

Ephesians 6:1–4. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” ⁴ **Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.**

3. Fathers play a central role in helping their kids love and live for Jesus.
4. Making disciples of our children requires a balance of discipline and instruction.
5. Faithful parenting can only be done by the power of the Spirit working through God’s Word.

Proverbs 22:5–6. Thorns and snares are in the way of the crooked; whoever guards his soul will keep far from them. ⁶ **Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.**

6. Making disciples of our children requires purposefully and openly committing them to a proper course of life.

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Father's Discipling Children

Jason S. DeRouchie, PhD / www.jasonderouchie.com

Elder, Bethlehem Baptist Church

Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology, Bethlehem College &
Seminary

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Introduction

- a. This seminar addresses God's call on Christian dads to do our part in making our children disciples of Jesus—followers who love God with all their heart, being, and substance and who view reality and live lives in light of Christ's supremacy over all things. Discipleship in this sense is not restricted to “spiritual” matters but encompasses all of life. Discipleship is about education in its most ultimate sense—the act of shaping a proper world-and-life view and passion that glorifies God. This is my goal as a father.
- b. My wife Teresa and I are now in our twenty-third year of marriage, and God has blessed us with six kids—three black, three white; three boys, three girls. We have boy and girl twins who are 7, two more sons who are 8 and 13, and two daughters who are 15 and almost 18. I am speaking to you today as a dad who is still growing. All successes in my home are due to grace alone, and all the failures are themselves being overcome by grace. Parenting that honors God requires not only high intentionality but also radical dependence.
- c. In seeking to guide you in father's role in raising boys to be godly men and girls to be godly women, I want to let the biblical text speak first, and then I will offer examples of how my wife and I are applying in our home what we are learning. My hope is that the next forty minutes can be a solid balance between faithful exposition and practical examples. Let us pray....

Deuteronomy 6:4–9. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ **You shall teach them 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.

1. **Principle 1: Making disciples of our children is about helping them treasure Yahweh’s supremacy over all things in all of their lives.**

- a. **What “them” refers to in v. 7.** When verse 7 says, “You shall teach *them*” and “you shall talk of *them*,” the plural pronoun refers to “these words” in verse 6, which at the very least refers back to what Jesus tagged “the most important commandment” in 6:4–5: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (cf. Mark 12:29–30). There is only one God, unique in his perfections, and we are not him. He is creator; we are creature. He is sovereign; we are dependent, and this dependence demands our life-encompassing love—love with *all* our heart, *all* our soul, and *all* our might directed toward the supreme sovereign, the only savior, the ultimate satisfier. Every thought and desire, our entire being, indeed all that is identified with us is to cry out Yahweh is God, and I love him with all.
- b. **The spheres of radical God-centeredness.** Note the spheres where this radical God-centeredness is supposed to control. Moses first pleads for *personal appropriation (Deut 6:6)*—“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.” The old covenant simply called for the law to be on the heart; in the new covenant Yahweh actually places it there (Jer 31:33). But a person’s call to heed the most important commandment moves beyond personal appropriation to *personal application both in parenting (Deut 6:7) and public witness (6:8–9)*.
- c. **Lasting significance in the new covenant (Mark 12:29–30).** Although Moses is giving old covenant instruction, Jesus’ comments regarding the most important commandment identifies that his own law fulfillment does not alter our call to have the Lord capture our affections. We are to impress *these truths* on our children, which leads me to the second principle.

2. **Principle 2: Parental instruction should be both formal and informal, impacting every setting and situation.**

- a. **Distinct verbs and clauses in 6:7 imply two types of training.**
Deuteronomy 6:7 has two verbal clauses: “You shall *teach* them diligently to your children, and you 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.” I think this statement that parents use two forms of instruction in their disciple making—formal and informal.

b. **Formal or planned:**

- i. **ESV “teach”;** **NIV “impress”;** **Hebrew “repeat.”** What the ESV renders as “teach,” the NIV translates “impress,” and the Hebrew term likely bears the meaning “repeat,” suggesting formal, repetitive training. The text asserts that every home needs structured times of instruction, and it may be the closest clear directive for family devotions in Scripture.
- ii. **Psalm 78:5–8** says, “[The LORD] established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, ⁶ that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, ⁷ so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; ⁸ and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.” Our goal in helping our kids celebrate a big God who has worked in mercy for mankind through his Son is that they would set their hope in him, remember his works, and follow him. Thus we create formal contexts of instruction.
- iii. **Examples.** Certainly these formal settings would include things like *Sunday School classes and youth group*. But in these contexts, the leaders simply serve as surrogate parents and should simply be reinforcing what dad and mom are already doing at home. *Scripture sees the primary responsibility for shaping Godward kids to be the parents.* In my home we have formal or planned contexts for discipleship daily, weekly, annually, and at major life transitions.

