

A Call to Action

Proverbs 22:6

Two children were overheard discussing their parents. The first said, “I’m really worried. Dad slaves away at his job so that I have everything I need, so I’ll be able to go to college someday. Mom works hard washing and ironing, cleaning up after me, taking care of me when I am sick, driving me everywhere I want to go. They spend every day of their lives working for me. But I’m worried.” His friend asked, “What have you got to worry about?” The first boy replied, “I’m afraid they’re going to try and escape someday.

In his book *The Strong Willed Child*, James Dobson writes “Child rearing is like baking a cake. You don’t realize you have a disaster until it’s too late.”

It goes without saying that parenting is a challenging endeavor. Most days it’s demanding, on the other days it’s utter chaos. The last time I checked a college catalogue there were no majors on parenting. There may be a course a two here and there but nothing adequately prepares you for the role of parenting. If I remember from before David was born, we had a prenatal class on parenting we had to attend. It was just one evening and mostly taught about changing diapers and feeding, nothing about how to handle the two’s or the tweens or the teens. There is only one real manual for that.

Many of you will remember Dr. Spock who was the foremost authority on childrearing in the 1940’s – 1980’s. You may even have had a copy of his bestselling book *Baby and Child care*. For 52 years it was the second bestselling book on the market. It was second to the Bible.

His message to mothers was simply “you know more than you think you do.” It was Dr. Spock who did ground breaking work on the importance of parents being more flexible and affectionate with their children. In a word, be more tolerant.

Consequently, his views also led him to be an advocate the New left and was involved in anti-Viet Nam protests.

Since then bookstores and book shelves alike have been filled with a plethora of secular self-help books on parenting, how to discover and develop your child’s personality, how to uncover his or her temperament, and a host of others. We have bought them and bought into them hook, line and sinker all the while generally ignoring the one book, the best-selling book that offers the soundest advice. **Why is it people will research for the best car or the best stereo or the best refrigerator but often take the second best when it comes to raising children?** As you would expect me to say, the Bible offers the best advice for helping the little rug rats grow to be responsible adults and maturing Christians. At least that’s what I read in the Bible.

Lest you think our text today is merely for those of us with children yet at home or who have children at all, let me reassure you that this passage is for everyone. While the primary focus of the passage is for parents, the message of the text also strongly implies that everyone who has contact with children bears a responsibility for training. So don’t walk out thinking “*Whew, I’m off the hook.*” Even if you don’t have children or don’t have children yet or don’t have children living at home, this passage is for every one of us.

With that as an introduction, please turn in your Bible’s (still the number 1 best-seller) and turn to **Proverbs 22:6.**

“Train [up] a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn [depart] from it.”

An entrusted responsibility
An endearing relationship
An eternal result

I. AN ENTRUSTED RESPONSIBILITY

Now there are a couple of things I want to say right away lest I forget.

The first is life is a battle. It's not easy and we need to teach our kids more than just managing the day to day stuff that life is made up of like balancing a check book, paying bills, getting a job, learning to change a tire or cook tomato soup or mac and cheese. There is a spiritual battle being waged for each soul. Our kids are being attacked with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life and it's a subtle attack. They need to be prepared and that is our responsibility to teach them how to stand in their faith.

The second thing I want to say about this verse is that this is not a guarantee that our children will become or remain Jesus followers. This is not a promise that if you do everything in your home to teach them the principles of God's Word that they will embrace that faith and always walk in His ways. You may be a parent whose heart is broken or is breaking because your children are not walking with the Lord. I know, because I was one of them who for a time spurned my parent's teaching and turned my back on God, but I am a testimony of God's grace and forgiveness. God is patient and so must you be as well. Faithfully pray for them.

So it is that we have a grave responsibility. It is a responsibility that has been passed on from generation to generation. It's sometimes easy to go the trouble-free route, the one that is less stressful but in the end will reap the consequences of not sticking to the battle plan.

So what is our responsibility? Solomon begins with a simple but profound word of action – **“train.”** Everyone repeat that word – “train.” Good.

The word has several meanings. It can mean to dedicate and is used when Solomon dedicated the temple of the Lord.

It can also mean to inaugurate as in making a formal beginning, very similar to a dedication.

