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DO YOU
MIND
IF YOUR
KIDS
DON'T?

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Chapter Two

Training: Will It Always Work?

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” What a helpful promise we find in Proverbs 22:6! Or is it? Several years ago I remember reading an article from a man I had once met. I had known him and his family, although not well. I did know that his children were grown, though I did not know where they were or how they were doing. Perhaps I should say I did not know how they were doing before I read his article. He did not say anything about his own family or his children. He simply dealt with this wonderful verse.

Proverbs 22:6 was not a promise, his article intoned. Well, at least, it was not a promise in the traditional sense. It was only a promise in a “general” sense. That is, the arti-

cle said, Proverbs 22:6 does not teach us that if one trains up his child in the way he should go, that when he is old he will not depart from it. It is just a promise that says, generally speaking, if we train 'em right, they will turn out right! Quite frankly, the article did not make sense to me. In fact, the only way that it could have been logical would best be described in a statement I made to Mary.

"I didn't know that they were having trouble with their grown children," I commented, speaking of this dear brother and what he was saying about Proverbs 22. It just seemed to me that since this brother had experienced difficulty with his grown children, he did not believe that Proverbs 22:6 means what it says. Some time later, Mary and I found out that his offspring had indeed broken his heart.

This brother is not alone in his interpretation of Proverbs 22:6. You won't have to read very much or listen very carefully before you hear someone say that this verse does not mean that if one trains up a child correctly, the youngster will turn out all right. In other words, there are good people who believe sincerely that Proverbs 22:6 doesn't mean what it seems to say.

WHAT ABOUT PARENTS WITH BROKEN HEARTS?

What about people who love the Lord and have for years? They have been in church all of their adult lives. They have a grown son or daughter; and, as a child, he went to church regularly with his parents. These parents believe the Bible, and they will tell you that they taught their child the Scriptures. Yet their son or daughter is

grown now, gone from home, and far from the faith he had learned from his parents. If Proverbs 22:6 means that when parents train their children correctly, the youngsters will turn out right, and if sons and daughters do not turn out right, does this not mean that the parents failed? Wouldn't it be unkind or perhaps cruel to force every brokenhearted parent of a wayward child to look once again at Proverbs 22:6? Wouldn't it be insensitive for me or anyone else to tell a parent who is already grieving that according to Proverbs 22:6, the fault for the grief is his?

There are two things which I believe are important for us to consider.

INFLECTING PAIN

First, I have no desire to add pain to your life if one or more of your grown children disappoints you. As an evangelist, I have met my share of grieving parents. The hurt was caused by a child or children who had left home and had rejected all of the Bible truth that had been taught. I can certainly understand the pain that situation would bring.

Mary and I know several young people in whose lives we have invested much. While they are not in our family through natural birth, one could say we are all in the family of God through the new birth. So, we have sons and daughters in the faith that are not doing well as I write this. And, I can tell you that while we are not blood kin, the fact that these young people are not serving the Lord is very painful!

I am sure you would understand that this is heart-breaking. Recently, I preached in a revival campaign on the

truth of Proverbs 22:6. A couple of weeks after the meeting, I received a letter from a lady who had attended the service in which I had preached from Proverbs 22. She was brokenhearted and it was obvious. She had a child who was grown and far away from the Lord. She was adamant that she had raised her children properly. Therefore, she wrote, the Bible does not teach that the right kind of training will produce the right kind of people. The letter-writer did not say what had gone wrong with her children, but she wanted me to know that she was not responsible for it. Further, she wanted me to know that my preaching on Proverbs 22:6 had hurt her deeply and that any recollection of my message on her part brought tears!

I disagreed with that dear lady about many things that she had said. But if we could set aside our disagreements for a few moments, it would certainly be true that I had no desire or intention of hurting her. In fact, I had said several things in the message that evening for the express purpose of trying to keep the kind of people she represented from unnecessary hurt or pain. Looking at Proverbs 22:6 that night and looking at the verse with you right now is not for the purpose of making you feel uncomfortable. Having said that, facing the consequences of incorrect parenting whether the problem is mine, yours or our descendants, may not be pleasant, but it could be helpful.

TO WHOM WAS GOD SPEAKING?

It is time for us to stop and ask the question, "To whom is God speaking in this verse?" When the Lord says, "*Train up a child...*" would He be speaking primarily to young

couples with young children or perhaps yet unborn children? Or would the Lord be speaking to grandparents or parents whose children are grown?

