

When it comes to choosing the right way, Kids today face more cultural pressure, more media pressure, more in the world leading them to do wrong than that which is leading them to do right.

So...we know we must train them in the way of the Lord. How do you do that? What do you teach them specifically?

My wife Sheila is going to share with you the Precepts of Parenting. Sheila is the Children's ministry director here at Edgewood and leads women's ministry...and a whole host of other things.

III. The Precepts of Parenting

A mother was out walking with her 4 year old daughter. The little girl picked up something off the ground and started to put it in her mouth. The mom took the item away from her and told her not to do that.

"Why?" the daughter asked.

"Because it's been on the ground, you don't know where it's been, it's dirty, and probably has germs" she replied.

At this point, the little girl looked at her mom with total admiration and asked, "Mommy, how do you know all this stuff- you are so smart."

Mom thought quickly and said. "All moms know this stuff. It's on the Mommy Test. You have to know it, or they don't let you be a Mommy." They walked along in silence for 2 or 3 minutes, and the little girl was evidently pondering this new information.

"OH...I get it!" she beamed, "So if you don't pass the test you have to be the daddy."

Congratulations all you moms on passing the mommy test... and happy Mother's Day.

You know, being a mom has always been tough. And I don't want to whine about how hard it is...I mean, we've got washing machines, dishwashers, microwaves... and so on.

But the pressure to be the perfect mother has been amped up. You've got pinterest, and blogs, and facebook...where most moms put forth their perfect mommy-ness for the world to see. They hardly ever mention their mommy-fails.

So we feel guilty.

And this proverb doesn't help. I mean, isn't it saying that if we don't do everything just right as a parent we'll ruin our kids forever!?!?

We ask ourselves:

Am I a good example?

Am I teaching them the right things?

Am I giving them too much freedom? Too little?

Am I a helicopter parent – hovering too much?

Am I doing ok as a mom?

Here's the good news, moms. (And dad's too, but this is our day, so let us bask in it) We are imperfect, but the Gospel can overcome our faults as parents. Our God is the God of the impossible, and He can use our imperfect parenting to produce kids that love and follow Him.

When we talk about what to teach our kids, in the context of this proverb and in all of life, it has to begin with the Bible. 2 Tim 3:15, 16 says "*And how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training*

in righteousness that the man of God [kid of God] may be complete, equipped for every good work .”

What will teaching your children the truths of Scripture do for them?

- It makes them wise for salvation
- It equips them for good works
- it prepares them to give an answer
- it prepares them to stand for righteousness in our culture

This teaching must be intentional. If we are passive about the Bible, we teach them that God’s word is not the authority in their life. If we don’t set limits on their behavior, we teach them that God doesn’t care what they do.

Isaiah 28:9-10 says *“To whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from the milk, those taken from the breast? ¹⁰ For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.”*

But what does that look like in real life? Like, you-are-late-for-work (again), kid-lost-their-shoes-the-dog-threw-up-on-the-carpet REAL LIFE?

Most Christian parents have good intentions of talking about God and the Bible with their children but struggle about the best way to do it.

Check out Deuteronomy 6: 6 & 7: *And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.*

So as we are sitting, walking, talking, riding in the mini van, etc. etc....what do we talk about?

You incorporate God’s truth into everyday life. You present the truths of God in an appealing and compelling way. You make it real and practical...and you model it for them. In the reality show called your life. Discipling our children is our assignment from God. It is long term. And grandparents, you are a part of that, too. You might think, “Hey, I’ve done my time...I raised my kids. It’s time for me

to go pursue that bucket list!” No, this is a race. A relay race. You carried that baton throughout your child-rearing years, and then when your children became parents, you passed the baton to them. But this is no ordinary relay...you don't stop running. You run along side them.

Ray Pritchard says this: “The goal of Christian parents ought to be to create a family atmosphere that makes it easy for your children [and grandchildren] to follow Jesus Christ.”

It starts with the Gospel. If you asked a group of people “What is a child's greatest need?” they might say love, security, education, discipline, self-worth. But the greatest need of each child's heart? REGENERATION. Proverbs 22:6 talks about “the way they should go”. We help our children get on this path to life through a relationship with Jesus Christ. The ultimate purpose of training our children is to bring them to Jesus Christ.

