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Series: Proverbs: Living Wisely in a Fallen World
Message: The Most Basic Task

Transcribed Message
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This morning is actually our 22nd lesson from the book of Proverbs. If you have been here for any number of those lessons, then you are prepared this morning for a little word association time that we're going to do together. I am going to say a word, a topic, and then you are going to shout back out the chapter and verse where we're going to go to find that. I know that you're prepared for that. We've been in this book for a good long time. If I were to say to you the words "knowledge and wisdom", you would most likely say Proverbs chapter 1 verse 7. Very good. We're off to a good start. We know in that verse that it is the way of the wise that walks in the knowledge of God. Fools despise wisdom and instruction, but the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and the beginning of wisdom. If I were to say to you "trust" you would say 3:5 and 6. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths. If I say the word "heart", you say Proverbs 4:23. Guard your heart with all diligence for out of it flow the issues of life. If I were to say to you "marriage", you'd say Proverbs 5:18. Rejoice in the wife of your youth. Maybe you'd say Proverbs 31 where you have that wonderful description of a godly woman. If I say "parenting", and maybe add the word "promise" to it, I know you would say Proverbs 22:6 because it's on the screen. But you would probably also say that because you know that's where we're going this morning.

If Proverbs 22:6 is the best-known verse on parenting maybe in the Bible I would suggest to you that it is likely the most debated and maybe the most misunderstood verse as well. Let's look this morning at what will likely be just a singular verse. We'll likely turn to a couple of other places but we're not going to move all around Proverbs on this particular topic this morning. We're going to primarily look at Proverbs 22:6 and as we focus on this verse, this is what we want to see. Parenting is this great faith adventure and it requires sensitivity to God and sensitivity to our children. Sensitivity to

God so that we can obey Him and do the things that He has told us to do. Sensitivity to our children so that we can help them find their way.

Let's start off by knowing your child. I want to touch just as a way of introduction by looking at the scope of this verse, because the first thing we need to note about this verse is the context. When we're handling the Word of God, we always begin by noting where we are. What is the place of this particular book passage? Obviously we are in the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs is a particular kind of literary genre. It's not historical information per se. It is not as other narrative examples might be in the Gospels. It's not in the literature that is hortatory, exhorting us like we have in the epistles. There is something unique about wisdom literature. Wisdom literature is a part of what Proverbs is so we just note that we have to as an interpreter of the Word of God be aware of what it is that we're looking at, what we're dealing with. Proverbs is that.

We start off by asking the question: Is this a promise or is this a proverb? It might seem pretty simple at face value, but even that question is debated and discussed. We know first of all that a promise in the Bible is a promise. I think we would all agree with that. If God has promised that He's going to do something, He is going to do it. He will do it. That is not debated. We rest in that. We lay claim to those things. When Jesus said to the disciples before He left, I am never going to leave you. They believed that. They took that to heart. They were encouraged by that. They hung on to that truth in some of those hard times that were coming. When Paul writes in Romans 8 and says there's nothing that can separate you from the love of God, and then he lists out about 12 things that we might think at times can separate us from God's love. We claim the promises of God's Word because of what they are. They are the unchanging truth of God's promise to us. We know that a promise is a promise.

We know secondly that a proverb is a general truth. A proverb by definition is a general truth. It is giving us a life principle. It's not a promise. Proverbs is filled with general life principles. We can just stay in the 22nd chapter and I can illustrate this for you. In verse 4 it says: "The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life." You can say, I'm a fairly humble person. I do the best I can to fear the Lord but I'm waiting for the riches and honor to come my way. If you take that as a promise, you might be disappointed because this isn't teaching prosperity gospel. This isn't teaching

that if you do this, God is going to bring wealth into your life in that sense. This is a life principle.

Look at verse 11: "He who loves purity of heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king as his friend." I know a lot of you. and I know that you are gracious people. You are people of a pure heart. I don't know how many of you have a king as a friend. You can look at that and say, wait a minute. There's a promise here, isn't there? No, this is a proverb, a general life principle. You see the same thing in verse 29: "Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings. He will not stand before obscure men." again we can say the same thing. We are faithful in our work. We're doing all that we can and yet we're probably not literally standing before kings. As we handle the book of Proverbs and as we look at this particular one, we understand that we're dealing with a life principle, not a promise that God has necessarily given.

