

“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Prov. 22:6).

I think most Christians are familiar with the verse at the top of this page. It is likely that you have heard it, or read it or talked about it. And yet, while many Christians know this verse, the things it teaches are not so well known, the command it gives is not obeyed very often.

The subject of teaching children is not a new subject. We have been on this earth for six thousand years and for most of that time we human beings have been thinking about this question: what is the best way to train our children? Parents everywhere look for the best schools for their children and try and find the best way to raise their children. And yet, despite all this, it is obvious that the vast majority of children do not receive proper training in how they should live. Why do I say this? Because when we look around us, we see very clearly that when many children grow up into young people, they are not walking with God. Many of our young people are living lives of open sin. They never go to church and they live only for the pleasures and possessions of this world. And when you look at those who do attend church, even there you see a lot of hypocrisy. Their Christianity is only on the outside; their hearts are hearts of sin. Why is it that young people in our country are like this? The reason is that the command of God in this verse is not being obeyed. In this verse God gives us a promise. He says, “If you train your child properly in the way that he should live, then when he grows up, he will not depart from that path.” God is saying to us, “Put your children on the right path from the time when they are young and they will not leave that path.” The reason why many young people are not on the right path today is that their parents never put them on the right path when they were young; we are not teaching our children in the way in which they should walk, and so they are not walking in it when they grow up.

Reader, this is a matter of the greatest importance. The most important thing that parents can do is to train their children well. It does not matter if they cannot get into the best school and if they cannot have the best toys. These are not the important things. The most important thing is that they should be trained from the time when they are young in the path of godliness.

In this booklet I want to place before you some teaching on how to train your children. May God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit bless these words and make them of great help to you. Do not reject my words simply because they are direct and simple; do not despise them because they do not contain anything new. Do not reject the advice I am giving you here if you want to train your child in the right way.

1. Make sure you train your child in the way he should behave, and not in the way he wants to behave.

Remember that children are born with a love for sin in their hearts, and so if you let them choose for themselves, they will definitely choose the wrong thing. A mother cannot tell what her child will be like when he grows up; she does not know whether he will be tall or short, weak or strong, wise or foolish. A child could be any of these things, it is all uncertain. But one thing a mother can say with certainty and that is that her child will have a corrupt and sinful heart. It is a natural thing for us as humans to do wrong. Solomon says, “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child” (Prov. 22:15); “A child left to himself disgraces his mother” (Prov. 29:15). Our hearts are like a garden, if you leave it to itself, it will grow weeds.

So, if you want to be wise with your child, you must not leave him be guided by his own will and follow his own desires. You have to think for him, judge for him and act for him, just as you would do with a person who is weak and blind. Do not let your child just follow his own desires and inclinations. He does not yet know what is good for his mind and soul, just as he does not know what food is good for his body. You do not let your child decide what he shall eat, what he shall drink and what clothes he shall wear. Be consistent and deal with his mind in the same way. Train him in the way that is biblical and correct and not in the way that he fancies.

If you cannot accept this first principal of Christian training then it is useless for you to read any further. The first thing that appears in a child’s mind is to follow his own sinful desires, and it must be your first task to resist this.

2. Train up your child with all tenderness, love and patience.

I do not mean that you are to spoil him, but I do mean that you should let your child see that you love him. Love is the thing that should be there in all your conduct towards your child. Be kind, gentle, patient, forgiving and sympathetic. Be prepared to talk to your child about what troubles him, and be ready to share with him the joys of life. In this way you will be able to lead your child most easily. These are the means you must use to find a way into his heart.

With most people, it is easier to encourage them to do the right thing rather than force them. We as human beings do not like to be forced to obey anyone. People like to be treated kindly and they like to be guided gently into obedience rather than beaten and forced to obey. This is what children are like. The parent who tries to force his child to

obey will find that the child will not obey from his heart. He will also find that the child begins to resent his parents and to despise them in his heart. He will also find that the child will close his heart and will not be open and honest and free with the parents because he is afraid of being beaten. In the long run the parent will not win; he will only get obedience for a few years.

Make sure that your child knows that you love him and that you want him to be happy and you desire his good. Make sure that even when you have to punish him, you are doing it for his own good, not because you hate him. Once a child understands that you love him, he will follow you and obey you whole heartedly. We need to win our children into obedience with love and kindness rather than beat them into obedience. Remember children are weak and tender and therefore we as parents need to be patient with them. We must treat them gently because if we are rough with them we will do more harm than good. Children are like young plants, they need gentle watering, little and often.

Remember also that we cannot expect everything from a child all at once. We must remember that they are only children, and we need to teach them what they are able to take. Their minds will be shaped by gentle teaching; their understanding is sometimes slow and we need to be careful we do not expect them to understand everything all at once. Our teaching must be, “a little here, a little there” (Isaiah 28:10). We need a lot of patience in training a child, and without patience we can do very little.

If you do not train your child with love and tenderness, then no matter how much teaching you give, you will fail. A pastor may preach the truth as it is in Jesus clearly, and with great power, but if he does not speak it in love, few souls will be won. In the same way, you must teach your children their duty, but if there is no love in your dealings with them, your efforts will all be in vain. Love is the great secret of successful training. If you are angry and harsh with your children you will frighten them, but you will not persuade them that you are right. Also, if your child sees you losing your temper frequently, he will not have respect for you. In the Bible, King Saul lost his temper with his son Jonathan and said, “You son of a perverse and rebellion woman!” (1 Sam. 20:30). Any father who speaks to his son like this will not have any good influence upon his son.

