

Ages and Stages – Children

1/7/24

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Sunday AM

I love the story about the man at the mall trying to calm his crying baby. Softly, he was saying, “There, there George – don’t cry. Everything is okay. You’re good – just calm down.” Well... a lady watching said, “I have to commend you for your patience in trying to keep George quiet.” He said, “Ma’am, I’m George.”

Many of us can identify w/ George – we’ve all been there. Like the time I was at Kohl’s w/ Colin (age 6) and he was having a tough time. Pretty much everyone in line (except the person in front of me) recognized Colin wasn’t a typical child – and yet he decided to turn around to offer me advice on how to parent my child – let’s just say things deteriorated from there.

**Needless to say**... parenting (and grandparenting) is not for cowards or the faint of heart.

Maybe you’re like that lady who got on the bus w/ 6 rambunctious kids. The driver asked, "Are all these your kids – or are you going on a school picnic?" The lady replied, “Yessir, these are all my kids, and I can assure you – this ain’t no picnic.”

Or maybe you’re like the mom who took her son to his first day of 1<sup>st</sup> grade. When she got home, her husband asked, "Did little Billy cry when you left him at school?" She said, "No, but the teacher sure did."

Can I just say that as a dad of (4) – I can sympathize?

**Indeed** – parenting is not for cowards or the faint of heart – and yet there may be no greater blessing in life.

This AM, we’re launching into a month of lessons on the joy/blessing of parenting/grandparenting in which we’re going to consider the different ages and stages of the parenting/grandparenting process.

- Parenting/Grandparenting Preschoolers/Children
- Parenting/Grandparenting Adolescents
- Parenting/Grandparenting Adult Children
- Parenting our Parents/Grandparents

This AM, I want to begin w/ the **EARLY** stages. So, for those of you who just starting out – **welcome to parenting/grandparenting 101** – and for those of you who are wily veterans – welcome back. Now, as it pertains to parenting, I’ve some 26 yrs of experience, but as it pertains to the joys of grandparenting, I can only conjecture w/ the hope that one day I can join the ranks of hyping my grandkids up on candy and red-dye Kool-Aid only to send them home to their parents as a form of retribution for when they were kids. HA!

**NOW** – as we get started, I want to assure you that while I have some experience in parenting, I have not cornered the market nor am I an expert – just a fellow traveler. Still, there are some things I’ve learned in life, and in the Scriptures, I hope will be of some help.

Speaking of the Scripture, DYK there are more than 1,900 verses in the Bible that speak to being a mom or dad – yet only a few of these passages directly address the parent-child dynamic. Still, while there are no all-inclusive texts on parenting, there are some (15) texts that speak to the roles, responsibilities, and realities of parenting – and possibly none as simple, yet emphatic as Proverbs 22:6.

*Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6*

To appreciate and apply this verse first requires an understanding that this is a **proverb** and not necessarily a **promise** – meaning that it is **preemptive** in nature.

**That is** – b/c every child has their own unique personality, nature, and experiences, there's NO guarantee your child is going to turn out the way you hope, even if you do most everything in accordance w/ God's design on parenting – BUT if you do choose God's design, you can be assured there's a much greater chance they will turn out to be God-honoring, sensible, healthy people who contribute to society.

**WTM** – let me offer a couple of truths from this text for raising kids who have a desire to know/honor God.

I        The **DUTY** of Parenting

The duty/calling of parenting is to – *train up a child*...

The idea is that there is NOTHING more important in a parent's life than serving as God's key instrument to help shape/form the soul of this child God has entrusted into your care.

**Notice** this calling is **NOT** to be your child's buddy, taskmaster, benefactor, or taxi- driver. ***It is to be the key persons who train them to prepare them for life.***

**train up** – means to **hedge in** to provide appropriate boundaries to protect and to point in the right direction. The picture is of a shepherd herding sheep into a pen so he can watch over them to keep them safe/nurtured.

**Meaning** – to *train up* a child is to have a gracious influence over your kid's life to **appropriately** shape and form their character, convictions, and direction.

The key idea here is that as a parent, you're to do more than **TELL** them; you're to **TRAIN** them. This requires more than **lip service**; it requires a **life investment**. So, if you're a *selfish, self-centered, self-absorbed* person, then parenting is going to test/expose you unlike anything else in life – b/c parenting, from the start, requires a selfless posture.

**What are we to invest**... Biblically speaking, we are to invest the truths of God into our children. *Heart, mind, emotions, and will* – parents are called to raise their children in the admonition of the Lord to **know** Him, to **walk** w/ Him, and to **honor** Him.

