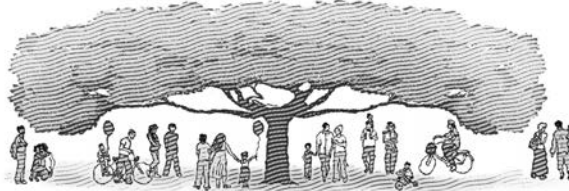


Season of Parenting



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 18:11, Jer. 31:25, Matt. 11:28, Psalm 127, Prov. 22:6, 1 Sam. 3:10–14, Phil. 3:13.*

Memory Text: “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward” (*Psalm 127:3, NKJV*).

Births are such a common, normal occurrence that often we don't always fully appreciate the wonder that they are. Imagine what Eve must have felt holding baby Cain in her arms. The changes she experienced in her growing body during those months, the excruciating pain of childbirth, and then seeing this small child, so much like them, yet so defenseless. What an experience it must have been for Sarah, in her 90s and way past childbearing age, to contemplate upon the face of her own son, Isaac; she must have laughed every time she pronounced his name. After praying for a son for who knows how long, Hannah held Samuel and said, “For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him” (*1 Sam. 1:27, NKJV*). The wonder in Mary's heart, still a young girl, cuddling her son, God's Son, with a combination of amazement and fear.

At the same time, not everyone has the privilege, and responsibility, that comes with parenting. This week we will spend time exploring the season of parenting with its challenges, fears, satisfaction, and joy.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 25.

Childless Parenting

Read Genesis 18:11, 30:1, 1 Samuel 1:1–8, and Luke 1:7. What do these people have in common? How did God answer their longings?

Children are a blessing. But for some reason God doesn't always bless everyone with children. Some hope and pray for a family, and God graciously grants their request, sometimes quite miraculously, as in the case of Sarah; others just as fervent in their petitions before God's throne are met with deafening silence. Every time they see friends praise God for their pregnancies and when they welcome their babies, it deepens the depth of the wound as they consider their empty nest. Even such innocent questions as "How many children do you have?" serve as painful reminders of an exclusive club that those without children are excluded from, even though they may want to join.

Those who have gone through such an experience should come to accept that God understands their sorrow. The psalmist declares of God, "You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book" (*Ps. 56:8, NLT*). Even though He seems silent, "the LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him" (*Ps. 103:13, NLT*).

Other people, meanwhile, for various reasons, might choose simply not to have children. One can understand in a world like ours, so full of suffering, pain, evil, and potential calamity, why some might decide not to bring more people into it. In some cases, some people might choose to adopt children instead of having their own; that way they can raise children who are already here, often giving them a chance at a much better life than what they might have otherwise had.

Our world is a complicated place, and we are likely to meet all sorts of people in all sorts of situations in regard to having or not having children. In whatever situation we find ourselves regarding the question of children, we can live with the assurance of God's love for us and His desire for our good end. At the same time, too, let's always remember to be as sensitive as we can toward people who, for whatever reasons, do not have kids.

Jesus never had any natural children of His own. What lessons, if any, are there for us in this fact?

Single Parenting

One phenomenon the world faces is that of single parents, often but not always a woman as the single parent.

Sometimes we think of single parents as those who have conceived a child out of wedlock. However, that is not always the case. Hagar was pressured into having a child with Abraham and then was forced to leave with her child (*Gen. 16:3, 4; 21:17*). Elijah was sent to a village called Zarephath to help a single mother who was a widow (*1 Kings 17:9*). By the time Jesus began His ministry, Joseph, His adoptive father, had died, leaving Mary a widow and a single parent. “Death had separated her from Joseph, who had shared her knowledge of the mystery of the birth of Jesus. Now there was no one to whom she could confide her hopes and fears. The past two months had been very sorrowful.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 145.

Being a single parent is perhaps one of the most challenging jobs a person can have. Many face difficulties, such as managing their finances, dealing with the other parent, or simply having time just for themselves or to spend with God, and wondering whether they will ever be loved again.

