

Train Up A Child
May 9, 2021

Today we start a new sermon series. This is a series about Bible passages that are often misunderstood, mistaught, or mis-applied. There are probably a couple dozen passages at least that could be included in such a series. I will be dealing with seven that I run across most often.

We are celebrating Mothers today. We are showing appreciation for them and all they have done, are doing, and will do for their children.

We are also mourning with some at their loss. Those who have lost a child to due to illness, accident, miscarriage, or violence need our compassion.

One reason a mother may be mourning today is because one of her children is on a path of self-destruction. Her child, and I mean a teen or adult by that term, her child has rejected the wisdom and morality that the mother taught. He or she has rejected a relationship with God. The mother's heart is broken, hurting over the sad state of her child and worried over the eventual outcome of such behavior.

Many Christian parents are angry with God because of the state of their child. They are angry with God because they believed something that was not true. They were taught incorrectly, or adopted for themselves a meaning God did not intend for a specific verse. That verse is in Proverbs, chapter 22.

Proverbs 22:6 (NIV) Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

Many a parent has read this passage for comfort in the context of their child's disobedience, disrespect, defiance of God, and possibly criminal behavior. The parent interprets this verse as a promise from God that if they teach their children about God, about Jesus, take them to church, and teach them to pray, their child will eventually turn back to God.

The problem is that they misunderstand the nature of this verse. They are making it to mean something it does not. They are reading it as a promise from God. And it is NOT a promise from God. God did not intend it to be a promise. That's why it is in the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs does not contain promises. The prophets contain promises. The history books contain promises. The New Testament books of Jesus, Paul, Peter, and John contain promises. But the book of Proverbs is not a book of promises.

Let's see what the book is. The first six verses give us the purpose of this book.

Proverbs 1:1-6 (NLT2) These are the proverbs of Solomon, David's son, king of Israel. Their purpose is to teach people wisdom and discipline, to help them understand the insights of

the wise. Their purpose is to teach people to live disciplined and successful lives, to help them do what is right, just, and fair. These proverbs will give insight to the simple, knowledge and discernment to the young. Let the wise listen to these proverbs and become even wiser. Let those with understanding receive guidance by exploring the meaning in these proverbs and parables, the words of the wise and their riddles.

That is the purpose of the book. Let me give you my summary of what it is about. **The book of Proverbs is a collection of observations, advice, and warnings about how to live your life.**

Solomon wrote this book specifically for teaching his own son. We know this because he addresses his son more than a dozen times in the opening chapters. Here is the first instance.

Proverbs 1:8 (NIV) Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.
(Pr. 3:1-2; 5:1-2; 6:20-22; 7:1-2)

He wrote this book to teach his son how to live wisely. Solomon knew that living wisely usually brings success in life. That success includes a right relationship with God, a happy marriage, financial prosperity, and the respect of the community. These are things every parent wants for his or her child. Solomon had gained such wisdom from God. He learned what attitudes and behaviors lead to success and what attitudes and behaviors lead to failure. And these he recorded for us in the book of Proverbs.

Such books are always popular, often they become best sellers. Currently an actor has such a book on the best seller list. He has been keeping a diary of life lessons for decades and eventually turned them into a book. Steven Covey did the same in 1989 with his book titled, 7 Habits of Highly Successful People. People of every generation want to learn how to succeed in life, in marriage, in business, in parenting. And they seek the advice of successful people.

But not everyone wants to learn such things from others. That is one of the things Solomon learned. There are many people who reject advice. They aren't concerned with learning how anyone else has lived. They only rely on themselves, on their own experiences. They are not interested in learning what others have learned about life.

Solomon observed many such people and the tragic outcomes of their lives. He wanted something better for his son. So he put together this book.

Proverbs is a book of advice. It is based on his observations and life lessons. It is a book of generalities. **Proverbs is a collection of observations about life that are true most of the time. It is a book of predictions, not guarantees.**

You know, the weather forecasters have gotten pretty good at forecasting the weather. They even do a 10 day out forecast which is often pretty close to what happens. And yet I have noticed that when they predict the weather for tomorrow, they are wrong about 5% of the time. The temperature might be as much as 5 degrees colder or warmer than they predicted.