(1) **Daily:**

- (a) *Designated daily prayer targets:* (30 days for family, missionaries, and church leaders; 7 days for immediate family members);
- (b) Set patterns for *daily personal devotions*;
- (c) *Bedtime routine* of listening and prayer.
- (d) *Praying for safety* when we get in the car; praying when we see an accident.

(2) **Weekly designated instruction times:**

- (a) *Saturday mornings with my boys* (1 Peter; Revelation)
- (b) **3-D** (“DeRouchie, Devotions, Delicacies”)
 - Gary Morgan’s *Understanding World Religions in 15 Minutes a Day*

- Living Wisely in Proverbs
- The Shadow of Christ in the Tabernacle (Exod 25–31)
- The Minor Prophets
- The Story of God: A Walk Thru Salvation History
- Bruce Ware’s *Big Truths for Young Hearts*
- Christ and the Ten Commandments
- Zephaniah—The Savior’s Summons to Satisfaction
- Lee Strobel’s *The Case for Christ*
- Marty Machowski’s *Long Story Short: Ten-Minute Devotionals to Draw Your Family to God*

(3) **Annually:**

(a) **Advent** (3x per week for four weeks)

- (i) John Piper’s Christmas poems
- (ii) Key OT messianic prophecies
- (iii) Defining the gospel through verses and pictures: “The reigning God saves and satisfies believing sinners through Christ Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.”

(b) **Birthday and Christmas dates** to hear from the kids on how they are doing, to delight in them, and to pray for them.

(4) **At major life-transitions:** Sex talks

- c. **Informal or unplanned:** Not only do my wife and I instruct our kids in godliness at designated times, as we ourselves increase in our own walk with Christ we are trying to be mindful to make a radical God centeredness the point of all of our lives. All things come from God, and all things are designed to direct us back to God (Rom 11:36).
- i. **Everyday times of life.** This includes explicit verbal statements, but it also includes delighting in our kids over a board game, for here we emulate the delight our heavenly Father takes in us. Listening carefully to our kids when they ask a question displays the care God has for our needs and the mercy he has in helping us in our weakness. The goal here is that the everyday times in life—the mundane moments—would still be times where the kids are hearing about and seeing put on display the character and goodness of God, where they are being reminded that life is about God and that even in their youth they are a part of this purpose. This includes times when we are reading books together, eating around the table, enjoying family movie nights, or tucking them into bed at night. In

little league, biology, and drivers training we want our kids to meet Jesus through both word and deed.

(1) **My 15 year old Ruthie’s list:**

- (a) ***Showing intentionality to get to know us and our inward thoughts and feelings*** (birthday dates and random “talks”).
- (b) ***Taking time to invest in us and our interests***—by doing this you are setting for us a small display of the *big* amount of care and love that God has for his children.
- (c) Both you and mommy make sure to ***nurture our abilities at different*** skills (building, cooking, gardening, etc.) so that someday we will be able to serve others and God by our ability to work.

(2) Teresa and I have tried to help our kids ***recognize their part in this daddy’s ministry***. By honoring their mommy they help daddy not have to worry about the home, which frees me to serve my students effectively. This was brought home once when we got a missionary letter update from a girl that I had taught Hebrew to that now serves as a Bible translator in Papa New Guinea. The stories she shared were beautiful; people were receiving God’s word. And my kids had a direct part in equipping her for this task.