What promises can anyone, including single parents, take from the following verses: *Jer. 31:25; Matt. 11:28; Jer. 29:11; 32:27; Prov. 3:5, 6; Isa. 43:1, 2?*

We as a church have the responsibility to help single parents. James wrote, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble” (*James 1:27, NKJV*). One could add, in principle, “and single parents in their trouble, too.” The help we can offer does not have to be just financial. We could allow them to have some respite by taking their children for a little while so they can do other chores, rest, pray, and study God’s Word. We can serve as mentors to their children or help repair things around the house. We can be God’s hands in numerous ways to help support single parents.

Without passing judgment as to how they came to their situation, what specific things can you do to encourage and help single parents?

The Joy and Responsibility of Parenting

Read Psalm 127. What is the basic message of this short psalm? What important principles should we take away from it for ourselves and how we live?

When you wish to cook your favorite dish, you follow a recipe. If you add all the needed ingredients and follow all the steps, the majority of the time you get the desired results. Parenting, though, is not like cooking. No child is exactly like any other child, and even if you do everything just as you have done with other children, they can turn out different. This may have to do with their gender, the order in which they were born, their temperaments, or a host of other reasons. In God's plan, parents would lead and teach their children to love and obey Him (*Deut. 6:4–9, Ps. 78:5–7*). The directive from God to parents is to “train up a child in the way he should go” (*Prov. 22:6, NKJV*), not to hover over children to make sure they never make any wrong decisions.

While we want to see our children go from cuddly, defenseless little people to independent, successful adults, our ultimate responsibility is that they come to know, love, and serve Jesus Christ. As parents, we can follow the plan for the spiritual development of our children outlined in Deuteronomy 6. There are four important prerequisites: That we recognize “the LORD our God” (*Deut. 6:4*), that we love Him fully from the heart (*Deut. 6:5*), that we treasure His Word (*Deut. 6:6*), and that we share with our children what we know about Him (*Deut. 6:20–23*).

Deuteronomy 6 continues on to provide two important principles. First, the “teach-talk” principle (*Deut. 6:7*). Teaching refers to formal education, while talking refers to informal instruction. In both cases, the communication of biblical truth takes place within the setting of the parent-child relationship. Formal times of teaching can happen during family worship as we study God's Word with them. Informal teaching arises spontaneously in the circumstances of day-to-day life and is even more important. Everyday incidents can become effective vehicles for communicating biblical truth (*Gen. 18:19*). The second is the “bind-write” principle (*Deut. 6:8, 9*). Spiritual truth must be bound up in our actions (“hand”) and attitudes (“head”), but also it must be inscribed in our private (“doorposts”) and public (“gates”) lives. It must move from our hearts into our homes and from our homes into the world.

Parenting as Disciple-Making

Read Genesis 18:18, 19 and 1 Samuel 3:10–14. Contrast these two fathers. What were the results of their parenting styles?

Parents have a responsibility to be the disciple-makers of their children, so they will become disciples of Jesus themselves. There are parents who believe that the way to teach and correct their children is by applying physical punishment—the more, the better (*Prov. 22:15, 23:13, 29:15*). Passages like these have been misused to abuse children and force them into total submission, but often that also has led to rebellion against their parents and God.

The Bible teaches parents to govern with kindness (*Eph. 6:4, Col. 3:21*) and to instruct children in righteousness (*Ps. 78:5, Prov. 22:6, Isa. 38:19, Joel 1:3*). As parents we ought to provide for our children (*2 Cor. 12:14*) and set a good example for them to follow (*Gen. 18:19, Exod. 13:8, Titus 2:2*). We are told to direct our households well (*1 Tim. 3:4, 5, 12*) and to discipline our children (*Prov. 29:15, 17*) while at the same time reflecting God's love (*Isa. 66:13, Ps. 103:13, Luke 11:11*).

