

Proverbial Parenting

Proverbs 22:6

Introduction

- Here's an easy question for all of you: how many of you have parents? **PP** I should see all of your hands going up unless there was another immaculate conception.
- Now, here's a tougher question: how many of you have or had a good, loving relationship with your parents? Unfortunately, I see less than all of our hands being raised. That's because some of us never really knew one or both of our parents, or we had parents who didn't raise us in godly homes, or simply neglected us and left us to fend for ourselves.
- These are sad stories, and the alarming reality is that more and more families in this country contain poor relationships between parents and their children. With ever increasing rates of absentee parents, broken homes, and child-neglect – not to mention the decreasing number of Christian households – there is a parenting epidemic in this culture as our kids are being raised in an increasingly godless and parentless environment. And the onus is on parents to step up and begin to raise their kids properly.
- If you've been here with us over the past couple months you know that we're in the middle of a series in Proverbs, learning how to live wisely – to skillfully apply God's truth – in this foolish world.
- And if you read through Proverbs, you'll quickly find that godly parenting was extremely important to Solomon, the author of the majority of Proverbs. Probably because scripture shows us that his dad, David, really wasn't that good of a father. And if you look at Proverbs, you could plausibly argue that the majority of the book is really a manual on parenting. He gives lots of straightforward instruction directly to his sons, and he gives specific instruction on how we should parent our children, especially when it comes to disciplining our kids.
- Now, I just want to acknowledge at the beginning of this sermon that this is a touchy subject for many of us because we already think we aren't doing well enough parenting our kids. And this topic is one of those that is likely going to sting a little bit and maybe even make us feel a little shame or guilt.
 - Let me just say two things to that: 1) my intent is not to be critical of anyone for their parenting and I certainly don't want you to feel attacked, I just want to teach the truth of what Proverbs says on parenting and encouraging us all to be the parents we're called to be; and 2) I'm preaching in the mirror here today, directly to myself...I know I can be a better father and I've been convicted this week in studying this and preparing for this message. So don't think I'm preaching from a place of having this all figured out...far from it.

- So with that disclaimer out of the way, let's turn to **Proverbs 22:6** and learn what Proverbs has to say about parenting. As you turn there, let me pray.

The Perspective of Parenting

- Now before we dig into this Proverb, I want to talk a little about having a perspective of parenting in life. **PP** You see, there are those of us here today who don't have children – either because we're unable to have them, or we're not married, or we simply decided not to have kids.
- So I recognize that this may be a painful topic or you may be tempted to mentally check out of this sermon. But I really want to encourage you today to listen closely, because this sermon will apply just as much to you as it does to those individuals who have children. And it may even give you a new view of parenting.
- How, you may wonder, does this apply to me if I don't have kids? The answer from scripture is clear: every single one of us should have the perspective of a parent because every single one of us is called to have *spiritual* children.
- Jesus called the process of making and raising spiritual children discipleship **PP**, and he charged every single person who puts their faith in Him to be a disciple maker.
 - **Matthew 28:19-20** "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
- Jesus's command is to all of us, we're all called to make disciples – to have spiritual children. And in case you're unsure if its proper to think of discipleship this way, just listen to how the apostle Paul referred to his disciple Timothy when he wrote to him in **1 Timothy 1:2, 18 PP** "To Timothy, my true child in the faith...This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child..."
- Discipleship is parenting and parenting is discipleship. So we need to see that when Solomon is talking about parenting, he's talking about discipleship. If you have kids, your first responsibility it to disciple those kids, but if you don't have kids of your own, you can still have spiritual children and you're called to parent them – to disciple them. So when I talk about children today, know that I'm referring to both our biological children and our spiritual children.
- We all need to have a parenting perspective as we go through life and raise the children whom the Lord has entrusted to our care.

The Principle of Parenting

- And that brings us to **Proverbs 22:6 PP** where we see the overarching principle of parenting.