Try hard to make sure that your child loves you. It is a dangerous thing to make your child afraid of you. If your child is afraid of you he will not be free with you and he will not share things openly with you. Fear puts an end to openness in a relationship. If your child is afraid of you he will hide things from you, he will become a hypocrite, pretending to be something he is not; and he will learn to tell lies. The Bible says, “Fathers, do not embitter your children” (Col. 3:21). Do not forget this advice.

3. As you train your children, remember that a lot depends on you.

There are three things that will shape your child’s character. Firstly, your child is shaped by the nature he is born with. Some people are born with a kind and generous nature; some are born with a harsh and cruel nature. Secondly, if your child is saved, then his character is shaped by the grace of God. When a person gets saved, the grace of God comes into his heart and changes him completely; he becomes a new creation.

The third thing that shapes your child’s character is the training and education he received when he was young. Our early habits are very strong in shaping our character. The education and the training we receive in our childhood make us what we are: these things shape our character. This means, of course, that the people who brought us up when we were very young play a very important part in shaping our character. We learn from our mothers and our maids how to speak and we learn our manners from them and how we behave generally. During these early years our mothers and the maids in our homes sow seeds into our lives, and these seeds germinate and bear fruit as we grow older. The training we receive in early childhood has a very great influence upon us.

All this is by the merciful arrangement of God. He has given our children a mind that will receive impressions, like moist clay does. God arranges our children’s minds in such a way that they believe what we tell them and they receive any advice we give them. They will trust a stranger, but they will trust their parents and those who are bringing them up. In other words, God has given us a golden opportunity to do good to our children. Make sure that you do not neglect this opportunity or throw it away. Once you let it go, it will be gone forever.

Do not think to yourself that parents can do nothing for their children and that you must wait for God to work in grace in their hearts. If you believe this you are deceiving yourself. If you want your children to get saved and live a godly life then you need to start training them from a very young age. There are parents who desire much for their child and hope for much, but actually do very little training of their children. The devil rejoices when he sees people behaving like this! He will always encourage parents to think that they can do very little for their children, so that parents become discouraged and lazy. This is the work of the devil.

I know that you cannot convert your child. I know that those who are born again are born again not because of the will of man but because of the will of God. But I also know that the Bible says, “Train a child in the way he should go.” God will never command us to do something without giving us the ability to do it. I also know that it is our duty not to just sit

and do nothing, but to obey and train our children. If we obey the word of God then God will honour our obedience. The path of obedience is the way in which He gives us blessings. At the wedding in Cana, the servants were not commanded to make wine, they were only commanded to fill the water pots, God did the rest. We too are to obey whatever God commands us and then leave the rest to Him.

4. As you train your child, remember that the soul of your child is the thing you must consider first.

Your children are no doubt very precious to you, so when you think about them, think often about their souls. Nothing should matter to you as much as their eternal condition, no part of the child should be as precious to you as the soul, because the soul is that part of your child which shall never die. The world with all its glory shall pass away; the hills shall melt; the heavens shall be wrapped together as a scroll; the sun shall cease to shine. But the soul which lives in our children will outlive them all; and whether their souls shall be in heaven or in hell, humanly speaking, depends on you.

This is the thought that should be foremost in your mind in all you do for your children. In every decision you take about them, in every plan you make for them, in every arrangement that concerns them, remember to ask yourself this great question, “How will this affect their souls?”

When you love your child’s soul, you truly love your child. If you spoil your children by giving them all the things of this world you give them the idea that true happiness is to be found here on earth in the things of this world. This is not true love; it is actually cruelty because it is treating someone like an animal. Animals do not have a soul, and if we teach our children that pleasure is to be found only in the things of this world we are teaching them that they are no better than animals. We should teach our children the great truth right from their childhood that the most important thing in life is for them to get saved.

A true Christian must not follow after the fashion of the world if he is to train his child for heaven. He must not just do things because everyone else in the world is doing them; he must not teach his children and train them in certain ways simply because that is how the people of the world do them. He must not let his children read certain books just because everyone else reads them, or to form certain habits, simply because his friends have those habits. He must train his child in such a way that he keeps in mind the child’s soul, even though the people of the world think he is strange. So what if he is strange? The time is short and the fashions of the world pass away. The person who trains his child for heaven rather than for earth; for God rather than for man, is a wise man.

5. Train your child to have a good knowledge of the Bible

I know that you cannot make your child love the Bible. Only the Holy Spirit can give us a heart to love the word of God. But you can make sure that your child knows the Bible well. And remember that it is never too early to start teaching your child the Scriptures. If your child knows the Bible well, then he will know Christianity well. If he knows the teachings of the Bible well then he will not be led away here and there by every kind of false teaching. Any training we give to our children that does not give the Bible first place is a mistake. Make sure that your children know the Bible well. This is the training that God will honour. The Psalmist says about God, “You have exalted above all things your name and your word” (Ps. 138:2). God gives a special blessing to all who try to exalt His word among the people of the world.

Make sure that your children read the Bible *reverently*. Train them to treat the Bible not as the words of men, but as the word of God, written by the Holy Spirit Himself. Teach them that the Bible is all true, and all profitable and is able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Make sure that your children read the Bible *regularly*. Train them to regard the Bible as daily food for their souls, something that is essential to their soul’s daily health. It may be that they will read the Bible everyday just out of habit and not because they love to read it, but that does not matter too much. It will still bring great benefit to them.

