

I. The Importance of Context in Parenting

If you have your Bibles today, I want you to turn to Proverbs 22. That is where we have been for the last couple of weeks. Every Sunday morning when I get here, the guys on the soundboard always come over and ask me what passage I will be in so they can get it on the tape. Today I told them it is Proverbs 22:6. For your information, next week it will be Proverbs 22:6. And the week after that, Proverbs 22:6. For the next eight weeks, it might be Proverbs 22:6. Today we will get into one of the greatest verses and principles in all the Bible on our role as parents in a biblical sense.

I talk a lot to you about the Bible and studying the Bible, about the importance of context. I do not think there is any single issue more important in learning your Bible than understanding the aspect of getting a context. But it does not stop with the Bible. Most people probably think it does, but it does not. Your job and my job, once we learn the Bible, is to be able to put the issues of life in a context.

I talk about things that will happen to you in your life and how you are not to take it personally and you are not to be able to deal with it, especially if you are working with people in the ministry. For me, after almost 50 years in the ministry, I must confess to you, the only thing that has kept me sane in all of the things that I have had to deal with is the aspect of putting it all in a context. When you have to deal with issues or you have to deal with problems, the great unknown about it is not understanding it. When you do not understand something that has happened to you or you are going through, then there are too many variables, too many question marks, too many unanswered things, and that can scare you. That will make the problem even worse.

I have found that the way that you handle situations like that, to keep it to a minimum, is to be able to put all of life and the individual scenarios that we all go through into a context, understanding why this is the way that it is. It is a lot easier to deal with it. You will find that there needs to be a context, obviously, of the Bible. There needs to be a context of the issue of life. There needs to be a context of your family. There is a context to everything.

II. The Guarantee of Proverbs 22:6

This single verse, without a doubt, is the greatest promise and the greatest principle. Remember, I explained three or four weeks ago the difference between a principle and a promise. But this is one of the greatest promises to you, and yet one of the greatest principles that we can operate by in all the Bible. That is your 100% guarantee that your child can grow up in this world and stay faithful to the Word of God and the family.

I have had couples come over and talk to me, and they have not had any children yet. They had a concern that, with the world the way it is today, they were somewhat afraid to have children and bring them into the world as bad as the world is today. I understand that, but I always tell them

that that is always relative. If you lived in the 16th, 15th, or 14th century, you would be seeing all your friends butchered and crucified by the Roman Catholic Church and tortured, and you would think twice about having kids back then. If you lived back in 200 or 300 AD, all your Christian friends would be down in the Roman Colosseum being hacked together with the gladiators, and you would probably say to your pastor, "I do not know if I should even want to bring kids into this world."

The bottom line is, no matter where we live in history, no matter where we live in time, the Bible is faithful to whatever circumstances or situation we have. God has given us as parents the 100% guarantee, 100% guarantee, that in the world that we live in, you can bring a child up, or children up, and they will stay faithful to everything.

In most cases, and I know there are exceptions to everything, but in most cases, no parent ever wanted anything but the best for their child, and I really believe that. I know I have met parents that were terrible parents. I have met parents that, in my estimation, should have had a chain around their ankles and hooked to a bumper on a truck and dragged around a parking lot someplace for a couple of hours; I get it. But in most cases, that is not true. I do not think that most parents ever wanted anything but the best for their child, and I really believe that.

But here is the problem, and it has always been the problem. The problem is a lack of understanding on the parents' part of what really is best for that child. What they think is best is not always what is best. We want to talk about some of these things today.

III. The Church's Role in Family Ministry

Our church is a very young church, age-wise. Most churches today, the average age is 60, 70, 80, 90, somewhere in there, and they are like a dinosaur graveyard. Everybody goes there to die. Ours is just the opposite of that. Our 20s, 30s, and 40s, we have a host of great teens. Our single adults are just beyond belief, in my mind. The young couples are throughout our church, and even the 40 and 50 crowd. I will tell you, even the people who are in their 60s or even 70s, they are still young-minded in everything that they do. We really do not have that element in our church where you are just looking for a place to roll over and die. I think that is very good.

Over the years, I have watched us grow. I have watched us grow numerically with the new people that come in. I was talking to, had lunch with a guy this week who watches us on YouTube, and he said, "Boy, there are a lot of new faces in your church. I see them when you guys are walking, you do not know if the camera is on when you are walking back and forth." Our church has grown people-wise, but it has also grown spiritually. We have an incredible base of men and women who do the ministry and have grown to an unparalleled depth in the Word of God and their ability to really understand and to do ministry.

I remember years ago when we first started our church, I took about 40 or 50 of you, and we went through our first round of Bible Institute. Then we went through church history together, we went through, we began the counseling ministry and all of that stuff. Most of you really stayed with it. You have developed yourselves to where you are today. Now, here we are, many years later, we are in round two of the Bible Institute. We had almost 100 people in it last time

we met. Our people ministry was packed out there. We have a whole new world of people who are where you older ones were years ago, and they want to learn and grow in the Word of God too.

Our youth group has grown and matured through our youth program. Zach and Jenny worked with that with all the great counselors that we have that put so much into that. Our camps, last year was the sixth year of our camp. We started out with just a very, very small group, and now it has matured and it has really taken off and paid off. This year when we come out of camp, we started our leadership training program where we took all of the kids, the young ones and the older ones, and wanted to keep that thing going alive so that they could keep and not lose what they had.

