

# Children Don't Come With A Guarantee

## *Proverbs 22:6*

One Christmas our family put all our money together and bought a gas barbecue. It came in kitset form. It had to be assembled, so it came with a very good set of instructions. There was a complete list of parts, right down to the last nut and washer. There were assembly instructions on how to put it together. Then there were instructions on how to keep it clean and in good condition. Finally there were operating instructions on how to use it and how to cook on it. It came with a guarantee. There were warnings about what to do, and what not to do. The biggest warning was printed across the top of the instructions. "Warning – Read all these instructions before attempting to operate this device!"

Today I want to take one line out of the instruction book that God has given us about life. The line has found in Proverbs 22:6. "***Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.***" These words are old Proverb, or wise saying from King Solomon who was one of the smartest men who ever lived. Some of you might want to question that, because Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Anyone who has that many wives can't be all that smart. But God has preserved this wise saying about bringing up our children, so let's look at it.

### **1. Bringing up children involves training.**

When we got our children they came without an instruction book. Somewhere between the hospital and home we must have lost it. Three times. I don't know how we could have been so careless. When we got them home we looked to see if there were any tags on them telling us how to care for them. There was nothing that said "Do not dry clean. Wash in warm soapy water and drip dry." There was no instruction book that said "Warning – if this child is treated badly it is liable to explode." There was certainly no guarantee that said "If in any way this child is found to be defective, bring it back and we will replace it free of charge. Just make sure you hold on to the receipt."

Many parents have felt that the day they become parents they got on a rapid learning curve that hasn't stopped. The trick as parents is to stay one step ahead of your kids on that learning curve, rather than being one step behind.

***Train a child.*** In Solomon's day the word "train" had two interesting meanings. The word train came from a word meaning the palate. It was a reference to the roof of the mouth, or the gums. It was a word used of giving direction to a horse by putting a rope in it's mouth. The idea of that rope or bit in the mouth of the horse is not to break the spirit of the horse. It has the idea of harnessing the power of the horse for good purposes, rather than letting it run wild. Ask any teacher or social worker what the root cause is with today problem kids and they will tell you that these kids have never had their potential harnessed. They have never been trained. Never been brought under authority. The word "train" was also used in Solomon day of the midwife who would put her finger in the juice of chewed or crushed dates, and then she would massage the gums of the new baby with that juice. When the baby tasted that juice, it would want to suck. That was the way they introduced a newborn baby to breastfeed.

What were they doing in training this child? They were creating a desire to feed. To train up a child is to develop in that child a thirst for what is good. So if we take these two meanings of the biblical concept of training and put them together we see that the goal of training is to harness the potential of that child. It's creating a thirst within that child for everything that is good.

Parents, in deciding to bring this child into the world, you are accepting primary responsibility for this training. Not the church. Not the school. Not the youth leaders. Not Grandma and Grandpa – that responsibility rests with you. God has laid on every parent the responsibility of disciplining and training their children. That's not an easy task, because research has shown us that the ratio of strong willed children to compliant children is about three to one. That means that most parents are committed to a battle of wills with their children.

Parents, training your children means an invasion of your comfort zone. It means taking responsibility rather than parking them in front of the TV or X-Box or Playstation, or letting them do what they like. One of the characteristics of our generation is that we have a generation of delinquent parents. It's too much bother to train their children. It's too much like hard work. So rather than stand up to their children, they let them get away with anything. It's easier to let them have their own way and stick a bit of money in their hot little hands and send them off to amuse themselves. It's less hassle to not make them do their homework, or clean their shoes, do dishes, tidy their room or brush their teeth. Parents are abandoning their responsibility, and we are all paying for it. Delinquent parents are creating delinquent kids. By the way parents, the word "child" in this scripture refers to all the years that the child lives under your roof. It's used in scripture of a new born infant, right through to a young man ready for marriage.

## **2. Bringing up children involves Gods direction.**

The second part of the verse is to ***train up the child in the way he should go, not in the way you*** want him to go. We are to train our children in keeping with the unique character that God has given him or her. God has established a unique character in your child. Discover what that is and encourage it. Don't try shape it into what you think it should be. Some kids are more intellectual – others are more practical. If your daughter is into outdoor sports and the rough and tumble lifestyle, don't try and make her into a beauty queen. Each child has a God given individual character. Encourage that. Train that character. You will be satisfied as a parent and so will your child.

## **3. Bringing up children involves letting them go.**

The next part of the proverb says ***"When he is old."*** In the Hebrew language that literally means "the bearded one". In other words when he's got hair on his chin. It's indicating a stage in life when they are ready to take increasing responsibility. Parents, your responsibility is to train these children until they reach an age when they should be taking responsibility for themselves. It's not a matter of letting them go overnight, but trusting them with increasing levels of responsibility, and letting them live with the consequences of their actions. In almost every civilisation there has been a recognised time when a boy becomes a man. In Papua New Guinea there are ceremonies that a boy goes through where he is recognised that from that point on, he is a man. In Jewish society, at 13 a boy goes through his Bar mitzvah, and then he is recognised as a man. In many societies of the world there are no such thing as teenagers. You are either a girl or a woman, or a boy or a man. In our Western society we have lost the art of initiation into manhood and womanhood. The thing that marks that initiation is responsibility. It's often been said that in wartime, young men went away as boys, and came back as men. I'm not advocating we send our kids off to war, but I am advocating that we stop wrapping them in cotton wool and help them to grow up into maturity by giving them increasing responsibility. Parents, that means at the appropriate time you have to let them go. There comes a time when you have to put the training to the test.

#### **4. Bringing up children means trusting God with your kids.**

The other part of that verse says "***When he is old he won't turn from it.***" Now there will be many people here who will be thinking "I wish that were true. I did everything I could in training my child. I made some mistakes, but before God I did my best. But she's caused me nothing but heartache and grief and pain." Parents, hear me carefully on this. This verse in scripture is a wise saying. It's a proverb. It is not a promise from God. So many parents have taken this proverb, this wise saying, and treated it as one of God's unbreakable promises. Your responsibility before God is to train your children. You are not responsible for what your children do with that training. It's time some of you parents stopped beating yourself with guilt because your children have rebelled against the training you have given. God gave your children a free will. If they choose to be rebellious and damage and destroy their lives, it's going to hurt you deeply, but don't add to that hurt by blaming yourself.

An airline pilot can be trained in all the right safety procedures, but he can still abandon the training in a crisis. An ambulance officer can be trained to cope in a medical emergency, but it's no guarantee that she won't lose her head and panic when disaster strikes. Parents, don't let Satan, or society, or well meaning friends, or even your children dump guilt on you for their rebellious behaviour. Pray for them, love them, be there for them, but don't take on yourself responsibility that belongs to them. What you can do, is trust God for them.

I want to finish with some encouragement for parents. Dr. James Dobson surveyed 37,000 parents to discover information about strong willed children. One of the things he found was that 85 percent of hard headed, strong willed, rebellious children who reject their parents' values, eventually return to those same values. Parents, 85 percent of rebellious kids come back to their training. Don't give up. Don't give in. Pray and ask God to give you wisdom. Love your kids. Train them. Bring out the potential God has placed in them. Then leave the results to him.

*David McChesney, Westlake Church in Nyon, Switzerland*