- **Psalm 127** tells us that children are a blessing from the Lord, and it compares children to “arrows in the hands of a warrior.” Well, **Proverbs 22:6** tells how we can help those arrows to fly straight...it gives us the principle of parenting
- **Proverbs 22:6 PP** "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it."
- The principle really isn't that complicated is it? If we raise our children in the way they should go, they won't depart from that path as they grow old.
- Now, it's really important that I remind us here that Proverbs is a book of *principles* of truth...not *promises* of truth. This isn't a parenting *promise*, this is a parenting *principle*.
- Because the sad reality is that many godly parents have done their best to raise their children to put their faith in Jesus Christ and to love and serve the Lord – and yet the children have chosen not to do so.
- This isn't necessarily a failure of parenting, God doesn't promise that all of our children will be saved...tragically, some of our children will make the heart breaking choice not to follow Jesus Christ. This is a hard reality, but it's the truth and we must trust the Lord's plan for our lives and the lives of our children.
- So we see that this verse is a principle, not a promise – but just because it's a principle doesn't mean we shouldn't follow it!
- In fact, **Proverbs 22:6** is actually a command. **PP** The Hebrew for the words “train up” is an imperative which means if we want to obediently follow the direction of the Lord, we are commanded to train up our kids in the way they should go.
- You may be wondering...ok, well what's the way they should go? That's a fair question...this proverb doesn't tell us which specific way we should train them. But if we look at the whole of Proverbs we will quickly find the answer: **PP** we're commanded to raise our children in the way of wisdom and teach them to avoid the path of foolishness.
- Proverbs is all about these two paths, and we as parents need to train our children to follow the path of wisdom, which means we must teach them to fear the Lord, put their faith in Jesus Christ, and to love and follow the Word of God.
- That may be obvious to some of us, but the sad reality is that many Christian parents don't do this. In a recent study by the Barna Research Group, **PP** it was found that only 33% of parents who identify themselves as born-again Christians say that they use the bible and biblical parenting principles in raising their children. Only 33%!!! The main parenting influences they cited were their own upbringing, the opinions of relatives and spouses, and what they read in books, magazines, or articles on parenting.
- I've had the privilege of serving as the youth pastor here at Cornerstone over the last year and a half and I've really enjoyed spending time with your kids. But I've repeatedly been surprised at the overall lack of spiritual depth in our 7 through 12 graders. Please,

don't hear that as a condemnation of anyone...the Lord knows I can do a much better job training my own children. But I want you to hear my heart on this – we've got to be more intentional about training our children in the way they should go.

- Too many of our children don't know the Word of God and have merely intellectually accepted Jesus Christ but haven't allowed Him to be the Lord of their lives...and they follow after other idols instead. Fathers especially – and I'm speaking to myself here – we've got to step up and do a better job of training our kids in righteousness.
 - We should read and study scripture with them – maybe a family bible study, talk about the sermon's together – engage them in spiritual conversations, pray with them *often*, give them the opportunity to ask you spiritual questions and then look up the answers together. Let them see you reading the Word of God and making your faith your top priority.
- **Deuteronomy 6:5-7** says **PP** “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 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.”
- Training up our children in the way they should go means having a lifestyle of discipleship and teaching our children – biological or spiritual - to love and follow the Word of God.
- Now, some of us may be getting a little discouraged right now. I'm not saying this is easy, in fact it's one of the hardest things we're called to do. And it should make us run to the grace of our heavenly Father for help.
- We won't be able to do this on our own strength, we've got to put our faith in the redeeming power of Jesus Christ's sacrifice for us and we've got to cry out to God to help us, that He would fill us with His Holy Spirit so that we'd have the strength, patience, discipline, and self-control necessary to train our kids properly.
 - Parents, don't be discouraged – be encouraged that we have a heavenly Father who is ready, willing, and able to help us raise the children He has entrusted to us.

Practical Parenting

- So how should we teach our kids to follow the way of wisdom...what does practical parenting look like? **PP** I mean, it's all well and good that we teach our children about their desperate need for Jesus Christ, but practically speaking, what does it look like to disciple our spiritual and biological children to love and serve the Lord?
- If we look at the Hebrew word for “train” (Hb. *ḥānaḳ*) **PP** it originally meant to give basic instruction and it was used to refer to raising children from infants to adulthood and training soldiers for combat.

- But even stronger than that, the word evolved to mean not just to train but to dedicate something for a specific purpose and it actually had this meaning in every other instance it was used in the OT.
- So when we seek to follow the command to train our children, we need to know that scripture means that, starting when they are infants, we should not only teach them to love and follow Jesus Christ, but we should actually dedicate them to this life-giving path.
- So how does that work, what does that look like? Well, we're not going to go over the *specifics* of *what* we should teach them. I mean, we should teach them everything contained in scripture since all of scripture teaches us how and why we should Love and follow Jesus Christ.
 - **2 Timothy 3:16-17 PP** says "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 may be complete, equipped for every good work."
- So if we want to know the specifics of what to train our kids, just open the Word of God and you'll have everything you need. In fact, Proverbs is full of specific examples of what to teach our children.
- But what I want to touch on for the rest of this sermon isn't *what* we teach our children, but *how* we teach and dedicate our biological and spiritual children to the Lord.
- And in order to help us to remember four key principles of how to train and dedicate our children to the Lord I've put together a little acronym for easy memorization: we've got to LEAD our children to the Lord. **PP** Love, Encourage, Affirm, and Discipline them.
- Love, Encourage, and Affirm: I'm only going to scratch the surface on these four principles today...I mean this could be a whole sermon series by itself. But I'm going to take the first three here all in one shot.
 - Scripture is full of exhortations to love one another **PP** (**John 13:34-35, 1 John 3:11-16, 1 Cor. 13:5-8**), encourage one another (**Hebrews 3:13, 10:24**), and affirm one another in Christ (**Philippians 1:6, 2 Timothy 1:7**).
- And while these verses don't specifically refer to raising children, we know that as we disciple our children we must love them, encourage them, and affirm them just as we would anybody else.
 - There is nothing more powerful in a child's life than knowing that he is loved unconditionally by his parents, there is nothing more empowering in the life of a child than receiving encouragement and exhortation from a parent, and there is nothing more confidence building than receiving affirmation from a parent.
 - Loving, encouraging and affirming our children are critically important as we train them in righteousness...because how we treat our children is vital in shaping their

