

BRINGING UP A CHILD

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

Date: 12-07-2026

Scripture: Proverbs 22:6

Proverbs 22:6

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

Few responsibilities bring us as much joy and as much anxiety as raising children. From the moment a child is born, parents begin asking questions. Am I doing enough? Am I making the right decisions? Will my child grow up to love the Lord? Will they remain faithful when they leave the home? Those questions don't disappear as children grow older. They often become more pressing.

When they're little, we worry about scraped knees and school admissions. When they're older, we worry about the decisions that they will make, the friends they will choose, the values they will embrace, and above all, whether they will continue to walk with Jesus.

That's why Proverbs 22:6 is so precious to many Christian parents. Train up a child in the way that he or she should go and when they are old, they will not depart from it. It's a verse full of responsibility, of wisdom, and hope. But it must be read carefully. It's not a mechanical guarantee that perfect parenting will produce perfect children. Scripture never teaches that. It is a proverb, a statement of God's wonderful wisdom given to us for life. It calls parents to faithful training and reminds us that early spiritual formation leaves deep and lasting marks.

So, let's unpack it, maybe a couple of words at a time.

“TRAIN UP”

The first two words tell us that parenting is intentional. The Hebrew word translated 'train' carries the idea of dedicating or initiating or launching someone into a particular way of life. It was used in dedicating a house or the temple, setting something apart for a purpose.

Parents are not simply raising children; they're actually launching lives. A ship that is launched does not stay at the dock; it is prepared for a journey. In the same way, every child entrusted to our home and our care is being prepared for a journey that will one day take them beyond our reach.

And the question is not whether our children will be influenced. The question is: Who will influence them? Because someone is always training our children. School, friends, social media, entertainment, and culture. The world never stops disciplining our children. That's why Christian parents cannot afford to be passive. Solomon does not merely say, “Teach your children.” Teaching is important, but training is more than teaching.

Teaching fills the mind; training shapes the life. A child may know the Ten Commandments and still grow up dishonest. A child may memorize Bible verses and still become very proud and haughty. Information alone does not produce transformation. Training involves example. It involves repetition. It involves correction. It involves love and the steady shaping of habits and affections.

Children learn far more from what they see than from what they hear. They watch how we speak to our spouse. How we respond to disappointment. How we handle pressure. Whether Christ is truly the center of our lives or merely a Sunday morning activity. Long before children understand theology, they understand authenticity.

Beloved, never underestimate ordinary faithfulness. One bedtime prayer, one Bible story, one conversation as you travel, one act of forgiveness, one meal around the table. Spiritual formation rarely happens in dramatic moments. They happen in the ordinary moments in life that are repeated over and over again over many years. Brick by brick, day after day, until by God's grace, Christian character is quietly built and shaped.

But we must also remember the goal. We're not training our children merely for success, but for godliness. Academic achievement, professional advancement, and financial security, all of them have their place. And we should encourage diligence and the wise use of gifts.

But if our children become successful professionals and yet do not know Christ, we have missed the greater goal. Our greatest joy must always be that we will see them walking with Jesus. It's about the eternal horizon. We're not simply preparing children for university or employment; we're preparing them to know, love, and follow Jesus for all eternity. We're shaping disciples. And disciples are formed one ordinary day at a time.

May I say this – the responsibility belongs to both the father and the mother. Proverbs repeatedly says, "Hear, my son, your father's instruction. And forsake not your mother's teaching." Both voices are needed. Both influences are essential. God never intended one parent to carry the whole responsibility alone.

So fathers, I say this as gently as I can. Don't quietly step back from the spiritual leadership of your home. Don't! God did not give that responsibility to anyone else. Not to the church, not to the Sunday school teacher, or even the youth leader. He gave it first to the home, to you as fathers. The spiritual authority in the home rests with you.

And biblical leadership is not about privilege; it's about responsibility. The head of the home is not the one who is served, but the one who serves first. Goes first, takes responsibility, and sets the spiritual climate of the home.