Make sure that your children read *the whole Bible*. Do not be afraid that there are things in the Bible your children may not understand. Children understand far more of the Bible than we think they do, and they are able to understand all the major teachings of the Bible.

Make sure that you read the Bible with your children, and make sure that you teach them all the important things that are found in the Bible. Teach them about sin: its guilt, its consequences, its power, and its vileness. Teach them about the Lord Jesus Christ and His work for our salvation; tell them about His death, about the cross, about His blood and His sacrifice; tell them about His work in heaven as the High Priest of His people.

Tell them about the work of the Holy Spirit in a person’s heart, how He, the Holy Spirit, changes a person and makes him new, and how he cleans and purifies a person. You will find that your children are able to understand many of these things. I suspect we have no idea how much a child can understand of the gospel. They can understand far more than we think they do. Fill your children’s minds with the Bible. Let the word dwell in them richly. Give them the Bible, the whole Bible, even while they are young.

6. Train your children in the habit of prayer.

Prayer is the life-breath of true Christianity, it is the first evidence that a person is born again. The Lord said about Saul of Tarsus after he was saved, “He is praying” (Acts 9:11). Saul had begun to pray and that was the proof that he was a saved man. Prayer was the mark of the Lord’s people when the separation began between them and the people of the world: “At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord” (Gen. 4:26).

Prayer is the mark of all real Christians now. They pray – they tell God what they need and what they feel and what their desires are and what things they fear. Their prayers are real prayers. The person who is not saved may just repeat some words, and they may be good words, but he goes no further. Prayer is the turning point in a man’s soul. Our ministry is unprofitable and our labour is in vain until we come to God in prayer. Until we pray we have no hope that anyone will get saved.

Prayer is the great secret of spiritual progress. The person who spends time with God in prayer will grow quickly in spiritual matters; but the person who hardly prays will be standing still spiritually. When you see a Christian who is growing spiritually and making great progress in his faith, one who is a strong Christian, then you may be sure that he is a man of prayers. He asks for much and he has much. He tells Jesus everything and so he always knows how to act.

Prayer is the greatest weapon that God has put into our hands. It is the best weapon to use whenever we face difficulties, and it is the best help in times of trouble. Prayer is the key that unlocks the promises of God, prayer is the hand that brings help from God in time of need; it is the cry of the person who has need, and God has promised always to answer prayer, just as a loving mother listens to the cry of her child.

Prayer is the simplest means that a man can use in coming to God. Everyone can use prayer, whatever their condition. The person who is sick, the person who is old, the person who is bed-ridden, the blind, the poor, the uneducated, all can pray. You cannot say that you have a poor memory or that you are uneducated or that you do not have books. So long as you are able to speak, you are able to pray. The Bible says, “You do not have because you do not ask God” (James 4:2). This is true of so many of God’s people.

Parents, if you love your children, do everything you can to teach them the habit of prayer. Show them how to begin to pray, tell them what to say, encourage them to continue in prayer. Remind them to pray if they become careless and slack about it. If they never call on the Lord, let it not be because you never taught them to pray. Prayer is the first step in

Christianity that your child is able to take. Long before your child can read, you can teach him to kneel by his mother’s side, and repeat the simple words of prayer and praise which she teaches him.

As your children are learning how to pray, pay careful attention to the manner in which they pray. This is a very important matter, though few parents seem to realise it. Do not let your children pray in a hurried and careless manner or in a way that does not honour God. Do not let the maid or anyone else be the one who teaches your child how to pray, and do not assume that your child will pray when he is left to himself. This matter of teaching a child how to pray is something a mother needs to do herself personally. Prayer is such an important matter that it must be the parents themselves who teach it to the child. Believe me, if you never hear your child pray, the fault lies with you. In the book of Job, we read this about the ostrich, “He lays her eggs on the ground and lets them warm in the sand, unmindful that a foot may crush them, that some wild animal may trample them. She treats her young harshly, as if they were not hers; she cares not that her labour was in vain” (Job 39:14-16). The parent who does not teach his child to pray is like this bird, he is careless about his child.

Prayer is, of all habits, the one we remember the longest. Many times you will meet an old man who will tell you how his mother used to make him pray when he was a young boy. Other things have gone from his memory perhaps. The church where he was taken to worship, the minister he heard preaching, the friends he used to play with, all these have gone from his memory. But you will often find that he remembers the time he was taught how to pray. He will be able to tell you where he knelt and what he was taught to say and how his mother watched him while he prayed. He will remember it all as if it were yesterday.

Reader, if you love our children, I urge you, do not neglect this matter of teaching your children how to pray. If you train your child in one thing only, train them in the habit of prayer.

7. Train your children to attend church regularly.

Teach your children the duty and privilege of going to the house of God and joining with the congregation in public worship. Tell your children that wherever the people of God are gathered together, the Lord Jesus is present there, and the people who do not attend will miss a blessing, just as the apostle Thomas did. Tell them how important it is to hear the word of God preached; tell them that God uses the preaching of His word to save people, to build them up in the Christian faith, and to prepare them for their eternal dwelling in

heaven. Tell them how the Bible encourages us in this matter: “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:25).