We do all that for one reason. I understand that at our very best, the church is no substitute for parents and a family. I understand that. I would never try to supersede that. But sometimes you are forced into a situation where, because the parents will not do what they need to do, then you have to try to help the kids where you can. Everything that we do fundamentally is to help the family become everything that God wants them to be.

Our key kids today, in their 14, 15, 16, 17 now, but when we started our church back in the day, they were four, five, six, seven, and eight. Now here we are a number of years later, and these are the very kids that we watched as babies running up and down and doing all the little things as young kids. Now they are on the threshold of adulthood. With that, we begin to see the devil do his work and stopping them from fulfilling all that God has had for them.

I look at our young couples, as I mentioned a moment ago, babies and toddlers all over the place. It is hard to walk up and down the step without tripping over one. They are everywhere. They are running around. They are happy. They are healthy. It is exciting to watch what is going on. I do not believe for a moment that there is any accident that, given our church family and where we are at with the kids and everything, and where we are spiritually as a church, we now find ourselves in the book of Proverbs, chapter 22, right in the key verse that we need to be. As all through the book of Proverbs, we need to stop and we need to develop this concept, this principle, this promise to its fullest.

I want you as parents, if you are a young couple who just had babies or you are thinking about having, and I know many of you have talked to me about the fact that you are thinking about having children. You come over and ask me about it. We talk about it. So I know that there are prospective parents. There are young parents that have kids. There are you singles who will meet the love of your life before long and you will get married. The inevitable happens that you will have children. Then we have those who have teenagers or are in junior high, and they are all right there. This verse is a foundational verse and a principle that you will build your children on. We want to talk about today, if you miss this, then you will have some major issues coming your way.

I talk a lot, and you hear me use different terms. I talk a lot about long-term and short-term. I talk about being proactive versus being reactive. In marital classes, I talk about responding to a

situation instead of reacting to it. All these are absolutely essential in child development. They really are, especially the long-term and the short-term.

The lifeblood of this church, from our viewpoint today, will be the men and the women who are faithful to the work and really do the ministry. That is true. Most pastors, when they have something good like that going on, they are satisfied. They are happy with that. They think, "Wow, I have all these people that are ministering to people and all these people that are taking the truth of the Word of God and doing the hard aspect of the Word of God." But I have learned in the ministry that there is never a time that you get satisfied, and there is never a time that you do not look beyond what you have, long-term. Short-term, I understand it, but long-term, it is something else. Because the lifeblood of this church today, maybe you who are doing the work, and I thank God for you, but in the long-term, the lifeblood of this church will be our children that will be responsible for today, that will take over this church if Jesus does not come in the years to come. So it is a short-term now, but it is a long-term concept that we need to understand and start working toward.

I said about our camping ministry, and we had a great deal. The first year, we kind of were testing the waters, and the guys did the camp and did a great job. We had Dean from Pensacola up for a couple of them, and he did a great job. Then, about three years ago, I started doing them, and I have been out of camp for years and years and years. I get calls periodically. I got one just last week; somebody wanted me to come and do their camp. I am past that point in my life. This is where I need to be. This is what I need to do. But I really enjoy doing our camp because, and I think I said this to you when we got ready for camp, I look at it as long-term, my preaching at camp. I want to build a relationship with your children. What I did last year, basically what I do every year, but what I did last year is I wanted your kids, our kids, to understand that the bond between me and you as their parents in ministry, how we got to where we are at and how they are part of that, and how they need to understand that it is not mom and dad and then the children, it is mom and dad and the children in a ministry team together. I wanted to build that concept. I wanted them to understand that the real key and the success of a family is families ministering together. That is why leadership training for them is so important, like we had last week, is that we keep those things alive in their life because they are vital to them.

If there is one word that we will get to in depth, if there is one word that needs to be the watchword of us with our children, it is the single word "reinforcement." We have to continually reinforce in their young lives everything that we want them to understand. My goal is to help you in every way that I can with your children.

IV. Children as God's Heritage

Now I know the reality of that, we will lose some of them. I understand that. That is just the reality of life in the ministry. Every pastor would like to keep everybody that comes to a church, but that is just not real. That is not going to work. The odds are against me. We have already lost some, but you need to know this: your job, our job together, is to try to keep that number as low as possible. We do not want to lose our children to the world.

My heart is filled with so many things today. I watch you girls that are in your early 20s or your teens, and you guys too. Nobody told you to do this. Yet it just warms my heart because for me as a pastor, it makes it clear that you are picking up on it and you are getting it. I watch some of you young gals, you are 18, 19, and you guys are just saying, "I want you to take these young kids and mentor them. I want you to take them into your world." You could be doing a thousand things that guys your age and girls your age do, but you do not. You take your time and you mentor them. We have kids, young boys and girls, that are in other states that do not have anything, that you take the time to mentor them. A lady called us a couple of weeks ago that just wanted somebody in our church to be a big brother to her boy, and people always step up to the plate.

I look at that and I think to myself, there is no greater love that you can display of what you are learning about God in the Bible than taking that and unselfishly taking of your time, taking young men and young ladies and simply mentoring them, being a role model for them, letting them know, getting into their world when all of the things that will be coming their way. Our kids are this church's future. Whether we will be here or not another 50 years, the future of our church will lie within the children that we have today.

