

Intentional Parenting

Proverbs 22:6

Most people are familiar with the phrase *preventive maintenance*. It means to maintain something (perhaps a car or other piece of equipment) in such a way that potential problems are identified and eliminated before they happen. The idea is to keep things from breaking down. *Reactive maintenance* on the other hand is waiting until a piece of equipment breaks before fixing it.

Most people use both kinds of maintenance with their cars. They use *preventative maintenance* by taking their vehicles in for regular oil changes and tuneups according to the manufacturers recommendations. They use *reactive maintenance* if their cars break down alongside the road and have to be towed to a mechanic.

Even if a person does all the right *preventive maintenance*, there is still the possibility that his car will break down from time to time. On the other hand, good *preventive maintenance* can greatly reduce the frequency and severity of breakdowns. It might be said that preventative or scheduled maintenance is *pro-active*. It finds and fixes little things before they become big problems.

Not only do people use preventative maintenance with their cars but also by having regular dental and medical check-ups. Those who only go in when they can't stand the pain, often find that the needed repairs are major and sometimes life-threatening. Being proactive in every area of life takes time and effort but pays off in the long run.

Another area in which people need to be proactive is parenting. They need to parent in a way that sees potential problems in their children and fixes them before they get out of control.

When a child is born into a home he or she is God's special gift to that family. It is God's desire that the child grow to be a man or woman of God. This does not happen by accident. It happens when parents take a proactive role in their child's moral and ethical training. It is not enough to change diapers, feed, and play with a child. It is not enough to get the child in school and church. It is the parents responsibility to proactively train the child so that he or she becomes part of the solution to society's ills and not part of the problem. Parents who wait to train their children when the challenges of adolescence arrive may find themselves fighting an uphill battle.

Pro-active Parenting is thus the topic of this message. As we look at proactive parenting, I invite you to turn in your Bible to Proverbs 22:6 as we delve into familiar but often neglected truth.

Although there are other verses in Scripture that deal with parents and children, I believe that Proverbs 22:6 is vital. It is actually an *if-then* statement. *If* a parent does such and such, *then* they can expect a certain result.

Proverbs 22:6 states,

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

If parents train their children, *then* they can expect those children to hold onto those values for the rest of their lives. Conversely, if they do not do this directive they may find that the opposite is true. Because this is wisdom literature, it is not an iron clad promise. Wisdom

literature is the way things normally happen. In other words there are parents who have trained their children only to see them walk away from the Lord. Each person is ultimately responsible for his own decisions. But the normal way things happen is, if you really train your children, most likely they will grow up to be those who walk with God. With this in mind, it is vital for parents to be pro-active in their parenting. This is also not to say that parents won't be reactive, because they will need to do that, too. But their focus must be pro-active!

As we look deeply into Proverbs 22:6 we will look at four specific areas. They are:

1. Train up ----- The TASK
2. ... a child ----- The TARGET
3. ... in the way he should go ----- The TYPE OF TRAINING
4. ... even when he is old ... ----- The TRIUMPH

As we look at each area we will seek to understand the various implications involved.

TRAIN UP - The task

Train up means *to dedicate*. It was used in the Old Testament of dedicating a house (Deut 20:5), the temple (2 Chr 7:5) and other things. In relation to children, a parent who "trains up" a child is literally saying, "I am dedicating this child to God." That is why it is a good idea for parents to go through a ceremony in the church where they publicly say, "We are dedicating this child to God." But it can't stop with the dedication ceremony. Parents must show their own dedication by living day to day life what they have committed themselves to do. They must be dedicated to TRAINING their children. They must take time to make it happen.

There are many implications in this idea of TRAINING UP a child:

1. The responsibility starts in the home

One implication in TRAINING involves responsibility. The primary responsibility for training a child lies within the home. Although Proverbs 22:6 does not specify who is to do the training of children, Deuteronomy 6 makes it clear that it is the responsibility of parents. It is not the school's or the church's responsibility to train my children, it is mine as a parent. Church and school may be good *supplements* but they can never be *substitutes*.

When it comes to reading, writing and arithmetic, the school may do the best job training children. When it comes to learning about life, right and wrong, building character, dealing with people, handling life's challenges, problems and successes, the primary place for this to happen is in the home!

As much as I love Sunday School/Childrens Church, it has lulled some parents to sleep. They think that sending their children to Sunday School or Vacation Bible School covers them for the training they need. Wrong! At best Sunday School can only assist what is going on in the home. If nothing is happening at home, Sunday School will be of minimal value. It is important for us to remember that Sunday school is a relatively new phenomenon. It started in the 1800's. Before that, parents took sole responsibility for training their own children.

2. The trainer must be trained

A second implication regarding TRAINING involves the qualification of the trainer. It would seem logical that a person who would train another must have some level of expertise himself. How does a parent get such expertise? They need to look for help! The Bible is replete

with principles of parenting. There are also any number of good books available on how to work with and train children... Parents owe it to their children to have read and studied at least one good Christian book about parenting. Since the responsibility for TRAINING children rests directly upon parents a parent should not say, "I'm just not qualified."

