

## **Train a child in the way he should go!**

Proverbs 22:6 Mother's Day May 12, 2019 Pastor Robert Hein

Dear Fellow Children of God,

Some parents don't believe in providing a Christian education for their children when they are young. They say, "We aren't going to force religion on our kids. We will just let them decide for themselves what they want to believe when they grow up. I am sure they can just figure it out on their own."

There are some real serious flaws with that line of thinking, that "hands off" approach to parenting. First of all, it assumes that left to themselves, kids will just naturally be able to figure everything out and make their own wise choices.

But discerning parents understand this simply isn't the case. That's why parents childproof their homes with safety plugs in the electrical outlets and lock their poisons away. They know little kids love to put their fingers in electrical sockets and eat poison like its candy. Did you ever see a toddler run around in a house? They just seem to be drawn to trouble. They don't know any better. That's why parents continually remind their kids to brush their teeth, look both ways before crossing the street, and not to fill their stomachs with junk food before dinner. You see, kids don't know how to make the right choices all on their own. They need to be taught, and guided and directed to follow the right path, over and over and over again. Yes, the writer of the book of Proverbs was correct when he said, "**Folly is bound up in the heart of a child.**" Proverbs 22:5

There is also this misconception that all children are born good or at least morally neutral, and so once again, all on their own, they are capable of making wise choices and God-pleasing decisions.

But this denies the devastating impact of original sin upon all people, including our children. God's Word teaches, "**Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.**" Psalm 51:5 Let's face it. We aren't born good. We aren't even born spiritually neutral. No we are all born spiritually blind, dead and hostile to God. The Lord made this summary statement about the corrupted sinful nature of every

human being when he said following the Flood, **“Every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.”** Genesis 8:21

The voices our children hear in this world and from the media are not going to point them in a godly direction either. In fact, quite often the standards and priorities this world promotes stand in direct opposition to the standards and priorities God sets out for us in the Bible. That’s why God’s Word instructs parents, **“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.”** Proverbs 22:6

If this is true for teaching children to brush their teeth and eat a healthy diet, it is even more important for bringing up our children in the truths of the Bible and the saving knowledge of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

This starts by bringing our children to receive the blessings of Holy Baptism. The Bible says that we are all born spiritually blind, dead and hostile to God. But in Baptism, God brings us rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. He grants us new life in Christ. He opens our eyes to see and appreciate the blessings Jesus won for us on the cross. He converts us, turning us from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

Who wouldn’t want to share these precious, life changing gifts with their children? That’s why we bring our kids to be baptized and then help them stay connected to Jesus their whole life through.

Yes, in Holy Baptism, God the Father adopts our children into his own dear family of believers. Jesus washes away all their sins and covers them with his perfect robe of righteousness, and the Holy Spirit comes to live in their hearts by faith. Understanding our children’s foremost need and treasuring the priceless blessings God offers through this sacrament, baptizing our children becomes an urgent priority and our great delight.

But Christian training doesn’t end there. It is really just getting started. It is the Gospel in baptism that the Holy Spirit uses to kindle the fire of faith in our child’s heart, then it is the Gospel in the Word and in the Lord’s Supper which will keep that fire of faith burning brightly.

That's why parents make it a priority to worship with their children in God's house regularly, bring them to Sunday School and provide for their Christian education. There are plenty of negative influences pulling our children in the wrong direction every single day. Every day they are taught to disregard the truths of the Bible. Every day sinful behavior is promoted as good and beneficial. Every day they are fed false information concerning the sanctity of marriage and the God-pleasing practice of our sexuality. Every day truth is being turned upside down. Under that constant assault, it's easy for our children to be led astray and caught up in sinful living. It's even possible to lose their Christian faith all together.

That's why wise parents continually train their children in the way they should go, God's way, Christ's way. To counter all the negative influences and worldly philosophies out there, we want our kids to be continually influenced and encouraged and equipped by God's Word to know the truth, to defend the truth, and to live by it.

Our chief goal however, is not to give our kids a list of rules to live by, but to help them enjoy a close personal connection with Jesus Christ. Laws can tell us we are guilty. Laws can show us where we fall short of the glory of God. But only the good news of Jesus provides the solution to our problem of sin and guilt. We want our kids to know where to bring their sins and failures, to Jesus and to cherish the forgiveness he won for them on the cross. We want our children to find value in Jesus, because he has called us to be children of God. We want our children to find comfort in Jesus because he lives to help us in time of need. We want our children to find hope in Jesus because he promises to guide us safely through all the trials and troubles of this life until he brings us safely home to heaven.