view of God and teaching them about *His* love, *His* encouragement, and *His* affirmation of them.

- Because the reality is that the stronger our relationship and attachment to our kids the more likely our kids will be to build a relationship with their heavenly Father.
- But raising our kids isn't all about lovey-dovey training and gentle hand holding...if we look at Proverbs, Solomon doesn't actually talk at all about these first three principles with regards to parenting. Instead he focuses exclusively on the fourth principle of training our kids: discipline. **PP**
- Remember, scripture shows us that Solomon's dad didn't really discipline his kids which led to lots of problems in their family...huge problems. So discipline is a really big deal to Solomon. I mean all Solomon's dad tried to do was to appease his kids and make them happy.
- **Discipline:** And Solomon shows us that a parent's primary responsibility isn't to make their child happy; it's to build godly character in them. That means that we have to be willing and able to discipline our kids when they sin.
 - But it's really important to note that discipline *without* love, encouragement, and affirmation will fall on deaf ears and ultimately lead to rebellion. **PP** The only way discipline will be effective is if the other three aspects are present and we're building genuine relationships and deep attachments with our kids. I mean, do you actually expect your kids to listen to you if you barely have any relational attachment to them? Especially as they get older – the weaker our relationship is the less likely they'll listen to what we say and the more likely they'll be to rebel.
- But we can't just be all about love, encouragement, and affirmation...we've got to discipline them too.
- **Ephesians 6:4** puts it this way, **PP** "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."
 - While Proverbs says **Proverbs 13:24** "Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him."
 - Did you know that the number one reason that parents give for not disciplining their kids is that they love them and don't want to upset them? Yet, scripture paints the exact opposite picture:
 - Disciplining our children is actually an act of love and if we don't discipline them then it proves we actually hate them because we're doing far more harm than we realize.
 - An article popped up on my phone this week that caught my eye about how the actor Will Smith raises his kids. Here's a direct quote from him: **PP** "We don't do punishment. The way that we deal with our kids is, they are responsible for their

lives. Our concept is, as young as possible, give them as much control over their lives as possible and the concept of punishment, our experience has been — it has a little too much of a negative quality. So when they do things — and you know, Jaden, he's done things — you can do anything you want as long as you can explain to me why that was the right thing to do for your life."

- Men and women, that is the wisdom of the world and it's foolishness that leads to death. We can't leave our children to themselves, with no consequences for their actions...that type of training will lead to their ruin and our shame.
- **Proverbs 29:15** says **PP** "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother."
- Dr. James Dobson says that discipline is not something that we do *to* our children it's something that we do *for* our children. Children need us to discipline them so that they learn that there are consequences for sinful behavior, that they need to repent of their sin and seek God's grace and forgiveness, and that they are safe when they follow God's commands. **Psalms 119:71** "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes."
 - Now this doesn't necessarily mean that we're going to talk to our young kids about the theology behind why we discipline them as we're doing it — I mean, when I'm in the middle of disciplining my 3 year old daughter, going into a deep discourse on repentance and Christ's salvific work on the cross isn't going to do her much good. But godly discipline does mean that as she grows older I've got to teach her that she is a sinner who needs the grace offered through Jesus Christ, and godly discipline is one of the primary means of teaching her that.
- Discipline is an act of love and we can't neglect provide it for our children when they sin. Because the reality is that if they continue to sin and live in unrepentant defiance of God the eternal consequences will be disastrous.
 - Look, I know how hard this can be...I know how easy it is to let things slide...its far more convenient sometimes to just let things go. I mean, just this week there were times that my sons were arguing and fighting in one part of the house and I was sitting comfortably studying in another part of the house and I had to stop what I was doing and go discipline them. But I have to be honest and tell you that there are times when I don't stop and go and discipline them because it's inconvenient or I'm tired. That's on me...I can't do that. I've got to put my convenience aside because when I neglect to discipline my kids I'm reinforcing their sinful behavior and not training them to walk in the wisdom and fear of the Lord.
 - **Proverbs 22:15** **PP** "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him."

