

TRAIN UP A CHILD
Raising Champions for Christ – Week 6
By Andy Manning

The title of this sermon is “Train up a Child.”

Today we are going to finish up this sermon series on parenting by studying the most popular parenting verse in the Bible.

To review, the big idea of this sermon series is that if we train our kids to succeed in athletics, academics, and the arts, but they ultimately go to hell for eternity, then we have failed them.

We cannot force our kids to accept Christ, but we must do everything within our power to lead them to Christ.

When you take into account the fact that heaven and hell are real, and that your child will spend eternity in one or the other, and that the only way to eternal life is through Jesus Christ, then parenting takes on a completely different shape.

The way Christians raise their kids should be radically different from the way of the world. We are not just training them to be a success in life, but in eternity. We are not just concerned with their temporary happiness, but with their eternal happiness. We are not concerned with our kids fitting in, but with them getting in to heaven.

Turn with me to **Proverbs 22:6 (ESV)** “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

Charles Spurgeon said, “He who thinks it easy to bring up a family never had one of his own. A mother who trains her children aright had need be wiser than Solomon, for his son turned out a fool.”

Parenting is not easy. So today I want to point six principles for training a child from this wonderful verse.

SIX PRINCIPLES FOR TRAINING A CHILD

ONE: Children need training.

Why train up a child? Because children need it.

God's commands are our needs.

God doesn't command us unless it is good for us.

God's commands reveal our needs.

God's commands meet our needs. We know what our children need from what the Bible commands us to do for them. And it commands us to train them.

Children need training for three reasons.

One: For their ignorance.

Proverbs 1:4 "for teaching shrewdness to the inexperienced, knowledge and discretion to a young man"

Children do not know right from wrong. They are inexperienced, and they lack knowledge and discretion. They need to be taught about God, and how to please Him. They need to be taught that it is wrong to hurt others, to steal, to lie, to disobey authority.

Two: For their immaturity.

Proverbs 29:15 "A rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a youth left to himself is a disgrace to his mother."

Children may know what is right, but without training they do not have the willpower to choose what is right.

If you just let the child make their own decisions, they will most likely make bad choices because of their lack of willpower.

They may know that it is wrong to steal, but they do not yet have the willpower to resist temptation.

They may even desire to do what is right, but they lack the strength of character to do it.

Three: For their inclination.

Proverbs 22:15 “Foolishness is bound to the heart of a youth; a rod of discipline will separate it from him.”

Children do not want to do what is right. They may know what is right, but they want what is evil.

They are naturally foolish. Foolish in the Bible does not mean stupid; it means wicked. Every child has inherited the sin nature of Adam and Eve, so their natural inclination is to do what is wrong, not what is right. Their natural inclination is self-centeredness, not God-centeredness. Their natural inclination is selfishness, not love.

The **ISV translation** says, “A child’s heart has a tendency to do wrong.”

The **Living Bible Translation** says, “A youngster’s heart is filled with rebellion.”

Psalms 14:1 “The fool says in his heart, ‘There’s no God.’ They are corrupt; they do vile deeds. There is no one who does good.” This describes your child’s natural inclination.

We have been in our house since 2005. And owning a house requires constant upkeep. If we did not paint, and mow the lawn, and trim the hedges, and make repairs, then our home would be an absolute wreck right now. Without care and

maintenance, our home would deteriorate. Without proper training, your children will go the wrong way. They will do evil rather than good. They will run from God rather than to God. They will hate God rather than love God.

A child without training for life is like a driving a car without lights at night. Neither of them will stay on the right path.

TWO: Parents must embrace the role of trainer.

Who is to train the child? Certainly parents can enlist outside help, but the primary trainer is supposed to be the parent.

Ephesians 6:4 “Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

A parent is not an advisor, nor a friend, nor a peer, nor a chauffer, nor Santa Claus. A parent is a trainer.

Surely a parent’s job is to *provide*. **1 Timothy 5:8** “But if anyone does not provide for his own family, especially for his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

Surely a parent’s job is to *protect*. Listen to how God cares for His children. **Deuteronomy 32:10-11** “he surrounded him, cared for him, and protected him as the pupil of his eye. He watches over his nest like an eagle and hovers over his young; he spreads his wings, catches him, and carries him on his feathers.”