We ask the question: What difference does it make anyway? What difference does it make? I want to suggest to you that it can make a lot of difference. It can make a lot of difference in how we understand and interpret this verse. How we handle Scripture always matters. If you don't handle Scripture properly, you're going to come to a conclusion and an outcome that maybe God never intended. When Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:15 that we want to be approved men and women who are rightly handling the Word of God. that is a beginning point for any time that we're studying Scripture. I believe that if you don't handle this passage properly, you're not going to understand this verse in the way that God intended. You're not going to be able to apply it to your life the way God intended.

Let me illustrate it this way. You have a parent, maybe a friend of yours, and they come to you and they're visibly upset. They begin to share with you something of their heartache, something of their pain. They're telling you about their teenager or their young adult child who has clearly made some bad choices and has just taken a right-hand turn away from the Lord. Their child is no longer walking in the values that were a part of their home. They're no longer reflecting any desire to walk with the Lord, to know the Lord, to be even engaged and involved in the Christian faith. Your friend might say something along the lines of we did everything that we knew to do. We encouraged them in their walk with God. They seemed for many of those years to be very interested

in the things of God. They ask you: Doesn't the Bible say somewhere? Doesn't the Bible promise me somewhere as the parent of this child, doesn't the Bible say somewhere that if I will do these things that God will ensure that my children turn out this way? If you are at all familiar with this verse, you understand that that is a very practical, very real reality that many parents face. How you answer that question to that hurting parent is going to depend largely on how you understand and see this verse. Is this a promise that God has given? You do A and B, and it will equal C. or is there something else going on here?

Let's look at the viewpoints of this verse because this is the way this verse is understood depending on how you interpret it. First, some people look at this as I have indicated and look at it as an absolute guarantee. This is a promise that God has given to us. The proper training and proper upbringing is going to result in the desired outcome. You will have a son or daughter this to going to be walking with God. They will not depart from the way. They will not move into a period of rebellion. You do the right thing and it will turn out right. This verse has been handled that way in a lot of cases and it has been understood and taught that way in many places. There's no rebellion because if you do what God says to do as a parent, He tells you right here the child will not deviate from the way. If they do, then it means there's some deficiency in the parenting process because this is a promise that God has given.

A second way to look at this verse is to come at it a little bit differently and it is to say this is a limited guarantee. There's a limited guarantee here. Even when a child is raised right, there may be a period of time in their life when they began to walk away from the faith, when they begin to leave the things that were a part of their upbringing, the values and the desires that their parents lived their life by. There may be a period of time in their life where they move away from the faith, but in the end they're going to come back. While this is not promising that they'll never wander, it is saying that if they do wander, they are going to come back. It may not be until they're senior citizens. It may not be that you even as a parent get to see that return. But this verse is telling you that if you do it the right way, that child, having been instilled with that faith belief system, is going to come back at some point in their journey to their faith.

The other alternative is that this offers no guarantee at all. This is to be understood in that way. This is a proverb. It's not a promise. It's not talking about the outcome of the process as much as the talking about how it is that this process is to unfold. Is there parental responsibility in childrearing? Of course there is. Everybody agrees. No matter which view you take of this verse, everybody says parents have the responsibility before God to do all that they can to instruct their children in the things of God. Everybody would agree with that. But not everybody agrees as to whether this is an absolute promise. Not everybody agrees as to whether this is even a limited promise.

So we want to look at it with that in mind. Let's look at the training that is in view in Proverbs 22:6. Again, the interpreter is faced with this question of what is in view here. We're going to begin by looking at that phrase in the verse that says "in the way". Train up a child in the way he should go. Let's start there. There are three possibilities as you look at that phrase. Train up a child in the way that he or she should go. How do we understand that phrase?