It is a sad thing when only old people come to church meetings and young people do not make the effort to come. Parents, do not let this be your fault. There are many children who do not attend church regularly and if you are a parent and your children do not attend church, then it is your duty to encourage them to attend. Do not allow your children to grow up with a habit of making excuses for not going to church. Tell them plainly that as long as they are under your roof, it is the rule of the house for everyone to honour the Lord’s house on the Lord’s Day. Teach your children that the person who neglects the Lord’s Day is murdering his own soul.

Make sure that your children attend church with you and that they sit near you during the service. To attend church is one thing, but to behave well in church is another. Believe me, the best way to make sure your children behave well in church is to have them near you. The minds of young people are easily distracted and they quickly lose attention, so every possible means should be used to fight this. I do not really like to see young people coming to church on their own. They often get into bad company along the way, and so learn more evil than good on the Lord’s Day. Neither do I like to see young people sitting by themselves in one corner of the church. They sometimes misbehave there and also they get easily distracted. What I like to see is the whole family sitting together, old and young side by side; men, women and children sitting in family groups worshipping God.

There are some people who say it is useless to ask children to attend church because they cannot understand the preaching and teaching. This is simply not true. I find no such teaching in the Old Testament. When Moses spoke to Pharaoh, I notice he says, “We will go with our young and old, with our sons and daughters, and with our flocks and herds, because we are to celebrate a festival to the Lord” (Ex. 10:9). When Joshua read the law, I notice, “There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them” (Josh. 8:35). And when I turn to the New Testament, I find that children are mentioned there as taking part in public worship. When Paul was leaving the disciples at Tyre for the last time, it says, “All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray” (Acts 21:5).

When Samuel was a child, he served the Lord, even though he did not know the Lord well: “Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him” (1 Sam. 3:7). The apostles themselves did not seem to have understood all that our

Lord said to them until later: “At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realise that these things had been written about him” (Jn. 12:16).

Parents, comfort your minds with these examples. Do not be discouraged because your children do not understand the full value of attending church at the moment. Train them in the habit of attending church regularly. Teach them that it is a holy and a serious duty, and believe me, the day will come when they will bless you for what you did.

8. Train your children in the habit of faith.

I mean by this that you should train them to believe whatever you say. You should train your children to trust you and respect your opinions as better than their own. You should train them to think that when you say something is bad for them, then it really is bad for them; and when you say that something is good for them, then it really is good for them. Train them to understand that your knowledge is better than theirs and that they can trust your judgement. Teach them to understand that there are some things which they cannot yet understand, and that if you ask them to do something there is a reason for it, though they may not yet understand that reason.

To have a spirit of faith is a great blessing. Unbelief has brought such a lot of suffering into the world! It was unbelief that made Eve eat the forbidden fruit because she doubted the word of God when He said, “If you eat of it you shall die.” It was unbelief that made people reject Noah’s preaching and so to die in the flood. It was unbelief that kept the children of Israel in the wilderness for 40 years, it was because of unbelief that they did not enter the Promised Land. It was unbelief that made the Jews crucify the king of glory. They did not believe the words of Moses and the Prophets, though they read them everyday. And unbelief is reigning in man’s heart to this very day. People do not believe the promises of God, they do not believe the threatening of God, they do not believe that they are great sinners in the sight of God, they do not believe that they are in great danger of judgement. It is pride and worldliness in man’s heart that causes unbelief. Reader, there is little point in training your child if you do not train him to believe what you say, and accept what you say as right.

Some people tell us that we should never expect our children to believe things they do not understand. But this is false. Of course we must try and explain things to our children so that they understand why we are asking them to do certain things. It is true that children can understand a lot of things and we should try and explain as much as we can to them. But we cannot teach our children that they must only believe what they can understand.

Remember that a child is a child and that he cannot possibly understand everything and so you cannot expect him to understand everything that you ask him to do. Set before him the example of Isaac when Abraham took him to offer him on Mount Moriah (Genesis chapter 22). He asked his father, “Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” and the only answer he got was, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.” Isaac was not told how the lamb would come and where it would come from; all he was required to do was to trust his father. He believed that it would be well because his father had said so and so he was content.

Teach your children that we are all learners at the beginning, that we can only know a few things at first and then grow in our knowledge and understanding. The day will come when they will see why you taught them as you did. But in the meantime, if you say a thing is right, that that should be enough for them, they must believe you and be content. Parents, training our children in this area is highly important. Use every means to train your children in the habit of faith.

9. Train your children in the habit of obedience.

This is something we need to work very hard to do. There is no habit that has such an influence upon our lives as this one. Parents, make sure that your children obey you, though it may cost you a lot of trouble and cost them a lot of tears. Do not allow them to question you in a bad way or to argue with you or to dispute what you say or to delay in obeying you or to answer back. When you give a command, make sure that they obey it. Obedience is a sign that a person’s faith is real and living. It is the test of whether we are true disciples of Christ or not. Jesus said, “You are my friends if you do what I command” (Jn. 15:14). It should be the mark of well trained children that they do what their parents tell them. This is what the fifth commandment tells them: “Honour your father and your mother” (Ex. 20:12).