- Discipline is all about dealing with the sinful and foolish hearts of our children and we've got to love them enough to teach them what wise living looks like, even if that means lovingly inflicting some momentary pain to teach them that lesson.
- And let me take this opportunity to point out that the bible is a strong proponent of spanking your children when they are willfully and defiantly sinning. This is important because the number two reason that people give for not disciplining their kids is because they don't want to hurt them.
 - **Proverbs 23:13-14 PP** "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol."
 - The word of God is clearly instructing us to spank our kids when they sin. And God made each of us with a nicely padded posterior to absorb spankings without doing any real damage.
 - Now I need to be very clear, this doesn't mean that we ever, ever spank our kids with the intention or hopes of hurting them, and we never, ever spank our kids in anger or without self-control. Because if we're disciplining them in anger than we ourselves are falling into sin and we'll bear consequences of our own.
 - And just because we may not spank them in anger doesn't mean we're free from sin...we've got to be especially careful of the words we speak to them as we discipline them. Yelling at our kids in anger and tearing them down with our words is probably more harmful than spanking them too harshly.
 - We must seek the grace and self-control of the Holy Spirit in those moments so that our discipline of them is truly loving and redemptive.
- **Proverbs 29:17 PP** "Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart."
- Disciplining our kids is critically important for their training in the way of wisdom and when done properly the results will ultimately delight the hearts of parents because it will help them walk the path to repentance and putting their faith in Jesus Christ. And that should be the goal of every parent – to see our biological and spiritual children putting their faith in Jesus and walking ever more closely with Him as they mature in their faith.
- We've got to love, encourage, and affirm, our kids, but we also need to discipline them in order to properly LEAD them to the Lord.

Conclusion

- Because even though some of us may have had poor relationships with our parents growing up, that doesn't give us permission to have bad relationships with our children

now. We've got to break the cycle of bad parenting and follow the example of our heavenly Father as He parents us perfectly.

- His example gives us the perfect picture of a parent as He loves us, encourages us, affirms us, *and* disciplines us all for the purpose of drawing us to Himself. His is the example that we should be modeling to our children because the reality is that our kids are always watching and how we live our own lives is going to be the chief influence in how they live their lives.

- Many of you may recall the song "*Cat's in the Cradle*" by Harry Chapin. PP The words of the song always cause me to pause and ask myself if I'm training up my children properly, am I giving my kids the time and example they need to follow Jesus Christ.

- So before we close I just want to read the words to you:

- PP My child arrived just the other day,
He came to the world in the usual way,
But there were planes to catch, and bills to pay,
He learned to walk while I was away.
And he was talkin' 'fore I knew it and as he grew,
He'd say, "I'm gonna be like you, Dad.
You know I'm gonna be like you."
- PP And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon,
Little Boy Blue and the man in the moon.
"When you comin' home, Dad?"
"I don't know when, but we'll get together then;
You know we'll have a good time then."
- PP My son turned ten just the other day.
He said, "Thanks for the ball, Dad, come on, let's play.
Can you teach me to throw?"
I said, "No, not today, I got a lot to do."
He said, "That's okay."
And he walked away but his smile never dimmed.
It said, "I'm gonna be like him, yeah,
You know I'm gonna be like him...."
- PP And he came from college just the other day;
So much like a man I just had to say,
"Son, I'm proud of you, can you sit for a while?"
He shook his head and he said with a smile,
"What I'd really like, Dad, is to borrow the car keys.
See you later, can I have them please?"

▪ **PP** I've long since retired, my son's moved away.

I called him up just the other day.

I said, "I'd like to see you, if you don't mind."

He said, "I'd love to, Dad, if I can find the time.

You see, my new job's a hassle, and the kids have the flu,

But it's sure nice talkin' to you, Dad,

It's been nice talkin' to you."

▪ **PP** And as I hung up the phone

It occurred to me,

He'd grown up just like me.

My boy was just like me.

- **PP** I read that Chapin's wife is the one who actually wrote the words to that song, and she asked him one day when he was going to slow down from touring and give some time to their children. His answer was, "At the end of this busy summer, I'll take time to be with them." That summer, on July 16, 1981, tragically, Harry Chapin was killed in a car accident.
- Men and women, children are a gift from the Lord whether they're our biological children or spiritual children, and we've got to seize the opportunity that the Lord gives us to train them in the way they should go...the way of wisdom **PP**.
- Let's parent our children as the Lord parents us. Let's love them, encourage them, affirm them, discipline them, spend time with them, and build relationships with them so that we can point them to putting their faith in Jesus Christ. Don't waste this opportunity, because you never know when it'll be gone. Seize the moment and be the godly parent you've been called to be. Amen. Amen.