We could understand that phrase as simply being an encouragement to parents and the way the parent wants child to go. Train up the child in the way you as a parent want that child to go. And all the parents said amen. Absolutely. Father knows best. Mother knows best. It sounds good to us as parents to think that this proverb may be saying to us train up your child in the way you think they should go because you as a parent obviously walk with God. You understand the principles of life in Scripture and you're going to guide that child in the way that they should go. Well, of course, we would all agree with that. But this is again the question that is before us. Is it possible that there's something else going on here than simply me as a parent saying what I want my child to do? Children, please listen to me if you want to have a wonderful life. Listen to me as a parent and I will train you in the way to go. That's one way.

The second way is the way God wants him to go. The way God wants him to go. Here the focus is on that phrase "the way". Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it. Proverbs talks a lot about the way, doesn't it? If you've been here for even half of our studies, you know that Proverbs is filled with exhortations to walk in righteousness and to avoid unrighteousness. We can easily

describe those two scenarios as being the way the path of righteousness or the path of unrighteousness. The way of obedience or the way of disobedience. Clearly that is a part of the teaching of the book of Proverbs. In fact, Proverbs 14:12 says there is a way that seems right to a person, but the end thereof is the way of death. That is a possible understanding of Proverbs 22:6 because we do have that choice all through Proverbs.

But there's a third possibility. And this is the third possibility. The way the child is designed by God to go. So as we come to this verse, we can focus on the outcome or we can focus on the process. In focusing on the process we can say as a parent, I understand the way the child should go and that's the way this child needs to go. We could understand it as God has given us a way to go and He has described it for us all through Scripture. Or, is it possible that this is talking about the way God has designed this child to go?

Let's look at those three choices. Probably all of us have experienced number one where you have parents who have decided the way they want their child to go. They've already determined the vocation that child is going to go to. They gear everything towards that and as a parent they've picked number one. I know the way you should go. This is the way I want you to go and I'm going to do everything I can to influence you and move you in that direction. what often happens is you see parents who are trying to live out their dreams in the lives of their children. What you often see with that are not only very frustrated parents at some point along the way, but you see you very frustrated children as well. I don't think that's what Proverbs is saying in Proverbs 22:6. Parents, pick the way and that's where your child is going to go.

What about the second view? The second view is very valid. Obviously, as we said repeatedly, every parent who has a heart for God wants their children to walk in the way of obedience, wants their children to walk in righteousness. You could argue that Proverbs 1 through 9 is a whole section that is all about "listen, my son". Listen, my daughter. Hear what the Word of God, the truth of God that He has given to us says about life. I want you to be wise. I want you to walk in the wisdom of God. I want you to understand how God wants you to see life. I want you to understand how God views life from His vantage point. Clearly number two is in play. Listen, my son. Listen, my

daughter. Walk in this way. It's consistent with what we understand is going on in Proverbs.

Here is where I'd like to depart just a little bit. I'd like to suggest that there's a third way to look at this verse. It includes the principles of number two but it also brings to us a different thought with regard to verse 6. And so thirdly, I'd like for us to see point C. Helping our children find their way. Helping our children find their way. What's a parent to do in this process as we think in terms of how we're being encouraged to parent, not the outcome per se as much as the process. So we look at this verse again and we start off right at the beginning of verse 6: Train up. Train up a child. What is a parent to do? A parent is to train up a child. That word that we have there, the Hebrew word *chanak* is used only four other times in the whole of the Old Testament. Do you know that in every one of those usages it has to do with the dedicating of a building, of a house, or in another case, the temple of God? So here this verb is used five times in all of the Old Testament, four of those times it has to do with dedication of a building, one time we find it here in Proverbs 22:6. When you think about it in that way, there is obviously something of an active nature in view here. This isn't a passive thing. If you're going to train up something or somebody, you're going to be active. You're going to be intentional. You're going to be purposeful. You can even argue that you're going to start early. When you think of how this word is used, it is at the beginnings. There is this idea in this word to train up. The focus is on the need for instruction. We understand that Psalm 127 says our children are a gift from the Lord, so we're invited into this process. We're invited to this training them up. We do this with who?

We read secondly that it is the child. Train up a child. This Hebrew word *naar* is a word that is used hundreds of times in the Old Testament. It speaks of a child that is very young and it also speaks of a child that is of age to be married, which of course in that culture and time would be younger than we would might think today. It covers a wide range. I think that you could conclude that these are children, young people who are under the influence of their parents. They're living within the home. That would be the most likely scenario that is in view. The influence and guidance of the parents is very much a part of their daily life. They are to train them up in this active, intentional, purposeful, get-after-it-early process. They're to do it with those who are called a child.