There is a great verse in Psalms 127:3. It is a great verse, and we will be looking at a lot of good verses here over the next couple of weeks, but it simply says this. Remember now, what I am trying to do today is put your child training into a context. I am trying to put your family into an understandable context so that when you leave here today and come back next week and we start looking at all this stuff, you have a context by which to put it in.

Psalms 127:3

Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.

Our children are God's heritage. They are not our heritage. Many times we think of the legacy of our family, and I understand that in a physical sense, but in a spiritual sense, it is a much larger picture. In a spiritual sense, our children are God's heritage. They are not our heritage. The Bible says the fruit of the womb will be His reward. Parents are nothing more. All of us were simply the caretakers, the stewards of taking care of God's heritage to ensure that God's plan never stops.

I know that probably we never think on this level, but God's original plan for the Old Testament and for the New Testament was to reach the world through families. This is why in the Old Testament, when it is dealing with your children under the law, they deal with a zero tolerance. There is a zero tolerance in dealing with kids. If you get a kid that mouths off to his parents and is rebellious in the Old Testament, he may get one or two shots at going before the elders to get him straightened out. But if that does not work, they simply take him out, dig a hole, and kill him. That ends the disobedience and the problems that are going on within that nation because God knew that if you lost one family, you will lose another one. If you do not deal with the children, the whole aspect of God's program of reaching the world goes out the window.

That is God's plan for all things. It was an absolute foolproof plan of parenting. Parents having a relationship with God and then having children, understanding that they are not theirs, they are the caretakers, it is God's heritage and God's fruit. Then building into them, training them, and passing on through the family for generations to come an unbroken line of ministry that will reach the world. We never have to go out and reach one more soul for Christ if God's families would just start doing what they need to do and look at their families and let them start winning their families, their families ministering, and then their families, and it would go on forever. In a very short time, the world would be won to Christ. But the devil made sure that did not happen.

God gave us as parents a 100% guarantee because this is His program. This is the way that He wanted to reach the world. He wanted to establish churches, and then within that established church, established families, and families working together as a team to reach the world. So with that in mind, the devil then, with all the forces of hell, comes against the family, and the attack in the Old Testament, as in the New Testament, was against the families, stopping the families from doing what God had designed families to do. The quicker you come to the understanding that your kids are not yours, they are God's heritage, and you have been entrusted with the stewardship of God's heritage and God's fruit, God expects you and I to build a relationship with Him and then develop that into our children, that the unbroken chain goes on.

The thing that excites me so much within our church is, many of you young guys and gals, you came into this church from families that were not saved, or if they were, they were not very good. You have broken the chain the other way. You were in a family that for generations did nothing. Now you got plugged into the Bible, and when you have children and get married, your kids, you will start that unbroken chain. To me, that is exciting. To me, that is really exciting. It is an incredible thing. It is something that we want to always remember and something we never want to forget and how we look at it.

V. The Tragedy of Losing a Child

In all of Christianity, there are many tragedies. We talked today that Kelly was 42 years old. She was born on December 7th, the day the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. In 44 years, I have seen a lot of tragedies. I have had to deal with a lot of tragedies. I have seen it all in 42 years of the ministry here and in another five back in Canton. But I want to tell you, without a doubt, the most heartbreaking tragedy is when a mom and dad lose a child to the world. I want you to know that. I do not know of another tragedy that could befall anybody that hurts deeper, hurts longer, and hurts more. Because it is an ongoing thing. It never just comes to an end.

I have seen it many times. I have spent many long hours watching the disasters unfold. I know that we ask ourselves, "What happened?" All their young life, those kids seemed to be fine. Then one day they just slip through your fingers and they are gone. Almost overnight it seems they changed. Their attitude changed. Their lifestyle changed. The way they dress, their appearance, their attitude about things, their thinking changed. Now, like smoke from a campfire that just kind of goes up and dissipates into the air, away they go. It is devastating. The truth of it is, the real tragedy, it did not have to happen. God has given us a 100% guarantee. It was never God's

intention for us to lose our children. Every saved parent has the guarantee of Proverbs 22:6. Unfortunately, in most cases, they just never use it.

Proverbs 22:3

A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.

It is like last week I gave you Proverbs 22:3, "A prudent man foreseeth the evil." Parents, they lose their kids and they never see it coming. Maybe they do not want to see it coming, but they never see it coming. They could never read the tell-tale signs. Maybe they did not want to read them. I do not know. I know that this is not true, but it is true in some areas. Parents can be the most selfish people on the planet. Parents can make a lot of bad choices that ruin their marriage, ruin their life, ruin their health. They can make a lot of bad choices that complicate themselves on top of it. Then maybe they wind up being a single parent or in a bad relationship or relationship after relationship. Because all they want in life is what they want to make them happy, their children get lost in the shuffle. They are so busy trying to make themselves happy and going through all of the disasters and all of the compounding effects that really mess them up, and all of the drama that they have to deal with for years to come. Then they wonder why their children have issues. They wonder why their children have problems because they are so caught up in all of the bad choices that they have made, and the compounding effect that just goes into that, that the kids just get lost in it all. Mom or dad, whatever the case may be, simply because of their own issues, do not have the time to address the issues that they are going through.

The devil, he does not sneak in the back door. He comes right in the front door. Through the course of our study on this great verse, I will give you the four or five scenarios of where your child is at. Your child today will either be in four or five scenarios. We may not get there today, but we will get there. On top of that, no matter what the situation with your children is, I want you to know this: there is always something you can always do to begin to reverse the process. But the issue will always be that parents will not do what they need to do. I will tell you this right now, the longer you wait to begin to fix it, the harder it is going to be to fix, and the more heartache it is going to push you through.

