

The Greatest Parental Challenge: “Train Up A Child”

A verse of Scripture every Christian parent claims is Proverbs 22:6, which says, *“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”* The desire of every parent I know is that our children will grow up and do right. This is an all-consuming task in those formative years. Knowing that parents are reading this article encourages me to say something that will help you claim this principle of Proverbs 22:6.

1. Teach the child that salvation is of the Lord.

It is important that a child understands, *“...Salvation is of the LORD”* (Jonah 2:9). Keep ever before them the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Gospel has always been -- and shall ever be -- the way, means and only plan of salvation. *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth...”* (Romans 1:16). Remind the child that salvation is all of grace, not of works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8,9).

Understanding salvation by the grace of God frees up the youth from faith wavering and doubts when they know that the emphasis of salvation is not based on what they did, but instead on what Christ alone did for us. Salvation is based on God’s acceptance of us through the love, merit and works of Jesus Christ.

2. Remind the child regularly that he or she is no accident.

Life becomes immersed in purpose when we believe that we are here by Divine design. The Bible teaches us: *“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love”* (Ephesians 1:4). A child is more likely not to stray and if they do, they will be more likely to return, if they know God has a purpose for their life. Remind them that they are no accident or product of an evolutionary process. Therefore teach them diligently the biblical account of creation. Inculcate the importance of our being made in the image of God and we are accountable to live up to His image.

3. Teach the child the value of a day’s work.

God said, *“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground...”* (Genesis 3:19). The world constantly teaches the child to take the short cut, don’t work hard or get somebody else to do your work for you. Yet the Bible teaches the contrary: *“...Do your own business, and to work with your own hands...”* (I Thessalonians 4:11). *“...This we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat”* (II Thessalonians 3:10). This will help make them a better Christian and a better citizen.

4. Follow the God-given desire of his or her heart.

Scholarship tells us, *“Train up a child in the way he should go...”* (Proverbs 22:6a) is saying there is a natural bent or inclination in every child. This is a longing or desire that God places within a child’s heart. It is the way he or she should go. As we parents discover that God-given propensity, we should go with it and encourage a child to go with God in His will for their life.

Let me give you an example. A father who is 6’2”, 225 lb. of solid muscle and played college football for A & M has a son who at fourteen years of age has the potential of growing up to be 5’4” and 145 lb., when full grown. This kid loves to read and exercises himself in prayer on a regular everyday experience. His play time often consists of sitting his brothers, sisters and neighbor kids down and then he takes the Bible and preaches to them. This is fun to him! He rarely watches football, but often downloads preaching on his iPod. Many a father has coerced a son to do “his” thing rather than God’s plan. If the boy is not interested in playing on the High School football team, don’t make him. Get him the books he desires to read and pray about sending him to a wonderful Bible college and allow him to follow his bent.

It should be noted I mentioned “God-given” desire, not the desires of a child in rebellion against God. It is important to not cater to a child whose only desire is to please himself. This is when parenting becomes a little tough. When a child goes there spiritually speaking, he has entered a battle zone. At that time we parents must “ride herd” on the kid -- which is not going to be popular -- until they get their heart right with God. Stay firm and stay committed to the command of Ephesians 6:4, *“...Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”*

5. Leave a legacy for your kids.

The most Christ-like man I ever knew was my father, Dr. Julian Jackson Pope. He was content to serve God “behind the lines.” Two truths my father placed in my heart while growing up were: 1) Obedience to the unenforceable. This simply means do right in the dark, when no one is watching but God. Character is never measured by our public performance. Anybody can fake it. *“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence...”* (Philippians 2:12), and 2) Find a need and fill it. Dad used to claim the prayer of David Brainerd who prayed, “Lord, help me not to out-live my usefulness.” And he did not; on the day Dad passed into glory he had a paid-for ticket to Bombay (now named Mumbai), India in his desk drawer. He was planning on doing mission work; he died with his proverbial boots on!

There is no limitation to how far someone will go if they don’t care who gets the credit. Dad lived with an insatiable desire to get the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth in every nook, cranny, lane, highway and hedge. He did not care who got the credit. Is it any wonder that a man whom few people in our concentric circles of fellowship knew little if anything about is now known more after death? In the last fifteen years, the ministry that Dad started called

BEAMS (which is an acrostic for: Bible Education And Missionary Service) has sent out over one million Bibles to the uttermost parts of the earth. I miss him every day. He was more than a dad; he was the friend of a lifetime. God used him to bring me into this world, but even better, this is the man who introduced me to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and made sure I had the second birth. *"The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage"* (Psalm 16:6).

As you whom I pastor have often heard me say, "More is caught than taught." No matter how much time transpires since the passing of my father, no matter what I do or where I go in this world, Dad's legacy follows me and shall until I die. I am challenged by his example to the same for his grandkids, my kids. This is more valuable than monetary gain or worldly popularity. *"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold"* (Proverbs 22:1).

-Pastor Pope-

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