

DIG

Proverbs 22:6 reads, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (NIV). This very familiar proverb has provided many parents assurance on raising children. This proverb seems to provide a promise that if one gives careful attention to raising a child in the right way, that child will remain in it into adulthood. For many godly parents this interpretation has been validated by experience. But for some it has not. Instead, the verse has occasioned many agonizing questions and self-doubt. A fresh look at the verse will reveal that it has more to do with a warning to parents than a promise.

A look at the literal Hebrew text is startling. Translated very literally, the Hebrew reads, "Train a child according to his way; even though he become older he will not turn aside from it." What immediately surfaces is that there are no words in the Hebrew for "should go." (Reread the literal interpretation one more time to let it sink in.) The Hebrew language can express "should go" very clearly but it does not do so in Prov. 22:6. Therefore, though most English translations and many commentators support the traditional translation of this verse, there seems to be little warrant in the Hebrew text for such an understanding. Interestingly, the King James Version offered the more literal translation as an alternative in a footnote, a practice not followed by newer English translations.

A close study of a few words in this verse yields helpful clarification for our understanding. The rare Hebrew word often translated "train" is used elsewhere of dedicating a new house (Deuteronomy 20:5) or of dedicating the temple (1 Kings 8:63; 1 Chronicles 7:5). A related noun is used in Numbers for dedication of the altar (7:10) and in Nehemiah for the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem (12:27). A better meaning as suggested by modern Hebrew dictionaries is perhaps "begin" or "inaugurate." "Begin/Inaugurate a child in his way..."

Furthermore, the text does not specify if the "way" is God's way or the child's way. The closest antecedent for "his" in the verse is "child." This would indicate the verse speaks of the way the child would choose, not the way God has designed the child to be nor the way the parents would choose for him.

It would also do us well to understand that the book of Proverbs is simply a collection of instructions and observations on life intended to offer practical guidance. These proverbs are not pronouncements by God in which he gives eternal promises. These wise sayings of wise men are given as general guidelines for educating the young. These sayings are considered to be true in general, but not to be exhaustive.

The whole book of Proverbs is designed to guide the young man into maturity and wisdom and faithfulness to God. Its early, long passages are designed to help the young man avoid the two major dangers for him: evil companions and loose women (chapters 1-9). The major proverbial sections from chapter 10 to the end have many observations about not only how to raise a son, but also on the nature of foolish and rebellious sons. It is recognized that sons can turn out in different ways and great care must be exercised in their rearing. Strong discipline is a must (13:24; 15:32; 5:7-14; 23:14). Even with the best discipline, sons can be wise or foolish (10:1, 5; 13:1, 13, 18, etc.). In fact if folly is in the heart, only strong discipline will drive it out (22:15). Discipline is not to be withheld (23:13, 14). So, to be consistent, Proverbs 22:6 interpreted as a promise (like many modern translations have done) contradicts all the above passages.

Reflection on how "way" is used in Proverbs is also helpful. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death" (14:12; 16:25). The way of the fool seems right to him (12:15) and the way of the wicked leads them astray (12:26). On the contrary the way to life is through discipline and in keeping the way of the instructor (16:17; 6:23; 8:32). A man plans his own ways and they seem right, but the Lord weighs the heart (16:9; 21:2).

In the light of these observations on the "way," it would have been quite in context to interpret "his way" in 22:6 as the way that seems right to the child, the way that he plans, the way that he follows, (even if that means) ignoring instruction. That is a sad reality. The traditional translation imports a moral tone to "way." The word "way" is used with moral nuances in Proverbs but always with a moral qualifier such as "good," "righteous," or "evil." Because there are no such descriptive words in 22:6 with way, it doesn't seem proper for it to have a moral tone in this verse.

A suggested interpretation of Proverbs 22:6 is as follows: "Dedicate (begin) a child to (on) his way, and when/even as he grows old he will not depart from it."



GROW

How does understanding Prov. 22:6, not as a promise from God for the lifelong faithfulness of our children but as a warning on the gravity of parenting our kids the God would desire, change your application of it to your parenting?

What practical and spiritual ways can we "begin" our kids on the godly path that will develop them to resist ungodly influences?



LIVE

True or False: If we allow the child to follow his own inclinations and do not apply discipline and instruction he will turn out to be a selfish, arrogant, inconsiderate adult, following his way which he things is right, but which is the way to death.

PART B

(These questions are tailored specifically for parents who do not have children living at home any more.)

Ephesians 6

1Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2"Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise— 3that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." 4Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

5Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. 6Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. 7Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, 8because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

9And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

1. What TV family best represents your childhood experience: Cleavers, Flintstones, Brady's, Adams Family, Munster's, Huxtable's, Walton's, other?
2. What is the statute of limitations on children obeying their parents? How should we relate with adult children?
3. When does honoring father and mother cease? What about abusive fathers or mothers? Give three ways to honor your father and mother?
4. Book Question 3. In what ways do Paul's instructions to slaves (to work with integrity whether the master is watching or not) apply to employees?
5. Book Question 4. Paul reminds masters that they and their slaves are both serving the same master (God). In what ways does this truth apply to bosses or managers?
6. Book Questions 5. Why would the Bible command us to do our work with enthusiasm?
7. Describe the ideal; working environment, boss, employee.
8. Book Question 9. In what way is God honored by our diligent work in our jobs?
9. Even nonChristians might work long and hard, how can the way we work be a witness?

The Book Questions are from: Life Lessons, Max Lucado, Ephesians, Chapter 11