It can mean to begin or to initiate. If you are learning to play basketball, there is a thing called muscle memory. You may begin training your muscles to shoot free throws. It's training that does not end. I haven't shot free throws in quite a few years, but I'm willing to lay claim that with some practice the muscle memory developed years ago would return so that I could make 70 to 80% of my shots.

The word TRAIN can also mean to instruct or discipline. Discipline is not just in structuring your lifestyle around certain activities. *Four days a week I discipline myself to get up at 5a.m., have devotions and head to the gym to ride a bike 12-13 miles. Saturday I may sleep in till around 7 or so and then ride 15-16 miles.*

Discipline can also mean the methods by which we correct wrong behavior or attitudes.

Some will learn from a scolding.
Some will learn from a stern look.
Some will only learn from a stronger method.

In this verse Solomon is stating that we need to know the different personalities of our children and using age appropriate methods discipline our children so they will be trained in life.

Part of training is consistency. We can't one day correct them for something and the next day ignore correcting them if they did the same thing again because we're too tired to deal with it or what we do doesn't seem to help. We need to be consistent in how we train them.

From the word train I see several important traits for parents and mentors. Let me again stress something here that I said at the beginning, each of you have a responsibility in training children. While the primary responsibility falls to the parents, we also train through our **conduct**, through our **character** and through our **conversations** – how we

live and act in front of them teaches volumes to children. They are watching adults to see if what we say and do measures up to what we say we believe. If it doesn't they may grow up and chuck the very faith we have been trying to instill in them. Parents may not be the reason they leave church and the faith, it may be you or me.

A friend of mine has a son who left his faith because he watched people in the church who claimed to love Jesus bicker and quarrel with each other. He said if that's how Christian's act I don't want anything to do with it.

A couple weeks ago I was having lunch with another friend. In the course of our conversation he was shared how on a few occasions when he was a boy he would go with his Dad who was an usher at their church and be with him while he counted the offering. On one such occasion as his Dad and another usher were counting the money, the other man wrote out a check for \$500 and placed it in the pile of money to be counted and then proceeded to take out \$500 in cash and put it in his pocket. Later on my friend asked his Dad about the action of the other man and his Dad said that he was robbing God.

For our children, for any child, to grow up with a fighting chance to keep the faith as it were, we all need to exhibit godly conduct before them. I don't want David to come to me or Robyn someday and say *"well, how come so and so does that."*

Now here's the thing about training. I don't want to leave it up to others to teach our son. When David comes to church and sits in Sunday school or children's church I want what he learns to supplement what he should be learning at home. And just because we send him to a Christian school doesn't mean we abdicate the responsibility of training either. He will learn under your teaching but we have the primary responsibility for his moral character.

The word here is a command. "TRAIN." We could say "you train." Take up the mantle and pass on what you have learned or are learning so that in turn they will pass it on to the next generation of children. The idea is training that will be a) lifelong and b) taught in such a way that that child picks it up and teaches his child and so on.

We are not to claim ignorance.

We are not to relinquish it to someone else.

Here's what I think the word train implies.

1. Train through availability.

It takes time and energy. Robyn and I have to learn to give time to David because quite frankly if we don't it will get filled up with others who would train him in things we may not agree with and then like Dr. Dobson said before we realize it we'll have a disaster. Availability isn't just quality time it's quantity as well.

2. Train through ability.

Don't train by the seat of your pants. Don't just wing it. Take time to grow yourself by learning how to be a better parent or grandparent. There are a lot of helpful Christian resources available to help us learn how to train our children. Don't leave it to chance or even how your parent's may have raised you. Start with the bestselling book of all time and study what the Bible has to say about our responsibility in training children. Then supplement it with other great Christian resources.

3. Train through activity.

Here's the quantity. Do things with your children or grandchildren that will instill godly values. Use those activities as teaching moments about God. When you're at the zoo or watching National Geographic on Television use it as time to talk about God's creation and the wonders of all He has made. Teach Biblical principle through programs you watch together, or when you're eating out.

We like watching the old Bill Cosby show "Fat Albert and the Cosby kids." He always interjects

some life principle that is important to live by. We will often take time to share with David a principle from the Bible that correlates to the lesson.