The Bible has many examples of people who lived lives of obedience. God said about Abraham, “I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just” (Gen. 18:19). The Bible says that the Lord Jesus was obedient to his parents (Lk. 2:51). Notice how Joseph obeyed the order of his father Jacob (Gen. 37:13). Isaiah says that at the time of sin, “the young will rise up against the old” (Isaiah 3:5). Paul says that in the last days, people will be “disobedient to their parents” (2 Tim. 3:2). Notice also what Paul says about an elder: “He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect” (1 Tim. 3:4). He also says about deacons, “A deacon must manage his children and his

household well” (1 Tim. 3:12). Again he says that an elder, “must be a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient” (Titus 1:6).

Parents, do you wish to see your children happy? Take care that you train them to obey you and to do as they are told. We are not created by God to live just as we want without being under someone’s authority. Even those who have been set free by Christ must be His servants and serve Him (Col. 3:24). Children need to learn that no one in this world is free of authority; they need to learn that they must obey their parents. Teach them to obey while they are young or they will rebel against God all their lives.

Reader, this teaching is much needed today. There are many today who allow their children to choose and think for themselves before they are able to make wise decisions, and sometimes parents even make excuses for their children when the child is disobedient. To me the parent who always gives in and the child who always gets his own way is a painful sight because I see the order that God has appointed is turned upside down. It is also painful because that child will be selfish and proud and arrogant when he grows up. The child who refuses to obey his father who is here on earth will not obey his Father who is in heaven. Parents, if you love your child, teach him to obey you.

10. Train your children in the habit of always speaking the truth.

Telling the truth is not very common in our world today. We need to bear in mind that we are always required to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The sin of telling lies is a very old sin. The devil is the father of lies. He deceived Eve by telling her a lie, and ever since the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, all the children of Eve have to be on their guard against this sin. Think of how many lies are being told in the world every day. People exaggerate and add things to a story or leave things out of a story because they want to give a good impression. How many people are there whom we can trust completely that they always tell the truth? The fact that we all tell so many lies is proof that the whole human race is deep in sin.

Reader, think of how many times in the New Testament is God described as the God of truth. The Bible teaches us very clearly that the God who is watching us and who will judge us is the God of truth. He never departs from the straight line, he hates lying and hypocrisy. Try to keep this continually before your children’s minds. Impress it upon them that anything less than the truth is a lie; teach them that when they refuse to give a clear answer or make excuses or exaggerate the truth, then they are on the road to telling lies. Encourage your children at all times to be straightforward and honest in all things, even though it may cost them to tell the truth.

I urge this matter upon you because it will help your children greatly in their future lives if they are people of truth. I urge this matter on you also because it will help you in your dealings with your children. You will find it a very great help in your own life if you are able to always trust your child. If you teach them to always tell the truth then they will not hide things from you, rather they will be open and straightforward with you at all times.

11. Train your children to always use their time profitably.

Idleness is the devil's best friend. The best way to give the devil an opportunity to do us harm is to be lazy. An idle mind is like an open door, and if the devil does not come in himself, he will certainly throw in something to raise evil thoughts in us.

Everything that God has created is designed to serve and to work; it was never God's intention that any part of his creation should remain idle. The angels in heaven work; they are the Lord's ministering servants, ever doing His will. In the Garden of Eden Adam was given work to do; he was instructed to look after the garden and keep it. Those who are saved and are in heaven now are working day and night, singing praise and glory to Him who bought them. We as human beings must have things to do otherwise our souls will fall into sin unhealthy condition. We must be busy and our minds must be kept occupied with something, otherwise they will soon begin to plan all kinds of mischief.

And what is true of us is true of our children too. The person who has nothing to do is in great danger. Among the Jewish people idleness was a sin, and every Jewish family had to teach their children some skill so that they could work. They knew the heart of man, and we need to learn from their example.

It was idleness that took Sodom into sin. "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy" (Eze. 16:49). David fell into sin with Bathsheba because of idleness. We read in 2 Sam. 11 that Joab went to war against the Ammonites, "but David remained in Jerusalem." David was being idle, and it was then that he saw Bathsheba and fell into very great sin against the Lord. I truly believe that idleness has led to more sin than almost any other habit. I suspect it is the mother of many sins – adultery, fornication, drunkenness and many other deeds of darkness. Examine your conscience to see whether this is true or not. It is very likely that at some time when you were idle, the devil knocked on the door of your heart and led you into sin.

When we look at life around us, we learn the same lesson about idleness. It is still water which becomes stagnant and impure; the running, moving streams are always clear. If you

have some machinery, you must make sure you are doing work with it or it will soon get out of order. If you have a horse or a donkey you must exercise him, he will keep fit and well when he gets plenty of exercise. If you want a good healthy body then make sure you take exercise. If you are just sitting around then your body will begin to complain and become sick. It is the same with the soul. The mind that is always active and moving is hard for the devil to hit. Try to make sure that you are always doing something useful. If you do that your enemy will find it difficult to plant the seeds of sin in your heart.

Reader, I ask you to teach your children these things. Teach them that time is a valuable thing, and teach them to use their time well. I am greatly disturbed when I see children being idle. I love to see children being active and hard working and to work whole heartedly. I love to see children working hard at school and giving their whole heart to their studies. If you love your children, let idleness be considered a sin in your home.

12. Make sure that you do not spoil your children.

This is a matter on which you must be on your guard. It is natural for us to love our children and to be tender towards them. But it is when we are too tender to our children that I fear. Take heed that your love for your children does not make you blind to their faults, take care that your love for them does not make you deaf to all advice about them. Be careful that your love for your children does not make you overlook bad behaviour to such an extent that you refuse to correct them and punish them.

