



Train Up A Child

Proverbs 22:6 Dedicate a child to the way he should go, and even when he becomes old, he will not turn away from it. (Evangelical Heritage Version)

- Perhaps no proverb of Solomon is more familiar or on account of its familiarity been more misused and misunderstood than Proverbs 22:6, and unfortunately a significant part of that confusion can be attributed to our English translations. Both the NIV and the King James versions translate the opening phrase of this proverb as, “TRAIN UP a child in the way he should go...” However the Hebrew word here is not your typical word for teaching or instructing. In fact it is a fairly rare word that describes the act of formally dedicating something to God’s service and glory, usually by means of anointing. This could include sacred vessels used in worship (cf. Numbers 7:84, 88) or newly built structures such as a home (Deut. 20:5), a city wall (Neh. 12:27), or even the Temple itself (1 Kings 8:63). So perhaps a good illustration of what this verse is communicating would be Hannah dedicating her son, Samuel, to the Lord’s service (cf. 1 Sam. 1:21ff).
- From little on our children should be dedicated to the way of God—to the life-long way of righteousness and salvation through faith and obedience in Christ. For us as New Testament believers that would include bringing our children to be born again through the waters of Holy Baptism and instructing them in the words and way of the Lord. As Moses told the Israelites God’s Word was to be their constant companion and the center of conversation in their homes, “Impress [these commandments that I give you] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut. 6:7). Now does that mean that unless every one of our kids becomes a pastor or teacher or a Sunday school leader that somehow we’ve failed as parents? Not at all! Instead it is our duty to start our children off right by seeing to it that they taste how good God is and how sweet and comforting his words are to the soul, that of all the paths that their lives may take—however God has gifted and guides them—the way of salvation is the most important of all.
- The second half of this proverb has also caused much consternation for believers. I’ve heard so many conscientious parents beat themselves up lamenting, “I’m such an awful parent! I thought I brought my child up in the Lord, but now they’ve wandered from him—what did I do wrong!” And on the other side others use this passage as an excuse to stay uninvolved. They say, “I brought my child up, and God promises to bring them back!”—as if this proverb is saying that it’s impossible for a believer to lose their faith, when we’ve got plenty of warnings and examples from Scripture to the contrary.
- While we can be certain that God loves us all equally in Christ and wants both the faithful and the wayward to repent and be saved, we need to realize that this proverb is a command, not a promise. Solomon is commanding parents to bring up their children in God’s way, in the hopes that that good start will stick with them to the very end. And that is what typically happens, but in this sin-cursed world we dare take nothing for granted—especially not God’s grace and promises. On the other hand this passage cannot be used as an excuse for anyone to avoiding uncomfortable spiritual conversations with a wayward son or

daughter, family member or friend. To do so would be to deny the ministerial cause of salvation—that God uses fellow-believers to comfort, correct, and encourage one another with his words of grace and truth whereby he keeps us in his way to life everlasting.

Prayer: Lord God, by your grace you have made me your own and set me on the way to salvation. Continue to send godly parents, family, pastors, teachers, and friends into my life who use your Word to keep me focused and dedicated to you to the very end. Amen.