

“Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22:6

I love the home and family and all that goes along with that. Children amaze me and we can see the Father’s heart toward children by just glancing into the Word. It seems lately, though, that my attention has been drawn to a sort of disconnect between parents and children. As I began to pray through that, I kept being reminded of the familiar promise that if we ‘train up a child in the way he should go, when he is old he will not depart from it’. I have claimed that verse, prayed that verse, and decreed and declared that verse many times over my sons. I’ve heard my dad say over the years that this verse isn’t just speaking of spiritual training, but training up a child in every way of life. I must say, I agree. This beautiful promise is a treasure found in the book of Proverbs. It’s interesting that many of the scriptures in Proverbs begin with, “My son...listen”. Proverbs covers just about every morsel we need to raise our children. It’s no wonder this scripture is packed in the middle of this book of wisdom. I encourage you to read Proverbs and see what jewels you find.

What does it mean to train up a child? Let me ask you this. What will your child need to not only survive, but to thrive in his or her lifetime? Jesus said He came to give us abundant life so we know we were meant to prosper in all things...and so are our children. As your child grows into adulthood, he or she will need to know values such as honor and integrity...respect, honesty, wisdom, discernment. They will need to know how to handle discipline and correction. It is imperative that they can distinguish truth from a lie. They will need to know how to work. They will need to know what it means to respect authority and to walk in authority. They will need to know what it’s like to be loved and accepted...and to love in return. They will need to know how to handle the bumps that they’ll face in their lifetimes. They will need decision making skills. They will need to know financial responsibility. It is a must that they know Jesus as Lord and Master. All of these things seem to be just practical life skills, but remember that we are three part beings. We are a spirit, we have a soul (mind, will and emotion) and we live in a body. These three things cannot be separated. One will always affect the other...even in raising our children. Your child will learn many of these qualities from watching you. For example, they will learn honesty from seeing you deal fairly with people. They will learn integrity by watching you do the right thing even when no one is watching. Some things are taught by example and other things are taught intentionally and are learned by doing. As a parent, under the direction of Holy Spirit, this blessing and responsibility of teaching falls to you. God will graciously provide others along the way that will pour into your child’s life and help you in your parenting journey. The Word says that the older ones will teach the younger ones. Allow them to do that. Just remember, the Father gave that child to you to raise up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Raising children is a great responsibility, blessing and challenge but with Holy Spirit as your counselor and guide it can be one of the most wonderful times in life.

Jesus was a carpenter. He was the son of a carpenter. No doubt, He spent many hours side by side with Joseph laboring and learning the skills necessary to succeed in this trade. He was only to be on this earth a short time, and was the Son of God; but from what we see in scripture, it must have been important for him to work alongside His earthly father learning the family business. Wouldn't you love to have been in on the father / son conversations that went on during those hours of work? David was a shepherd, tending his father's sheep as a fairly young boy. Training up a child means teaching them how to work and how to be responsible. That's not always easy because so many times we get in a hurry or our child puts up a fuss and doesn't want to do as they're asked, and it is just easier to do it ourselves. However, how are they going to learn if we don't stand our ground and teach them? Age appropriate responsibilities teach a vast amount of life skills. Dads, teach your sons to change the oil in the car and how to change a flat tire. Even before they can work a jack, they can sit with you and hand you the necessary tools. Moms, let your children help you fold clothes. The towels may not be folded perfectly, but the relationships that are built out of those times are so valuable! Washing the dishes, mowing the yard and keeping their rooms clean are among the many necessary skills they need to know. If you are a family that owns a business that your children will inherit, start early training them up, giving them all the skills necessary to do what will be required of them someday. Frustration comes upon a child when they are expected to perform a task they haven't been equipped to do.

Many stories from the Bible can be taught during these times. I remember pulling weeds with my children and explaining to them how the Lord will separate the wheat from the tares someday (only it was the weeds and the grass!!). The yard was getting much needed attention, we were spending time together building relationships, and visual lessons from the Word were being taught. You may be fortunate enough to have someone care for your yard or clean your house and that's a wonderful thing. Don't let that take the place of teaching your children how to do these things and giving them responsibilities. What is age appropriate for your child? What can they help you with occasionally and what responsibilities can they be given on a regular basis?