It is a phenomenon that I have never really fully understood. Parents will protect their kids from everything. They will protect them from getting sick. They will get their flu shots. They will keep them home from school if they do not feel good. If there is any sign of something that might be serious, they are right to the doctor. They have all their vaccinations. They have everything. They protect them from the dangers that are around them when they are little and they are playing out in the yard. You say, "Do not leave the yard, do not play in the street." I do not need to tell that to my neighbors across the street there, but they do not play in the street. You are going to get hit with a car. You give that child boundaries where he can play or she can play because you know there is somebody out there who will hurt them. You tell them, "Do not talk to strangers." You get on the internet sometime and look at the pedophiles or the child molesters, and you put your address in; you would absolutely be shocked at how many of them live right around your area. So you tell them, "Do not talk to strangers." Somebody comes up with a little,

"Say, do you want to see my little puppy?" "No, I do not want to see my little puppy." No. Sign up for the child concealed carry classes that he was going to have also. We tell them, "Do not touch that. It is a hot stove." And they touch it and they say, "It was a hot stove." "Do not touch that." They buy those things that you put in electrical sockets. You know why? Because your little kid will want to stick his finger in there, or better yet, his brother's finger in there, or a pencil, or a piece of wire, or a fork. So you protect them from all those things. But parents will not do one thing to protect them from the worldly things that will take them from them.

I will tell you, the worst nightmare for a parent, the worst nightmare for a parent, would be to have your child kidnapped. I cannot think of anything more devastating. I just cannot. I do not even like to think about it. If there is one thing that we instilled in our girls growing up, and one of them was kidnapped at one time, but they brought her back within two or three hours. I am just kidding. I cannot think of anything more tragic. I cannot think of anything more devastating. Go home and know that somebody has kidnapped your child and you do not know who took them or where they are at or if you will ever see them again. But at the same time, we protect our kids from everything, but we will allow the world to kidnap them. In many cases, the kidnapers are in union with you. Many times parents will deliver their children to the kidnapers.

VI. The Meaning of "Train Up a Child"

Our verse today will be our foundational verse on child training that we will build on every week. We will start every week with this verse and then we will move out from there.

Proverbs 22:6

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Now, as I said, what I intend to do is give you a context, a context for training up your child, a context for your family. I will say it again, everything in the Christian life needs to fit into a context. Context is understanding. When you have a context of what you are looking at, then you understand it. It puts everything in its proper order. Context is based on principles. This is why, as I said, in the ministry, when you work with people, there will be things that people do to you, how they try to hurt you, say things about you. If you do not have a context to put all that in, and you cannot take every case as an individual case and look at it and put it into a context and then be satisfied and walk away from it, you will have a lot of issues.

Now, let me begin by saying this. It says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Now, let me say this. Either this verse is 100% true or it is not. Either you and I, as parents, can claim it or we cannot. All my life, I have heard pastors and Christians twist the verse to justify how they lost their child, their child went into the world, and yet they are fine as a family. "I am fine as a pastor. It was not my fault. It was so-and-so's fault. It was this fault. It was that fault. We sent him here. This person got into the world." I have heard them twist that verse to try to make it work for them, and I want to tell you something. There is no twisting the verse. It says what it says. That verse is just as absolute and sure as any verse on your salvation.

Romans 10:9-10

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

This verse is our guarantee that we can bring our kids up in the world that we live in and be 100% sure they will make it. Either the verse is 100% true or it is 100% false. You will find in these situations that the problem is never with the verse. The problem will always be with the parents. The key to unlocking and understanding how to use this verse will be found very simply in a couple of key words here that we want to look at that really set the context.

VII. The Hard Work of Training

The first word I want to look at is in the first phrase here, it says, "train up a child." I want to just talk for a few minutes about one word: training. Without a doubt, it is the key ingredient in our verse. I want you to understand something. You raise corn, you can raise rabbits, you can raise puppies, and you can raise cats. But when it comes to children, you have to train them. You do not raise children, you train children. When it comes to children that God entrusted to us as His heritage and His fruit, we train them. As in everything in the Christian life, there will be a right way and a wrong way to train them. It is just that simple. There is one right way, but there are always many wrong ways. That is a constant in Christianity. There is one right salvation, but there are many false salvations. There is one true church, and there are many, many false churches. There is one real Bible, and then there are many wrong ones. There is one right way to learn the Bible, and then there are many wrong ways. There is one right way to train children, and of course, there are many wrong ways. These are the things that you need to understand.

As your pastor, my job obviously is to train you. My job is to equip you the right way. I told the people in the people ministry yesterday that I am old school. I am not much for all this modern stuff that you see going on today. I am old school. I was raised and brought up in a time when Christianity meant something, that the Bible meant something. Yet I understand I was caught in that vacuum because it was changing from one to the other. But I have the people in my life that instilled in me through their training. Today the church and Christianity, the right way, is viewed as the wrong way.

Isaiah 5:20

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

We saw this in Isaiah 5:20 that he was prophesying of the time to come. He said, "There is a time coming," I will paraphrase now, "There is a time coming when the right things will be looked at as the wrong things, and the wrong things will be looked at as the right things." That is where we are at today. Today in churches, the right way is viewed as the wrong way, and the wrong way is viewed as the right way. In both cases, with people and churches and our children, the right way will be a lot of hard work.