Regeneration –

--we can't do it for our kids

--we can't force them

--we can't choose for them

It is a work of the Holy Spirit. A blogger wrote: “You can make your child clean her room or do his homework, but you cannot make them have a relationship with Jesus Christ.”

It's not about good behavior. It's not about keeping the rules. Rules change behavior but they cannot change the heart.

Author Sarah Marr wrote, “To be a parent is to be a heart-shaper; And being a heart shaper can be the most heart-wrenching job in the world.” An excellent resource for parents is the book *Parenting is Heart Work* by Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller –it's a study of the word “heart” in Scripture and how you can direct the heart of your child.

Our goal should be to reach our child's heart with the Gospel. This is the Gospel, as found in I Corinthians 15:3-4 *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that*

he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

We need to teach children that good behavior can never be good enough to make us right with God. So, we talk about the Gospel:

- God is holy
- I am a sinner
- Jesus died that my sins could be forgiven
- I need to accept that forgiveness
- Following Jesus will cost me something

Training up a child in the way they should go is directing them to the Savior.

Larry Fowler, in his book "Raising a Modern Day Joseph" offers five principles that as parents and grandparents we should weave throughout everything we do to spiritually develop our kids and grandkids. He calls these the "Master Life Threads" and he lays out the best age to emphasize and teach each principle.

RESPECT – This principle is based on Proverbs 9:10 *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"*. This focuses on preschoolers. The biggest heart issue for a preschooler is how they view authority. This is the time to teach them about God's authority, and the best way to do that is to encourage them to obey our authority. We as parents are their first picture of God. It is important that they learn that they must obey: God, parents, and others in authority. This builds a foundation on which the rest will be built.

WISDOM- This is an important master thread for the early elementary years. What is important to these kids is truth and how they view the truth. We want them to see the Bible as God's truth. Knowing God's word leads to Godly wisdom. In 2 Tim. 1:5 we learn that Timothy learned God's word from FAMILY – his mother and his grandmother: *I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.*

We love teaching your kids about God's word. We do all kinds of crazy things to make it fun, and engaging, and memorable. Our first Super Saturday, our version of VBS here at Edgewood, is coming up June 10.

But we only have your kid 2-4 hours a week, at the most. You have the opportunity to pour so much more into them!

I once had the opportunity to hear Reggie Joiner speak at a Children's Ministry conference. He is currently the director of Family ministries for North point in the Atlanta area. He brought with him to the stage a small grocery basket of about 60-70 play pit balls. He said they represented the number of hours the average church kid spends at church. He then signaled for a half dozen assistants to wheel in grocery carts heaping with play pit balls. This represented the hours parents have to influence their kids.

The early elementary years are great years to give kids a foundation of Bible truth:

- Stories from the Bible
- How the Bible is arranged and organized
- Biblical truths about God, Jesus, Man

The most important truths are the truths of the Gospel: Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. Talk about these, read verses about these, and pray for God to work in your child's heart.

We had some good news a couple of weeks ago in our family. (Ari on video)

For Elementary age kids, the master life thread is GRACE. If you have kids this age, you know they are all about fairness (*Hey, that's not fair!*) Their heart issue is how they treat others and they need to get a view of God's mercy and grace. Titus 2:11-12 tells us *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.* We want kids to learn what the Bible has to teach us about our interactions with others. Should being a follower of Jesus change the way we treat others? Yes! What does that look like when people are mean to us, or we get angry? For this age group, there are more social interactions outside of the family and they need to learn that just like God gives us grace (not giving us what we deserve when he gave us forgiveness through Jesus) we need to give others grace and forgiveness.

