

The Nurture & Admonition of the Lord #2

Proverbs 22:6

As our children grow up in Christ our delight in them increases. New stages bring new challenges so we must look to Scripture and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us.

Summary of the Text

Children are like trees that start small and flimsy but grow up to be big and inflexible. This proverb makes the connection between training a child in his youth and him continuing in it when he is old. Proverbs summarize large and complex matters into simple statements. When he says “train up” he has in mind the thorough nurture and admonition of the Lord, all founded upon His promises. This is the immersive covenantal environment where the Lord is honored and enjoyed everywhere and all the time (Dt. 6:6-9).

Homo Adorans

As kids grow up you learn who they are and who they are becoming, but don't forget they are learning the same about you. They learn what you love by being with you. We are *homo adorans*, worshiping creatures even more fundamentally than *homo sapiens*, thinking creatures. You will think about what you love. You will pursue the things you most desire. It's possible to force a kid go to church, but if that's all you do, that's what they'll learn—it's possible to be made to go to church, at least when they're small. We do need to go to church to worship the Lord, but it's a *get to* more than a *got to*. You've *got to* take out the garbage. You *get to* come worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. As the chief of sinners, Paul says “Imitate me as I imitate Christ.” So must every believing parent. Jesus' yoke is easy and His burden light. Do you believe and therefore live like it is? The one who is forgiven much, loves much, and just as small children need to learn how to confess sins to God and forgive one another, older kids need to continue maturing in this discipline following the example set by their parents. Teenagers will be shaped by knowing you love God because He first loved you, and nothing can separate you from His love.

Fellowship

When kids are small we roll around on the floor with them, play with toys, and take them in our laps to read heaps of Bible and other stories. When they get older, they don't ask for time to the same degree but this doesn't mean they don't need it. These are the days to keep reading both together and apart, where more in-depth discussion should happen. Friends, sports, activities, movies, shows, stories, history, music, politics, current events, technology—there seems to be an endless number of things they encounter and you get to guide, teach, and learn with them, always taking every thought captive to Christ. Who are the heroes and villains of history? Why was the French Revolution a bloody, godless disaster and the American War for Independence principled and necessary? Just as we grow closer to the Lord the longer we live, increasing the knowledge of Jesus Christ, so we grow closer with our children including during the teenage years. Some kids are a lot like dad or mom in terms of interests or tastes, so it's easy to connect and spend lots of time. Others are wonderfully different. Because that's your kid, you need to know and care about what they're doing and be sure they're thriving in their faith as they do it. Families should eat together where dad and mom set the tone of gratitude to God and each other, joy and laughter from the day, and interest in the kids. This consistent experience of happy fellowship comes directly from the gospel and it puts to shame all rivals and counterfeits.

Immaturity vs Rebellion

Young adults can appear very mature which makes it easy to forget that they aren't. What might appear as rebellion or intentional rudeness may well just be immaturity. We all need to continue learning how to love in

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the small things (that really add up), how to greet those we don't know, how to think of others more highly than ourselves, and how to bless and build others up. Teenagers often don't know what their blank and bored faces look like: like a fat, oblivious cat in a recliner, uninterested and entitled. It's very easy to take offenses like this personally, to impute motives, and to be critical instead of kind. By taking time to talk and explain how the offspring comes across, you find out whether it is immaturity or rebellion, whether there is a deeper bad attitude or not. These challenges and corrections should be made discretely so your kid knows you love and honor and don't want to embarrass them. When you discover rebellion or serious sin such as deep-seated anger, sullenness, or dishonesty, then you want to offer the grace and hope of the gospel.

Wise as Serpents

Kids maturing into adults have all kinds of questions. Parents need to be willing and available for them to ask about anything. You become this kind of source to your children by welcoming to ask and by initiating conversations about sexuality, dating, the internet, the way companies advertise, the false promises of sin, and whatever else you can think of that you wanted to know or they might want to know at their age. Would you like the fools on TikTok, or their peers, or people they see on the internet to disciple them? Or should it be you? Who does God assign to do it? These questions answer themselves but parents need to make sure their actions follow the answers. Do not leave your children vulnerable to learning from liars or ignorant people who will steer them. Do not leave them alone with a phone or a screen without the protection of knowledge about what is out there. If they go on or post on social media, know that it's instantly visible and probably permanent (somewhere). Put screens away at home and not be available to time and soul-sucking activity, but also know there's no substitute for wisdom to handle the material they *will* encounter. The only way you can have confidence in the wisdom and maturity of your kid is if you are talking to them about what they are consuming—music, movies, books and so on—what it means, and the effect it's having. What's on their playlist? What is that song about? How does that movie define evil and portray the villain and the hero? One of the most common poisons of our time is toxic empathy where people toss aside the truth based on their feelings (cf. Prov. 18:2). This is how people justify supporting transgender mutilation, causing years if not decades of harm to children and adults. Parents must stand between their children and these predatory people and trends.

Increasing Freedom / Marks of Maturity

Many Christians complain about all the changes happening in our culture and worry about their children. Think about the faithful in past generations—the early church, the medievals, the reformers, the American pioneers, the first Great Awakening all the way down to our time. Christians have always faced impossible things and overcome by faith. Chesterton said, "The one perfectly divine thing, the one glimpse of God's paradise given on earth, is to fight a losing battle—and not lose it." We are not trying to survive or get along or hang on for dear life. We are asking for God's kingdom to come and for our children to see more of it than we do. That's what you are raising your children to do and by grace they'll do it.