- ii. **Challenging times and seasons of suffering.** But this informal training doesn’t only happen in the good times. It continues in challenging times and seasons of suffering, when the family journeys through the grief of deep loss. In these times we want our kids to continue to remember that there is only one God, and we will love him with all. ***Share adoption story.***

Ephesians 6:1–4. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” ⁴ **Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.**

3. **Principle 3: Fathers play a central role in helping their kids love and live for Jesus.**

- a. **Dads are to be neither passive nor aggressive like Adam.** After calling children to honor both “father and mother,” Paul specifically calls “fathers”

to “provoke your children to anger” but to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). Dads are not to follow passive Adam in watching their homes move toward destruction (Gen 3:6), nor are they to be like aggressive Adam who shifted blame for family problems away from himself (3:12). Instead, Paul calls fathers to step up and bear the ***primary—though not sole—responsibility*** before God of shepherding their children’s hearts. As with Adam in the Garden, the Lord will hold household heads responsible for the direction of their homes.

- b. **Dads are servant leaders who model provision and protection.** The man’s headship brings with it high responsibility. Before God ever created woman, he created the man and called him to two tasks—to “work” and to “keep” the ground (**Gen 2:15**). To “work” points to the man’s role as primary *provider*; to “keep” points to his role as primary *protector*, and this points to both spiritual and physical realities. Then the Lord granted him his girl and commissioned her to serve alongside and complement her man. Dads and moms are to shape for their kids a vision of maleness and femaleness, headship and helpship in the home, all in order to help our kids cherish the distinction between Christ and his church (Eph 5:22–32). Dads play a key role in clarifying how headship is about servant leadership.¹

i. **Dads set patterns of godliness.**

(1) **Modesty and purity:** Girls’ dress, TV viewing, sex talks

(2) **Mediation and nurturing honor.** As my oldest daughters have grown into their upper teenage years, I have found it increasingly necessary to serve as a mediator between my wife and them, helping them understand our parental support and yet also the boundaries of our family. In doing this I am working to minimize confusion, to help them honor their mom, and to identify for them that dad and mom are *one* on issues. Similarly, I am quick to ensure that the kids are listening and obeying when mom speaks.

(3) **Modeling and guiding.** I am thinking here about teaching my boys to turn away from immodesty when watching television, and modeling

¹ The Ten Commandments stress the central place of household head as servant leader. The text directly addresses household heads, who have sons and daughters, male and female servants, property, and *wives*. Moses never explicitly calls women to not covet their neighbor’s husbands; instead he calls men to not covet their neighbor’s wives (Deut 5:21). The text addresses male household heads, and it calls them not pursue their own rights but to live sacrificially for the welfare of all others. Similarly, Numbers 30 stresses how husbands bear both the authority and responsibility to trump their wives or daughters vowed commitments if he believes they are not healthy or appropriate for the family. From beginning to end Scripture defines male headship within the home in relation to servant leadership.

honor of their mom when she desires us to eat at the table together rather than in front of a football game.

ii. **The best dads work with and not against the moms.**

(1) The wife of noble character in Proverbs 31 is highly industrious and productive; her husband trusts her, as she carries out and manages numerous domestic duties, while he “is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land” (Prov 31:23). In our home, life works much this way, with my *wife serving as the point planner and implementer* in much of our home life. We happen to home school our kids, and for at least this year, we still have all six at home with twin first graders, a third grader, an eighth grader, a tenth grader, and a senior. Teresa and I have *nightly walks* where she updates me on the kids and queries for my perspectives. We often pray during these times. And because she knows our children so well and has strengths in coming up with solid ideas, *it’s also a time when she offers me helpful suggestions and aids my thinking about how to be the best dad I can be. Part of what it means to be a father is to celebrate the mother.*

(2) From the beginning husbands and wives were to subdue and have dominion *together* (Gen 1:28). Adam was the head, but Eve was the helper—an agent of grace to help lead, serve, support, suggest, make decisions, and initiate, all with respect and a heart of submission to her man. I find it fascinating that of all the wisdom literature in the ancient Near East, the Bible alone gives a central place to the role of the mother in child education. Thus Solomon urged, “Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching” (**Prov 1:8**). “My son, keep your father’s commandment, and forsake not your mother’s teaching” (**6:20**; cf. 31:1). The “excellent wife” is one who “opens her mouth in wisdom” and who has “the teaching of kindness ... on her tongue” (**31:26**). Timothy was the man and pastor that he was because “from childhood” his Christian mother Lois and grandmother Eunice acquainted him with “the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15–16; cf. 1:5; Acts 16:1). As I will highlight in a moment, I believe that father’s do bear primary responsibility to ensure that their children are being raised to think and live in the sphere of godliness. Nevertheless, the helper wife and mom serves with him and is absolutely essential.

c. Dads themselves are men under God’s authority.