But if a parent is a trainer, then a parent’s job is to *prepare*.

This is the meaning of training. Your job is to prepare your kids.

Think of basic training. Training wheels. Training camp. Potty training. Training is preparing.

If you see yourself as a provider, and as a protector, but fail to see yourself as a preparer – a trainer – then you will fail in your job.

What are we to prepare our children for? For four things.

One: For life's mission.

Proverbs 22:6 (The Passion Translation) “Dedicate your children to God....” Your child was created to live for God. Christ saved them to live for Him. For the glory of God and the salvation of men. Your job is to prepare them to be a useful tool in the hands of God. To serve God for the rest of their lives.

Two: For life's battles.

For life's challenges. **Psalm 144:1** “Blessed be the Lord, my rock who trains my hands for battle and my fingers for warfare.”

Your child is headed for troubled waters. They are headed for the storm. They will face very difficult trials in their life. Sickness. Financial challenges. Rejection. Failure. The death of a loved one. Spiritual warfare. Your job is to prepare them for those battles. Prepare them to win life's battles.

Three: For life's decisions.

Proverbs 22:6 (TLB) “Teach a child to choose the right path....”

The older your child gets, the more decisions they will make without you.

It's easy for them to make good choices when you are making the choices for them. But your job is to prepare them to make good choices on their own.

Don't merely show them the path; teach them to choose the right path.

Four: For life's landmines.

1 Peter 5:8 “Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour.”

Life is filled with landmines. Satan has laid traps all over the path.

Peer pressure. Sexual immorality. Drugs and alcohol. Laziness. Pornography. Obesity. Atheism. Evolution. Transgenderism. Homosexuality. Socialism. Cultural Marxism. False teachers. Credit card debt. Get-rich-quick schemes. Divorce.

You won't be able to protect your child when they grow up and move out. You must prepare them for life's landmines.

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

Don't take it for granted that your child will grow up; or will become an adult. Thousands of young people die every year before they grow old because they were taken out by one of life's landmines.

You may be raising kids, but are you training them?

Tim Elmore wrote, “The greatest gift parents can give their children is the ability to get along without them.”

How do we prepare our children?

Fortunately God has not only told us what we are to do – train our children – but He has given us the training manual. The Bible. **2 Timothy 3:16** “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness,”

The best way to train and prepare our children for life is to teach them to understand, believe, and obey the Bible.

THREE: Children require boundaries.

Many parents make the mistake of allowing their children to make too many decisions. They give their children too many options.

They let their children decide what it eats, when it eats, how much it eats. They let the child decide what school to attend, even what church to attend, or whether to attend at all. They let the child decide what to wear, what to watch on TV. They give the child pretty much anything it asks for. Cable TV in their bedroom? Check. A smart phone? Check. They let the child choose which activities it participates in. They don't make their child do anything. It's all up to the child.

This is foolish parenting. And it's not training.

Remember, children are ignorant, immature, and inclined to evil. A third of the time they don't know what is best. Another third of the time they know what is best, but they don't have the willpower to choose it. And the last third of the time they know what is best, but they don't want it. Children need boundaries.

The Hebrew word for "train up" means to hedge in. To hedge in means "to form a boundary around something (Google).

Your job as a parent is to form boundaries around your child. This is a big part of training.

Consider basic training in the military. The trainees don't make any decisions. They follow orders. They are told what to do, how to do it, when to do it, and how to feel about it. They are told when to wake up, what to wear, how to wear it, how to make their bed, what to eat, and how much to eat. Just about every second of their day is planned for them. All decisions are made for them so that when they graduate from basic training, they are prepared to make the right choices on their own.

A parent is not a drill sergeant, but you are a trainer. You must decide what the child should wear, because they can't. You must decide what your child should eat, because they can't. You must decide which activities your child should participate in, because they can't. You must decide whether or not your child should own a smart phone, because they can't. You must decide who their friends should be, because they can't.

The younger your child is the more boundaries they need; the more decisions you should be making for them. And then as they get older, if you have trained them well, then they can make more and more of their own choices, and those choices will be wise.

Did you know that God has given us boundaries? God's boundaries are His laws. His commandments. God tells us how to behave and then disciplines us when we misbehave. Without God's law we wouldn't know how to behave, and we would destroy ourselves and each other.