Sadly, the Bible reveals stories of parenting gone wrong. Isaac and Rebekah played favorites with their sons, Esau and Jacob (*Gen. 25:28*), and later Jacob displayed the same attitude toward Joseph (*Gen. 37:3*). Eli, even though he was a religious leader, failed to correct his children (*1 Sam. 3:10–14*). Samuel, who also was raised by Eli, turned out to be a very deficient father himself (*1 Sam. 8:1–6*). King David, by committing adultery and ordering a murder, taught his children who followed his example. King Manasseh sacrificed his children to demons (*2 Kings 21:1–9*), as did King Ahaz (*2 Kings 16:2–4*).

Fortunately, however, we also find in the Scriptures some examples of good parenting. Mordecai was a wonderful adoptive father to Hadassah, Queen Esther (*Esther 2:7*), and Job prayed for his children regularly (*Job 1:4, 5*). In all of these examples, good and bad, we can glean lessons on parenting.

What can we learn from the examples of parenting that we see in the Bible? In what ways can we use some of these principles in our interactions with those who are not our children?

Fighting for Your Prodigal Child

Read Proverbs 22:6. What is your understanding of this passage? Is this a guarantee, a promise, or a probability?

Sometimes as a parent you do everything you should—spend time teaching your children the right things, live according to your knowledge of God, send them to good schools, attend church regularly, become involved in mission work with them—and they end up leaving the faith in which you raised them. The amount of pain is excruciating, and there is not a moment of rest from your concern for their salvation. The cause is not necessarily the parent’s fault. Children have minds of their own and are ultimately responsible to God for their actions.

Some have taken the words “when he is old he will not depart from it” as a promise, a guarantee that proper parenting will always result in their child’s salvation. But Proverbs often gives us principles and not always unconditional promises. What we can take out of this text is the assurance that the lessons learned in childhood will last a lifetime. Every child reaches an age when they either accept the heritage of their parents as their own or reject it. Those parents who were careful to provide their children with godly training have the assurance that what they taught their children will always be with them, and if or when their children walk away, the seeds they planted in their hearts will continuously be in them calling them home. Being a good parent is our choice; how our children turn out is theirs.

What should a parent do when a child goes astray? Turn your children over to God in earnest prayer. If anybody understands your pain, it is God, whose children, by the billions, have turned their backs on Him, the perfect Parent. You can support your prodigals with love and prayer and be ready to stand alongside them as they wrestle with God.

Don’t be too embarrassed to ask for support and prayer, don’t blame yourself, and don’t be so focused on the prodigal that you forget the rest of the family. Parenting a prodigal can divide your household; so, build a unified front with your spouse and set clear boundaries for your child. Remember that God loves your child more than you do, look to a brighter future, and accept that your child is God’s work in progress.

It’s only natural in such a situation to blame yourself. And even if you have made mistakes, why is it better to focus on the future and on the promises of God? See Phil. 3:13.

Further Thought: “You should take time to talk and pray with your little ones, and you should allow nothing to interrupt that season of communion with God and with your children. You can say to your visitors, ‘God has given me a work to do, and I have no time for gossiping.’ You should feel that you have a work to do for time and for eternity. You owe your first duty to your children.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 266, 267.

“Parents, you should commence your first lesson of discipline when your children are babes in your arms. Teach them to yield their will to yours. This can be done by bearing an even hand, and manifesting firmness. Parents should have perfect control over their own spirits, and with mildness and yet firmness bend the will of the child until it shall expect nothing else but to yield to their wishes. Parents do not commence in season. The first manifestation of temper is not subdued, and the children grow stubborn, which increases with their growth and strengthens with their strength.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 218.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What does it mean to be a “child” of God? How are we to understand that image, and what comfort can we draw from it?
- 2 One father, soon after his children were born, said the following: “I’ve learned two great theological truths within the first few years after my children were born. The first is the reality of free will; the second, the reality of sinful human nature.” How might young children have taught him these truths?
- 3 When is the appropriate time to help shape the will of children? How should this be done? How can we shape the will of our children according to God’s plan when we have not fully submitted ourselves to His will?
- 4 Dwell more on the question of single parenthood. What are practical ways that your church, as a whole, can help single parents and the children they are seeking to raise on their own?
- 5 What are ways to encourage parents whose children have strayed from the faith?

Why I Quit My Job

By Bo, as told to ANDREW MCCHESENEY

A remarkable experience prompted me to quit my 17-year job as a worker at a thread-making factory and devote myself to full-time gospel work in China.

When I was 39, my son wanted to go to a trade school to become a lathe worker. But the tuition for the three-year course cost 10,000 yuan, money that we didn't have.

My Seventh-day Adventist mother suggested that we pray about it. We prayed, but I didn't expect a miracle.

When my sister heard about the problem, she contacted a friend who worked at the trade school and asked whether my son could apply for a scholarship. The friend, the school accountant, said scholarships only were available for low-income families, and we didn't qualify. But at her suggestion, my son went ahead and enrolled at the school.

Meanwhile, my mother, four sisters, and I pooled our money. When we went to the school to pay, we were greeted by the accountant. She told my son to write a scholarship request letter on the spot, and she took it to the principal's office.

When the principal looked at the letter, he asked, "By how much should I help this student?"

"You have the power to do whatever you like," the accountant replied.

The principal wrote "500" on the letter.

When the accountant returned with the letter, I was so excited. I didn't know what the "500" meant, but even a 500-yuan discount would be a big help.

We took the letter to the cashier's office.

"Would you like to pay for one year or all three years?" the cashier asked.

"All three years," I said.

The cashier did some calculations and announced, "Your grand total is 2,700 yuan."

We were in shock! We didn't know what happened or how she came up with that figure. Even today, we don't know what happened.

Until that day, my faith in God had been shallow. But after that experience, I realized that God cares for us, and I decided to serve God with all my heart. I have few talents, but I decided that I could help clean the church or visit people.

Today, I am 54 years old and oversee five churches. I feel very unworthy to be called a gospel worker. But I believe that God is leading, and He will help me to do the gospel work.



Part of the third quarter 2018 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering was sent to open a wholistic inner-city church plant in China. The author's name has been changed.

Part I: Overview

Having children in the Bible was a big deal. Mothers pleaded to God (or to their husbands) for a child. God sometimes acted miraculously to do so (think of Hannah weeping before the tabernacle or Rachel thinking of death as an alternative to barrenness). Today, the subject of having children is complex and engages a spectrum of issues, such as infertility, birth control, abortion, adoption, single parenting, and methods of discipline. Whatever the burden one carries in regard to children, it is imperative to remember that God deeply cares about each family's situation. That's the easy part. To extend that same care to yourself or to those you may believe are making poor choices in regard to their children, that's the hard part.

Raising children can be considered a branch of disciple making. Though Scripture offers nuggets of parental guidance (*2 Cor. 12:14, Eph. 6:4, Col. 3:21*), most of the families focused on in the Bible will provide plenty of examples of what *not to do* in raising children (e.g., playing favorites, neglecting discipline, living an ungodly life). But if we can learn from their mistakes and our own mistakes, then our children will each be a star in their parents' heavenly crowns. However, in the hopes of our children being saved, Proverbs 22:6 has been invoked in a way that doesn't integrate well with free will and the great controversy metanarrative. A brief, prayerful study on this famous text will hopefully bring some clarity and provide us with some other interpretive options.

Part II: Commentary

Scripture

Proverbs 22:6 is a rare verse possessing just the right amount of translational ambiguity and theological consequence to produce either existential hope or psychological trauma—or both. It is an exegetically juicy bit of Old Testament wisdom literature whose potential English translations can be virtual opposites of each other. Proverbs 22:6 made the short list of Douglas Stuart's "My Favorite Mistranslations," in his W. H. Griffith Thomas Memorial Leadership lectures in February 2013. Studying this verse can serve as a microcosm for the challenge, thrill, and surprise that make deeper Bible study all worth it. That this verse is arguably the most known or quoted verse on child rearing in the Old Testament makes it worth parsing, as we reflect on parenting for this week's lesson.

The Standard Translation

What I am calling the standard translation is the one followed by almost all English translations (and multiple German and French translations), which follow fairly close to the King James: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (*Prov. 22:6*).

First, the lesson brings out a crucial point that briefly bears repeating. No matter how one translates this text, it does not mean that every wayward child is the direct result of bad parenting. So, let’s get that off the table. One always has to take into account the literary genre of the text, and this one falls within a wisdom anthology full of proverbs and pithy (brief, forceful, and meaningful in expression) sayings. A proverb wouldn’t be a proverb if it included a list of qualifications, exceptions, and exclusions. So, this verse should be taken as a general principle about how experiences in earlier years can have long-term consequences. Parental guilt and/or parental assurance, as reflected in the query “When is my child going to come around to ‘the way he should go’?” should be transformed into parental reflection, lessons learned, and continued prayer.

Supporters of the standard translation have had to defend the phrase “in the way he should go” because the Hebrew only reads “according to his way.” Translators, however, picking up on the general point of Proverbs, were convinced contextually that the “way” in this case was the way of the wise and righteous that Solomon and friends were advocating and so inserted “should” to preserve that notion. A little pushback on that translation comes from those who see “his way” as referring to an individual’s discovering his or her vocational propensities and being encouraged in that direction. This view is the tack *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* takes on this verse as it observes that the “lifework should be in line with the natural bent.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1020. Some, however, feel that this view imposes an anachronistic psychological perspective on the text that falls outside of Proverb’s themes.

The Minority Translation

Another translation also takes issue with the modifier “should” in the phrase “the way he should go” and believes the Hebrew should be taken at face value as “according to his way.” Doug Stuart and others also have a problem with the Hebrew *na’ar* being translated as “child” in the standard translation and opt instead for “an unmarried young adult.” (Doug Stuart’s full 2013 Griffith lectures entitled “My Favorite Mistranslations” can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJnnbIypnz8&t=16s>.) In light of this proposal, the verse

now involves our teenagers rather than our toddlers. Stuart proposes the translation: “Train an adolescent in his own way, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

The text is now understood as a promise, not that good parenting guarantees good results, but that lax parenting that caters to the teenagers’ undisciplined “way” will have long-term deleterious results. Stuart quotes the medieval Jewish philosopher Ralbag’s (acronym for the Rabbi Levi ben Gershon) translation: “Train a child according to his evil inclinations, and he will continue in his evil way throughout life.”

So why doesn’t this angle of translation have wider representation in modern versions? There is likely a certain translational inertia that is created from a popular/early translation that subsequent versions often have a difficult time resisting. Gordon Hugenberger offers a theory on the possible initial misstep: “It is likely that earlier translators missed this understanding of the text as a warning not because of any difficulty in the Hebrew, but because it construes the first clause as an ironic command. It tells the reader to do something he should *not* do: ‘train up a child according to his way.’ Actually, such a rhetorical device is entirely at home in wisdom literature such as Proverbs, which uses sarcasm to good effect. Compare Prov. 19:27, ‘Stop listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge.’”—In Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), p. 163.

A 1,000-Year-Old Interpretation . . .

The following “translation” is more of a historical interpretation than a translation. But it has just enough converging evidence to make it a tantalizing possibility.

If you were to look at the Leningrad Codex, which is the oldest *complete* manuscript of the Hebrew Bible, you would find notes in the margins. These were written by the Masoretes, a group of Jewish scribes and scholars between 600 and 1000 C.E. who created diacritical marks around the consonantal Hebrew text in an attempt to standardize the pronunciation. In other words, they added a vowel system to the text so that the Jewish community wouldn’t forget how to pronounce/read their Hebrew. They also wrote technical and linguistic notes in the margins. It is these notes that potentially give us a thousand-year-old window into how they understood Proverbs 22:6.