There are many opinions out there regarding allowances for chores done. One positive lesson that can be taught by paying your child for a few chores here and there is the lesson of tithing. It's a fun thing to pay them 10 dimes and have them learn that at least one of those belongs to the Lord. Seeing their little faces as they put a dime in the offering plate is such a sweet thing. I know the Father smiles at that!! As they grow in this, giving a tenth of their first real paycheck won't be a hard thing. Remember, your children won't always be under your care. These lessons are so important. I heard a man say one time that from the day your children are born, you are preparing them to be on their own. Selah!

In speaking of teaching responsibility, we are saved by grace...through faith. It is a free gift. However, immediately following that, we are given responsibility to 'work out our salvation with fear and trembling.' The Bible is full of promises that go something like this: "if you will do this, then I (God) will do this"; "if you believe and do not doubt, you can have whatever you ask." We are given responsibility in the Kingdom. Teaching children responsibility at home from

an early age will only enhance their understanding of what it means take seriously their responsibilities in the Kingdom.

I love what Proverbs 22:6 says when it says to train up a child *'in the way he should go'*. Of course this means to teach them to walk in and follow the ways of the Lord but I believe it also means to discern the desires of your child's heart...what makes him or her tick...and find ways to encourage them in these areas. It was evident to my parents when I was very young that I had a heart to nurture and mother. I always had baby dolls to play with and stray animals to nurse back to health. The Kingdom lessons they taught me through those desires of my heart are still there today. God created your children to be unique individuals. No two are alike. Some may lean toward academics, some toward craftsmanship, some toward the home or a million other things. Whatever it is your child leans toward, whatever way he is to go, encourage him in that. Help them become who they were created to be. Of course, this doesn't mean that they don't have to do other things. Few kids will be drawn to take out the trash or pull weeds. Those things just have to happen!!

Training up a child means discipline. Don't be afraid to discipline your children. Proverbs 29 says, "The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother." We spend a life time being required to follow rules. There are traffic laws, laws regarding your money, rules and expectations at work, and laws telling us what we can and can't do as citizens of this country. We don't always like or agree with these laws and expectations but we are required to follow them anyway. If we fail to follow these laws, we quickly suffer the consequences of our rebellion. So it must be with our kiddos. The best time to start teaching your children is at a very young age. They may not be in the mood to pick up their toys or clean their rooms but if that's the rule you've set, it needs to be enforced. How many of us just love having to be at work at 8:00 a.m.? Sadly enough, that's not something we get to vote on and yet it is required. Most of us would really rather go shopping for fun things than to pay the bill that is due. However, the right thing to do is pay the bill! Like it or not, there are rules. "A child left to himself"... "a child that is repeatedly given their own way"... will bring heartache.

Children learn authority...and how to walk under authority...from you in your home. They are also under other authority figures, for example, at school. Trust me when I say that your children watch how you, as their parents, respond to that outside authority. Remember the days of, "if you get in trouble at school, you'll get in trouble at home"? If a child can divide the different authority figures, be that mom and dad, or parents and teacher, they know they've won the battle. I overheard a conversation a few days ago that fits right in here. A young driver had gotten a speeding ticket on one of his first times to drive alone. He was going 79 in a 70 zone. The parent was furious...not at the child, but at the officer for giving him a ticket. I heard the parent tell the child, "That's ridiculous. You were only 9 miles over. You didn't deserve this. Don't worry about it. Your dad and I will take care of it." That's a perfect picture of authority figures being divided. The child got off free and clear and never had to take responsibility for his actions. What that young person learned from his mom was how she responded to authority. Of course,

there are legitimate times when things are completely unfair that you must stand with your child. Ask for discernment to know the difference. Ask Holy Spirit when to stand in agreement with the other authority figure, when to keep silent and pray through and when to take a stand. He will show you each step.

Obedience and discipline are directly tied to love. Obedience is vital in the Kingdom. It is so tied to love that several places in scripture refer to Jesus saying, ‘if you love Me, you’ll keep my commandments’”if you love Me, you’ll obey Me”. The Lord disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:6). I remember telling my kids after a spanking or other disciplinary measure, “I love you too much to let you act like that.” They didn’t like the spanking, but they never doubted the love. Where there are no rules or expectations, there is nothing to obey. I truly believe children crave boundaries. I believe it shows them you love them enough to put up guards around them. Consistency in discipline is a must. Confusion can only come from a child getting away with something one time . . . and getting a spanking for doing it another. It takes effort on our part. It can be tough to be consistent when all we want to do is sit down and relax a while. But I promise you, the benefits will far outweigh the effort. Remember, it just isn’t fair to the child to be constantly given his own way, to make his own rules and to not be held accountable as a little one and then expect him to understand that he must drive the speed limit and follow rules at 16 years old. Train up a *child!*