4. Train through accepting responsibility.

Accept the responsibility given as parents, grandparents and mentors to instill godly traits that train them. Training is not a part time job, you're always on call.

5. Train actively.

Training means investment. An investment costs something, but there is a positive gain from the investment. Be involved. **When Thomas was in boot camp he said that one of the drill sergeants would get them in formation, tell them what to do and then, especially if the weather was rainy or cold, would send them on their way and then head back into the barracks and have coffee until they were done. The other drill sergeant would be right out there with them barking orders, training them to become soldiers.**

Here's what disappoints me about the world's philosophy of parenting. **Parenting as defined by Wikipedia is "the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood."**

There is not even a hint of spiritual training that should be given by the parents. It even alludes to parenting responsibilities ending once the child has reached adulthood. **How many of you would agree that you are always a parent regardless of the age of your children?** I still look to my Dad as a trainer.

So here is this word train or train up and it bears a great measure of responsibility that we have been entrusted with. One translation uses the word "POINT" instead of "TRAIN." I'm not particularly fond of that word. It implies to me avoidance of responsibility, indifference, and unavailability. **I can go to the store and hunt for an item and after some frustration ask the nearest worker where to find it They can point me in the general direction**

by saying go down this aisle and turn right past the toy section and it will be on your left near the automotive section. I can still wander around even though they have pointed the way.

The other day I was in Meijers shopping for some white out for the office. I went up and down the office supply aisles with no success. A clerk walked by and asked what I was looking for and then took me directly to the aisle and to where it was on the shelf.

Training is more than pointing. Now I understand that the intent of the translation is that we point children in a specific direction. But folks, I'm here to tell you that we need to do more than just point them down the aisle of spiritual truth, we need to take them there ourselves, show them how to live godly. **The old adage "Do as I say, not as I do" just doesn't cut it. The NLT says "Teach to choose the right path."** That's a better rendering. Don't just point them down a spiritual road, take them along with you. Show them the way through example.

So just what are we supposed to train them in: martial arts, water color painting, a love of classical music or how to mow the lawn? Those might be good things, but there are so much more and better things. Our verse gives us a clue. **"Train up a child in the way he should go."**

The early church had a word they used for such instruction. It was the word 'catechizatio.' It's our English word catechism. The Believers of the early church taught children the fundamental truths of the Bible, they wanted to imprint God's Word on the heart and mind of the children.

When Romania was in the height of its religious persecution, pastors taught the boys to give one minute sermons and then when they got a little older it was 5 minutes. It was a way of preparing them to become spiritual leaders in the church because at any moment the church leaders could be taken and imprisoned or killed for their faith. They set about the task of spiritual training for its youth.

Parents, grandparents, people, will you accept that challenge to help train our youth to stand on the principles and commands of God's Word so that

they are not part of the statistic of those 66% of teens leaving church when in college?

We need to teach them wise, godly living so that the philosophies of the world don't pull them away.

At the end of my life here on earth when it comes to parenting I want to hear the Lord say to me **“Well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your Master's happiness!”** (Matthew 25:23)

I don't want to be just a good parent; I want to be a great parent. I want my children to look back and say he was a great Dad, not just because he spent time with us or taught us to change the oil or drive a stick shift or took us to the zoo. I want them to remember that I trained them to be godly and for them to pass that on to our grandchildren.

Deuteronomy 6 is an exhortation to take seriously the responsibility of Godly training by seizing opportunities to instill godly principles where ever you are. The time we have with them is so short, make every opportunity count.

“Impress them [God's commands] 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. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:7-9)

Let God's commands live through you.

So what are we to teach them? I would like to suggest some things from Scripture and by no means is this list exhaustive. These principles speak for themselves without much need for explanation. They are not new concepts.

1. Teach them how to love God **Deuteronomy 6:4-6**

This passage reveals three things we should teach our children.

The first is that there is a God who exists.

The second is that God desires to have a personal relationship with us.

The third is that we are to worship this God by loving Him with everything we have.