I know it is not a nice thing to correct our children and punish them; I know that we find it very unpleasant to have to punish our children. But we human beings have sin in our hearts, and so it is impossible to bring up our children without having to punish them at some time. Spoiling children is something we all understand. The best way to spoil your child is to let him have his own way; it is when we allow them to do wrong without punishing them that we spoil our children. Believe me you must not do this regardless of the pain it brings you unless you wish to ruin your children's souls.

Remember that the Bible speaks very clearly about this matter:

"He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him" (Prov. 13:24).

"Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death" (Prov. 19:18);

"Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him" (Prov. 22:15).

“The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother; Discipline your son and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul” (Prov. 29:15,17).

Notice how clear these verses are. How sad it is that many Christian families do not seem to know them at all! Their children need correction, but they hardly ever correct them; their children need to be disciplined, but they hardly ever discipline them. Yet this book of Proverbs is part of the Bible: it was written by God Himself and is profitable for us. It is given for our learning, just as the letter to the Romans or to the Ephesians is. The person who brings up his child without following the advice of this book is saying that he is wiser than God, and this is a great error.

Fathers and mothers, I tell you plainly, if you never punish your children when they are doing wrong, you are doing them a great wrong. I warn you, this is an area where many Christians have made serious mistakes in the past. Look at the case of Eli. He “heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with women who served at the Tent of Meeting” (2 Sam. 2:22). Eli “failed to restrain them” (2 Sam. 3:13). He gave them a mild rebuke instead of disciplining them. In one word, he honoured his sons above God. And what was the result of this? He lived to hear of the deaths of both his sons in battle and he himself died full of sorrow.

Look also at the case of David. Some of David’s sons were men of great sin: Amnon slept with his sister, Absalom murdered Amnon and then rebelled against David himself and Adonijah tried to become king despite the fact that David had not appointed him king. These were grievous wounds for the man after God’s own heart to receive. But when we examine the Scripture, we find that much of the fault lies with David. We read about Adonijah David’s son, “His father had never interfered with him by asking, ‘Why do you behave as you do’” (1 Kings 1:6). David spoiled his children, he was a father who let his children have their own way and he reaped according to what he had sown.

Parents, I urge you for your children’s sake, do not spoil them. I call on you to remember that you need to think about their real interests not what they would like to have. I urge you to train your children, do not spoil them; do that which will be of profit to them, not just that which will please them. Do not give way to your child’s every wish, however much you love him. Do not let him think that his will is everything, that he only has to ask for something and it will be done for him. Do not make your children your idols, lest God should take them away and break your idol just to teach you how wrong it is. Learn to say “no” to your children. Show them that you are able to say no when you think it is right to do so. Show them that you are ready to punish disobedience. Show them that when you

threaten to punish them, it is not just empty words; show them that if they misbehave they really will be punished. Do not be the kind of parent who is always threatening and never doing what he threatens. This will spoil your child. Make your threats few, but make them real.

Also beware that you do not let small faults pass without dealing with them by saying, “It is a little fault.” When we are training children there are no little faults; all faults are important. In a garden the little weeds also need dealing with. If you leave them alone they will grow into big weeds.

Reader, if there is one area where you need to be careful when training your child it is this one. This is the area that will give you a lot of trouble, but if you do not take trouble with your children when they are young, they will give you trouble when they are old. Choose which you prefer.

13. As you train your children, keep in mind how God trains His children.

The Bible tells us that God has His elect in this world, the family of God who are in this world. They are all sinners who have been convicted of their sin and have come to Christ for peace. All of us who truly trust in Christ for salvation are its members.

Now God the Father is always training the members of His family so that they may be ready for their eternal dwelling with Him in heaven. He acts as a gardener pruning the plants so that they may produce more fruit. He knows the character of each one of us, he knows the sins that we still have in us, he knows the areas in our lives where we are weak, and he knows our special needs. He knows our works and where we live and who are our friends in life. He knows the trials and the temptations we face and He knows the blessings we have in our lives. He knows all these things and He arranges all things in our lives for our good. He gives to us the very things that we need in order to bear more fruit; He gives us all the sunshine we need and all the rain that we need to bear fruit; He gives us sweet things and bitter things. Reader, if you want to train your children wisely, notice carefully how God the Father trains His children. He does all things well; the plans He adopts must be right.

Notice how many things God withholds from His children. All of His children will tell you that there are some things they really wanted but which they never got. It is as if God is saying, “This is not good for you; it would not help you to have this.” Moses desired very greatly to cross the Jordan and see the Promised Land, but his desire was never granted.

Notice also how often God leads His people in ways which seem dark and mysterious. We cannot see the meaning of all His dealings with us; we cannot see why God is leading us down a certain path. Sometimes we face so many trials and have so many difficulties in our lives that we have never found out why God allowed us to have them all. It is as if our Father has been taking us by the hand into a dark place and saying, "Do not ask questions, just follow me." There was a direct road from Egypt to Canaan, yet God did not lead the children of Israel into it (Ex. 13:17). Instead, God led the people round through the wilderness. To them it was a hard route (Num. 21:4-5), but God had a purpose in it.