As parents we need to give our children boundaries.

The **Preacher's Complete Homiletical Commentary** says, "If the parent does not set a hedge about his son's path, he is only making it certain that he will encounter thorns and snares further on in life."

FOUR: Training should be hard.

Hebrews 12:11 "No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

Notice that training is not enjoyable; it is painful. Effective training is hard, not easy. It is uncomfortable. It is challenging. It is painful.

Go back to the example of basic training for the military. Basic training is not easy. It is not supposed to be easy. It is hard, and it is supposed to be hard. The

drill sergeant's goal is not your happiness, your comfort, or your fun. His goal is your preparation. Easy training makes for weak trainees.

That must be your mindset as a parent. If you want your children to succeed, then your mind must be on preparation, not just protection. Preparation, not just provision. And that means that must guard against making life too easy on your kids.

The best drill sergeants are the toughest. The hardest. The most challenging. Why? Because the harder the training, the more prepare the soldier. The best teachers are the toughest.

When I was a student in middle school and high school, I learned that my favorite teachers were the strictest. The teachers who pushed us the hardest. They put up with the least. They were the most serious. They expected the most. Those were my favorite teachers because I learned the most.

The best coaches are the toughest. The strictest. Why? Because the harder the coach, the better the team. The harder the practice, the easier the game. The tougher the coach, the more the team is prepared for battle on the field.

A drill sergeant is a trainer. A teacher is a trainer. A coach is a trainer. And a parent is a trainer. So could it be that the best parents are the toughest?

I'm not saying that parents should be unaffectionate and unloving. I'm not saying that parents should be authoritarian and abusive and domineering.

But I am saying that if a parent's job is to train, and the best trainers are the toughest, then most parents need to reconsider how there are raising their kids.

Many parents make it their mission in life to protect their children from all pain, hardship, failure, and sadness. But that's not training a child; that's crippling the child.

Your job is not to make your child happy; your job is to train them. Your job is not to make your child comfortable, but to train them. Your job is not to entertain your child, but to train them. Your job is not to protect your child from pain, and failure, and sadness; your job is to prepare them for those things. And effective training involves pain and hardship.

Most parents are way too easy on their kids. **Tim Elmore** wrote a great book on parenting called *12 Huge Mistakes Parents Can Avoid*. The thesis of the whole book is that most parents today are not preparing their children, they are pampering their children. They are coddling their children, and therefore crippling their children. He says that most parents are so easy on their kids that it is a form of child abuse, because instead of preparing them for success, they are setting them up for failure as adults. Let me share with you some of the mistakes that he writes about:

“We won’t let them fail. We prioritize being happy. We remove the consequences. We won’t let them struggle or fight. We give them what they should earn for themselves. We praise too much and too easily and for the wrong reasons. We value removing all pain. We do it for them, instead of making them do it. We reward too frequently.”

Tim Elmore said that the problem of modern parenting boils down to this, “We prepare the path for the child instead of the child for the path.”

We try to make the path trouble free, pain free, failure free, consequence free, struggle free. And they live like kings and queens as children. But we are setting them up for failure as adults. Adults who can’t handle failure; they can’t handle consequences; they can’t handle responsibility; they can’t handle hardship; they can’t handle the struggle; they can’t handle pain. Why? Because we made sure they didn’t face those things as kids.

Tim Elmore wrote that we need to parent for the long term rather than the short term. “We need to worry less about today’s happiness and more about tomorrow’s readiness.”

FIVE: Children must be trained up for God.

What does it mean to train up a child in the way he should go?

There are two main interpretations of Proverbs 22:6.

Some believe that it is an exhortation for parents to train up a child according to his natural bent. In other words, don't try to fit a square peg into a round hole. If the child really wants to be a teacher, then don't force her to be a nurse.

While that is good advice, I don't believe that is the meaning of the verse. I believe the meaning is moral and spiritual, not vocational.

The **KJV Study Bible** says, "Parental training should help children develop a taste for the things of God."

Matthew Henry said this verse refers to "the propagating of wisdom...."

The **ESV Study** says "to train means to dedicate or initiate children in the way (the right moral orientation)."