Yes, we want our children to be healthy and happy, to get good grades, to have good friends, to do well in their activities. But what we want most of all for our children is to stay closely connected to Jesus as their Savior, enjoy his blessings and cherish his promises, and rest secure in his faithful love. That's why our top priorities as Christian parents is to train our children in the way they should go, and bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Parents also want to lead by example because we realize values are more often caught than taught.

Do you know who Charles Barkley is? He is an outspoken sports commentator. Before that he was an NBA basketball player. I remember that Charles Barkley frequently got into trouble when he visited various cities. Sometimes he would get in fights at bars or cause other mischief. Once he was asked about the impact of his behavior on young people. He replied, “Hey! I’m not a role model.” To that a Christian speaker once said, “Sure, you are a role model. You are a just a bad one.”

There’s a lot of truth in that statement. As adults, as parents as leaders, like it or not, we are role models. Children are watching us. Our actions are going to influence our kids. We are role models. The only question is are we good role models or bad role models?

Of course, our goal is to be positive role models, and to imitate and honor Christ in our words and actions. Parents, understand that to a large degree your children’s worship habits are going to be patterned after yours. If you value time in God’s house and hunger and thirst for the Lord’s Supper yourself, your kids will benefit from your example. But if you adopt casual worship habits and place sports and entertainment and shopping and leisure as higher priorities than time with Christ in his Word, or take the summer off from God’s house, then your children will suffer from your poor example.

A special encouragement to the dads in the congregation. God has given us a wonderful privilege and important responsibility. As fathers, we paint a picture of our heavenly Father to our children. They will build their concept of what their heavenly Father is like based upon the love and faithfulness we show to them.

Husbands, you get to paint a picture to your children of what a Christ like spouse looks like also. The Bible says, “**Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.**” Ephesians 5:25

One reason we want to be God-fearing dads and faithful husbands is because of the impact our actions will have upon our children. Studies indicate that dads especially have a powerful influence on the worship habits of their children. Remember, “Start

children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it.”

It’s even been said that daughters often base their view of marriage upon the way their dad treats their mom. So, dads, one of the greatest gifts you can offer your children is to dearly, love, honor and cherish their mom, your wife, for life. You see, if a daughter comes to understand her value as a precious child of God, and learns how to be loved and cherished by you as her father, and as she has seen you love and respect her mother, she will expect any guy she enters into a relationship with to treat her the very same.

Moms, you are also continually teaching your children important life lessons by your example as well. Besides folly being bound up in the heart of a children, there’s a lot of selfishness residing there also. Let’s be honest. We all come into this world pretty self centered. We think the whole world revolves around me.

But Christian moms teach their kids not only to look to their own interests, but also to look to the interests of others, to adopt the mindset of Christ. Moms teach their kids to share, and care and serve , not only by their words, but also through their own personal example of caring and sharing and serving the needs of others. It starts with Christ. He serves our needs. He washes away our sins. He looks out for our best interest. In grateful response we are eager now to pay it forward, to reflect Christ’s love to others, to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

So moms, be filled with the Spirit. Let’s Christ’ love and compassion and patience and forgiveness flow to you and then through you to your family. It’s contagious. As you children heart about Christ’s love from you and see Christ’s love in you, it’s going to rub off on them too, and empower them to be the kind of holy caring people God calls them to be.

You may have noticed the wording change in our text today from NIV 84 to NIV 2011. We are used to saying, “Train a child in the way he should go.” NIV 11 says, “Start your children out in the way they should go.” Actually the Greek word “train” or “start” could be translated “dedicate” That’s how this word is translated in other verses from the Old Testament. It refers to the dedication of a building.

Last September we dedicated our building expansion to the glory of God. We set apart these new facilities for a holy purpose. We said we were going to use them, not for evil intent or sinful pleasure, but to God's glory. We dedicated these facilities to build strong connections, with Christ through his Word, with one another through fellowship and service, and to help unchurched people get connected to Christ through the power of the Gospel.

It's important to remember why we built this expansion and the sacred purpose for which we dedicated these facilities.

This is just true for our children. In Proverbs 22:6 the Lord encourages, "Dedicate your children in the way they go. Set them apart for the purpose to which I have called them. Dedicate them to a life of worship, a life of spiritual growth, a life of Christian service. Bring them to me and help them stay closely connected to me through by the power of the Gospel. This is your highest calling as Christian parents.

Dedicating our facilities to God's glory reminds us they are not our own. They are his, and we just get to use them to carry out his will, for his purpose.

In the same way, children don't really belong to parents. They belong to God. He just entrusts them to us for 20 years or so, to dedicate them back to him, to start them off on the right path, to train them in the way they should go, so that they will always stay close to him. May the Lord bless our efforts to encourage equip and empower God's children for life and for eternity. Amen.