- i. Notice in Ephesians 6:4 that the dad’s themselves are men under authority. “Fathers, ... bring [your children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Fathers lead through discipline, and they lead through instruction, but all of it happens in relation to the Lord, whom Paul already noted is the ultimate Father (3:14–15; 4:6).
- ii. At stake is *not a dad’s way but God’s way*; parenting is not about a human father establishing his domain but about a father modeling by deed and word that our home is God’s domain—he is king, and we are his subjects. *Godly fathers are men under authority, who are themselves first submitted to the discipline and instruction of the Lord before they guide their kids through deed and word.* Godly fathers serve as solid pointers to our heavenly father and thus help shape a framework in our kids for understanding manhood, headship, and godliness.
- iii. Finally, just note that God calls dads and moms—not churches and not the state—to stand as the primary agents of education in the lives of our children. Others can help as we deem best, serving as surrogate instructors of both the world and the word, but the Lord calls *parents* to “bring up,” “teach,” and “train” our young.

4. Principle 4: Making disciples of our children requires a balance of discipline and instruction.

- a. **“Bringing up” is about nourishing our children in a way that honors God.** In Eph 6:4, Paul calls fathers to “bring up” their children, and here he uses the same term he employed earlier to highlight how husbands are to love their wives: “No one ever hated his own flesh, but *nourishes* and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church” (5:29). Thus dads are to make disciples of our children in a way that works for their best interest as God defines it.
- b. **Christ’s authority is central.** We next read that the sphere in which fathers raise their children is the “discipline and instruction of the Lord.” I think most likely this means correction and admonition or warning that find their reference point in Christ. We must always discipline and instruct in light of Christ’s authority and glory and not most ultimately our authority and glory.
 - i. **The discipline of the Lord.** In Scripture, this term “discipline” can refer both to *correcting wrong action* or to *strengthening or readying one for a task*. We see the latter element in **2 Timothy 3:16**, where Paul declares that Scripture is “profitable for ... *training* in righteousness.” In contrast,

all three instances of the phrase the “discipline of the Lord” in the Greek OT (Deut 11:2; Prov 3:11; Isa 50:5) reveal discipline as corrective or guiding in nature. For example, **Hebrews 12:5–6** cites Proverbs 3:11–12 in this way: “My son, do not regard lightly *the discipline of the Lord*, nor be weary when reproved by him.”⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” The passage continues in **12:7–11**: “It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?”⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” **The dad who corrects his children with reference to Christ’s lordship readies his children to persevere through the sufferings of this life with trust in God. Fathers who love their children discipline their children, but we must always do so pointing to Christ as the chief Lord and displaying the grace with which our heavenly Father disciplines us.**

- ii. **The instruction of the Lord.** The phrase “instruction of the Lord” occurs in the Greek OT only in **Isaiah 30:9**, which addresses the nation of Israel’s turning away from God’s law: “For they are a rebellious people, lying children, children unwilling to hear the instruction of the LORD.” In the NT, its two other occurrences refer both to tutelage (1 Cor 10:11) and “warning” (Tit 3:10). Living amidst the new covenant, for we as Christian dads to bring up our children in the “instruction of the Lord” likely includes **two things**:

- (1) **The Law of Christ as love of others.** We continue to make them aware that the law of Christ both calls for and empowers radical love—lives that recognize our greatest gain comes in serving others (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2; cf. Jas 1:25; 2:8).
- (2) **Warnings.** We warn them that failure to receive and treasure Christ above all will result in sure destruction (e.g., Rom 11:22; Heb 6:4–6; 10:26–27).

iii. Comments:

(1) **The need for intentionality.** Far too many parents fail to help define for their kids right and wrong and the boundaries of action. Kids are born thinking that they are the center of their solar system, and parents are given the responsibility to help our kids think less of themselves and more of God. We need to help our kids find their identity in Jesus. Parenting is about nurturing God-esteem, not self-esteem in our kids. We must be intentional to shape, lead, guide, and correct our kids in paths of righteousness. We need to set boundaries for media intake, dress code, friendships, screen time, event involvement. God has called parents, not kids, to be in charge, yet to do so in love and with Christ as Lord in the forefront of our reasoning.