2. Teach them about God's Word
Psalm 119:9, 11
Joshua 1:8
3. Teach them about salvation
John 3:16
II Timothy 3:14-15
4. Teach them about faith
Ephesians 2:8-9
Hebrews 11:6
5. Teach them to always trust God
Proverbs 3:5-6
6. Teach them to develop godly character through yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit
Galatians 5:22-23
7. Teach them to serve through humility
Philippians 2:3-4
8. Teach them about prayer
Philippians 4:6-7
9. Teach them about obedience
John 14:21
10. Teach them about forgiveness
Ephesians 4:32
Colossians 3:13
11. Teach them about repentance
I John 1:9
12. Teach them to stand strong against temptation
I John 2:15-16
Romans 12:1-2
13. Teach them about the Solid Rock
Psalm 18:2
14. Teach them about worship
Psalm 100:1-5

We have been entrusted with a great responsibility. We also have an endearing relationship to consider.

II. AN ENDEARING RELATIONSHIP

“Train a child...”

We need to start when they are young. You need to understand again clearly what you already now but just by way of reminder. That child has been entrusted to your care. It was not by chance or by accident, it was designed by God. He chose you to parent that child. From the first parents that graced this earth through time until the Lord returns He chose you out of all the parents who came before or who will come. In all the places that child could have been born from Thailand to Turkey to Timbuktu to Toledo, He chose the place and the time and the parents. Nothing was a mistake or a miscalculation. There is a song on Christian radio these days with a phrase that says “God gave me you.” That’s your son or daughter with all their foibles and faults and failures; all their personalities and potential and possibilities and propensities. Everything about them God gave to us to help shape them into people that will love God. **How are we doing with what He has entrusted to us?**

On a Wednesday night about 5 or so years ago, Pastor Don and I were sitting right here on the steps of the platform. David had toddled up for a hug or something and then toddled off. Pastor Don watched him and then commented “that boy is a gift to this church.” I’ve often thought about that comment. **I ask myself, if he is a gift not only to his mother and me, how well is the church doing at helping to train him because he is a gift to you, too?**

We should consider every child in our care with an endearing relationship to love them and nurture them as God loves and nurtures the church.

Whether each child came as a result of a natural process through birth or by adoption or as a foster parent, it was all God’s doing. If you complain because your child isn’t quite what you hoped for, then blame God. If you complain because they are too noisy or disruptive, then blame God. **If you complain because a child’s behavior isn’t what you**

would like to see then ask yourself what kind of spiritual training has he or she been given by me? What kind of role models are they exposed to?

If you are a grandparent, God chose your family for you to be a role model of Christ like character. If you are part of this church you are here by design to be an influencer either directly through teaching or indirectly through your attendance as a godly model to children that come through these doors.

We have been entrusted with a great responsibility. We must have an endearing relationship with the children entrusted to our care.

We can see eternal results through accepting our responsibility and developing these relationships.

III. AN ETERNAL RESULT

Your children may have moved out a long time ago and they may even be older than me but that doesn’t mean that your responsibilities to train have ended. The intent of the verse is to say that when we train up a child when they are old does not mean when they are in their 60’s or 70’s they will return to their spiritual heritage. It means when they are mature or when they are grown.

There is a Danish Proverb that says “what youth learn, age does not forget.” How true that is.

In Genesis chapters 4 and 5 we have different stories of two individuals and their heritage.

In chapter 4 we see the descendants of Cain. The result of how he lived shows in that his descendants lived for this world. We still see its impact today on those who chose the here and now.

In chapter 5 we see the descendants of Seth. The result of how he lived shows in his descendants who lived for the world to come. That’s what we’re training our children for. We’re teaching them as the old hymn goes that “**this world is not my home I’m just a passin’ through.**” **Temporary or eternal? What are we teaching?**

Start him or her in the right direction by training them through God’s Word so that when grown up he or she

will not depart from those truths. Choosing one path leads to wisdom and to eternal life. Choosing the other path is foolish and leads to eternal death.

To train them must involve a hands on approach. This is like a relay race. In order to win a team must successfully hand the baton off to the next runner and so on to the end of the race. If the baton is dropped, the team is disqualified. We have been given a spiritual baton to pass on to our children and they in turn pass it on to their children. Let's make sure that our exchange is successful and that the baton is not dropped by us or by them. If your children are not walking with the Lord today continue to diligently pray for them and show them by example a life of godly character.

To close today I have one more thing to share with you and would ask if David would join me.