Then the key phrase – “in the way”. Train them up in the way. If you had to pick one phrase out of this whole set of ideas that is the most debated and most open to interpretation, it's that little phrase. Train up a child in the way they should go. What we don't see in the English translation that is in the Hebrew text, this literally could be interpreted train up a child in his way. The word “should” doesn't appear. It doesn't say the way with the definite article. It is really according to his way. According to her way. It is a very valid interpretation. Train up a child according to his way, according to her way, or in his way. So certainly we have the idea of the two paths. We've already acknowledged that. We've accepted that. Proverbs talks a lot about the way of righteousness and the way of unrighteous. A godly parent wants their child, however you understand this verse, to walk in the way of truth, to walk in the way of righteousness.

But is there another way that we can see this word being used even in Proverbs? The answer to that is yes. Yes, there is. Turn over to Proverbs 30. In Proverbs 30, this idea of walking according to his nature, for according to his way is beautifully illustrated in verse 18 and verse 19. There we read: “Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand; the way of an eagle in the sky...” There is nothing there about the way, is there? It is the nature of an eagle in the sky. “...the way of a serpent on a rock...” The very nature by which a serpent functions. “...the way of the ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a virgin.” Here the idea of a way that we're to train our children according to the very nature by which God has created them. We're going to train them up according to their personality, according to their temperament. We're going to take in to view their interests, their talents, their gifts, their ability. What are the passions that God has put in their hearts? Those are the things that we're to be mindful of and focus on.

Every child, if you've got more than one, you know is different. Every child is unique. No two children are exactly the same. Even twins aren't exactly the same in all of their interests, all of their desires, all of their ideas about what they want or what they're interested in. Each is different. As this process unfolds, you're taking into account the age of the child because at each point along the way there is something different to take note of. We recognize the sovereign design of God in the life of each of

our children. As a parent, I've got a way I want them to go. I don't think that is saying that to me — to train them in the way you as a parent want them to go. We've got the choices of the two paths – the path of righteousness, the path of unrighteousness. We acknowledge that, but now we're introduced to the idea that you train a child by virtue of the design that God has vested in each one of them that is unique and different, special. With that in mind, with that constantly being a part of our interaction with them as parents, we are guiding them in the way. Then when they are old, it says, they won't depart. This training is an encouragement because of what we have seen by way of their gifts, their talents, their abilities, and they're encouraged to walk in that. There is a sense of being equipped for life by the acknowledgment of the uniqueness with which God has made them and designed them. That is a part of their discipling on the part of us as parents. You help set the course of their life. You haven't picked their vocation. You haven't said this is what you are going to do and become. But you're taking into account the things that are the passions of their heart, the interest of their heart, the gifts that God has given to them, and you're molding that into each one of these children in a unique and different way with the idea of how God Himself has made them.

How is a parent to do that? How do we do that? Let's look at a couple of things. First of all, you do everything you can to introduce your child to the gospel. Obviously, that's the beginning point however you understand this verse. First priority is you do everything you can to introduce your child to the gospel. One of your goals as a parent, a very important goal as a parent, is to create an atmosphere in which it is easy to come to know and understand the gospel. Obviously we understand the work of God. We understand the sovereign purposes of God in calling each one of us to Himself. We are not speaking against that. We are acknowledging that. We are saying that as a parent we want as one of our goals to create an atmosphere within our home that makes it easy for our children to believe and to walk with God.

What does that look like? That means as they look at our lives, they don't see our Christian journey as one of drudgery and negativity and one that we're constantly feeling like we're "having to". They see something of the joy of what it means to walk in the Spirit. They see something of the blessing of God on our life as we are walking with and pursuing God. If all they see in our life is the drudgery of legalism or of a to-do list

and that's what we pass on to them as this is what the Christian life. Do this list of things and don't do this list of things. We're not making it easy for them to want to walk with God. We're very likely putting up barriers. If every Sunday, instead of the joy of looking forward to gathering with the people of God and mixing lives together, they get from you that we've got to do this. We wish we had something else that we could do but we don't have anything on the calendar, so I guess we'll go to church. That's not making it easy. You're making it hard. It begins with us as parents. Spiritual conversations are just a natural and normal part of life. They look at our lives and see parents who want to know God. Parents whose lives are overflowing with love for other people. Parents who daily are living out the gospel. That's what they're seeing. That's how to make it easy for your children to follow after this example.

