

Parenting from Proverbs

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Session 1

Our topic is parenting, and I want to start off by reading a quote from a book written in the late 1800s by J.C. Ryle, *The Duties of Parents*. What he said back then is still incredibly relevant today:

"Home is a place where habits are formed. Home is a place where the foundations of character are laid. Home gives the bias to our tastes, likes, and opinions. See then, I pray you, that there be careful training at home."

I love that quote because, in all the work and counseling I've done over the past 35 to 40 years in ministry, I realize how profound it is. The quality of what happens in the home directly affects that child for the rest of their life. We make impressions on children that last, but we cannot guarantee how our kids are going to turn out. Nothing in the Bible guarantees that. Yet, we still have a stewardship responsibility before God to do the right thing and let God work in our child's life. There's no magical spiritual button that makes your child turn out a certain way. Each child is unique—they have their own tastes, likes, and dislikes. As Christian parents, of course, we are concerned about ultimate outcomes, but we must trust God and what He is doing in our child's life.

One of our children, when they became a teenager, unlike our other kids, who had their individual struggles, seriously weighed whether to walk away from the faith. That was a difficult time for us as parents—praying, helping, and encouraging them. But I saw that time as very important because they were deciding whether Christ would be their Lord, not just their parents' Lord. They were grappling with whether they would own their faith. The fact that they were questioning wasn't bad in itself. The outcome is what we are concerned about, but during that struggle, you can't always know how things will turn out.

We live in a world that is rapidly changing, and our children will face things much earlier than we did. I recently received a phone call from a pastor in the Midwest. He called me in a panic because a local school system had invited the parents of a boy in their church to a meeting, where they were informed that their 15-year-old son no longer wanted to be a boy. The school said they fully supported the boy's decision to identify as female and expected the parents to support him as well. The father had the presence of mind to say, "Thank you for informing us. We'll discuss this as a family and get back to you." The pastor, who is close to this family, called me for advice. I told him the first thing they should do is get the child out of that school. We live in a culture that embraces the social construction of reality theory, which asserts that anyone can define themselves however they want, and everyone else must support that.

This story is a reminder of the world your children are growing up in, and it's everywhere—even if you homeschool or send your kids to a Christian school. So, what does the Bible say about child rearing? What are the foundational principles we need to pay attention to? Let's talk about parenting, using the book of Proverbs as a paradigm for thinking this through, especially in our contemporary culture.

Your children are going to face experiences at a much younger age and make decisions that you didn't have to make until much later. Information technology is advancing rapidly, and children have access to knowledge far beyond what we did at their age. Most Christian young people today experience so much at a young age that the habits of decision-making they form in reaction to those experiences stay with them for life.

Christian parenting in the 21st century presents a whole new set of challenges. While we've been 7, 11, 13, and 17 years old, we've never been their age because the world is different. How do we handle parenting in the midst of rapidly changing societal norms, including issues like homosexuality, transgenderism, and shifting sexual customs? Not only are these things accepted—they are praised. Add to that designer drugs, specialty alcoholic drinks, and ever-changing moralities, and you have a recipe for confusion.

Second Timothy 3:1-4 tells us what the last days will be like, and at the top of that list is the love of self. This was taught as a virtue when I was in college, but Paul says it's a vice. Self-love is a vice, not a virtue. Even though challenges have changed, children have not. As Christians, we must view Scripture as the answer for rearing children in the 21st century.

This brings us to a critical verse—probably the most misunderstood and misused verse in the Bible regarding child rearing: Proverbs 22:6.

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

Many Christian parents view this verse as a promise. They think if they bring up their child the right way, that child will never depart from it. But Proverbs 22:6 is often understood incorrectly as a guarantee. It's not a guarantee—it's a warning.

Let's break this down. The phrase "in the way he should go" literally means "upon the mouth of his way." It doesn't mean catering to your child's interests, like music or sports. It's not about tailoring your parenting to what your child likes. The word train used here is translated from the Hebrew word *chanak*, which means dedicate. It's the same word used for dedicating the temple.

This verse is not a promise but a warning. If you let your child do whatever they want, when they are old, they will continue to do whatever they want. It's a call to parents to intervene in their child's life and redirect them, but even then, you cannot control their heart—that is between them and God.

A parallel verse is Proverbs 29:15:

"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother."

The child left to themselves brings disgrace. Parents are responsible for influencing their children. You can't determine how your child will turn out, but you can influence them. Even God, the perfect parent, reared children who rebelled, as we see in Isaiah 1:2. If Proverbs 22:6 were a promise, it didn't work for God.

Proverbs teaches us that children have sinful hearts. They are born with folly bound up in their hearts (Proverbs 22:15). You never have to teach a child to do wrong; they do it naturally. This is why parenting requires hard work. You must use a balance of both physical and verbal discipline, as we see in Ephesians 6:4. Discipline is not just about correction—it is an opportunity to share the Gospel. Through discipline, we teach children their need for Christ because they cannot be perfect.

Every discipline event becomes an opportunity for the Gospel. You remind your children that God expects perfection, but they cannot achieve it, which opens the door to teach them about their need for Christ. They must understand that they need Jesus because they cannot be perfect on their own.

This balance of physical and verbal discipline helps children grow in their understanding of their sinful hearts and the grace of God. As parents, we must guide them in making godly decisions, but ultimately, their decisions are between them and God.

Scripture References

1. Proverbs 22:6

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

2. 2 Timothy 3:1-4

"But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."

3. Isaiah 1:2

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: 'Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.'"

4. Proverbs 29:15

"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother."

5. Proverbs 22:15

"Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him."

6. Ephesians 6:4

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."
