

PARENTING THROUGH PROVERBS

Selected Proverbs



MAY 5, 2019 | DAVID ANDERSON

Nancy and I were the very best parents when we didn't have kids. We knew exactly what to tell the parent whose kid was melting down in the grocery store. We knew exactly why children didn't obey their parents, and with great self-righteousness we concluded these things wouldn't happen to us.

And then God gave us our own kids. I have to be honest, if there was a way to teach Proverbs and avoid this subject, I think I would. My personal preference would be not to speak on this subject at all, because I feel so inadequate in this area. The problem is that Proverbs has so much to say about it.

Who is responsible for our children? Two extremes to which we can go: On the one hand, we may conclude that the spiritual life of a child is totally the responsibility of the parent. It might surprise you to be told that this approach is not only unbiblical, but breeds a level of control that is dangerous to you and your children. On the other hand, we may go to the opposite extreme where we conclude that we have no responsibility for the spiritual life of our children. This is not the loving shepherds that our kids need either.

I believe we will find that the truth in Scripture and specifically Proverbs lies between these two extremes. Hopefully our study will address some shame we carry on the one hand, but also move us to greater diligence based in grace and move us into a more vibrant prayer life for our kids.

*Train a child in the way that he should go,
and when he is old he will not turn from it. –Proverbs 22:6*

"Train" (hanak) means to dedicate (cf. Deut. 20:5; 1 Kings 8:63; 2 Chron. 7:5; Dan. 3:2). It's the idea of dedicating and committing your child's conduct into the way of wisdom. Our calling as a parent is to shepherd our children in word and action. Our heart is that they would fall in love with Jesus and want to serve Him for the rest of their lives. The Hebrew word translated "child" (na'ar) normally means a teenager who hasn't married yet. This is comforting, because it's never too late to train up our children.

What does it mean to train a child in the way that he should go? This may mean according to his personality, temperament, responses, or stage in life. I think this interpretation is true elsewhere in Scripture and I think this is brilliant parenting advice, but I think Solomon is thinking about the central theme of Proverbs. Where the child should go is towards wisdom, fearing the Lord (1:7), abandoned trust to the Creator of the universe.

Many parents have wrestled with this last part, "and when he is old he will not turn from it." Here's a couple of problems if you think this is guaranteeing results and is a promise rather than a general rule that will have exceptions.

- Solomon's son, Rehoboam, was a mess and divided Israel during its greatest period of history. We probably need to stop reading right now because Solomon failed miserably in raising his son (1 Kings 12).
- When you read the history of the kings of Israel, a good and faithful king is sometimes followed by a bad son. A bad king is sometimes followed by a good son. There is no promise that faithful fathers will always have faithful sons and unfaithful fathers will always have unfaithful sons.
- The other thing to remember is in the history of the universe there has only been one perfect Father. God has never made one bad parenting decision, and yet starting with Israel, God's

children have always been rebellious. This is the Old Testament in a nutshell; faithful Yahweh, rebellious Israel. Before we get too self-righteous, this is our story too; faithful Yahweh, rebellious me.

What's the focus of Proverbs 1-9 in parenting? Our children have a choice. We cannot determine the spiritual destiny of our children. We are responsible through word and action to instruct and correct our children, but we cannot make their hearts fear the Lord. Our ministry according to the first nine chapters of parenting is to appeal and pray that God's love would take hold of them.

- Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and do not forsake your mother's teaching; indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head, and ornaments about your neck (1:8-9).
- My son, if you will receive my sayings, and treasure my commandments within you...Then you will discern the fear of the Lord, and discover the knowledge of God (2:1, 5).
- My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments (3:1).
- Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, and give attention that you may gain understanding (4:1).

Proverbs 10-31 teach us what will happen if our children decide to allow the love of God to take hold and fear Him.

- A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother (10:1).
- A wise son accepts his father's discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke (13:1).
- A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish man despises, his mother (15:20).
- A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her who bore him (17:25).
- He who robs his father or his mother, and says, "It is not a transgression," is the companion of a man who destroys (28:24).
- The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother (29:15).
- There is a kind of man who curses his father, and does not bless his mother. There is a kind who is pure in his own eyes, yet is not washed from his filthiness. There is a kind - oh how lofty are his eyes! And his eyelids are raised in arrogance (30:11-13).

Ultimately our children have to own their own lives and own their own relationship with the Lord because as they say - God doesn't have any grandchildren. This is a brutal reality.

- They would not accept my counsel, they spurned all my reproof. So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way, and be satiated with their own devices. For the waywardness of the naive shall kill them, and the complacency of fools shall destroy them (1:30-32).
- If you are wise, you are wise for yourself, and if you scoff, you alone will bear it (9:12).
- The foolishness of man subverts his way, and his heart rages against the Lord (19:3).

YOUR CHALLENGE AS A PARENT IS YOU!

Proverbs 3:5 proclaims, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." As we take on this mantle to train up our children, we need to realize one of the greatest works that God wants to do is IN US.

Here are some questions to consider this week:

1. What has your recent parenting or grand-parenting taught you about your insecurities and fears?
2. Can you think of a time this past month where you overreacted? What do you think was happening in your heart in that moment?
3. What do you think your kids or grandkids would say about your parenting if they could have an honest moment with you?
4. What do you want to hear Jesus say to you as you navigate these difficult waters of parenting?

Our parenting is handicapped in many instances because we have so much unresolved junk in our own hearts that Jesus wants to heal. Jesus wants you to trust in Him with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. What step can you take today?