(a) **From Ruthie's list:**

- (i) Helping us *process after a sermon* that is confusing or biblically challenging to understand.
 - (ii) Not being afraid to *share hard things* with us (e.g., someone's struggle with cancer, how to address homosexuality and transgender, a missionary family has a child die). Instead of having to process or fight these on our own, you share some things with us and help us process them in a God-honoring way.
 - (iii) I don't really know if this fits into this list, but I think that it is neat that the *one language* that you choose to teach us in High School is a biblical one. Yes, it is definitely hard at times, but it really does grow in me a deeper love and curiosity for the Bible.
- (b) **Visiting grandparents.** This Christmas, before making our annual trek to MI to visit family, we intentionally talked to our children about ways to care for aging grandparent who would be hosting us.
- (c) **Appropriate action in certain locations.** We guide our kids in what type of action is appropriate in the church auditorium.
- (d) **Financial stewardship.** We lead our kids in how to allocate their finances, helping them set vision and giving them accountability.
- (e) **Prayer and follow-up on struggle areas.** We pray with them before they go to youth group, and we follow-up with them to hear how their doing at battling for purity in thought and deed.

(2) **Paul Wegner** wrote a great article in *JETS* that I cite in the bibliography titled, “Discipline in the Book of Proverbs: ‘To Spank or Not to Spank.’” In it he notes three levels of parental corrective discipline:

- (a) Parents *teach guidelines* by clarifying appropriate and inappropriate behavior and explaining the negative consequences for disobedience;
- (b) Parents *reiterate guidelines* by giving appropriate warnings;
- (c) Parents *enforce the guidelines*, first by reprimand with non-physical discipline and then by non-abusive physical discipline.

5. **Principle 5: Faithful parenting can only be done by the power of the Spirit working through God’s Word.**

- a. **Be filled with the Spirit.** This principle is drawn from the literary context of Ephesians 6. We are in a section of the letter that some term a household code. We find guidelines for the interrelationship of wives and husbands in 5:22–33, of children and parents in 6:1–4, and of slaves and masters in 6:5–9. What is important to recognize, however, is that all of these units grow out of Paul’s command in **5:18**, where he charges: “Because the days are evil ... do not get drunk with wine, ... but be filled with the Spirit.” What then follows are four units of dependent participles that clarify the results of one who is filled with the Spirit, the last of which is “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” 5:22 then includes no verb in Greek but draws on the focus of “submitting.” The text just reads, “Be filled with the Spirit, ... submitting to one another. Wives to your own husbands as to the Lord.” Mutual submission is to characterize the relationships of husbands and wives, children and parents, slaves and masters, though that submission looks different for each party. Christ’s submission to the church meant his giving of himself sacrificially for her ultimate salvation, and this is the pattern of submission for husbands to wives. Children submits to their parents by obeying and honoring, whereas a father submit to his children by working for her greatest good in light of Christ. And all this submission is only possible if we first are filled with the Spirit of Christ.
- b. **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.** The parallel text in Colossians is instructive here, for in the very place where Paul calls the Ephesians to “be filled with the Spirit” he charges the Colossians to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” He writes in **Col 3:16–22**: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in

your hearts to God.¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.¹⁸ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.²² Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.” I can only be the kind of dad I need to be if I am regularly filled with the Spirit, and the filling happens only in the context of meditating on God’s Word. As Paul said to the church in Galatia, “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?” (Gal 3:2). As we began, we must continue. Faithful parenting needs God’s help, God’s wisdom, God’s strength.

Proverbs 22:5–6. Thorns and snares are in the way of the crooked; whoever guards his soul will keep far from them.⁶ **Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.**

6. Principle 6: Making disciples of our children requires purposefully and openly committing them to a proper course of life.

- a. Proverbs 22:6 is very familiar to most parents. In my own pastoral ministry, I have often encountered confusion regarding this well-known verse, which first states a command and then details the consequence. What I want to draw attention to first is that the term that the ESV renders “train” occurs only three other times in the OT, and in each it refers to “dedicating” houses—whether of man (Deut 20:5) or of God (1 Kgs 8:63; 2 Chr 7:5). In these texts a formal ceremony gives witness to a long-term commitment that from this time forward, this house will bear God’s name and be used for his glory. In light of this, “train up” may be too weak and may actually miss the likely element of consecration to religious and more direction.
- b. Certainly “dedicating” a child would include the common ceremony of commitment that many parents engage in at the birth of their children. Yet most of Proverbs addresses the parenting of teenagers, suggesting that the act of dedicating in Proverbs 22:6 is focused more on an intentional, public, God-dependent shepherding of our children’s hearts as they grow into adulthood—one in which the children themselves are aware of the parents’ trajectory-setting intentions. This is not a passive calling for dads and moms.