I have been in the ministry a long time. I do not claim to know much about anything in life, but I know preachers, I am one. I have seen them from every shape and angle and size and every church and every denomination and every dimension all through my life. Most pastors, I will tell you, most pastors when it comes to the ministry, they want to take the easy route with their people. They want to make their life and their ministry as simplistic for them as they can. That is why they get to a point where they spend 30, 40 years in the ministry.

Another thing that is a phenomenon to me, you can see it in the Bible that in the Bible, a man is not even considered a man until he is 30. He is not allowed to go to war, he is not allowed to do anything meaningful until he is 30 years of age. That is when he is recognized as being a man. We look at it, in our world, when you are 18, you can drink beer because you are an adult and make your own decisions. The Bible puts that at 30. There is a reason for that. As you get to the point where if you are just now starting as a man into the introduction of the world when you are 30, by the time you get to be 60 or 70, if you have learned anything at all, you probably are now the most valuable in your life of what you have learned, if you have learned anything, to give it to somebody else. But the pastor mentality today is, "I will pastor a church until I am 50 and 60, 70 years old," and I will pastor not even 70 anymore. "Then I will, I have done my part, I will retire." When you go through your whole life and you have now amassed all the information that you have of the situations and the people that you have dealt with, by the time you are in your 60s, you are in your prime to train somebody. But that is when they get out. You know why? They want the easy way. Honestly, they are lazy. They are.

All you have to do to understand that is every time we have one inch of snow, there will be 60,000 church cancellations. When they start to tell you the night before it is going to snow the next day, they are already calling the snow hotline. I will tell you where the pastor's mind is. He is saying to himself, "I could use the sermon I have tomorrow next week. I have a week, I do not have to do anything." I know the mindset. I know exactly the way they think. Most pastors, they simply want to take the easy route. They will go Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night, but they do not put anything into it. You may get your best shot on Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night. When a missionary used to come through town, we would always put him on Wednesday night to preach because we knew that missionaries typically do not preach very well. We always put them on Wednesday night because nobody came Wednesday night anyhow. That is the mindset. They never understand. It is much work, the hundreds of hours that need to be invested in specialized training, in one-on-one working through all the issues to build people one person at a time. You do not do that just getting up on Sunday morning. You do not do that by just letting people see who you are. You have to take the hours and invest in them. You do not build anybody from a long distance. There is no easy road in ministry. It is 24/7, all day, every day. In ministry, you give until you have nothing left to give, and then you find some more to give. Most pastors and most parents want to take the easy route in training up their children.

I grew up in, and some of you know what I am talking about, I grew up in the era of the Christian school movement. Somebody came up with the idea a long time ago that the Christian school was the answer to the public school system. Pastors, they were taught in Bible college, "If you

want to start a church, the way you start a church is you start a church and then you open up a Christian school. Then you tell all the people that if they do not go to a Christian school, their kids are all going to die and go to hell and go to the world, and they will flock to your school." Because they think the guarantee that if you send your child to a Christian school, there is a big shine over the door as they walk in school. Big shine, "Devil cannot come in here." He is teaching the classes. What parents did is they took the easy route. They thought if they sent their kid to Christian school, that they would not have to do the training, that the school would do it. Pastors make the same mistake by sending all of their people off to Bible college, thinking if the Bible college trains them, then I will not have to do it.

Mel Sabaka one time, he was talking to a guy that was in charge of a Christian school, and the guy in the Christian school wanted to know why Mel was against Christian schools and why he would not send his people there. Mel always had the answer, but he never gave you the easy answer. He always gave you one that either walked you alongside the head or made you think. I was standing right there, and he said, "Okay, let me think here. Why do I not want to send my people to your school? I send my kids to your school to learn ministry. You take them, put them into work in your church to build your church for four years. When they graduate and now they are ready to go out and go be a missionary and start them after they have worked in your church, building your church, then you send them back to me for me to pay for it and support them. That is why I do not send them." Brilliant. But that is what it is. It is exactly what it is. It takes hundreds of hours to take a group of people. It takes years, it takes months. Most parents, like pastors, they want to take the easy route in training up their kids.

I get it, I get it, I get it. You work all day, you are tired, I understand. You come home, you have one kid, two kids, three kids, you worked all day, you are tired, and you come home, they want to climb all over you, and you are tired, you want some time for yourself. This is where the training now begins. You say, "What is your advice to me?" Get a puppy. Do not have children if you are not understanding that it demands a tremendous amount of work.

As a pastor, I have free time, but I do not have a lot of free time. I am on call 24/7. There have been times when I used to work down at Paola, and I worked for SMNP, marking the lines and things. Paola is way down in Miami County. I went two counties below Miami all the way down to Anderson County, and I was the only guy that worked down there, and I was on call 24/7. Many times I wanted to go do something, and my pager would go off, and I would have to drive 70 miles one way just to write on a ticket, "We do not have anything here." My pager, I had to sleep next to it. There were many nights that it went off in the middle of the night, and I had to go and just go on to work the next morning. There was never a time because it was my job that I could ever say, "I am not on call." I want to tell you something, in the ministry, you are on call all the time. Now I will take it up one level. As a parent, you are on call all the time. I get it. But training up your child the right way will be work. With children comes demanding responsibility of training them. Moms and dads together.