Notice also how often God disciplines His children with trials and afflictions. He sends them difficulties and disappointments; He sometimes sends them sicknesses; sometimes they lose all their property and friends, and sometimes their whole status in life is changed. He sends trials to His children that they sometimes find very difficult to bear and sometimes they almost feel they are being crushed under it. The apostle Paul had a thorn in the flesh from the Lord. It was some difficult trial in his body, though we do not know for sure what it was. He sought the Lord three times that it might be removed; yet it was not taken away (2 Cor. 12:8-9).

Now reader, despite all these things, have you ever heard of a child of God who thought God was unwise in the way He has dealt with him? No! God's children always tell you that in the long run it was a blessed thing that He did not let them have their own way. They will tell you that God dealt with them far more wisely than they would have dealt with themselves. They will tell you that the way God chose for them was hard at first, but it brought them great happiness which they could never have obtained for themselves. They will tell you that the way was hard but in the end it brought a lot of blessing to them.

I ask you to take these things to heart; there are great things for us to learn from all this. Do not fear to withhold from your child anything that will do him harm, whatever his wishes may be. Do not hesitate to give to your child commands of which he cannot see the wisdom; do not hesitate to guide him in ways which he may at the moment think are unreasonable. Do not fear to discipline your child and correct him whenever you see that his soul needs it; however painful it may be to you. Do not reject discipline simply because it causes him pain. This is God's plan.

Above all, do not be afraid to give your child any discipline that may make him unhappy for a time. Do not just allow him to have his own way all the time: that is not the way to happiness. It is a blessed thing for us to be disciplined and corrected, it makes us value blessings when they come. The child who is spoilt all the time will be selfish; and selfish

people and spoiled children are never happy in life. Reader, do not try to be wiser than God, train your children as He trains His children.

14. As you train your children, remember that your own example is very important.

When you give instruction and advice and commands to your children, they will be of little use unless they are supported by your pattern of life. Your children will never believe that you are serious and that you really wish them to obey you if your lifestyle is contrary to your words. The person who gives good teaching to his children but is a bad example to them is showing them the way to heaven while leading them by the hand to hell.

We need to understand how powerful example is. No one can live in this world in isolation; we are always influencing other people in one way or another, either for good or for evil, either for God or for sin. Other people notice our ways and mark our conduct and observe our behaviour, and what they see us do, they will assume is the right way. This is especially true of parents with their children.

Fathers and mothers, do not forget that children learn more through their eyes than they do through their ears. Remember also that they will learn more at home than they will at school; the best teacher will not teach them as much as their parents will. Children imitate those around them, especially their parents. What they see has a stronger effect on their minds than what they hear.

Therefore, take care what you do before a child. The person who sins before a child leads the child into sin. Do your best to be a living letter of Christ which your family can read plainly. Be an example to them in the way you respect the word of God, the way you respect prayer, church attendance and the Lord's Day. Be an example to them in words, in temper and in faith. Be an example to them in love and kindness and humility. Do not think that your children will automatically do what they do not see you doing. You are their model and they will copy you in everything. All the teaching and all the advice that you give them they may not understand, but they can understand your life.

Children observe things very quickly and they can see hypocrisy very quickly. They will very quickly find out what you think and feel; and they will quickly adopt your way of life. You will often find that a son is very much like his father.

When you train your children, do not just teach them about godliness, lead them into it with your example. They will not take up habits which they see you hating and they will not go down a road that they do not see you walking. The person who preaches to his children

things that he does not practice is doing a work that will never make any progress. He is building with one hand and destroying with the other.

15. As you train your children, remember the power of sin.

I make this point briefly so that you do not have unbiblical expectations as you train your child.

You must not expect your child's mind to be pure and sinless, and you must not think that as long as you give good teaching, they will obey it and live good lives. I warn you plainly that you will find no such thing. It is painful to see how much corruption and evil there is in a young child's heart, and how soon it begins to bear fruit. Your child will sometimes have a violent temper, self-will, pride, envy, idleness, selfishness, deceit, cunning, falsehood, hypocrisy, a desire to learn what is bad and no desire to learn what is good. At times he will pretend to be whatever you want him to be just so that he can get his own way. All these things can be found in your child, and you must be prepared to see at least some of them in your own child. In little little ways these things will come out as your child grows, and it is sometimes shocking to see how they spring up in our children. Children do not need to be taught how to sin.

But you must not be discouraged and cast down by what you see. You must not think that it is a strange and unusual thing that your children's hearts are full of sin. We all inherited a sinful nature from Adam so we all have sin in us. What we need to do therefore is to use every means available to us to fight this sin that is inside us and in our children. Make sure that you keep your children out of the way of temptation.

Do not listen to the people who say your children are good and well brought up and can be trusted. Remember that their hearts are hearts of sin and that sin can burst forth at any time. Parents are very rarely careful about this. Remember that your children have sin in their hearts and take care.

16. As you train your children, remember the promises that God has made in the Bible.

Here I want to say a few words to guard you against discouragement.

You have a plain promise from God in the Bible: "Train you child in the way he should go and he will not depart from it when he is old" (Prov. 22:6). Just think what a blessing it is to have a promise like this from God. When the great servants of God in the Old Testament lived here on earth, the only thing they had that kept them going were the

promises of God. Men like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob all lived only on the promises of God, and they made great spiritual progress. The promises of God in every age have supported and strengthened the people of God. The person who has a clear promise in the Bible will never be discouraged. Fathers and mothers, when you are becoming discouraged look at the words of this text and take comfort.