And when children see their fathers open the scriptures, hear them pray, watch them worship, and see them humbly confess their sins, something powerful is communicated. They learn that following Christ is not merely the mother's faith, but their father's as well. It is a faith by which the family ought to live.

And mothers, never underestimate your own influence either. Countless homes have been held together by a praying mother whose quiet faith shaped her children and generations after that. So, thank God for godly mothers who love, and teach, and pray, and persevere. And these things you must do.

Imagine the strength of a home where father and mother walk together spiritually, where children hear both parents speak of Jesus, see both parents read God's word, hear both parents pray, and watch both parents forgive one another. That is God's beautiful design. Not one carrying the other, but both walking together.

Let me say this. If you're a single parent today, or your spouse does not share your faith, remember this. God's grace is sufficient. He delights to strengthen those who faithfully serve Him. And He often supplies through the family of the church, what is absent in the home.

"TRAIN UP A CHILD"

The Hebrew word that's translated 'child' is very broad in its understanding. It can refer to a young child, an adolescent, or even a young adult.

Joseph in the Bible is called a child at the age of 17. Samuel is called a child while serving in the tabernacle. And that reminds us that parenting is not confined only to the early years. The methods change, but the responsibility continues. When children are toddlers, we hold their hands. When they become teenagers, we spend more time holding them up in prayer. And when they become adults, we no longer direct every decision. But we never stop loving or encouraging or praying for them.

Maybe, you're looking at this verse and saying, "I wish I'd heard this a few years ago." But I say to you: Don't despair. As long as there is breath in your body and life in your child, God is not finished writing that story. You may not be able to change the past, but you can still pray faithfully, encourage consistently, seek and extend forgiveness, and allow God's grace to shape the days that lie ahead.

Sometimes, the greatest influence parents have comes not through perfection, but through repentance. One of the most powerful sentences a parent can say to their children is, "I was wrong. Will you forgive me?" Children, beloved, don't need perfect parents. But they're deeply valued and influenced by authentic parents, by authenticity.

Although Proverbs speaks first to parents, the principle extends to the church as well. Because the church also helps to raise children. Children in worship are never interruptions. They are part of our worship. And together we have the privilege of helping them know Christ. Every Sunday, when our Sunday service is over, I can't wait to hear those two doors banging. And then the pitter-patter of children's feet running through the sanctuary, just coming around – the sound of laughter, their talking.

That's whom God has given us as precious gifts, but precious gifts to nurture and to shape and mold.

"TRAIN UP A CHILD IN THE WAY HE OR SHE SHOULD GO"

I believe this is the heart of the verse. Everything depends on understanding the way. What does it mean?

In Proverbs, the 'way' often means the way of wisdom, of righteousness, and the fear of the Lord. So, we are to train up our child to walk in God's wisdom, to love what God loves, hate what God hates, and delights in God's word. Yet, the Hebrew can also be understood to mean according to their way. In other words, suggesting the child's individual bent or disposition or their personality.

I don't think that these ideas in any way kind of compete with one another. I believe they complement each other very beautifully. Every child, if you put it together, must be led in God's way, in reverence and in getting to know Him.

But every child may need to be led very differently. The destination is the same, but the route may vary. Any parent with more than one child knows this.

We came back after meeting with our children and grandchildren, and many of you asked how they were doing, and how the grandchildren were. One of my stark replies was that every grandchild has a different personality. Each one of them, completely different from the other. Each of them has a bent and disposition that God has uniquely placed in the children.

So what works beautifully with one child may not work with another. God has never mass-produced children. Each bears their uniqueness wonderfully. Just like a gardener does not care for every plant in exactly the same way. Each is cultivated according to its nature. Yet all are cultivated to flourish. And those of you who have green thumbs know that this is possible. Those of you who don't, have seen many dead plants along your life's way.