The **Apologetics Study Bible** says that it means to model God's truth for children and encourage them to live according to God's order.

The **NIV Zondervan Study Bible** says it refers to "early moral training."

John MacArthur says it means to insist upon the right way, God's way, the way of life, "teaching God's word and enforcing it with loving discipline...."

In other words, to train up a child in the way he should go is to train up a child to be fully-devoted to God.

There are three phrases that I want to highlight in Proverbs 22:6. "Train up."
"The way." "Should go."

One: Your job as a parent is to train your kids *up*.

In the Bible, the word “up” is associated with God and heaven; down is associated with hell and the world.

Psalm 14:2 “The Lord looks down from heaven on the human race to see if there is one who is wise, one who seeks God.” **Ephesians 4:6** “one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” **Philippians 2:9** “For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name.”

Every child is trained, but not every child is trained *up*.

Your job is to dedicated your children to God; to point them to God; to prepare them to serve God for the rest of their lives.

Proverbs 22:6 (TPT) “Dedicate your children to God and point them in the way that they should go....”

Colossians 3:1-2 “So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

Your job is to train your kids to seek the things above, and to set their minds above, not on earthly things.

The Hebrew word for “train” comes from the root word that means “put into the mouth” and implies the idea of conditioning the palate. Your job as a parent is to condition your child’s palate for God; help them develop a taste for God.ⁱ

The Hebrew word for “train” literally means to dedicate, such as the dedication of a new house, or of a newly constructed temple. One **commentator** wrote, “As a temple newly built, and not yet profaned, is solemnly set apart to the Lord, so a child, by pious training, is dedicated as a temple of the Holy Spirit.”

You may be training your child, but are you training your child *up*?

Two: Your job as a parent is to train up your children in *the way*.

What way? The **CSB** says, “Start a youth out on his way; even when he grows old he will not depart from it.”

Whose way are you to start him out on? His way. That is, God’s way.

Psalm 18:21 “For I have kept the ways of the Lord and have not turned from my God to wickedness.” Your job is to train your child in the way of the Lord.

In the early days of Christianity, Christianity was known by a different name: The Way.

Listen to what Paul said when he was on trial before Felix. **Acts 24:14** “But I admit this to you: I worship the God of my ancestors according to the Way...”

Your job as a parent is to train your children to worship God according to the Way.

What is the way? **John 14:6** Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Jesus is the way. Your job as a parent is to train up your kids in the way of Jesus. To love and worship and obey and follow and live for Jesus Christ.

You are training your children in a way, whether you mean to or not; but are your training them in *the way*?

Three: Your job is to train up your children in the way they *should go*.

Not in the way they want to go. Not in the way you want them to go. Not in the way the world wants them to go.

Proverbs 16:25 “There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death.”

Your job is to train in the way they *should* go.

The **NIRV** says, “Start children off on the right path....” The **VOICE** translation says, “Teach children how to follow the right way.” The **NIV Study Bible** says that “the way” refers to “the right way, or the way of wisdom.” The **ESV Study Bible** says, “To train means to dedicate or initiate children in the way (the right moral orientation) by pointing to the kinds of conduct that please or displease the Lord, and to the normal outcome of each kind of conduct.”

Your job is not to help your children in the way they want to go. Or to encourage your children to find their way. Your job is not to support your kids, whichever way they choose.

Your job is to point them to God, and to His way of living. Teach them that there is right and wrong, and they should choose right. Teach them that there is truth and falsehood, and they should choose Jesus, who is the truth. Teach them that there is a God, and they should choose to love and serve Him.

Children must not merely be trained up. They must be trained up for God.

SIX: A child’s training is monumental.

Now let’s move to the second part of the verse. **Proverbs 22:6 (ESV)** “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

First, what this verse is not saying. This verse is not a guarantee, a promise, that if you train up your kids to follow Jesus, they are sure to follow Jesus.

Why do I say that?

First, because this verse is a Proverb, not a promise. A proverb is a wise saying about the way that life usually works. It is a principle. There are exceptions, but the exceptions prove the rule.

In general, on the whole, whichever way a child is pointed when he is young will determine the direction he walks for the rest of his life.

Second, there are many examples of ungodly people who were raised by very godly parents. And there are many examples of godly people who were raised by very ungodly parents.

