Sermon Series: Words of Wisdom in a Whacked-Out World
Sermon Title: Coaching Your Children to Achieve Their Potential

Announcement: Watch your emails this week. We'll be providing details of our Christmas Musical, One Bethlehem Night, that you'll want to attend the weekend of November 15th-17th.

Text: **Proverbs 13:24 -- Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him. Proverbs 22:6 -- Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:15 -- Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.**

Introduction: Last week, we took a brief break from our series, "**Words of Wisdom for a Whacked-Out, Crazy World**" to look at what the Bible says about believers using our spiritual gifts to serve the body of Christ. A good many of you responded to the message by talking with some of our various ministry leaders after the service to better understand what needs they have and what part you might be able to play in meeting them. I just want to thank you for your overwhelming response.

Today, as we jump back into our study of the book of Proverbs, I want to talk about the role parents play in raising godly children, a role that has been much disputed over the centuries. Let me explain. According to an article written by **Lauren Steele** on the website, **Fatherly,** parental discipline has changed over time. Before the latter part of the **17th century**, most parents followed the Old Testament teaching taught in passages such as **Proverbs 29:15** – "T**he rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother**." It wasn't until **1690, that** English philosopher and physician, **John Locke**, commonly referred to as **the Father of Liberalism,** published the ***Essay Concerning Human Understanding*** and challenged the notion of corporal discipline. He presented the idea that children resemble a blank tablet (tabula rasa) at birth, and are not predisposed to sin. **Locke** encouraged parents to have children learn about consequences naturally so that self-control and a desire to be accountable for their actions became a by-product of guidance, not (harsh) discipline. STILL, PARENTING DID NOT CHANGE MUCH UNTIL THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. **In 1946**, **Dr. Benjamin Spock** released the now-famous parenting tome, ***Baby and Child Care***, in which he encouraged parents to be reasonable, consistent, open, and friendly with their kids — not regimented or authoritative. "**Children are driven from within themselves to grow, explore, experience, learn, and build relationships with other people.**" **But when the first generation of Spock-raised babies turned into the rebellious teens of the 1960s and 1970s, Dr. Spock's ideas took a serious hit**. ***That's when conservative psychologists such as James Dobson came along and encouraged more authoritarian parenting styles*** with the belief that children learn best when parents focus, not only on instruction but also on discipline that teaches children how to live correctly in the fear of the Lord which, Scripture says, is the beginning of wisdom (**Proverbs 9:10**). **With these two competing viewpoints, A CLEAR DIVIDE WAS DRAWN BETWEEN PARENTS WHO BELIEVE CHILDREN NEED DISCIPLINE AS A TOOL TO TEACH WHAT IS RIGHT AND PARENTS WHO BELIEVE POSITIVE ENCOURAGEMENT WILL ACCOMPLISH THE SAME THING.**

Let me ask you a question, "**Which side of the debate are you on**?" "Or to put it another way, "**In your opinion, what is the best way to raise godly children**?"

This morning, I want to focus on a saying of Solomon that gets a lot of attention because its meaning is in dispute. I'm talking about **Proverbs 22:6**, "**Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it**." For some parents, this verse has produced a lot of guilty feelings because it seems to promise that **if we start out by teaching our children the ways of the Lord, they will continue along that path for the rest of their lives**. Unfortunately, sometimes one of our children goes astray, and when that happens, we wonder where **we** went wrong and what we should have done to prevent this from happening.

If you're feeling that way, it's possible that you could have neglected your God-given responsibilities and that's why your children are not following Christ. But it's also possible that you might have done most everything well and still they rebelled. **What do we say to this?** You must understand this verse is not a promise that if parents do everything right, their children will turn out right. **You see, the book of Proverbs does not give promises, but advice**. With that in mind, it should be viewed as a **GENERAL RULE OF THUMB**. In other words, Solomon is saying, "**If you raise your kids the right way, the outcome will very likely be that they will live the right kind of life**." Now, of course, we have to ask, "**What does it mean to train up a child**?" "**What is the way he should go**?" and "**What does it mean when it says he will not depart from it**?" Let's take a closer look at this verse by examining each part.