Solomon is giving predictions about the outcomes of certain attitudes and behaviors. He isn't giving guarantees or promises.

So what does Proverbs 22:6 mean?

Solomon is training his son how to live, how to stay out of trouble, how to succeed in relationships, how to avoid the pitfalls of various temptations. His goal is that his son listens to and adopts his advice. Solomon hopes his son will make this advice his way of living. If he adopts such practices and habits he will likely come to experience the benefits such a life usually brings to a person. It will keep him out of trouble and he will prosper. So when he is old, he will not turn from it. **After years of living prudently, and enjoying the success that brings, he or she will not later start living foolishly.** THAT is what Proverbs 22:6 means.

Teach your child the wise way to live. If they listen and live that way, they will stick with it the rest of their lives. That is what Solomon had observed.

Let me give you a personal example of its meaning. The house I grew up in was surrounded by oak trees. My dad let us climb any of the trees and even build a tree house. But he emphasized safety. For example. We could not use anything to help us get up a tree. We could not use a ladder, a board, or someone else to reach the lowest branches. If you could not shimmy up the trunk to the branches, you did not belong in the tree. He taught us never to grab or step on a branch smaller than our wrist.

He taught us the safe way to use a hammer and a hatchet, and other tools. Those safety lessons stuck with me. Even today, I follow my dad's training when it comes to such things. In fact, I usually think safety whatever I am doing, or whatever we are planning here. When picking Vacation Bible School games or youth events, I am always considering safety first. Those lessons became part of me. And I am not likely to abandon them the older I get.

That is what Solomon is saying. Teach a child the right way to live. If they start living like that and see the benefits of doing so, they will likely continue to do so when they are adults and no longer living in your home.

Proverbs 22:6 does not mean that if you parent in any specific way, your child is guaranteed to become a follower of Jesus Christ. It doesn't mean that. It just doesn't.

Some read that into it. But it does not promise such an outcome. I understand that they want a guarantee that if their child rebels against God as a teen or young adult that eventually they will submit to God. But it just does not say that or mean that. That is lifting it out of the context of the rest of the book.

It is NOT saying that if your child rebels against God or a moral life as a teen or young adult that he or she will eventually come around to what you taught them to do.

So, how DO we make sure our children become followers of Jesus Christ? The truth is, there is nothing you can do that will guarantee your children become Christians. There is no set of parenting practices that guarantee such an outcome.

What you can do. What you should do, is:

- 1) Walk humbly with the Lord Jesus, following the leadings of the Holy Spirit.**
- 2) Be a living sacrifice.**
- 3) Make sure you are not being molded by the world, but instead be being transformed by the Holy Spirit into the faith, hope, love, and character of Jesus.**
- 4) Be a wisdom seeker.** Don't rely only on what you know, what you think you know, or what your parents did. Seek parenting advice from others, from books, from articles. Do so prayerfully, allowing the Holy Spirit to sift out the junk advice. If your children are grown, there are still ways to influence their lives. Look for articles about doing so for them and for grandchildren.
- 5) Talk with your children about your relationship to Jesus, why you allow him to be Lord of your life.** Don't just take them to Sunday School and expect or hope they fall in love with Jesus. Tell them how Jesus has changed you.
- 6) Teach them the practical life lessons you have learned.**
- 7) Pray daily for God to be attracting them to himself.** Pray that God will give them to see the outcomes of loving him and the outcomes of rejecting him.

Parenting has never been easy. I think it is harder to day than ever before, if only because there are so many more things we have to teach them, so many more things we have to protect them from. And the enemy and the world want to mold them into ANYTHING but a follower of Jesus.

So, how do we start on a path of wisdom that leads to success? Solomon gives much advice in the book of Proverbs, in no particular order. But he did have a starting place. We read the introduction in verses 1-6. Right after that he gives us the foundation for living a wise life.

Proverbs 1:7 (NIV) The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge...

The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge. Wise living starts with believing in the reality of God, believing you must answer to God for your life. Seek to know God personally, to know and live his will for you. That is the beginning of a wise life. That is the foundation for success in life.

Seek a personal relationship with God. He wants that with you. He wants it so much that Jesus died a terrible death on your behalf.

Believe in and receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord.