

FATHERS TRAINING CHILDREN

EPHESIANS 6:4, PROVERBS 22:6

Pastor Andrew B. Pigott
Chinese Christian Church of New Jersey
June 16, 2002

I WOULD LIKE TO USE THESE TWO VERSES OF SCRIPTURE to serve as the basis of today's meditation. The verse taken from the New Testament is an admonition directed to fathers. According to the Bible, fathers and husbands are meant to have a leadership role in their family. I know that many people these days will argue that such a viewpoint is bigoted; however, it remains a Biblical fact that God chose men to take a leadership role in the family. Today I am not going to argue this point, and I am not going to explain why God chose men over women to take the lead in the family. Instead, I will assume it to be true, and I will spend my time explaining one aspect of a man's leadership role in his family; namely, to train his children in the instruction of the Lord.

As a leader, the father is ultimately responsible for the training of his children. If no training or if very little training takes place, the father is the one who is ultimately to blame. This does not mean that mothers cannot participate in training their children in the instruction of the Lord. They should participate. It simply means that fathers should take the lead and children should see their fathers taking the lead.

Now assuming that fathers are supposed to take the lead in the training of their children, let's take a look at the verse taken from the Old Testament. PROVERBS 22:6 gives us the same admonition and attaches a promise to it. "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." I will use this verse to establish the outline for this message. In this sermon, I would like to consider two things: first, what it means to train a child in the way he should go; and second, the meaning of the promise that says the child who has been trained will not depart from the way in which he has been trained.

Let's first consider the meaning of the training. In other words, What does it mean for a father to take the leading role in training his children?

The training of children, like all training, must have clearly defined goals in order to be successful. There can be no training without a desired result in mind, and training simply means working toward that result. So what is the goal of the training we are talking about? As far as fathers training children is concerned, I propose a two-part goal. There are two major results that every father should look for when training his children.

First and foremost, the training should result in the child receiving the power he needs to obey the instruction of the Lord. It does no good to train a child how to obey God when the child has no power to obey. In other words, the first and most important goal in the training of our children must result in them being born again.

Of course we cannot make a child experience a new birth and be filled with the Holy Spirit, but we can train our children to understand that being born again means more than anything else. Young boys need to sense that their fathers desire them to be born again more than they sense their fathers desire them to receive an education or land a good job. And young girls must see the same desire in their fathers. They must realize that their having a personal relationship with God is more important to their fathers than receiving a fine education or finding a mate or settling down to raise a family or buying a home.

I am not saying that it is wrong for a father to desire that his children receive education and job and family and home. I am just saying that fathers should not communicate to their children that these are the most important things in life. The most important thing is to experience a rebirth made available through the sacrifice Jesus Christ made on the cross for our sins.

As a father, I can stand back and look at the educational achievements of my children. I can take pride in the fact that my children have grown up to become responsible adults with reputable jobs. And when they have families of their own, I can become a proud grandfather. But the thing that should excite me the most as a father is the fact that my children are showing forth the fruit of a person who has been born again. The fruit I am talking about is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is Christian character. The Christian character I see in the lives of my children should never cease to excite me, because it tells me that they are born again. And if the fact that they are born again doesn't excite me more than anything or if I am failing to communicate that excitement to my children, then I, as a father, have failed in my training.

So the first goal of the training is to see our children receive the power they need to develop Christ-like character. The training requires us to pray and it requires us to help our children understand the meaning and importance of receiving eternal life. We need to find ways to communicate this truth

to them so they can understand it and yield to it.

The second goal is to see spiritual growth take place in the lives of our children. Of course this goal cannot be achieved apart from achieving the goal I just mentioned, because the growth I am talking about cannot happen without first experiencing a new birth, and children should not be led to believe that it can happen without being born again. This does not mean that we wait for a certain child to be born again before we train him to develop Christian character. We should always do both kinds of training at the same time. The point we must realize is that a person cannot develop something he does not have, and Christian character can only come by way of being born again. We cannot develop it if we don't have it.

The way we go about training our children to grow and mature in their new birth is a little different than the way we go about training our children to receive a new birth. In both cases, the training requires prayer on our part. Fathers are called to pray for their children. That is the similarity between both kinds of training.

But there is also a difference. When we train a child to receive a new birth, verbal communication is the most important factor. This training involves communicating with our children the meaning and importance of having a personal relationship with God and doing whatever we can in a natural and loving way to help our children yield to God's call for them to receive salvation. The training involves communicating to our children that having a personal relationship with God is the most important thing of all. This must be communicated both prior to and after the child receives a new birth.

But when we train a child to grow in Christian character, the most important aspect of the training is not verbal communication, it is non-verbal communication in the form of discipline. And I am not talking about disciplining a child who does wrong. I am talking about disciplining ourselves to become what we want our children to be. What I want my child to be, I must be.

If you really want to know what a certain father wants his children to become, look at who the father is. Who he is represents his true goal for his children. I have heard fathers say to their children, "Don't do what I do, do what I say." I have probably said it myself. But such a statement is very confusing to a child.

John Maxwell, a leading spokesman on the subject of leadership, defines leadership as influence, nothing more

and nothing less. As fathers, we are called to be leaders. And it must be our influence more than our spoken word that becomes the foundation of our training. Fathers please remember this; we will make our children what we are and not what we tell them to be.

What I am sharing with you now is not some deep spiritual mystery that is hard to understand. It is a fact of life proven over and over again. If we are going to train anyone to attain to a higher level of character, we must ourselves be or be in the process of becoming the very thing we are training a person to become.

Today I will travel to Pennsylvania to see my brother and three sisters and their children. I have not seen some of these family members for over eight years. Shannon will be meeting some of them for the first time. It should be a joyous occasion for everyone. But the joy is overshadowed by a certain amount of anxiety that still exists between family members. My brother has trouble forgiving his siblings for past things that were said and done, and he has even threatened to boycott this gathering.

**Fathers, do not
exasperate your children;
instead, bring them up
in the training and
instruction of the Lord.**

EPHESIANS 6:4

Now I love my brother. He is a father of five children, and I know he truly cares for his children and wants them to grow up to be good adults. But what my brother and every father must realize is that we are in the process of training our children by the very people we are. And when we refuse to forgive and forget we are training our children to do the same.

Think how this principle applies to every area of the Christian life. The strongest training a child will receive in the area of devotional life comes by seeing his father praying. The strongest training my child will receive in controlling his temper is to observe me controlling my temper. If I want my children to remain faithful to their future husbands and wives, then I must remain faithful to mine. Every direction toward which I desire my children move, I must be willing to go the same direction. And since the biblical command is for us fathers to lead our children in the direction of holiness, we must also travel in that direction. That is how we train them.

So the training actually comes in to parts. There is a verbal communication that leads a child in a natural way to eternal life. And there is also the non-verbal communication of discipline that influences a child to resist evil and choose good.

Now the last thing I want to say about training before we go on to the promise has to do with the importance of one-on-one training. In my opinion, there is no other way

to train a child than taking the time needed to be alone with each individual child entrusted to us by God.

And the reason why this is so important is that each individual child is unique in his personality and abilities and desires. Perhaps you have heard the saying, “When God made so and so, He broke the mold.” But the reality is that God breaks the mold after he creates each individual. After God made you, he broke the mold.

The training an extroverted child receives and the training an introverted child receives must be different. The extroverted child does not need as much praise and encouragement as does the introverted child, and if we treat them both the same, one will be sure to loose out.

I recently read a true story of a father named Darrell who had to learn this lesson the hard way. Darrell had grown up with major doses of discipline in his life. His father taught him how to keep his emotions in check. He trained him about the hard side of love. The warm, emotional side of love was something Darrell rarely experienced. When Darrell grew up, he became a father himself. And, as a father, he passed on the same training he received to his two sons.

He told himself over and over again, “It’s my job to put clothes on their backs and food on the table; and it’s their mother’s job to show them affection.” But his two sons were different.

With his older son, Larry, communication was never a struggle. He and his dad acted and thought so much alike that they didn’t need to talk much. They just did things together, like hunting or working on their cars. Darrell had always treated Larry as he did the men at his construction sites—rough. And Larry had always responded well to—even thrived on—that kind of treatment.

But Darrell’s second son, Charles, was a different case. Darrell could tell early on that Charles was much more sensitive than Larry. Many of the harsh things that Darrell said to motivate his sons actually hurt and discouraged Charles.

It wasn’t until Darrell was 51 years old that he finally realized what he had done. During a church retreat he came face to face with the fact that there are two ways of expressing love. He had become an expert on the tough expression of love. He could hand out the spankings, but he never could reach out to hug his sons. Now, at the time both his sons were going off to college, Darrell realized what he had done.

He made an appointment to meet Charles at a restaurant. It was there that Darrell confessed his mistake to his son and asked him for forgiveness. It was there that he, for the first time, actually told his son that he loved him. And after three hours of talking, and when they were getting up to leave the restaurant, Charles did something that shocked his father.

Several people looked up from tables nearby as this strong young man reached out and gave his equally strong father a warm bear hug for the first time in years. With tears in their eyes, those two strong men stood there holding each other, oblivious to the stares.

As fathers, we must know and appreciate the ways in which our children are different and adjust our training to fit the child. Some children are born with outstanding curiosities. They will ask us more questions in the course of a day than we will be able to answer in a lifetime. We must reason and answer the questions and take time to do it. Other children seem to believe everything they hear without asking questions. We must help these children learn how to test the spirits.

Some children are naturally inclined toward spiritual things. Fathers must train these children carefully, because the devil loves to get hold of such children, causing them to have spiritual experiences that are not edifying. Other children are turned off by anything that is spiritual, and these children must be awakened.

Every child needs individualized attention.

We send our children off to schools and care centers where it is virtually impossible for them to get the individualized attention they need. Even here at church, we send them off to Sunday school and children’s church. People have come to me concerned about the fact that some children in this church never learned how to worship in a respectful way. People are appalled to see young people passing notes and generally not paying attention during our worship service. But who is to blame? Is it the few volunteers who lead these children in children’s worship while they were growing up? Absolutely not! Those people did their best.

The ones who must take responsibility are the parents in general and the fathers in particular. I grew up in the days before children’s church. I did not understand most of what I heard during a worship service, but I had to listen with respect to what was being said and done because I was forced to sit beside my parents. From a child’s perspective,

Train a child in the way
he should go, and when
he is old he will not turn
from it.

PROVERBS 22:6

receiving such individualized supervision might sound awful. Children will not usually ask for individualized training, but they need it. They won't object to us putting them with a crowd of other children to be supervised by a few individuals; but by doing so, we give up our opportunity and our parental right to train them. We give to others who cannot possibly do the job the way God intends it to be done.

I once met a mother who took time out from her busy schedule every week to eat lunch with one of her children. Every month each one of her children would be pulled out of school for an hour to meet with her for lunch. During that hour she would give to her children the individualized attention they needed. She knew that you cannot train four or five children in the same way.

I am tempted to go on with other illustrations to emphasize this point because it is such an important point; however, time compels me to move on to the second major point of my sermon. It is the promise that a child who has been trained in the way of the Lord will never depart from his training, even when he gets old.

The difficulty with such a promise is automatically apparent. There are many examples of people who grew up under the training of godly parents who did not turn out to be godly themselves. This would appear to be hard evidence that such a promise does not hold up under the harsh conditions of real life.

But we cannot explain away a Biblical promise that easily. Training up a child in the way he should go is a two-part proposition. It involves both trainer and trainee. We cannot say a certain person has been trained if that person has never submitted himself to the training.

The Voo family owns a large dog. It is my understanding that they have taken their dog to training school. Now suppose Brian tells me that his dog has been trained to roll over just because a trainer has spent hours teaching him. And yet I discover that the dog has never successfully rolled over. I will object to the statement that the dog has been trained. He is only trained when he does the thing that he has been trained to do.

A child has not been trained up in the instruction of the Lord until he receives the new birth and responds to the lessons he receives from those who are training him. For every child who is trained up in the way of the Lord, the promise holds true.

If the promise depended on the trainer alone, then it must be argued that salvation can be attained through works. In this case it would be the work of the father and others who do the training. Our training cannot guarantee

the outcome, but it can greatly influence the outcome, and we must never forget that. The training is essential.

Of course that raises another question. If I fail to train my child, does that guarantee my child must go wrong in the end? No, it does not. As a father, I may neglect my child at home, and some godly Sunday school teacher may do the work I have neglected.

But how about the child who never receives proper training in the way of the Lord? What about the child who only receives wrong training? The grace of God is not restricted. Many adults who only received wrong training when they were growing up have found eternal life. But it usually only comes after much pain and suffering.

Our decision as fathers to take the time and make the sacrifice needed to do the training must be taken seriously. If we ask others or assume that others will do the training for us while we busy ourselves with making money and supporting the family in other practical ways, then we must be aware of the consequences of our decision. It is true that God, by His grace, may find another person to provide the training. But the consequence is this: *The one who provides the training will be the one who bonds with the child in the ages to come.* The lasting relationships we have with people are always spiritual in nature.

Two weeks ago I talked about people greeting us in heaven because we spent time and money here upon this earth to help them know God. As fathers who choose to neglect the spiritual training of our children so as to provide them with clothing and food and education, we must consider this consequence of our decision. If our children do make to heaven, they will be more eager to meet the Sunday school teachers who led them to God than they will be to meet us.

Today we celebrate the ideal of fatherhood, and that ideal is a father taking the lead to train up his children in the instruction of the Lord. The training will bring everlasting benefits both to the children and to the parents who do the training. The children will enter into a quality of life that is full of meaning and purpose. They will experience eternal life. And the parents will receive the reward of a special bond with their children that will last throughout the ages. May God grant every father the grace to attain to this high ideal of fatherhood, and may God encourage all of us to pray for fathers everywhere.

What kind of training did/is your father giving you? How much did/is he helping you to understand your need for salvation, and how much is he helping you to grow in Christian character? During the sharing time, take time out to pray for fathers.