When a pastor does it right, he will produce a solid Bible-believing church with people who are sound. They are solid. We talked about the seven sound concepts of a good Bible-believing church in Christian life. You have a sound doctrine which produces a sound mind, which

produces sound word, which produces sound speech, which produces sound faith, which produces sound wisdom that will translate into you building sound relationships, unmoved by the world. When a parent does it the same way and does it right, then he will produce the same soundness in their children that will be unmoved by the enticement of the world.

I will tell you something. There will come a time, and we will talk about it when we get to this phase of it, when your child will start to be enticed by the world. I am telling you, it is coming. It is already here for some of you. When you build a church, I will tell you something. When you build a church, you cannot build it by flying by the seat of your pants. You cannot say, "I will be a pastor, I will build a church. You all come on now, hear me preach." You need a plan. You need a training schedule. You need a format and a model for growth, and you need a vision of how you are going to do it. You not only need to know what you want to accomplish, but you better know how you are going to accomplish it. In training up children, you need to know the same four things. I will be honest with you, I love you, but I will be honest. If you as a parent this morning cannot define these four things in your child's life, you are already in some trouble.

You have to have a plan. What is your plan? "Well, I will just raise them up in the nurture of the Lord." That is not a plan. That is like a guy going into the general and the general saying, "How are you going to take that city?" "Well, we will just beat them." What is your plan? What is your training schedule? Do you have one? Or do you just look for opportunity times to train them? Do you have a scheduled training format for their growth? Could you right now project where your child is at by where they were, by where you want them to go? What is your vision for them? "I want them to be a doctor, I want them to be a ball player, I want them to be this, I want them to be that, I want them to marry somebody rich." Nothing wrong with that one. "I want them to have a better life than me." That is great. How are you going to do that? What does that mean? What is your vision? What do you want to accomplish with your child? My second question is, how are you going to accomplish it? What is your plan? What is your plan?

VIII. The Parent as the Archer

Now the second word will be found in a second phrase, and that is "in the way he should go." I want to give you another great verse here to help our context. It is also found in the book of Psalms.

Psalms 127:4

As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.

We as parents will decide which way your child will go in life. It should not be your gym teacher, it should not be the social advisor at school, it should not be their friends, it is you. We launch them in life toward a target. You take a man who is great with a bow and arrow, he picks up the bow and he picks up the arrow, and he puts it in there and he can hit a pie plate at 50 feet. He will put it through the same hole. He takes that arrow, he looks at a target, he pulls it back, and he is so well versed in it, he lets it fly, it hits the target. We do the same thing with our children, "as arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth." You take your children that God has entrusted to you, God's heritage, God's fruit. God puts you the custodian of

them, He made you the stewardship of them. You take that kid and you put him in the bow of life and you aim him toward heaven or you aim him toward hell.

All my life I have heard parents blame the failure of their kids on everybody else. "Well, he got hanging out with so-and-so, and so-and-so is no good." "Well, she started running with the wrong crowd, and she started doing that, and this, and they kind of pulled her down." Let me ask you one simple question, who trained her in the value system of choosing friends? "As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man, so are children of the youth." We as parents will decide which way the child will go in life. We launch them, and we launch them toward God or the world. We launch them toward heaven or hell. At the end of the day, we are the custodians of them. We are the stewards of them. If we have given up that stewardship, that is on us.

Listen, training up your child the right way will be a very hard, ongoing task, and it never ends. But I want to tell you this, if you do it the right way, the older it gets, the easier it gets. In most cases, the older the kids get, the more problems the family faces. The right way is just the opposite. The older they get, if you do it the right way, the easier they become. In time, we will look at those five stages of training up children on different levels as we go through, not today, but we will get there. This is a context day.

IX. Six Scenarios of Parenting

Today in our church, we will have parents who find themselves in one of six scenarios. This will help you with your context. This will help you identify where you are at.

1. Your kids are doing great. You put the principles into their life, and it shows. They are right on target. I am not saying they do not have issues, all kids do, but what I am saying is your family is ministering together. You have it together. You are working it together. They are in church with you. They are standing by your side. They are sitting next to you where they are sitting with their husband or their wife or whatever, and they are where you are at, and you have done a job. Your family is ministering together, and you are a model for the young people in our church who want to have what you have someday. I am glad we got that one out of the way.
2. Parents with new babies. If you do not want to have children in our church, do not drink the water. The bottles of water we put on the table out there are tainted. We have a host of parents with new babies. Some of you just had your first child. Some of you had your second child. Your scenario is your children are still very young. They are babies.
3. Parents with children aged two to five. Now you have realized that the only word your child is probably ever going to speak is the word "no." "Pick that up." "No." "Do not do that." "No." You are convinced that they will have a one-syllable, one-word life. You have some challenges with them.
4. Parents with children aged eight to eleven. These can be some tough years too. As kids begin to grow, and we will talk about the reason for this in weeks to come, but they automatically have a thing where they begin to challenge authority. Adam and Eve were the first two children in the Bible, and every child that is born in his early years is a picture of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were not afraid to run around naked. Adam and Eve were told not to

touch something. Adam and Eve were told not to put something in their mouth. When Adam and Eve sinned, like all little kids, that is what they do. They run around naked. You tell them all day long, "Do not touch that." You tell them, "Do not put that in your mouth." When it comes down to putting broccoli over here or fruit over here, they will take the fruit every time. Every one of them, when they do something wrong and you try to question them, they will blame it on their brother and their sister just like he did. "Lord, the woman you gave me." You see, human nature starts in the Bible in Genesis 1, 2, and 3.

