

TRAINING CHILDREN

“Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray” (Proverbs 22:6, NRSV).

“Even when they are old, they will not turn from it.”

The subject of this passage is the major product of society. The subject is children. What makes a man a Dad is caring about children. Without that, a man is just a man. You may be a Dad or a grandfather –or the guy next door. This job is partly about you.



No matter what else you are Moms and Dads, you are first of all a Mother or a Father. Whoever does not see children as central, misses God's perspective. What God loves is people; all people come into the world as children.

Who is going to do this job?

We live in a day of failure, so far as many children are concerned. I don't have to, nor will I, review the chaotic condition of the lives of many children, and the lives of many children, who are now adults. Has the church failed? Have the schools failed? Has the government failed? Has the family failed? Where do we start to work on helping our children? We've all listened to many scholarly debates on how to cure the problem. **This verse makes an appeal to only one person; that person is you.** There is not a Father in the world who would not appreciate your help. Surely, you do not think that God expects Dads or Moms to do their good work in isolation. Now, that doesn't mean you can boss other people's kids around –but, it certainly means something.

The verse says, "Train up a child..." The pronoun *you* is, of course, understood by everyone. "You train up a child." Who are you? I don't know; but, you know who you are. You may be a public school teacher, a mother, a father, an uncle or aunt, a grandmother or grandfather, a minister, a Sunday School teacher, a neighbor, a business person, a nurse or a doctor, a scout leader. You may be a school bus driver. You are somebody, and God expects something out of *you* relative to training children. What you have here is: "Let's support the Dads; let's support the Moms."

"You train up a child..." We think too small when we say, the family, the school, the church. The only way to think big enough is to think like God. You need to think **you**. By saying, you, God included all of us in the great child training project. You may give time, attention, teaching, caring, money, friendship, role-modeling, healing –but, you must give something to the effort.

Gloria and I have always been grateful for the hundreds of good people who helped to train our children. It

was a big job, bigger than two young people could have ever accomplished. We are deeply grateful for school teachers, Sunday School teachers, piano teachers, music teachers, the parents of their friends. Our girls picked apples at Bohlayer's Orchard to help earn money for college. One Saturday, Connie picked 100 bushels of apples –and David Loomis dubbed her the "Apple Queen." Connie came home that day to announce that "Mr. Loomis said that I am the Apple Queen." Her sister, Glorianne, chimed in with, "She got to use the hydro ladder; I had to use a wooden ladder –or, I could have been the Apple Queen." That is exactly how you train kids. Thank you David Loomis –you were a great help.

I grew up in an age that was kind to children. When I was about 13 years old I decided to build a dock on the Grover's Mill Lake. I started by working for my Dad in trade for some timbers. Once the timbers were mine, I bolted them together into a crib to be filled with rock. After the crib was in place in the lake, I noticed that there was a dump truck working near the location. The truck belonged to Mr. Aversano. After school, I drove over to his house on my bicycle to see if he would leave his truck on the job-site for the week-end so that I could fill it with rock for my dock. I figured he could just dump them near the dock on Monday morning before work started on the road. Mr. Aversano wanted to know all about my dock project, and he wanted to know when **we** would start work on Saturday morning. By Saturday evening, Mr. Aversano and I had all of the rock in place for the dock.

I noticed that Conover and Emmons, the local building supply and concrete company, always dumped their left-over concrete over a bank when the trucks came back in from the jobs. I thought, perhaps, I could talk to them about dumping it into the forms at my dock instead. What I lacked was the courage to talk with the big boss at the concrete company about my idea. After a number of failed attempts (due to lack of courage), I found my feet moving slowly up a flight of about 100 steps which led to his office up next to the tippie. At last, in something like shock, I found myself standing in front of his desk. I was one scared kid; but, not for long. When he was finished work, he drove me out to the dock and he measured up the forms. We went back to the concrete plant, got a truck load of concrete and he helped me pour the concrete and finish the surface. When we were done, we both stood there and admired our job.

You train up a child. Somehow, you need to take some of the responsibility.

What is the task?

The task is to train. Training has gone out of vogue; out of style; we educate now. However, the most successful "skills-development-programs" are still, without question, training programs, not academic programs. The services are expert at producing the highest quality people through training programs. Training programs go direct to the point. Training is a bigger word than teaching. Training includes actual "hands on experience." "Lets do this together –then you can take over." In educational theory, training is a multi-sensory modality method. It includes the body and all of the senses. It includes doing something over and over again, so that you can give the proper response automatically. It becomes part of your nature. It is not sitting on the sidelines thinking about something in your head.