Obviously, it is the former to whom God is speaking here. When the Lord says, "*train up a child*," He is speaking to parents with young children of a teachable age. Can we not agree that this is obvious?

Can we not infer from the verse that if kids do not turn out right, they were not trained properly? Yes, I think it would be proper for us to take some responsibility if our children fail. However, that is not the point of the verse. The statement from God is not written primarily to explain to elders what they did wrong; it is written to young people to help them see what they can do that is right.

So, just for the record, may I say that I do not bring up this wonderful part of God's Word to cause pain or hurt. I bring this verse up because of the reason for which I believe it was written. And that is to be a help and an encouragement to couples who will soon be parents or to couples who are parents of young children. Does it make sense to shy away from a verse because it may cause discomfort to one group of people, only to deny the help obviously intended to another group?

The verse means what it says.

HOW DO WE KNOW THAT THE VERSE MEANS WHAT IT SAYS?

All right, if the verse does mean what it says, how do we know that? Well, first, let's review what it says.

When the Bible says *train up* It means to train, or give

instruction, or to dedicate the child. We will get back to the business of “dedicating” in just a minute. The word *way* has a reference to the “trodden path.” In other words, this is the path that parents want their child to take. They want him to take it as a child, as a teenager, and as an adult! When the child is old or aged, the verse says, he will not depart from this path. The verse is not saying that he will come back to the path in his old age. It is saying he will not depart from it. In other words, he didn't depart from it as a child, he didn't as a teenager, he didn't as a young adult, and he won't as an old guy!

Psalm 127:3-4 says: *“Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.”* In verse 4 the Bible likens children to arrows. This analogy is helpful, I believe, in understanding Proverbs 22:6. When an archer sends an arrow toward a target, he actually has the arrow in his possession for a relatively short period of time. With the bow, the archer trains or dedicates the arrow to a certain target. Let's suppose the archer is standing ten yards from a target. The archer's intention is that the arrow hit the bull's eye in the center of the target. So, in the brief amount of time that the archer has the arrow in the bow, he aims or dedicates the arrow to the target. When the archer lets it go, the arrow is on its own. Well, kind of! The arrow is made in such a way that if the archer aims it properly, the arrow will carry itself to the intended target. The idea is that the arrow will not take a 90 degree turn to the right, circle around several trees in the forest, avert a horse in the pasture, fly between the antlers of a large buck, make its

way back out of the forest, and then hit the target. No, the arrow leaves the archer's bow on its way to the intended target, the one chosen by the archer.

Now, this is just an analogy, but it helps me to visualize Proverbs 22:6. A parent dedicates or instructs or trains a child in a given path. Later, when the child is away from his parents, he is still going the way he did when he was back home or "in the bow."

SIMPLE TRUTHS ABOUT PROVERBS 22:6

Let me mention four undeniable truths about Proverbs 22:6.

Number One

If Proverbs 22:6 does not mean what it says, then the verse says basically nothing! Suppose you are the parent of a young child and you are concerned about the direction of your children now, in the immediate future, and in the distant future. What kind of hope or help would Proverbs 22:6 give to you? Now, suppose I came to you and said, "I have wonderful news for you from the Bible. In Proverbs 22:6, the Bible says, *'Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.'*"

I look at you and say, "My dear friend, this wonderful verse means unequivocally that if you will train your children in the way they should go, that when they are old, they will... 'er, 'ah, be heading somewhere!" I would be saying nothing, except that the verse says nothing of any specific or practical value.

If this verse does not mean what it says, it means nothing.

Number Two

The verse is not saying that children who have gone away from the intended path their parents laid out for them will always return. Now, let me pause here and say that with all my heart I believe in revival. Revival is simply a return to Bible truth. It is a return to Bible principle. And I believe that those who know the truth but have gotten off the “trodden path” can get back on. However, this verse is not dealing with whether or not wayward children will come back to their parents and the Lord. Again, they obviously can, but that is not the fact with which this verse is dealing. It does not say that children who are off the “trodden path” will return. It says that children on the “trodden path” will not depart or turn aside from it.

Number Three

If Proverbs 22:6 represents a general promise, a “feel good” promise, or if it is basically a statement which means very little or nothing, what does one do with companion passages? Let us see a few.