5. Parents with teenagers (13-18). You have your hands full in some cases. This is where they begin to change. The change becomes really apparent. This is where rapidly it moves out of your control. This is where you spend your waking nights with tears on your pillow.
6. Parents who have lost their child. Even though they may live in your same house with you, you have lost control. The only interaction you have is fighting. You get into tremendous fights with them, you lose your temper. They say things to each other that they should not say. At this stage, this is basically a standoff stage. You are not going to fix anything going the way you are going here. They do what you say because they have to. They will comply with your demand, they will fight you on it. You get an argument over it, but at the end of the day, they will put you to sleep by telling you what you want to hear. Then they will always find a way to do what they want to do. At this stage, you have basically lost any influence in your child's life. They have seen the hypocrisy, they have seen the differences, and now they do not want any part of it. They cannot wait to be out. They may have to stay where they are at right now, but the first chance that they get older, they are gone. In many cases, when you have multiple parents and divorces and kids living with one or the other, this is where the kid will bail out, and he will go with the path of least resistance. I see it all the time. We have lost any influence in their life.

It is a lot like the little guy, his dad was driving him, and they were going someplace, and the kid was in the front seat. The kid wanted to stand up so he could see. The dad did not want him to stand up because if he had to hit the brakes, the kid would go through the windshield. Of course, he says, "Son, sit down." The kid was defiant. He said, "No, I do not want to sit down, I want to see." The dad said, "I said, son, sit down." And he said, "I do not want to sit down, I want to stand up." Dad said, "Son, I am telling you, I want you to sit down." And he said, "I do not want to sit down, I will stand." Now, I will tell you something. In time, I will show you how many times you want to tell your child to do something before they do it. I will show you how to do that.

If I was driving the car, then I would have said to the kid, "Son, sit down." And he said, "I do not want to sit down," I would have hit the brakes. He would have bounced off the windshield, he would have come back. As he cried with blood running down his nose, I would have said, "That is why I wanted you to sit down." "No, son, sit down." "I did not want to." "Son, sit down." "I do not want to." "Son, sit down." "I do not want to." "Son, sit down." "I do not want to." Finally, the guy pushed him down in the seat, put a soap on it, the kid looked at him and said this, "I may be sitting in this seat, but I am standing in my mind." You have some problems. That is what your kids many times in scenario number six are doing. You are telling them, and they are doing it, but they are doing what you want, but in their mind, they are doing what they want. You do not have

anything. I have heard that parent say, "Well, I do not want to really come down hard on my child because I am afraid I will lose him." You have already lost him.

In my next life, I am not going to be a pastor. I am going to raise dogs. I am going to get this huge kennel. I am going to hire my sister to work with me. We are going to have a time of our life raising dogs, find a good home for them. The problem with us is we would raise all the dogs. We would never find any home for them because we never want to get rid of them.

Now understand this. My purpose in all of this, in these next eight weeks, today I want to give you a context. But my purpose overall is to help you to be better. My goal is not to belittle anybody. My goal is not to embarrass anybody, not to beat anybody up, put you on some kind of guilt trip. That is not my goal. My goal is to help you understand the guarantee that God has given you, the greatest guarantee outside your salvation. But as your pastor, there are some things that I need to say. Some of you are headed for some real heartache. If something does not change, I do not want that. I do not want that for you. I do not care for me. I will spend whatever time it takes to spend. I am there for you. It is me and you all the way. I am in your foxhole. I am there. But I do not want you to go through that.

Let me remind you what Paul said. In the book of Galatians, they had gotten off track. There were some things in the church of Galatia that had to change. Paul was good, but there comes a time when you have to put the river down where the road is. He told them some hard things that they needed to change. Then he said in Galatians 4:16, "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" Many times in the ministry, when you tell somebody the truth, you will become their enemy. That is a tragic thing in itself. But I want to tell you, I am not your enemy here today. I want the best for you. I want the best for your children. All I want is to get your family to the biblical place where God's plan is realized that families are ministering together as a team. What is wrong with that? Why would anybody have an issue with that? But you will find people that do.

X. The "Taken" Analogy: Protecting Your Child from the World

I am weird in a lot of ways. I just try to learn something from everything. That makes me weird because you do not. I know that everything in the world has to start with the Bible. I get that. So I am constantly in everything that I see looking for the principles that Hollywood or whoever puts into the films that they make, and I look at those, and it just kind of illuminates and gives me all kinds of, to me, valuable resource material. I was watching a movie and I thought of this just the other day, as I was putting this together. I know you have all seen the movie. It is the movie *Taken*. What is that guy's name, Liam? You all know who he is. He is one of my favorite actors.

In the movie *Taken*, this is great. I want to suggest that you do something. I want to suggest, I am not remembering how the language is, but it probably is not anything that your kids have not heard come out of your mouth already, so it ought to be okay. I suggest you rent this movie. Sit down with your kids and then after you watch the movie, say to them this, because this is the

movie: He has a daughter who is a teenager, she is 19 or 20. He worked for the CIA or whoever he worked for. He is very capable in his skills. He has a lot of contacts around the world. His daughter wants to go to Europe with two or three other girls to go to a concert. Well, they are divorced. His wife is now remarried, and she says, "Oh, let her go." So they talk him into letting her do that. He is very skeptical of the whole thing because he has been around the world. He knows what is out there. So he says, "I will let you go on one condition." He gives her a cell phone that is programmed right to his phone. She has to call in and check in three or four times a day when they land, where they go. She agrees to it.

