

Train up a Child
Proverbs 22:6, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:1-7, 11:18-21

Friends, every time I hear that song “Cat’s in the Cradle” which the band played as our opener this morning, it makes me wonder what my daughter is really learning from me as she grows up under my care.

As I go about my day to day activities, my morning routine, the drive to school, the time I spend at my work, the kind of work I do, the way in which I relate to my wife, my friends, what I do for hobbies, how I handle money, keep the house, what I eat, if I drink or not, what I watch on TV, how much time I spend on the computer, and of course all of the interaction and time that I spend with her...

As this has passed by over the last sixteen years... what has my daughter really learned from me, and how has that shaped who she is becoming?

Now for those of you who have teenagers, or remember going through that time of having teenagers, or maybe you are

dreading that time when your kids will be teenagers - you may think that your kids have learned nothing from you...

Because on the surface it seems that the very last thing they want is to spend more time with you or to be like you – in fact it might seem they go out of their way to be as different from you as possible.

I remember not too long ago my daughter did not want to have to listen to any more of my 80’s hair metal music on the drive to school. So she turned on the radio instead and picked some alternative rock radio station. The music was pretty good and I happened to comment – *“hey this isn’t bad, I kind of like this song...”* Bam – a different radio station was selected instantly!

But it’s not all that bad friends – for as much as our teens would rather *“die a thousand dramatic deaths”* than share our taste in music and fashion, when it comes to passing on faith the studies and the statistics show that parents are actually

the greatest influence on what their children believe and how they will live later on in life.

Back in 1990 the Search Institute conducted a study among Jr. & Sr. High protestant youth to see who or what had the most significant religious influence on them, and the top three influencers were... mother, father and pastor.

70 – 87% of these students said their mother, 50-65% said their father, and 49-60% said their pastor... after that the next most significant influences were Grandparents, youth group, Sunday school, the Bible, friends, Sunday school teacher, and Christian Camp... all ranging between 20-35%

So, what this shows us friends – is that if we study and observe the world around us, we will see there are patterns of how things normally occur – or norms.

So then this study is a confirmation of the wisdom we find in Proverbs 22:6 where it says *“Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.”*

And that’s what we see happening here - parents and church members have trained children in the faith and it has had a significant influence on how they grew up.

Now, we must remember friends - this is Proverbs, it is wisdom literature not Law, so this is not a hard and fast rule that children will always grow up the way you raised them and never change.

Biblical wisdom is all about the normative way that things work in God’s creation, how things usually go.

So what Proverbs 22:6 is actually saying to us, is that childhood is normally the best time to train, teach, and shape a person in such a way that it will have a significant impact on the rest of their life.

And in the spirit of how wisdom is gained from observing and learning from God’s creation, when Proverbs 22:6 talks about the “the way” in which a child should go, it is telling us that we

need to observe our children to see how God has made them and how that can instruct us in parenting them.

And as I was reflecting upon this insight, sitting at my desk, I happened to glance out of my office and observe a group of toddlers from the Play with Me program and I noticed they were all little girls. And their teacher told me this is her easiest class, they are so well behaved and they all play nice together and they listen well and so on...

And in comparison I reflected upon the time I came up the stairs into the foyer and observed this teacher taking a group of mostly boys over to the washroom.

Usually she has to scold them for not walking quietly and staying in the line - but this time she wisely harnessed all that exuberant boyish energy and had all of them focused on dancing Gangnam style, on the way to the washroom.

So just by observing the different natures of children as boys and girls we can quickly determine the way in which they should go, and do what we need to do to train them up in it.

And friends, there are some very smart people who have taken the time to observe children... to observe childhood and its various ages and stages, and they have lots of good and wise information to give us and they have written down many helpful insights on how we can parent our children, and raise them in the way in which they should go.

And if I can recommend one of those resources to you that I've found helpful I would say check out "[Home Grown: A Handbook for Christian Parenting](#)" from Faith Alive Resources. It has 111 real life questions and answers that can help you observe your child and train them up in the way they should go.

And there's other helpful material out there as well by Focus on the Family, Dr. John Trent and Dr. Gary Smalley and other Christians writers.

You can even benefit from parenting material that's not written by Christians, because it's still wisdom. You see, people don't necessarily have to believe in God or follow Jesus Christ in order to observe His creation and gain insights wisdom about parenting from it.

However – we do need to be discerning with this material, not every book on parenting out there is going to help you build with gold, silver and precious stones... some of it is wood, hay and straw...

Friends that's because observing the creation can provide insight and wisdom, but it won't reveal the whole picture to us.

If Adam had never failed the test of the Covenant of Creation, then the wisdom that we could gain from observing and working with God's creation would be sufficient for us to know about God and what He requires of us in response as faithful covenant partners.