1. Proverbs 19:18: *“Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.”*

Why should a parent chasten his son if there is not expectation that it will work?

2. Proverbs 19:20: *“Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.”*

Here, one is to receive advice, counsel, instruction or chastisement so that he will act wisely in the future.

3. Proverbs 21:11: *“When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise: and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge.”*

Do instruction and punishment work? According to this verse, they obviously do.

4. Proverbs 23:13-14: *“Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.”*

Does correction work or is it ineffective?

5. Proverbs 29:15: *“The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.”*

If a child left to himself brings shame to his parents, then a child who is corrected or disciplined comes to wisdom.

6. Ephesians 6:4: *“And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”*

Why should a father bring up his children with teaching and discipline if there is no hope for it to work?

7. Hebrews 12:11: *“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”*

Does chastening yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness? This verse is clear in stating that it does.

Number Four

If a child is dedicated to a certain “trodden path,” and if he is trained by his parents, I have three questions. First, where is the child? That is, where is the child right now, at his present age, relevant to the desired “trodden path”? In other words, just for a moment, don't worry about where he someday will be, but be concerned about where he is *right now*. If he is six, is he on the right path at his present age?

The second question is, where was the child? This one might provide some comfort to you. Ask yourself about the progress your children have made in the last few days. Perhaps your six-year-old is not where you want him to be right this second, but ask, “Is he doing better today than he was last week?”

The third question is, where is my child going to be? Let me say it this way. If your child was where he should have been and is now where he should be, then he will be where he should be in the future. If he wasn't where he should have been, but is now where he should be, take hope in the future. If your child was not where he should have been and is not now where he should be, then let's get with the program. Your child needs to be where he should be now so that he will be where he should be in the future. Make sense?

OBSERVATIONS

Proverbs 22:6 brings several observations to mind.

1. **“Training up” is important.** If we want our children to be where they should be in the future, this makes train-

ing very important for today. How important is it for your family to have income? How many hours a week does a parent or do parents in your family work? How important is education in your home? And, how many hours a week do children in your home go to school?

Well, the answer to these questions is fairly obvious. One or both parents in your family work many, many hours every week. The children in your home probably go to school thirty-five or more hours every week. This is because an education is important and so is the responsibility for providing for the family. We don't mind spending time at work, or at least we understand it is important to spend time at work every week because making a living is important. It is necessary for our children to go to school for a specific number of hours every week because learning is important. Training up our children is important; and it necessitates dedication, effort, and time on our part.

2. Discipline does work. You know, it amazes me how often people make statements which imply that discipline does not work.

"I have told him and told him and told him to make up his bed," the exasperated father says, "but he just doesn't seem to understand the importance of doing it!" I did my part, this father is saying, but it isn't working!

Listen to this mother: "I can tell my daughter, she is fourteen you know, that modesty is important; but no matter how many times I tell her, it just doesn't seem to click." Got the picture? "I have done the instruction thing, but as you can see by her appearance, it isn't working."

This one is a little more subtle. Listen carefully: "You know, one can be an excellent parent, one can do everything he should to raise his children; but in the final analysis, it is only the grace of God if any of our children ever turn out right!" I understand that any of the tasks we face in life should be faced with a dependence upon the Lord's provision. But if God has promised that my obedience to Him will result in blessings, should not I take Him at His word?

Can you read? Obviously. As the old bumper sticker says, "If you can read this, thank a teacher!" In the discipline of a structured class led by a fine teacher, you learned that discipline really does work.

3. Personal responsibility is key. As a parent, I am responsible for training my children. In all fairness, children are responsible for learning what their parents teach.

4. Pitfalls. Are there pitfalls? Yes, certainly. What are they, you might ask. Would I be overly cynical if I said I would rather not discuss them here, because you can find them listed and discussed in almost any bookstore, radio talk show, TV interview, or magazine article? You probably already know that love, commitment, and consistency are all important.

5. Training does bring righteousness. We often live under the misguided idea that while parents may be able to teach mechanics, they will never teach righteousness. That simply is not true. Proverbs 23:13 and 14 can really

encourage you in this area. There the Bible says, *“Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.”* Physical correction and instruction result in spiritual benefits.

The Lord says that if I will properly train my children, they will wind up on the right path in life. We are not talking here about Interstate 65. We are talking about the correct spiritual, mental, and emotional direction that a human being needs to take.

Proverbs 22:6 clearly says that training in the home works!