

Introduction For MC Leaders

Before you begin the process of leading someone else into a focused study of Biblical parenting, it is good to put a couple things in order to appropriately center your thinking on what your goal is during this process. Oftentimes when we meet with young parents and discuss their situation, we can focus too closely on their parenting mistakes and begin to simply give advice about how they need to handle certain situations better. This would be a mistake, and it might potentially never equip them for a fulfilling and God-honoring lifetime of parenting in principle.

With this warning in our minds, we find it best to spend significant time, as disciplemakers, focusing your own mind on what God is calling you to do for the couple that you are discipling. Here are two simple steps that will help you do just that.

1. **Pray.** This process of discipling young and inexperienced parents is challenging. Who are we kidding? It was and is challenging for us! We need God to intervene and guide our process, to mold our understanding and communication, and to prepare the way for our investment in these parents. Prior to suggesting and beginning a discipleship journey of this nature, we advise a season of prayer: that God would prepare all parties involved and appropriately posture you, as the disciplemakers, to trust His guidance.
2. **Embrace a Key Verse.** In the case of parenting, there are many passages that speak to this topic, yet one of them is so simple and profound that it thoroughly summarizes the challenge of parenting in principle. It is our recommendation that, prior to meeting with the parent(s) you are discipling, you should study, pray through, personally consider, and even memorize the following key verse. Allow it to shape your motives, hem in your wayward advice, and give you steer in your discipleship.

Key Verse

Proverbs 22:6

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

For the purposes of this relatively short boot camp on parenting, we are going to use this verse in Proverbs 22:6 as the key verse, a guide of sorts, for us in this journey. In it we find the most succinct words of God on the topic of raising children. Though they are succinct, they are also deep and profound. It is worth our time to mine it for its riches and allow it to provide an overarching context for our journey.

To better equip you to lead others in this boot camp, we are providing the following short exegesis of this verse. It is designed to help you understand and communicate the deeper meaning of the verse as it gives direction to the other passages that we will address in the larger challenge of raising children.

“Train/dedicate”

The Hebrew word used in this verse, *hanak*, means “to dedicate.” Rather than a primary word for instruction or training, the word *hanak* is used throughout the Bible in much grander contexts than one would expect. It is used of the dedication process for a house (Deuteronomy 20:5), an image/idol (Daniel 3:3), and even the temple itself (1 Kings 8:63). In these contexts, *hanak* is the action verb of “narrowing the focus/direction” of people onto that particular event.

In child raising then, as parents, we are called to “narrow the focus of our children” onto something. This charge must inform our attitudes and actions toward them as we seek to encourage and discipline them to narrow their focus to that which God desires for them. To understand this best in this verse, we must ask the next question, “Onto what should I narrow the focus of my child?”

“In the way he should go”

This next phrase in the verse answers the question that was asked in the last phrase. This phrase has rich Hebrew meaning that is often lost in translation into English because it centers on a rich Hebrew word *derek* which means “way.” It is literally translated, “in the mouth of his way,” which carries a very interesting range of meaning. In one sense, the phrase must be understood in the context of Proverbs where an individual’s “way” speaks to a pattern of life in wisdom or folly. However, the phrase is also commonly used to express an individual’s “way of life,” meaning personality and expression. It is in parenting where both of these realities collide.

In the first sense, where Proverbs speaks of “way” meaning a walk of life in wisdom, God does certainly call us as parents to train our children into the correct or righteous behavior that is consistent with being a child of His. This is why God instructs us to teach our children His Word and His righteous standard that is best for them to follow. He also instructs us to discipline them when they rebel against it; this is certainly a component of this phrase.

We also must consider, and equally balance as a matter of emphasis and priority, the charge of God to train our children into their personal “way of life.” In English, we would communicate this as their personality and ego. By using the word “ego,” we certainly do not mean in the prideful, flesh-motivated sense. What God means here is the “natural design of the child, the unique person that they are designed

by God to be.” Parenting is not a one-size-fits-all proposition, but an individual process of shaping the child into a God-centered and fulfilling life in relationship with Him as He designed them to uniquely be. Chuck Swindoll paraphrases this verse in this way,

“Cultivate a thirst, initiate a hunger, create an appetite for spiritual things in the lives of children of any age, as long as they are living under your roof, and do it in keeping with the way they are bent—disciplining the disobedience and the evil while affirming and encouraging the good, the artistic, the beautiful. As children begin to grow into adults, their paths will be aimed directly toward the Savior, and they will continue to walk in His sovereignty.”¹

“He will not depart from it”

This last phrase in this verse provides the motivation for training children in God’s way. This hopefully is, and certainly should be, the drive of every Christian parent: to see his/her child grow up to become a faithful follower and disciple of God, as God uniquely designed him/her to be. With this promise as our motivation, we must aggressively pursue parenting in the Biblical manner, giving our lives to build a family culture that prepares our children for a long, full life in God’s family.

¹ Charles R. Swindoll. “Parenting: From Surviving to Thriving.”