But, since Adam and Eve rebelled... the creation is now under the curse of Sin which warps and twists things and prevents us from correctly knowing and understanding God, and how we should respond to Him.

In fact Sin warps and twists our desire to respond to God in such a way, that right from birth, we are all born with the orientation to ignore Him and pursue our own path in this world.

But you won't gain this insight by studying the world friends – this is only revealed to us through the story of the scripture, as we see God's Covenant restoration project progresses through successive administrations and this ultimately this reveals the true nature of sin and how it affects all of us and how God has dealt with it through Jesus Christ.

Not everybody has this Covenant context and biblical worldview in mind when they study children and parenting and it skews the insights and the wisdom they gain from their observations.

hus we, as Covenant Parents, need to be discerning and sift and filter and re-form their advice and tips if we intend to use them to train a child up in the way they should go. Does that make sense?

And if you are ever wondering about something you are reading – please know that you can always ask me to weigh in on it, to help you with that discerning process – that’s what I’m here for.

So – *train up a child in the way they should go* – as I said this is wisdom literature, not Law...

But there is another aspect to Proverbs 22:6 about training a child “in the way” they should go and that has to do with passing on the way of the Covenant.

And in Deuteronomy 6:7 God has specifically instructed His Covenant people to “*impress [His commands] upon their children.*”

So the deepest sense of wisdom Proverbs 22:6 not only encourages us to learn by observing and study of the creation, but it pushes us to observe and study God’s specific commands in order that we may truly know “*the way*” in which we should train a child.

The Apostle Paul echoes this sentiment when he writes to Timothy “*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*” (2 Tim 3:14-15)

Now we need to understand that the scriptures that Paul is speaking about here are the Old Testament writings – not the New Testament gospels and writings.

But, now that we know the story of the Covenants this should come as no surprise to us that we can prepare children for salvation in Jesus Christ by teaching them the Covenant

stories, right from the time they are little – so that they grow up to expect the Christ of the Covenants.

And they will recognize Him, and put their faith in Him, as we introduce them to Him from the stories of the New Testament.

Now I know that many parents, even some would say they are Christian parents, have decided that they will give their children some exposure to religion, to church, to the bible – but basically they are going to let their children make up their own mind about religion and Jesus and faith.

And this seems like wise parenting, since on one hand it's true that no one can force you to have saving faith in Jesus Christ, only the Holy Spirit can produce that faith in our hearts.

But friends, God intention in the Covenant relationship that we have with Him, is that the Holy Spirit will work through, and with, and even in spite of our parenting efforts to help

produce that faith in our children – that's the normative way that He wants it to happen.

And without Covenant Parents telling their children the Covenant stories, without Covenant Parents talking about God's laws and how Jesus fulfills them when they sit at home and when they walk along the road with their children...

Without Covenant parents teaching their children to pray when they lie down and how to go to worship when they get up.

Without Covenant parents teaching children how following Christ ought to determine what you do with your hands, by and how you train yourself to think...

Without Covenant parents dedicating their home and family life to God so that all who come in and go out of that home know who is Lord of the family...

Without Covenant parents doing all this friends, children are missing out on the very framework through which the Holy Spirit normatively works to produce faith in the Christ of the Covenants.

How are they supposed to respond to what God has done when, as Deuteronomy 11:2 says, *“your children were not the ones who saw and experienced the discipline of the LORD your God”*

It’s up to the generation who has experienced God to tell, and teach the next generation about what God has done so that they too might see and experience God’s work in their lives and respond in faith and love.

So while it might sound wise to *“secular humanistic ears”* to say that we’ll leave our children to decide for themselves about religion and faith in Jesus, in light of what God has commanded for His covenant people in scripture – it is actually rather foolish, and downright disobedient.

So as those who have been included in the covenant obedience of Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives...

And as the Holy Spirit has been transforming us to become more and more like Jesus Christ so that we desire and are enabled to live out of that obedience...

I know we want to be faithful Covenant parents... who obey the commands that we’ve read in the scriptures this morning, so let’s take a closer at them, to see what God wants to say to us and how we can respond to that.

So, looking at Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:18-21 and right away we notice that these two passages are almost identical – almost word for word... which means that whatever is being said here is so very important that it bears repeating.

And that’s exactly what Moses is doing throughout the whole book of Deuteronomy – which means “a repetition of the law.” He is repeating of all God’s covenant commands and

reminding Israel that they must obey them in order to be faithful Covenant partners in the Promised Land.

He's just like a parent who is sending their kid off on their first day of school, or college, or work or on some trip, repeating all the advice and warnings and encouragement to prepare them for what lies ahead.

So when Moses says *"These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts"* from 6:6 and *"Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds"* from 11:18, the commands and words that he is referring to are the Ten Commandments.