Then they find out that he finds out that she was not just going to a concert. She was going to follow this band, her and three other girls, all around four or five countries for a couple of weeks. But she is gone. So the movie goes on that she is landing, and she is having a great time. He is calling her because he knows the flight schedule. She is not answering. They get to their apartment or the place that they are staying, the three girls. She finally picks up the phone and she says, "Yeah, I am here," and he wants to know all this stuff. She really does not do much with the phone. All the time when they land at the airport, they were being shadowed by some Russian guys who kidnapped young American girls and sold them into prostitution in Europe and in all the other countries. That is what they did. They lured them in. They asked them for directions or whatever, they asked them to go to parties. They drugged them. They wound up being auctioned off to go who knows where.

When she is talking to her dad on the phone, she sees across the window that they have just come in, and they are taking two girls, and she is terrified. She is telling her dad they are being abducted. Her dad kicks right into his mode, and he starts asking for all the details so he can know how to best defend her. They come and they get her. He hears her screaming. She is hiding under the bed. They pull her out and they grab her. One of the guys picks up the phone, and he is still on the phone. He says to the guy on the phone, "If you let my daughter go right now and let her come back to the home, it will be the end of it. If you do not, I am going to come and kill every one of you." The guy simply says two words, "Good luck," and hangs up the phone.

He goes over to his wife's place, who is married to a rich guy. She goes into a panic. He is going to go get his daughter. So he gets on a jet, flies over. It is incredible how he tracked them down where they were, and he knew he only had a short window because his own CIA buddy said, "If you do not find her in 48 hours, you will never find her again." There was Russian mob that were kidnapping young girls, shoving them into prostitution, and they were going anywhere in the world. So he goes after them. He tracks them down one at a time. To make a long story short, he kills everybody that was associated with his daughter's abduction. Some of it is the most graphic stuff you will ever see. It is great. Especially when he has the guy duct-taped into a chair, and he is asking questions, and he will not tell him, and he takes two big nails with electric wires on them and sticks them in both legs and then turns the light switch on to the guy, and he gets the information. Then after he got the information, you would think he would be thankful. He annihilated everybody who was associated with his daughter. He walks out of this empty building, turns the light switch on, who knows what happens to the guy. He probably fried the electric company, came and took it because nobody paid the bill.

My point is this: He went around the world and he killed everybody that was associated with the abduction of his daughter. We, on the other hand, as parents, we make friends with the very abductors. We take them to our house. We take them to the parties. We let them date. We let them date the kidnappers. We let them date the very man or the very woman who is going to kidnap your daughter and take them from your family and introduce them to the world. You are happy about it. He picks her up in your house for the date, and you are standing there. He has a smile on his face and a condom in his pocket. You are there having a good time, kids.

The Bible says, "Prove all things." God help the first kid who ever came to want to date either one of my daughters. Joe Heeter says he still has nightmares, Bob, over your discussion. I wanted them to know. I wanted them to have a context of why I am killing you. I want you to have told her, understanding that these are my daughters. They are not yours. They are not your playthings. They are not your toys. God gave them to me. I am the steward of their life. You mess with them, you are going to die. You can take them out. You can enjoy, go get a pop, go get a soda, go whatever. If you do one thing that violates what I am telling you I am doing with them, you are a dead man. That is right. Do not worry about those mounds of dirt in my backyard. They mean nothing.

Like the guy in the movie, parents, you need to kill and wipe out every relationship that is going to allow your daughter, your child, your son to be abducted by the world. You have to kill it. I am not saying you have to kill the people, but you have to kill the relationship. I suggest you rent the movie, sit down with your kids. Now that I have explained it to you, you simply say to them at the end, "You see what he just did? That is what I am going to do." Because you are a parent. He loved that daughter so much that I do not care where he had to go or who he had to kill. The daughter, she did not like it at the beginning, but boy, was she glad to see him right after she got sold into sex slavery. Oh, now she was glad to see him. Save your child all the heartache. Rent the movie.

XI. Conclusion: The Promise and Future Plan

Our verse stands as one of the great principles and promises to every mom and dad who are truly saved. Today will be our context, a context of a training program that we will lay out for your child. I will walk you through every phase of this training. When we are done, you will have everything you need, including me, to make it all work for you. I will give you every tool. I will show you how to use the tool. I will give you the context of everything where your child is at, no matter what age they are. I will show you exactly what you are up against. Then I will show you the training format and the schedule by which you walk them through. When we are done, you will have everything you need to make it all work for you.

The greatest, simply the greatest guarantee in all the Bible outside of your salvation is the guarantee given that if you train up a child in the way he should go, when he is old, he will not depart from it. That is 100%. That is the greatest principle and the greatest promise in all the Bible that will guarantee your child from ever, ever not fulfilling within your family all that God has for them. It is time when we as God's people look at our custodianship, our stewardship of the greatest heritage that God has allowed us to be part of. That is your children being God's

heritage and your children being the fruit of His reward. So we will hold up there today. We had a good time, good context, good start today. Next week we will go to work, and I have it fleshed out for about eight weeks. We will see how it goes.