- c. But this raises the question as to what we are dedicating them for. The ESV's "in the way he should go" is a very idiomatic way of capturing the Hebrew "according to the dictates of his way." We could therefore translate the command line of the proverb: "Dedicate a youth according to the dictates of his way," or, perhaps more commonly, "according to what his way demands." What then is the child's way in this text?
- d. In wisdom literature like Proverbs there are only two "ways"—the way of wisdom and life and the way of folly and death. The previous verse declares, "Thorns and snares are in the way of the crooked; whoever guards his soul will keep far from them" (Prov 22:5). There is a right way and a wrong way, and within Proverbs, the moral content of one's way depends on the doer—whether God (8:22), the wise (11:5; 14:8; 16:7), humans in general (16:9; 20:24), or fools (19:3).² Significantly, a "youth's way" is often negative.
- i. When left to themselves, the "young" lack judgment and have hearts filled with foolishness. "And I have seen among the simple, I have perceived among the youths, a young man lacking sense" (Prov. 7:7). "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him" (Prov. 22:15).
 - ii. Without discipline, the young bring disgrace on their parents. "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (Prov. 29:15).
 - iii. Out of this context, parents are thus exhorted to discipline their children and to instruct them in wisdom. "Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death" (Prov. 19:18; cf. 1:1, 4; 29:15).
- e. The verb to "dedicate" shows that Proverbs 22:6 speaks not of a child's way left to himself but the way that he ought to walk in accord with parental guidance. We do train our kids through passivity. By failing to lead them to repentance before the sovereign God, we teach them that they are fine to continue living as self-made kings and queens rather than servants. By failing to instruct them in God's commandments, we teach them that God's Word is *not* the highest authority in our lives. By failing to set boundaries, we instruct them that we really do not care whether they do good or ill. Nevertheless, this type of passive training is *not* what seems expressed in the

² So Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15–31*, 205.

imperative “Dedicate!” Rather, the sage is here calling parents to intentionally commit or orient the moral and religious trajectories of our children.

- f. The consequence statement in Proverbs 22:6 implies that the parents’ intentional moral and religious shaping early on to have a permanent effect on their child for good. This statement is not a hard-and-fast promise to parents, for the rest of the book makes clear that the power of the youth’s future depends not only on the parents’ guidance but also very much on the choices he or she makes. The immediately preceding verse implies that the youth must guard his soul from those who are crooked (22:5). He could choose to follow the wicked unto death (2:12–19), or he could heed the wisdom of his parents and choose the good paths of the righteous unto life (22:1–11, 20).
- g. While Proverbs 22:6 is framed as instruction to parents, the book as a whole gives guidance to the young (1:4). This fact suggests that Proverbs 22:6 was actually intended to call straying youth back toward the right way. If you are a son or daughter who had parents that worked hard to set positive moral and religious trajectories for your life (though imperfectly), you must not counter this trajectory by foolish decisions today.
- h. Proverbs 22:6 sets out a principle that time will prove true unless God intervenes for good or ill. As a parent, I rejoice in the directions given me in God’s word—the Lord calls me and my wife to actively and intentionally dedicate our children to represent, reflect, and resemble the glory of God in the face of Christ. Yet Proverbs 22:6 also reminds me how much I and my children fail, so I also rejoice in the power of the gospel to curb my own faults and the hardest of my children’s hearts. God in Christ makes those dead in sin alive (Eph. 2:4–5), forgives all who confess (1 John 1:9), and overcomes the old creation with new (2 Cor. 5:17).³

³ For more on this proverb, see Ted Hilderbrandt, “Proverbs 22:6a: Train Up a Child?” *GTJ* 9, no. 1 (1988): 3–19; Peter J. Gentry, “Equipping the Generation: Raising Children, the Christian Way,” *JDFM* 2.2 (2012): 96–109.