The Masoretic understanding of Proverbs 22:6 goes all the way back to Enoch and the spelling of his name. There are two spellings of Enoch’s

name in Hebrew. The Masoretes noted the variant spelling in their margins. Usually Enoch's name contains what is called a *holem waw* (the *holem waw* gives the *o* sound in Enoch's name). But there are three instances in which it is spelled "defectively" and only contains the *holem* (which still gives the same *o* sound).

Keeping in mind that there is more than one Enoch, we note that the first occurrence of the defective spelling of Enoch's name in the Masoretic manuscript is Genesis 25:4. The Masoretes noted in their margin for that verse that the three texts containing this defective use were Genesis 25:4, Numbers 26:5 (this case is a bit different because it is the "Hanochites," or, we might say, the family of Enoch or "Enochites" that has the defective use), and Proverbs 22:6. In other words, the Masoretes see Enoch's name with its alternate spelling in Proverbs 22:6.

But wait, Enoch's name doesn't appear in Proverbs 22:6, or does it? It just so happens that the verb form of "train" in Proverbs 22:6 is spelled exactly the same as the defective spelling of Enoch's name. (A note for those familiar with Hebrew: it is true that the Masoretes could be commenting on the *Qal* imperative of *chanak*, but the defective *holem* is standard for *Qal* imperatives, according to Wilhelm Gesenius. Isn't it more likely they would annotate an anomalous variant on "Enoch" rather than the customary conjugation of *chanak*?)

What's more, the Masoretes make a marginal note in Proverbs 22:6, connected directly to the "Enoch/train" Hebrew word. Their marginal reference, which is not in the form of a sentence, literally reads: "twice," "beginning of," "verse," "Methuselah." Again, that is the Masoretes' comment on the Hebrew word *hanoch*, which in English could mean either "Enoch" or "train." A smoothed-over English rendering of the Masoretic marginal note to Proverbs 22:6 reads: "In two instances, the word [*hanoch*] begins a verse . . . Methuselah." Isn't it interesting that Methuselah is mentioned? The fact that Methuselah is being written as a comment on *hanoch* opens the possibility for *hanoch* to be interpreted, or seen as, "Enoch," instead of, or in addition to, translating *hanoch* as "train."

The other instance in which this "Enoch/train" word begins a text is 1 Chronicles 1:3, which says, "Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech" (*ESV*). This Enoch is referring to the same Enoch who walked with God in Genesis 5. In light of these marginal notes, it seems plausible that the Masoretes (who lived and breathed the Hebrew Bible) had Enoch on the mind when they read Proverbs 22:6, and possibly Methuselah too. Here is an interpretation based on Joseph Lukowski's rendering to whom we are indebted for this entire discussion: "[Use the example of] Enoch for a child according to his way [i.e., the way of Enoch]; even when he is old [like Methuselah] he will not depart from it" (*Proverbs 22:6*).—<https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions>

/21709/what-is-the-proper-translation-of-proverbs-226/21787#21787. Loosely paraphrased, Lukowski's interpretation could be rendered: "Raise your children in the Enoch way, and they will stay faithful till an old age like Methuselah."

It very well could be that the Masoretes saw this verse as encouraging parents to raise their children to personally know and walk with God the way Enoch did. As a result, a persevering righteous life would carry them into old age (*see Exod. 20:12*)—even as it carried the oldest man who ever lived, Enoch's son, Methuselah.

Part III: Life Application

We all want our children to walk in the way of Enoch, regardless of whether the Masoretes were seeing him in Proverbs or not. The fact that Enoch never saw death serves as an analogy of the hope we have that our children never experience the final/second death (*Rev. 20:14*).

- 1. How can we make "walking with God" so attractive to our children that they want it for themselves as much as we parents want it for them?**

- 2. One Christian speaker who had just finished a writing project gave public thanks to his family for their support. "I want to thank my wife, who lovingly helped, . . . and my children, who lovingly hindered." Children can be both a blessing and a trial (maybe the trial is the blessing). In what ways have children in your life helped mature and shape your character?**