Because Moses has just reiterated the Ten Commandments in chapter 5, and then in chapter 10 he describes how God had to give him a second pair of stone tablets with the Ten Words written on them – so the emphasis is on putting here is on having the Ten Commandments in your heart and in your head – so at the very center of who you are as a person.

And then we are commanded to teach them and impress them upon our children, by talking about them as we sit at home, when we walk along the road, when we lie down and when we get up. And we are to write them on the doorframes of our houses and our gates.

Now the question for us, as followers of Jesus, is how do we obey this command to teach the Ten Commandments to our children?

We know it has not been abolished, but fulfilled – as our Lord said in Matt 5:17 - so it is still in effect, but what form of obedience ought it to take in our lives?

Do we slavishly make our children sit down each day and simply read the Ten Commandments to them, take them for a walk along the road and we read the Ten Commandments to them, make sure that we read them for a bed-time story and as the first thing they hear in the morning when they wake up, and be sure to write them out with a sharpie on the overhead lintel of our front door... and what if we don't have a gate???

Friends –this command wasn’t intended to be obeyed in this manner when it was first given and certainly not in this manner now that it has been fulfilled in Christ.

However since we know that this command brings forward, and further articulates God’s creational intentions that parents would pass on the Covenant relationship to their children - we can establish that this is the norm.

Our obedience to this norm – both then and now – takes place in the following form: We are to use all the opportunities that raising children provides, to teach them how to respond to God’s Covenant work in their lives.

And there is no better way to start introducing our children to what our covenant relationship with God is all about than the Ten Commandments.

But... ***and this is important friends***, we must teach the Ten Words for what they truly are, they are not a moral code to follow, they are not a set of ten rules to keep, they summarize

our covenant relationship with God – that is how we must pass them on.

So let me offer the following wise tricks and tips that I found from a mom who takes her covenant parenting role seriously.

To help her kids learn what it means to “tie these words as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads” she has developed hand symbols using each of our ten fingers to help kids memorize the Ten Commandments “in their heads”

So here we go - you are all going to do this with me... ready? Hold up 1 finger. This means that God comes first. So the first commandment is “You shall have no other gods before Me.”

Hold up 2 fingers. Two gods is too many gods! If you have two gods, one of them must be an idol. So the second commandment is “Do not worship idols.”

Hold up 3 fingers. It looks like a “W.” W is for “Watch your words.” God’s name is holy, and we should only use it when

we are talking to Him, or about Him. Never in a bad or silly way. So the third commandment is “Do not misuse the Lord’s name.”

Hold up 4 fingers. What is the thumb doing? He’s resting! So the fourth commandment, to “Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.”

Now hold up your thumb and you have 5 fingers It looks like I’m making a promise. So the fifth commandment is “Honor your parents.”

Hold up 6 fingers. It looks like the finger is shooting the hand. So the sixth commandment is, “Do not murder.”

Hold 7 fingers. The fingers look like a man and a woman getting married. When people get married, they make promises. So the 7th commandment is, “Do not commit adultery.”

Hold up 8 fingers. It looks like bars to a jail cell. So the 8th commandment is, “Do not steal.”

Hold up 9 fingers. It looks like the thumb is telling lies about the fingers on the other hand. So the ninth commandment is, “Do not bear false witness.”

Hold up 10 fingers and wiggle them. It looks like I’m coveting. That means you are saying, “Give me that! Give me this!” So the 10th commandment is, “Do not covet.”

So – you do that a few times to get the hang of it and God’s words get tied to your hands as symbols and fixed in your brain.

Now to make sure we are not inadvertently teaching these as just rules, or moral codes it might help to ask our kids if they like having hands... and if they like what they can do with their hands... or if they like being able to think and imagine with their brain?

Obviously the answer is yes – so then we can explain to our kids that these are ten ways we can use our hands and heads to say thank-you to God for giving us hands and heads to play and imagine, and show others that we love God.

Now, once you’ve taught this to your pre-schooler you’re not finished.

It’s pretty obvious that “do not murder” and “do not commit adultery” encompass far more than just taking someone’s life or wife.

So we need to keep working at explaining and teaching all this to our children as they grow up and get older – perhaps you need to rap the Ten Commandments to you teens to help them go a bit more in-depth ;)

Or maybe just threaten that you will do this publically, and post it to their face-book page for all their friends to see, unless they start attending youth group regularly and pay attention to the bible studies...

You see friends; the good news is that we’re all in this task together.

We can’t do the work of parenting your kids for you, but ministers, grandparents, church members, Christian school teachers, youth groups, youth leaders, summer camps, and Christian musicians... we are all here to reinforce what you’ve been doing.

And God willing... one day, after speaking with your son or daughter, you’ll hang up the phone and it will occur to you... that they've grown up just like me, my kids are just like me.

You’ve trained them up in the way they should go – and now they will not depart from it.

Friends may the Holy Spirit work in us and through us to help this become a reality in our church community – Amen!