Faithful parenting is not treating every child identically. It's loving every child wisely. And whatever their personality, their gifts or the temperament, the destination never changes. The destination is always Jesus. Our goal is not simply to raise well-behaved children, but to raise faithful disciples of Jesus.

When we look at external behavior, it can be modified to suit situations. But only Christ transforms the heart. Therefore, our greatest responsibility is not merely to tell our children what to do, but to show them whom to follow.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." The way our children should go is ultimately not following or believing in a philosophy but following and believing in the person of Jesus. That means our homes should be places where children don't simply hear about Jesus but see what it looks like to follow Him.

Not simply hear about Him but see what it means to follow Him. They should see the gospel lived before it is explained. When the message they hear on Sunday matches the life they see from Monday to Saturday, then the gospel begins to take root. Not only in their minds but in their hearts as well.

TRAIN UP A CHILD IN THE WAY THAT HE SHOULD GO. AND WHEN HE IS OLD...

Now it seems like Solomin lifts our eyes from the present to the future. When they are old... He does not say when they become a teenager, or when they graduate, or when they get married. He says: when they are old. When he is old, when she is old. In other words, he's saying – take the long view.

Parents can become discouraged because they don't see immediate results. You remind your child again and again to tell the truth, say thank you, come to church, read scripture and pray. Then you wonder: Is any of this making any difference? Beloved, let me say this to you as encouragement. Much of parenting is invisible.

The result of good parenting is often invisible. Farmers don't dig up seed every week to see if the plant is growing. They trust what is happening beneath the surface. In the same way, God often does His deepest work where parents cannot yet see it. In fact, Galatians 6 reminds us: "Let us not grow weary of doing good." Don't get weary of doing what you're doing for your children. Maybe, you say, "What's the use? Is there any use at all?"

It says, "Don't grow weary, for in due season, we shall reap." When will we reap? If we don't give up. Our goal is not simply to raise well-behaved children, but children whose hearts are being shaped to know, to love, and to follow Jesus Christ.

... AND THEY WILL NOT DEPART FROM IT

This is perhaps the most challenging phrase. Does Solomin mean that if parents do everything correctly, their children will never wander from God? I don't believe that's what he means, and neither does the rest of scripture.

Remember,

- Samuel was a godly person, and yet his sons did not walk in the way of the Lord.
- David was a man after God's own heart, yet Absalom rebelled.
- In the parable of the prodigal son, the father loved his son, yet the son chose to leave.

The Bible holds two truths together. The parents are responsible for faithful training, and children are responsible for their own response. No parent can believe, repent, or follow Christ on behalf of another person. Salvation is the work of God's grace.

So, what is Solomon saying here? He is describing the ordinary pattern of wisdom. Children who are fully trained in the wisdom of God generally carry that training with them throughout their lives. The impressions made in childhood are remarkable deep, and truth has a way of remaining lodged in the heart.

Even when people wander, they often cannot escape what they once knew, because the word of God follows them. Conscience speaks, the Holy Spirit reminds, and the prayers of parents pursue, and that gives us hope. Many who wandered far from the Lord can still remember verses they learned as children, hymns they sang, schoolteachers who loved them, and prayers that were offered by parents.

Before we came here to start CAP, I was pastoring a church in the United States. One day, a man walked into church. He looked like he'd never been in church before. And his story was remarkable. He had been an alcoholic for over 25 years. The previous week, while driving under the influence, he'd gone off the road, hit a tree and landed in hospital. Lying in that hospital bed, he vowed that he was going back to church, that he had had enough of this life. The moment he got out, that Sunday, he came to church.

And we watched him grow. He was like a sponge. Everything that was spoke and taught, he just absorbed. He grew wonderfully as a disciple of Jesus. In fact, by the end of our time there, he was the Sunday school superintendent. Many times, when I sat with him, he would say, "My parents brought me up in the church, and so I knew the way home."