Just as an adult studies hard in his chosen profession, a parent must study hard to learn about the profession of parenting. Someone once said, "Long after a person's career is finished, his children will still be around. He had better be sure he trains them well so they're a blessing and not a heartache."

3. Training is more than telling

A third implication regarding TRAINING is that training is more than telling. Tell them once and presto, perfect child. This just doesn't happen. If telling were training, all our children would be brilliant. It obviously does not work that way. TRAINING takes time. It takes patience and going over the same principles in a myriad of different ways until the child begins to get it. It is one thing for children to understand godly values, it is another for them to adopt those values for themselves.

Have you ever taught a child how to hit a ball. You pitch and they swing the bat. Often they swing either way too early or long after the ball has passed. They swing too high or too low. They hold the bat funny. They stand incorrectly. You can't just tell them how to hit the ball. You have to tell them, show them, let them try it and then do it all again. Success comes through failure. So it is with training children about life and honesty, self-image and humility, fairness and responsibility and all the other things a child needs in order to grow into a godly adult.

This brings us to the next phrase of Proverbs 22:6.

A CHILD - The target

If we say that TRAIN UP is "the task", then A CHILD is "the target." A child is to be the TARGET of our TRAINING.

Here, too, there are several implications.

1. Children don't come trained

One implication regarding "A CHILD" is that children do not come trained. Have you noticed that parents don't need to spend any time training children how to do wrong things. That seems to come quite naturally. It is another confirmation of man's sin nature. Parents must spend their time training children in the right things.

2. Training can never start too early

A second implications involves starting training early. The verse does not say, "Train up an adult or a teenager," it says, "Train up a child..." As one author put it, children are like "Wet Cement". As they get older the wet cement begins to change into hard concrete. If training starts early then what hardens will be good. If there is no training, what hardens may be bad.

3. Training must be individualized

Notice that Proverbs 22:6 states, "*Train up a child.*" This is singular. The implication is that what works well with one child may not work well for another. Did you know that there are different personality types. If you have a very compliant child, you may find certain training quite easy. On the other hand, if you have a strong-willed child, you may have to try several approaches in order to find one that works.

4. Training takes a long time

Have you ever wondered why children don't reach maturity in just a year or two. Wouldn't it be wonderful if they were like birds, born and out of the nest the same year. God could have made it to be that way. Why didn't He? One reason is that we could never train them that fast. Birds are born with instincts built in. Once a parent bird teaches it's young how to fly and hunt, most everything else is taken care of. With humans it is different. We must teach values, morals, appropriate ways of behavior, just to mention a few, and all of these take time, lots of time!

This brings us to the third part of Proverbs 22:6.

IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO - The Type of Training

If TRAIN is the "task" and A CHILD is the "target", then IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO is the "type of training".

In the phrase, *in the way he should go* there are a number of powerful implications. the first is:

1. There are many ways to go

Matthew 7:13,14 confirms that there are many ways to go in life,

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it.

Some parents use the "QUE SERA, SERA" (what will be, will be) method of training their children. In other words they don't really train them at all. They just figure if you put a roof over a kid's head, feed and cloth

him, send him to school etc., things will turn out all right. This is dangerous thinking and yet it is what goes on in many homes today. Parents are either too busy with their own lives, too burned out from their own work or just don't see the need to train their children. The kids basically do what they want.

Some parents say, "I just don't have time to worry about training my children. After all, I'm exhausted when I get home and the youngsters have too much homework anyway. I've earned the right to kick back and relax. My job pretty much wipes me out. I've also got these TV programs I really enjoy... Anyway, the last thing we need as a family is one more night with another thing to do. Besides, no one ever took the time to train me and see, I turned out O.K."

If you feel that way, I have a quote for you which makes a lot of sense, "If you don't have time to help your youngsters find the right way in life, somebody with more time will help them find the wrong way."

A second implication is that:

2. There are several facets involved in *the right way*

In other words, there are a number of different areas that should be included in child training? And it must be said that this must start with the parent practicing what he preaches. If a parent tries to train his or her child and yet neglects the same truths in his own life, the child will get the clear message that connecting actions with beliefs really doesn't matter. Parents must walk their talk.

Here are some of the areas that need to be included in the training of children.

a. Salvation and spiritual disciplines

There are few things more rewarding than leading your own child to Christ. Learn how to share the plan of salvation on your child's level. Tell children about the importance of knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior. Teach them to love and reverence God. Proverbs 1:7 says, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.*" Every parent ought to have the joy of leading his or her own child to Christ. If you love the Lord, live it, and tell your children about Christ, they will want Him, too.

Train your children in spiritual disciplines. Teach them how to pray, study the Bible, serve others, and share their faith. Teach them to give to God's work. Help them develop compassionate hearts.

b. Life qualities

Train your child in life qualities like: HUMILITY, RESPONSIBILITY, INITIATIVE, RESOURCEFULNESS, PATIENCE, ORDERLINESS, DETERMINATION, ENDURANCE, HOSPITALITY, DISCRETION, WISDOM, etc. Base your teaching on Scripture. Do not fail to credit God as the author of these qualities. Don't be like the world who says these qualities are good but refuse to recognize God as their source. 2 Timothy 3:5 talks about this. Be sure to teach your child at his own level. Be sure that you are integrating the qualities into your own life as well... Parents should know that when their children leave home, they will follow their example as much as their advice.

c. How to defend Christianity – apologetics

All Christians need to learn how to defend their faith. One thing that happens to many young people is when they go off to college their professors challenge or belittle their faith with things like evolution. If young people are trained they will be able to stand when their faith is challenged. Some of the topics a young person should learn are:

- Evidence for God's existence
- Evidence for why the Bible is the Word of God
- Evidence for the resurrection
- Evidence for creation rather than evolution
- How to answer the question of why evil, suffering and pain exist
- How Christianity is different from other religions
- Why all roads don't lead to heaven

d. Hot topics of the day

Every generation has various hot topics that Christians need to understand from a biblical viewpoint. Many of those topics are the same in each generation. Here are some of the hot topics of our day that Christians need a biblical view of:

- Abortion
- Capital punishment
- Creation vs evolution
- Using Illicit drugs
- Gambling
- Smoking
- Drunkenness
- Homosexuality
- Euthanasia

e. Life in general

Train your children how to deal with the situations of life. Train them how to deal with those who are unfair. Train them how to handle trials, disappointment, failure, success, praise, pressure, and anger. Teach them how to be courteous, to say "thank you" and "you're welcome." Train them how to avoid being used or hurt by others. Train them on the qualities to look for in a mate.

f. Domestic issues

Train your children in things around the home: how to fix, make and do things. Train them to cook, clean, mow and other tasks. Give them chores to do. Help them be ready to face the world when they leave home.

If you are like me you are probably thinking, all of this training could take years. You're absolutely right, it will! That is why God has given you so much time with your children.

If you are like me you may also be thinking, "How can a parent possibly do all of this?" I have a plan for you that is so simple. Guess where it is found? In the Bible. **Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (NASB) states,**

⁶"These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. ⁷"You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.

Notice the two key elements in these verses: teach and talk; we are to TEACH our children and to TALK to them. Here then is the plan that these two words imply:

TEACHING implies formal instruction. TALKING implies informal instruction. Make FORMAL and INFORMAL instruction part of your family's plan.

Let's start with INFORMAL instruction. Here is how it works. As everyday situations in life arise, talk to your children about them. If Sally is having trouble with other children at school, talk about it. Help her see God's perspective. If Billy thinks a teacher is being unfair, talk

about it. Help him see God's perspective. That is the secret to good training; helping a child get God's perspective on a situation and then to trust Him in it. This INFORMAL instruction goes on day in and day out. It can be done after school, at meals, after meals, at bedtime, or anytime that situations arise. To be aware of what is going on, parents must be in constant communication with their children.

Now let's address FORMAL instruction. This is where a family sets aside an hour or so a week to deal in depth with some area of TRAINING. Perhaps it takes place in the evening after dinner. Perhaps on a weekend. The point is to find a time that is best for your family and make it happen. If we can find time for BASEBALL, VOLLEYBALL, DANCE LESSONS, TV PROGRAMS and other activities, we can find time for family TRAINING.

Come up with your own name for it. FAMILY TIME or FAMILY EVENING. Be creative with your own name. Let Dad or Mom be the leaders. Let the children help. Learn together, play games, do activities, talk, discuss, listen, laugh, have fun, set goals, assign projects...and in general, meet needs by addressing areas that are pertinent to your family's station in life.

If a family took an hour a week and kept that time sacred, we could start a very positive revolution in today's youth.

This brings us to the last part of Proverbs 22:6.

EVEN WHEN HE IS OLD... - The triumph

If TRAIN UP is the "task" and A CHILD is the "target" and IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO is the "type of training", then the phrase, EVEN WHEN HE IS OLD HE WILL NOT DEPART FROM IT is the "triumph".

God says if you train your child in this way, he will not depart from it. When your career and job is long gone, your children will be around and probably your grandchildren. In large part you can have a great impact on their lives. If you pass values and qualities on to your children, they will likely pass them on to their children. What a blessing to grow old and see your children serving God. What a TRIUMPH. I'm not sure that a parent could have a greater blessing than this!

Luke 6:40 reads, *"A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher."*

Conclusion

God has great expectations for parents. He expects them to know and do the truth of Proverbs 22:6.

1. TRAIN UP ----- the task
2. A CHILD ----- the target
3. IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO ----- the type of training
4. EVEN WHEN HE IS OLD...----- the triumph

None of us are perfect parents, but we can strive to be godly parents who train our children. If we DO, God will bless our efforts.

Someone said there are three kinds of parents:

- those who make it happen
- those who watch it happen
- those who wonder what happened

Don't be in the last category, be in the first!