One of the biggest attacks I see coming against our children in this day and time, due to a lack of discipline and responsibility is an ‘entitlement mentality’. It is a very serious matter and seems to be running rampant in our world. When a child is left to himself, isn’t made to work or have responsibility, is given everything he wants when he wants it, and has no boundaries or discipline, a message is sent to him or her that the world owes them. “I want to be the starting player on the basketball team, but I don’t want to run to get in shape. I don’t like running and I have better things to do than practice!” “That coach sat me on the bench for my attitude, so I just quit.” “That teacher failed me (even though I never brought a book home to study).” At what point do we tell our children that if you want that starting position or that good grade, then work to improve enough to get it? Instead, I see over and over, parents enforcing the entitlement attitude by siding with the child over the authority figure. Please be aware of this nasty way of thinking! I believe that the “cheap grace” mentality is also rampant in our world and is kin to this spirit of entitlement. “I’ll just sin because I can be forgiven. I know it’s wrong but Jesus died on the cross for that sin.” That’s an entitlement to sinthinking you are above discipline or rules . . . no boundaries. That’s believing that Jesus owes it to you to forgive you. When a child has never been made to be accountable, and has never had any consequences for disobedience by a parent, why would they see God as being any different? 2 Timothy 3:1-5 describes this in detail. *“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited,*

lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power.” Again, it’s so very dangerous and so subtle. It starts at a very young age. Beware!

There are so many areas we could address as we discuss children but I feel like the Lord gave me these few to encourage you. The last one I’d like to talk about is time. John 10:10 says that the thief comes to kill, steal and destroy. He is after your children and in doing so, is after our time. He is after our time in general; but particularly our time with our Father and our families. He is out to destroy relationships. It is a priceless thing to get away with your child for a weekend trip, but that can’t take the place of the day to day communion with them. A weekend trip is no substitute for the day in and day out ‘as you go’ conversations and trainings. That’s where relationships and trust are built. We live in a very busy world. Most families have both parents working outside the home. It’s hard. We love our children and do the best we can. We certainly don’t need to feel guilty or condemned in this area. Be encouraged...the Lord has provided all the time we need. We may just need to ask Holy Spirit to show us how to better utilize our time. Here are a few practical things you might want to try. They are small things that, if they work for you, could make a big difference. Try having dinner as a family around the table as often as possible without the distractions of media. Computers, texts, video games, television, etc. in many cases have taken the place of conversations. Ask Holy Spirit. He may lead you to limit those things. You may not be popular in your home for a while, but remember...you are the parent. You might try turning off the television while you’re cooking dinner or folding clothes. Those times are great opportunities for talking. It is a beautiful thing when a child realizes how important they are to you because you give them your time. They see that they are accepted; that they are a blessing and not a burden. They will learn that they are loved unconditionally by you, even if you’ve had to discipline. They will learn that you love them because they are worth it; not because they performed well enough to earn your love. These days with your children in your home and under your care won’t last forever. In fact, I’ve come to realize they are gone before you know it. Treasure the time.

Just a side note: Mom and Dad, don’t forget your time together. I believe a child is encouraged and made to feel secure when they see Mom and Dad spending time together. When raising your children, present a united front if at all possible. Discuss any disagreements privately. A house divided against itself can’t stand but a cord of three strands (mom, dad, and the Lord) are not easily broken. If you are a single parent, as I have been, take comfort in knowing that Jesus is your bridegroom and you’re not in this alone. There is great grace for your situation.

Our Father is our example. He is sacrificial love. He is unconditional love. He accepts us; guards us; forgives us and guides us. He nurtures and cares for us. He supplies our every need and treats us with great grace and mercy. He comforts us. He is never too busy for us. He hears our cries. He also expects us to grow up. He transitions us into more responsibilities. He disciplines us. He expects and requires our obedience. He requires that we respect Him in the fear of the Lord. He has set a narrow road before us even though we think it would be easier to go down that broad way. He calls us out of our comfort zones to grow us. He pushes and stretches us. He tells us to

work in our jobs as though we are working for Him. He doesn't leave us to our own way. In fact, He requires that our will be totally submitted to His will.

The Father carries both the nurturing attributes, and the strong, disciplinary qualities. Grace and mercy. Discipline and justice. He is the perfect picture of a parent. He is our example. Lean into Him and be encouraged. As you raise your beautiful children, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path."