

Train Up a Child – Proverbs 22:6

James Baldwin, a prominent African American civil rights activist and author once said, “Children have never been good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them.”

Most of you are shaking your head in agreement with Baldwin’s assessment. Why? Because you’ve either experienced it with your own children or in the actions of someone else’s child. This morning, we have set aside a special time to dedicate Miss Joanna to God. The biggest challenges which lie ahead are the ones Jacob and Cayleigh will face, but as long as these young parents remain focused on their relationship with Jesus, then they can raise Joanna with confidence knowing that they have done their best.

This thought brings me back to one of the verses quoted during this morning’s dedication. **Proverbs 22:6** is the most recognized Scripture in terms of raising children in a Godly manner. *“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”* This verse often serves as an encouragement for parents as it is generally true that children raised in God-centered homes are more likely to love and praise God as they become adults themselves. But does this verse guarantee children raised in Godly environments will eventually become followers of Jesus? The short answer to this is “no” because proverbs are not promises (guarantees) as much as they are points of advice on how to live in a fallen and sinful world. Proverbs are to be viewed as the best method for accomplishing a desired outcome.

This verse has trapped many a parent into thinking that raising their children right, even if they stray, they will return to right living at some point. However, this verse does not guarantee a person will always return to God. What it’s really saying to us is that if we make ever effort to teach our children about Jesus and let them see how a relationship with Him can be, the Spirit of God will work in their hearts and build a personality in them that will desire to follow God. Understand this... even in the best circumstances, children will sometimes break our hearts, they will sometimes disappoint us, they will sometimes rebel. Consider the actions of Adam and Eve. They had the perfect parent (God) and lived in the perfect place (The Garden), yet they made bad choices and brought the curse of death that people still face today. Unless, of course, we make the decision to repent from our bad choices, ask for forgiveness for those bad choices, and choose Jesus as our redeemer, as our rescuer.

God’s Word is packed full of verses about the teaching, training and discipline of children! Throughout Scripture we see, over and over, His directives to raise kids who are wise, obedient, and honorable. As I thought about this, I was drawn to the word “train.” God gave Solomon incredible wisdom and trained him to be a great leader. In doing so, He imparted His advice, from a fatherly perspective into those training sessions. The Bible informs us that an authentic relationship with Jesus means God adopts us as children into His family forever. **John 1:12** reminds us of this when speaking about Jesus, the Word that became flesh. *“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”*

What does it mean to “train up” a child. I look around the room and I see some new Christians. Guess what? They do not yet know how to be a Christian. They are just now learning to crawl. I

want you to see Proverbs 22:6 as a command from God, not just to parents concerning their own children, but to those of us who are already walking and running in our faith. Church family, we have a responsibility to “train up” all our children. Those who carry this title because of their place and age in life, but also those who carry this title because of their place and age in their Christian life. If you are a babe in the faith, do not be offended, but you need to be trained in the disciplines of true Christianity. Remember the words of Paul in **2 Corinthians 5:17** which says, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”*

The words commonly associated with ‘Train up’ are thought to mean Bible reading and study, regularly attending Sunday School or small groups and going to church, memorizing Scripture, praying, worshipping, giving, and serving. While these are excellent practices to include in your daily life, these things are not things which come naturally to most people. We must be trained by someone. God’s intent with Proverbs 22:6 is two-fold. First, to encourage His children to raise their children in a righteous manner. And second, to see Him as your Heavenly Father, who through the work of His Son Jesus, and through the leading and guiding of His Spirit, stands as the parent who is training you. How does this work? Go back to the words of James Baldwin. We are often better imitators than we are listeners.

We should observe how God loves others and then make sure we model that love in our lives. Jesus reminds us, *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

How do we learn to pray? First, we study the way Jesus prayed and taught the disciples to pray. Then, we observe those around us who are prayer warriors. Child of God... if you desire to become a more frequent and better person of prayer, you need to be trained.

How do you learn what the Bible truly teaches? It helps, but it is not just by showing up to church service on Sunday mornings. Attend a small group, i.e., Sunday School class, home groups, men’s ministry, women’s ministry, youth meetings, children’s meetings. Get involved with Christian people who will help you learn to study and apply the truths found in God’s Word.

Thinking along those same lines...every Christian has been gifted with special talents and gifts God intends to be used for building His Kingdom. How do you discover yours and learn how to use them? Surround yourself with Christians who are wise in their walk and observe how they use their gifts and talents for the Kingdom.

These are just a few of the things I am speaking of this morning. It is by no means an exhaustive list. I just hope you leave today recognizing the value in being “trained up.” I hope you leave today recognizing the value of being involved in every aspect of church. After all, because of our trust in Jesus Christ, we are God’s children, and that makes us family.