Secondly, ask God for insight into their character and their personality. Ask God for insight into their character, their personality, their gifts, their talents. Our daily prayer as we pray for our kids every day, we're praying for God to give us an understanding into how He's designed Johnny and how He's designed Susie. Help me to know what it is that makes them tick. Sometimes those things are obvious and fairly simple to see, and other times it's a prayer of desperation. It's a prayer of dependence always, but sometimes it almost becomes a prayer of desperation. What is it that You're doing in the life of my child? How is it that You have gifted and created them and made them into the special person that they are? There's that obviously that is an element.

Then thirdly, become a student of your child. Become a student of your child. Turn back a page to Proverbs chapter 20 and verse 11: "Even a child himself is known by his acts, by whether his conduct is pure and upright. The hearing ear and the seeing eye the Lord has made them both." If we take that verse within our context, here's a parent who is a student of their child. They're learning about their child which is going to require of us diligence and time and wisdom and observation. There is no cookie-cutter approach to training our children in the way that they should go because each one is unique. Each one is different. God has gifted them in different ways. Some of them are incredibly outgoing. Some of them are very quiet in their spirit. Some of them are interested in music. Some of them are interested in sports. Some of them are interested in academics. Some of them are interested in technology. Some of them are interested

in all of those things. Take all of those things into account because you're watching and observing and praying and seeing how God has made this unique person that He has loaned to you to train up in the way that God has created them and made them. We understand that some by nature it seems are compliant and others need encouragement – which we like to call it. All of these things, all of these differences. We raise each one according to the way that God has designed them. Our daily prayer is Lord, show me. Show me the way that You have made my child. Friends, parenting is a faith adventure. It is a faith adventure that requires sensitivity to God and to our children. To God so we can obey Him. To our children so that we can be mindful of the way God has made them.

What do we take away? I look at this verse and our child raising days are over, but the influence in our children and our grandchildren is still there. It reminds me that the truth of this verse calls us to lean so heavily on dependence on the Holy Spirit of God. Just as all of life calls for us. In this case, we want to lean on the Spirit because we want to instill the truth of God's Word into the lives of our children. We want to see God sustain us by His Spirit in the highs and the lows of parenting of which we know there are all of those. We want to trust the Spirit as we rely on His guidance in the lives of our family.

The truth of the matter is trusting and training absolutely go together. There's no conflict between those two. We're trusting and we're training our children to walk in the way that God has designed them, uniquely equipped them so that they can walk in the way that He has revealed. Just as our children, their greatest need is the gospel that is true for every one of us in this room. Our greatest need is the gospel. It always starts with the gospel and our relationship to God. God's desire is to have a personal relationship with us. We all have the need to have that sin that has separated us from God dealt with. There are two choices. We either find a way to work our way to heaven, which unless you're 100% perfect 100% of the time, the Bible says you fall short. Or the other way is to trust in this gospel. What Jesus did when He came and He died on that cross was to pay the penalty for sin and to allow us to have forgiveness and allow us to begin this journey with God that He has designed within each of our hearts to be in our relationship with Him.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, we are thankful that we have you as our Father. You are our heavenly Father. Father God, we thank You that You as You have worked in our lives, You have taken into account this unique design that You have placed in each of our lives that makes each of us fearfully and wonderfully made. Lord, give us as Your people, as those who serve within this church as parents raising their children, as grandparents influencing in the lives of their children and grandchildren, as single people serve and minister within our body, within our community, Father, give us a great sensitivity to how it is that You have designed and made us so that we can walk in this way and we can bring glory to You and we can lift up this gospel. We do all of this, Father, because we love You and we are grateful for all of Your blessings. In Jesus's name, amen.