But when a child goes in the opposite way of his upbringing, it is the exception. It is a child going a certain way in spite of his parents, rather than because of his parents.

Third, a parent cannot force a child to choose the right path.

You can train your child. You can point your child in the right direction. You can steer them in the right direction. But when they grow up, they must choose the right direction.

And there is no way to guarantee your child will choose the right path. If there were, then free will would cease to exist.

Fourth, if this was a promise, then parents would be responsible for the choices of their adult children.

But the Bible says that this is not the case. **Ezekiel 18:20** "The person who sins is the one who will die. A son won't suffer punishment for the father's iniquity, and a father won't suffer punishment for the son's iniquity. The righteousness of the righteous person will be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked person will be on him."

So if this verse is not a promise, then what is it? It is a Proverb. A wise saying about the way life usually works. Usually the way that you train your child is that way that they will travel for life.

We see this in **Proverbs 29:21** “A servant pampered from his youth will become arrogant later on.” How a servant is treated in his youth will usually determine who he becomes when he gets old.

Jesus said it like this in **Luke 6:40** “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.” A person who is fully trained will be like his teacher. The is the way life usually works. It is unusual – odd; the exception – when it turns out otherwise.

This verse is a reminder that a child’s training is monumental. It is not determinative. But it is of great importance. **John MacArthur** said, “Early training secures lifelong habits.” The **Worldview Study Bible** says, “There is tremendous importance in teaching youth, since they are still in their formative years. Wise instruction carries influence even to their old age.” The **KJV Study Bible** says, “The verse stresses the simple principle that education in the home forms the man throughout his lifetime.”

This is a reminder of the great opportunity you have a parent. Children are highly trainable. They are impressionable. Moldable like clay. Teachable. Humble. Trusting. They are not set in their ways. They have been exposed to fewer bad ideas.

The way you train them will be highly influential for the rest of their life. The best time to train someone for God is when they are young.

This is not a guarantee that your children will go the way you train them; but it is an assurance that they probably will.

At the same time, this verse is a reminder of the great responsibility you have as a parent. How you train your children is of great consequence.

HOPE FOR PARENTS

While this verse does not guarantee that your children will go the right way, there is hope in this verse.

There is a sense in which your children will never depart from your training.

There are two Bible translations that draw it out. **Proverbs 22:6 (GNT)** “Teach children how they should live, and they will remember it all their life.” **Proverbs 22:6 (TPT)** “Dedicate your children to God and point them in the way that they should go, and the values they’ve learned from you will be with them for life.”

Warren Wiersbe wrote, “Certainly children reared in the nurture and instruction of the Lord can stray from God, but they can never get away from the prayers of their parents or the seeds that have been planted in their hearts.”

The training you give them will never leave their memories; they will never escape the impression that you made on them; they will never uncover the spiritual seeds that you planted in them; the example that you set for them; the traditions that you ingrained in them. They will never unlearn the lessons that you teach them. They may depart from your training, but your training will never depart from them. They may deny the truth, but they cannot depart from the truth. They can never get away from your training, from your love, from your example, or from your prayers.

So for those of you who have children who were trained in the way to go, but they are not walking the in the way, don’t lose hope.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Proverbs 22:6. What is your key takeaway?
2. Why do children need training?
3. Whose responsibility is it to train up a child? Explain.
4. The goal of parenting is preparation. What should Christian parents be preparing their kids for?

5. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. What is the training manual that God has given parents to prepare their children? How does God's training manual help us to prepare our children?
6. Training involves setting boundaries for your children, limiting their options until they are mature enough to make good choices on their own. Do you have enough boundaries in place for your children? Explain.
7. Read Hebrews 12:11. For training to be effective, it should be hard. Easy training makes for weak trainees. What are some ways that many parents in our culture are too easy on their kids? How have you been too easy on your kids?
8. Proverbs 22:6 says that we must train our children in the way they should go – to be fully-devoted to Jesus Christ. What is the best way to do this?
9. Why should Proverbs 22:6 not be interpreted as a promise? If Proverbs 22:6 is not a promise, then how should it be interpreted?
10. How can parents find hope in Proverbs 22:6?

ⁱ KJV Study Bible.