The Command – Train up a child. The Hebrew word that is translated as "**train**" has a very **unusual word picture** behind it. It refers to the action of placing a morsel of food in the mouth. It's what a mom does for her little baby who is only learning how to eat. **She BRINGS milk to the child and then gently persuades her baby to take it**. This is what the Bible says parents are to do for their children. **Moms and dads are to BRING to them the food of life** (i.e., Truth from God's Word) **and then gently persuade them to receive it**. In keeping with the word picture, they are to bring the food to their children because children cannot do it for themselves. **The goal, then, is to give milk to your children when they are young so that you do not have to give it to them when they are old**. This was a frustration that the Apostle Paul faced with the church in Corinth. "**But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready**" (**1 Corinthians 3:1-2**). Though they should have displayed greater maturity by this time, they did not. That's why he had to go back to giving them the basics of the Christian life all over again.

Listen, when a child is in the early stages of life it's completely understandable that you would give them a bottle, but if you have to do the same thing when they become a teenager, something is certainly amiss. The point that Solomon is making is this: **get your child started off on the right foot at the earliest possible age**. Here's some of what it is going to take to accomplish this. As parents you will need to … (**1**) Understand your children and their individual needs; (**2**) Discipline your children out of love so that they learn what is right and what is wrong; (**3**) Demonstrate flexibility knowing that what worked for one child may not work for another; (**4**) Teach your children the Bible because it contains everything necessary for life and godliness (**2 Peter 1:3**); and (**5**) Persevere as a parent knowing that this is not one day, one month or one year job. You will in some sense never stop parenting your children. **Gary and Ann Marie Ezzo** wrote a book called "**Growing Kids God's Way**." In it, they discuss **the four phases of raising children**. **Phase One is discipline**. It covers the period from birth to five years. This is when you establish that you love your children and are here for them. It's also the time when you begin grounding them in the Word and establishing your authority. **Phase Two is training**. It takes place between the ages of six to twelve. This is when the parents are working closely with their children in many different settings as they prepare to enter the mainstream of life. **Phase Three is coaching**. This occurs during the teen years. It presumes that you have given them the foundation that they will need to navigate these exciting and potentially turbulent times. Parents no longer make the decisions for their kids but coach them to make the right choices. **Phase Four is friendship**. As your kids become independent, you cultivate the qualities of a close friendship with them. Although the parent-child relationship does not cease, both of you recognize that this is a new season in life. START WITH DISCIPLINING, MOVE TO TRAINING, EVOLVE INTO COACHING, AND FINISH WITH FRIENDSHIP.

The Direction – In the Way He Should Go. Now, to be honest, scholars are divided as to the meaning of this phrase. There are some who teach that this verse refers to training up a child according to his way or bent. The idea is that every one of your children has a unique personality and temperament. **It is your job to discover how God fashioned them so that you can lead them toward achieving their highest potential in light of their gifts, talents, and abilities**. So lead them in the way that they would naturally want to go because it's how God hard-

wired them. This idea certainly has some validity, but I don't believe this is what Solomon was saying. It seems to me (and other scholars) that he is exhorting parents to invest their energy in their children so that they choose the path of holiness. This is how the word "**way**" is used in much of the of the book of Proverbs. It contrasts the way of the wicked with the way of the righteous (**Proverbs 13:6 -- Righteousness guards him whose way is blameless, but sin overthrows the wicked**). It's likely, therefore, that the word means something similar here in **Proverbs 22:6**.

We all know that left to themselves, children will choose the wrong and destructive path. After all, **folly is bound up in the heart of a child** (**Proverbs 22:15**). That's why parents must play a key role in their spiritual development. **We want them to experience the blessings of God as they walk in His ways**. In the Old Testament, it says this in **Deuteronomy 6:7-9 -- You shall (God's commands) diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates**. **The point is that parents are expected to incorporate the things of God into virtually every area of life so that children don't view Him as just another facet of the good life, but the very cause of it**. In the New Testament, Paul tells parents to "**bring (their children) up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord**" (**Ephesians 6:4**). We are to teach our children what it means to walk with God in the way of righteousness, truth, honesty, and integrity. **Here's what we can expect to happen if we neglect our responsibilities according to the Houston, Texas Police Department (1960)**. Here are the **twelve rules for raising delinquent children**:

1. Begin with infancy to give the child everything he wants. In this way, he will grow up to believe the world owes him a living.
2. When he picks up bad words, laugh at him. This will make him think he's cute. It will also encourage him to pick up "cuter phrases" that will blow off the top of your head later.
3. Never give him any spiritual training. Wait until he is 21, and then let him "decide for himself."
4. Avoid the use of the word "**wrong**." It may develop a guilt complex. This will condition him to believe later, when he is arrested for stealing a car, that society is against him and he is being persecuted.
5. Pick up everything he leaves lying around - books, shoes, clothes. Do everything for him so that he will be experienced in throwing all responsibility on others.
6. Let him read any printed matter he can get his hands on. Be careful that the silverware and drinking glasses are sterilized, but don't worry about his mind feasting on garbage.
7. Quarrel frequently in the presence of your children. In this way, they will not be too shocked when the home is broken up later.
8. Give the child all the spending money he wants. Never let him earn his. Why should he have things as tough as you did?
9. Satisfy his every craving for food, drink, and comfort. See that every sensual desire is gratified. Denial may lead to harmful frustration.
10. Take his part against neighbors, teachers, policemen. They are all prejudiced against your child.
11. When he gets into real trouble, apologize to yourself by saying, "I never could do anything with him!"
12. Prepare yourself for a life of grief. You'll surely have it.

So far, we've talked about the command from Solomon – train up a child and the direction of the command – in the way he should go. Now let's talk about the principle behind it all.

The Principle – And when he is old, he will not depart from it. I don't need to tell you that children are not robots or puppets that can be programmed or manipulated**.** They are people just like the rest of us. And that means that God has given them THE WILL to choose for themselves which way they intend to go. Remember that this verse is not a promise from God, but a general principle that will ring true for most people who follow **His parenting plan**. It's as if God is saying, "**If you sow the right seeds of truth and love into the hearts and**

minds of your children, the chances a very good that you will reap a fruitful harvest of righteousness and goodness later in their lives." Or to use a different analogy, one mother compared her children to wet cement that can be molded into many different designs, but once it hardens their character is set. **That's why we have to be so diligent in training up our children in the way they should go**. It's not that they can never change later in life, but it is much less likely that they will. The reason I first went into youth ministry was because someone shared this statistic with me. **Eighty-five percent of the people who come to know Christ as Savior and Lord do so before the age of eighteen**. This statistic verifies what **Proverbs 22:6** is saying. We must get an early start on teaching and training our children in the things of the Lord if we want to protect them from a lifestyle shaped by the foolishness of the world's values. Twice in the book of Proverbs we're warned, "**There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death**" (**Proverbs 14:12; 16:25**). THIS IS WHY WE HAVE CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRIES HERE AT RIVER RIDGE. WE WANT TO PARTNER WITH PARENTS AND PROVIDE ADDITIONAL TOOLS TO HELP THEM IN THIS ALL-IMPORTANT ENDEAVOR.

Now let me finish by saying something to parents who have grown-up children who have wandered from the faith. What can you do now that they are on their own? Here are three answers to that question:

- **Confess to your children your failures and ask for their forgiveness**. We've all failed at some level, so this is an appropriate thing for all of us to do.
- **Don't write your children off**. Continue to love them no matter where they are or what they're doing. Remember -- Love never fails.
- **Pray for your wayward son or daughter**. What might seem impossible to you is always possible with God. Ask Him to do great work in your child's heart.

So, by way of review – The Command is to TRAIN UP YOUR CHILD; THE DIRECTION IS IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO; AND THE PRINCIPLES IS HE WILL NOT DEPART FROM IT. **So much is riding on how we, as parents, do in the role God has called us to.**

Conclusion: **Dr. Albert Siegel** once wrote this in **the Stanford Observer newspaper**: "**When it comes to rearing children, every society is only twenty years away from total (anarchy). Twenty years is all we have to accomplish the task of civilizing the infants who are born into our midst each year. These savages know nothing of our language, our culture, our religion, our values, and interpersonal relationships. The infant is totally ignorant of democracy, respect decency, honesty, customs, conventions, and manners. The barbarian must be tamed if civilization is to survive**." THIS IS THE JOB OF PARENTS.