In the first place, think about who it is that is making the promise. It is not the word of a man who can tell lies or fail to keep a promise; it is the word of the King of kings who never changes. Has God ever failed to keep His promises? Remember nothing is too difficult for God to do. The things that are impossible with men are possible with God. Reader, if we do not get the blessings that are promised in this text the fault is not God's but ours.

Secondly, think of what this promise actually says before you refuse to take comfort from it. It speaks of a certain time when good training will bear fruit: "When a child is old." There is comfort in this for all who are saved and are training their children. You may not see with your own eyes the result of careful training, but you do not know what fruit your training will produce long after you are dead and gone. God does not give to us everything all at once. He often chooses to work after some time has elapsed. When we face trials in life, after some time has elapsed we will see the fruits of those trials (Heb. 12:11). Many times parents have to wait for some time to elapse before they see the fruit of good training – we must sow in hope and plant in hope.

The Bible says, "Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again" (Eccl. 11:1). There are many children who on the Day of Judgement will bless their parents for the good training they have received from them, although they never got saved when their parents were still alive. Train your children well in faith, and be sure that your labour will not go to waste. Elijah stretched himself upon the widow's son three times before he revived. He persevered even when there seemed to be no life. Take example from him and persevere.

17. Finally, as you train your children, pray continually that God will bless your efforts.

Unless the Lord blesses your work, all your effort will be wasted. He has the hearts of all men in His hands, and unless He touches the hearts of your children by His Holy Spirit, all your work will be to no purpose. Therefore sow the seed of the word in your children by teaching them, and then water that seed by praying for them. The Lord is very willing to hear our prayers, and He is very willing to give us blessings but He wants us to pray for

these blessings. I set this matter of prayer before you as a very important duty. The child of many prayers is seldom lost.

Think of your children as Jacob thought of his children. He said to Esau, “The children which God has graciously given your servant” (Gen. 33:5). Think of your children as Joseph thought about his. He told his father, “These are the sons whom God has given me” (Gen. 48:9). The Bible says children are “a heritage and a reward from the Lord” (Ps. 127:3). Ask God boldly to be gracious and merciful to the gifts that He Himself has given you. Observe how Abraham prayed for Ishmael because he loved him: “Oh that Ishmael might live before you” (Gen. 18:18). Observe how Samson’s father Manoah speaks about Samson, “How shall we bring up the child? What shall we do for him?” (Judges 13:12). Observe how carefully Job cared for his children’s souls, “When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, ‘Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.’ This was Job’s regular custom” (Job 1:5). Parents, if you love your children, follow the example of these men, pray for your children. You cannot pray too often for them.

Conclusion

And now, reader, in conclusion, let me remind you how necessary and how important it is to use every means possible to train your children. I know that our God is a sovereign God and He does all things according to His sovereign will. I know that a man of God like Solomon had an ungodly son like Reheboam, and that a very godly man like Hezekiah had a very ungodly son like Manasseh. I know that godly parents do not always have godly children. But I also know that God uses godly, Biblical training in the home to save children, and if you are not serious about training your children in your home in a godly and a biblical way, then it is likely that your children will not turn out well.

Fathers and mothers, perhaps you will take your children to be baptised, perhaps you will take them to church each week, and to send them to a good school. You can buy your child a Bible and you can make sure he gets a lot of teaching about the Bible. But if you do not give your child regular training at home, I tell you clearly, things will be difficult with regard to your children’s souls. Home is the place where habits are formed; home is the place where the child’s character is formed; home is the place where our children learn what they like and what they dislike. Make sure that you train your child carefully in your own home.

Fathers and mothers, I charge you solemnly before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, spare no effort to train your child in the way he should go. I ask you to do this, not only for the sake of your child, but also for your own comfort and peace. It is in your best interests to make sure your child is well trained. Your own happiness depends upon it. Our children can either bring us great joy and peace and happiness, or they can make our later years here on earth full of trouble and anxiety. The children who do not follow Christ but follow the ways of the world bring a lot of trouble to their parents. That was the experience of Adam and David. There are no sorrows on earth like the sorrows which children have brought upon their parents. Be careful that you do not neglect your duty with regard to your children and then bring a lot of sorrow upon yourself. Take care that you do not neglect to train your children and then when you are old and in need they do not look after you.

If you wish your children to be a comfort to you when you are old; if you want them to be a blessing to you and not a curse; if you wish them to bring you joy and not sorrow, then take my advice and train your children from the time they are young.

Now, I will conclude my teaching in this booklet by praying to God for all who read these words. I pray that God will teach you the value of your own soul. There are many parents who do not understand the value of their own soul, so they do not understand the value of their children’s souls. They do not realise the great difference between being saved and being unsaved, and so they are content to just leave their children to follow their own way.

I pray that the Lord will teach you that sin is a hateful thing, and it is something God really hates. Once you understand this, you will be troubled about your children’s sins and will do your best to train them in the ways of God.

I pray that you will learn how precious the Lord Jesus is and what a great work He has done for our salvation. Once you understand this, you will begin to use every means to bring your children to Christ so that they may be saved through Him.

I pray that you will learn that you need the Holy Spirit to renew you and cleanse you and make you alive. Once you realise this, you will encourage your children to pray for the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts.

I pray that the Lord will grant you all this, because then you will begin to train your children well for life here on earth and for the life to come; that you train them for earth and for heaven; that you will train them for God, for Christ and for eternity.

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