How do you train? Training theory would tell us that training is rewarding successive approximations of a desirable behavior. A trainer doesn't praise just perfect behavior; a trainer praises every behavior that tends

toward the goal. At first, these behaviors are a good long way from perfection. Training allows children to be less than perfect. If we were training a dog to jump over a bar, we might reward the dog for running in the right direction first. Then, we might reward the dog for running in the right direction and jumping—even if it knocked the bar off. Anything that the dog did that tended toward the target behavior would be rewarded. That is why “peevish people” can never train children.

The progress would be made in steps; upward steps; little steps. Training is always upward. It is building up something that is already there. It is helping a child discover something that God has already built in. It is a means to an end; it is not an end in itself. Training is labor intensive; that is why few people want to do it. You might have to help children pick up rocks and load them on a dump truck. It requires repetition.

Training is much more than giving children confidence; it is giving children skill. In this case, certainly, skill in living a life that will serve God. We like to do a lot of our work by building self-confidence. Some people feel that is the main thing we lack. Recently, research was done to determine how well the children in four major countries were doing in math. Of the four countries, Japan ranked first, the United States ranked third. However, when asked, “How do you feel about your knowledge of math?” The United States ranked first and Japan dropped to third. Feeling good about ourselves is not enough. Now, this training is training in goodness, and in kindness, and in humility, and in godliness. I’m inclined to think that, once again, we have a lot of confidence in ourselves; but, that we don’t perform very well.

How about the focus? What do you teach? What is important?

Once again, it is so easy to get off target here. You teach ***a child***. “Train up ***a child***...” What is important is ***a child***. What you teach is ***a child***; not English; not math; not basketball; not biology. Every one of us should remember that what we teach ***is a child***. If you were simply training in basketball, you could very well end up with a jerk who can play basketball well. No, not basketball, English, math, or even theology; what is important is, ***a child***.

What is the child being trained in?

The child is being trained in “the way ***he or she*** should go” (KJV).

Here again, it is easy to get off target. Every child is different; every child is sent into the world to become something special and different for God. I believe some of those plans are encoded in the child as God sends him to us. How often do we smash the plans?

It is the way ***he or she*** should go; it is not to make him or her into *what you think he should be*—which is probably what you are.

We don’t live our lives through our children. Every child has a special mission, a special way to go, a special job to do. This concept increases our responsibility. We don’t own children.

The contrast is China, where children are raised very differently from this. In China, the plan is: “You are going to do this when you grow up. You are going to major in this at the university. You are going to marry

so and so. You are going to live in such and such.” However, the way he or she *should go* may be a lot different than what we think. Once it is determined what that is, then it is our job to help them get there.

Everyone has strengths; it is our job to help them to use those strengths to become what God intended –which is the way *they* should go. Everyone has weaknesses; it is our job to help them compensate for their weaknesses.

When they are old they will not depart from it.

Most commentators see this as a principle, more than a promise. The verse talks about *not departing from*, rather than *returning to*. At any rate, it indicates a strong force toward a certain “life-way.” It is a powerful principle.

The commentators tell us that the meaning is that he or she will continue in, and “not depart from,” even thru old age. Even when they are old, they will still benefit from, and practice that training –and, everyone will be blessed. It is good for a lifetime. The training will serve them well, and because of that, they will serve well.

A lifetime is a great contribution to God’s world, and God’s work, and God’s church. Training is doing a thing over and over until it becomes automatic. It becomes a part of you. That is why God used the word train. God knows the first rule of behavior, and that is, the more a behavior occurs, the more likely it is to occur in the future.

Years ago, I traveled with Dr. Sandra Link to Indiana University of Pennsylvania To present a “Graduate Research Paper” on the “Stress Among Dairy Farmers in Northern Pennsylvania,” I had published. Dr. Link was the assistant provost and head of the graduate school at the Mansfield University. At the time, she was in the process of becoming a Christian minister –which she did do. She had earned her Ph.D. and consequently, had heard most of the ideas that people have gotten over the years.

This is what she said, “We have all these things rocking about our society, and I’ve been exposed to them all. But, I find that I just go right back to my Missouri farm-girl upbringing. I think people tend to do that, don’t you?” Yes, I do!

They certainly do. They certainly do. Because of that, and because of the responsibility placed upon parents toward their children, I’m going to ask *you* to renew *your* commitment toward children this morning. *You* train up a child; *you* have a part; ***do your part***. Every Dad will thank you. Every Dad will thank you. Yes, “Thank you David Loomis, for helping our children;!” Thank you, Cheryl Lynn Ayers, for the choirs in our churches! Thank you, Marietta Ozment for teaching our daughter to play the piano! Thank you, Tom and Carolyn Hart for helping us train our kids! Thank you, Jack Kuyper. Thank you, Aunt Ruth and Uncle Bob. Thank you, Louie and Emma Arnold! See where we’re going with this? Sure! –And, while we are at it, “Thank you Dad, thank you.” Happy Father’s day.