This leads me to the text Jordan shared last week:

*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God w/ all your heart, w/ all your soul, and w/ all your strength. These commandments I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home, 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 6:4-9*

I want to point out a few **parental priorities**:

- 1        God-honoring parents begin w/ God being 1<sup>st</sup> in their own lives
- 2        God-honoring parents prioritize the Word of God in their lives and in their homes
- 3        God-honoring parents live out and model their faith before their children
- 4        God-honoring parents expect of their children only what they expect of themselves

This brings me to the 2<sup>nd</sup> need for parenting...

## II The DESTINATION of Parenting

*Train up a child in the way he should go...*

It might surprise you to learn that the phrase *in the way he should go* in Hebrew reads – ***in the way of the mouth*** – and while scholars differ on the interpretation of this passage – both views end w/ the same result.

Some translators have viewed this phrase as a **warning** interpreting the phrase (*in the way of the mouth*) to refer to parenting a child **according to their own will and desires** – *which appears to be the way many kids are being parented in today's culture*. As a warning, Proverbs 22:6 says that to parent in such a manner would be absolutely detrimental to your child's earthly/eternal life b/c he/she would only become more self-consumed thru-out their life and careless about the things of God.

So, Proverbs 22:6 serves as a warning to parents that if they allow their children to have their own way, they will not depart from such foolishness as they age.

*Dedicate your child to his desire and he will be happy to go there – and stay there.* Edward Wilde

**On the flipside**, many scholars have interpreted this text as an **encouragement** viewing the phrase – ***in the way of the mouth*** to be a reference to the birthing custom where the Hebrew midwife, upon delivery, would immediately dip her fingers into a paste made of honey/dates and rub it on the gums of the newborn baby to initiate the baby's feeding instinct.

If this is the case, then the idea here is that in like manner – parents are called to train their children in a manner that influences them to have a thirst for God and the things of God.

This would align w/ what God called parents to do in the **Shema** but also here in the translation – *in the way he SHOULD go...* would be viewed as raising one's kids to *choose the right path* – or *walk in the right way* – and the right way is the **one and only way** of God.

**Meaning** – the most important thing that parents can teach their children is about the *existence, character, and way of God*. B/c if they learn this truth, it WILL influence the way they understand and interpret every other truth/value in their lives.

**Of course** – in either case, whether a warning or encouragement – or both... this phrase acknowledges that there's a **wrong path** too – *which is a way that seems right to ourselves*. Or a way that seeks to fulfill one's own ambitions, desires, and priorities. As we all know – far too many parents instead of training their children *in the right way* toward God, have chosen to raise their children **in THEIR way** or **in the way their child wants to go** – w/ devastating consequences.

**SEE** – *children who don't acknowledge God will act as if they are God and will resist the help and rescue God has provided for them thru Jesus, the H.S., His Word, and their parents.* Paul David Tripp

What I find interesting in this phrase is that there is a hidden, embedded truth that is not so obvious in this passage – but present – that I wish I had learned much earlier in my parenting journey.

**In the phrase** – *in the way of the mouth* – speaks to the uniqueness of how each of our children needs to be parented. That is, we're called to parent each of our children as they need to be parented – yet there's no one right/best way to parent.

**SO** – while you may have general guidelines/ideas for your family – *b/c each of your children is fearfully and wonderfully made by God, knit together in their mother's womb* – they are NOT the same and therefore can't be parented the same. BUT oh, how we try.

**Truth is** – if you attempt to parent your children in the same fashion, *you're likely to wonder why it worked on one child but not on the other*. It's b/c they're NOT the same – and therefore, they can't be parented alike.

Meg and I learned this thru Colin. Abi and Madeline were so young (when you're more able to parent your kids alike) that we were stumped w/ Colin. We chalked some of it up to him being a boy, but the simple truth was he was not Abi or Madeline. Of course, when we hit the teen years, we quickly learned that we could no longer parent Abi and Madeline the same either.

**POINT** – God never intended for us to choose a single way to parent our children, but to understand that each of them is unique to Him w/ a Divine plan and calling on their lives. And since our calling is to help *shape, form, guide, and direct* them towards the things of God, then it'll require that WE as their parents learn how to uniquely influence each of them accordingly.

So, for those of you in the early stages of parenting (and those who are new grandparents who will assist your children in raising your grandchildren) – it is essential that we accept our God-given calling and commit ourselves to the mission of training our kids in the admonition of the Lord so that they might discover their true identity in Christ and His will for their lives.

And this brings us back to the last half of this verse – *and when he is old, he will not depart from it*.

Whether as an *encouragement* or a *warning* – if we raise our children in the admonition of the Lord according to the precepts/prescription of God's Word and will – while there are no guarantees – they're more likely to become whom God has called them to become and whom you have been hoping they would become – than not.

**This is the duty of parenting** – to lead/influence our children to know, honor, and walk w/ God according to His will for their lives.