"But" he said, "my son doesn't. All the years that I've been an alcoholic; he has been pulled over by the police for every juvenile problem that there was. My son is 17 now; when he's 18 and becomes an adult, there's no other place for him but prison because of the life that he's living. I knew the way back home; my son doesn't." Weeping, tears rolling down his cheeks.

Sometimes, the seed may lie dormant for years. But by God's grace, it can spring to life as it did in Stan's life. And perhaps, some of you here are hearing this with aching hearts. Maybe your son no longer comes to church, or your daughter who once professed the faith, now seems indifferent. And you wonder where you failed. But please, don't carry a burden that God has not placed on you. Were you perfect? No, none of us are.

But every child must personally respond to God's grace. If your child has wandered, don't stop praying. Don't stop loving. Don't stop hoping. Remember the father of the prodigal son. Don't wait with despair but wait with hope. The God who pursued us, beloved, is eminently capable of pursuing our children. The God who found us is able to find them. The God who changed our hearts is a God who can change theirs.

Don't ever underestimate the power of the grace of God or the work of the Holy Spirit, or the word that you planted in a child's heart, or the prayers that you pray day in and day out – the prayers of a

believing parent. Our influence has limits, but God's grace does not. Our responsibility is faithfulness, and the results belong to Him.

IN CLOSING:

Parenting was never meant to be an exercise in perfection. It is an exercise in faithfulness. Every parent can name things they wish they had done differently. But thank God our hope does not rest in perfect parenting. Our hope rests in a perfect Savior. And the good news of the gospel is not that God gives perfect parents perfect children. the good news is that God shows extraordinary grace to imperfect parents and imperfect children.

Our confidence must and never should be in ourselves. it must and should always be in Him. That's why Moses told Israel in Deuteronomy 6, "Weave God into the ordinary rhythms of life." Bring God in when you're sitting at home, walking, you're lying down and you're rising up. Faith was never meant to be confined to one hour on Sunday. It belongs at the breakfast table, on the drive on the way to school, in celebrations, in disappointments, in laughter, and even in tears. Children learn that God is real when they see that He is part of our ordinary life.

The greatest curriculum your children will ever study is your life. They may forget some advice, but they will never forget a home where Christ was loved, where imperfect parents repented, forgave, prayed, and trusted the Lord. And this morning, if you carry the burden of a son or a daughter or a grandson or granddaughter who is not walking with the Lord, don't stop praying. Don't stop loving. Don't stop believing.

The God who heard Monica's prayers for Augustine is the same God we worship today. If you know her story, Monica prayed faithfully for her son for many years as he wandered far from God. But in time, God answered those persistent prayers. And Augustine not only came to faith in Christ but became one of the greatest Christian teachers in history. Never underestimate what God can do through the faithful prayers of a praying parent. Never conclude that because God has not answered yet that He will never answer. Our God delights in bringing prodigals home.

So this responsibility rests with all of us – parents, the whole church, every smile given to a child, every Sunday school lesson taught, every conversation with a teenager, every prayer for the next generation, and every example set is part of God's work of shaping lives. The children of the church, of CAP, are not somebody else's responsibility. They are our responsibility. Ours, yours and mine. And together we must raise a generation that loves Jesus and begins to be disciples of Jesus. Our greatest joy will one day be to see our sons and daughters, our grandchildren, and the young people of this church still walking with Jesus.

It is no wonder then, that the apostle John wrote in 3 John 1:4, "I have no greater joy that to hear that my children are walking in the truth." I pray that that would be our testimony and joy as well for each one of us.

So, let's train up our children. Let's love them deeply. Let's point them constantly to Jesus, not only through words we speak, but by the way we act. And then let us entrust them to the one who loves them even much more than we can ever hope to do. Beloved, our greatest confidence has never been in our ability to hold on to our children. Our greatest confidence is in our heavenly Father's ability to hold on to them.

Amen.