How about Middle School Students? Their master life thread is DESTINY and their heart issue is how they view themselves. This age group is searching for acceptance and significance and asking “Why am I here?” We can point them to the answer: to fulfill God’s purpose for your life! Romans 12:1 tells us what is the reasonable thing to do: present ourselves a living sacrifice. Their God focus is God’s plan for their future. A sense of destiny tells them

- I am important because God made me the way I am
- I am important because Jesus died for me
- I am important because God has a plan for me

Isaiah 45:5 says, *“I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God.”* It continues in vs. 7 with *“I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity. I am the Lord who does all these things.”* We want high school students to get a glimpse of God’s sovereignty as they view the world and how it works. These students are wrestling with the answers to difficult questions: Why is there suffering? Why does God allow wars? Why does bad things happen to good people? As parents and grandparents, we need to listen to these questions and help them search the scriptures for the answers to these and other things. We can point them back to a sovereign God, whose ultimate purpose is for people to know Him and to have a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

No one will do this perfectly. But our kids don’t need perfection. They need authenticity, unconditional love, and redemption.

IV. The Pain of Parenting

“Even when he is old he will not depart from it...”

As parents, we are to instruct, disciple, prepare our children, point them in the right direction...but there is no guarantee that they will continue on the right path. Our problem is not with Proverbs 22:6. Our problem is with our kids. They have minds of their own. People do not automatically follow Christ because of their upbringing. We as parents have a sacred responsibility for how we raise our kids. But we have no ultimate control over how they turn out. We have all sinned. We all make choices. And sometimes we choose the wrong way.

The bottom line is that kids will answer to God for their own choices.

Because we live in a broken world, there are so many variables that affect our children's choices. Someone compared it to a farmer. A farmer can do his best getting the crop in and caring for it. But too much rain, too little rain, insects, wind, varmints – all can have an impact on his harvest.

There's a warning for us here, too. We are so quick to judge other parents. "Oh, look at how Bobby turned out. His parents must have failed in their parenting."

The pain of parenting is that if a child chooses a different path than we taught them, then we have failed as parents. Or did God fail to keep His promise?

We've learned from this verse that a general principle is that if we early on, intentionally, carefully point our children in the direction of the way of wisdom and toward the Savior, throughout their growing up years, that it's a pretty good chance that they will never stray from it.

But, there's no guarantee. There is not even a guarantee that after a season of rebellion, they will return. The story of prodigal son in the New Testament isn't a promise...just the story of one young man's return and the father's loving response.

So where is the hope? Are you a mom who is heart-broken because you have a child that has turned from God?

Here it is: God hasn't given up on them. He continues to woo them, to draw them to Himself. He loves them more than you do.

But they have to turn to Him. It is their choice.

What can you do?

1. Pray
2. Proclaim your love for them no matter what
3. Plead with them – be gentle in your disappointment, but be honest about your feelings
4. Point them to Jesus

V. The Potential of Parenting

Our parenting and grandparenting has the potential to change the world. Ken Ham, from *Answers in Genesis*, made this observation: “The way we train our children will affect the way they train their children and so on, generation after generation.”

Parenting (and grandparenting) affects the next 100 years!

We are raising the next generation of Christ followers, who will impact this world for Christ. The opposite is also true: if we don't transmit our knowledge and experience of God to the next generation, it will be lost. There are many examples from biblical history of a legacy of faith being lost in one generation.

The challenge is, can our children and grandchildren say “I followed your example and that helped me follow Christ.”?

All of us here have the capacity to influence children and students. As a church community, it is our responsibility to come along side parents as they train up their children in the way they should go.

Mother's day is always a tough day for those that would desire to be a mom, but that's not happening right now. May I lovingly encourage you to find a way you can be an influence in a child's life? A nephew or niece, a neighbor, perhaps serving here at Edgewood with children.

What are you taking to heaven with you? All the stuff...it's all staying here. But our children – we can point them in the way of heaven.

Let me close with this quote, by Leslie Leyland Fields, written in an article in *Christianity Today*:

“It's faith rather than formula, grace rather than guarantees, steadfastness rather than success, that bridge the gap between our own parenting efforts and what, by the grace of God, our children grow up to become.”

We have said that a child's greatest need is regeneration, a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Perhaps you are here this morning and you see yourself in Prov. 22:6 – as the possible negative result. You had parents that taught you about God, took you to church, perhaps even lived a godly life as best they could. Or maybe that's not your story. But you are far from God. This Mother's Day weekend would be a great time for you to respond to God's gracious gift of the death of His Son Jesus in your place. No one can chose for you.

“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:13

I'm on my way to heaven and I want you to do with me.

Prayer