

**“MY CHILDREN HAVE FORSAKEN CHRIST - WHERE DID I GO
WRONG?” - Sunday, September 11th, 2022 - 5:30 p.m.**
Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

Most of us have been either comforted, or challenged, or haunted by the familiar words from **Proverbs 22:6** - **“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”**

The promise seems too air-tight. Just keep them in Sunday School and church, get them reading their Bibles, do your best to keep them from the influences of the world (though we know that’s an impossibility) - just do these things and they’ll stand for Christ till the day they die.

But many times they don’t. They go to university and find their faith no longer seems relevant. They get tired of church. They make unchristian friends. Often they either ***drift*** away from their childhood commitment to Christ or officially ***renounce*** their former faith as foolish or even cult-like.

What’s gone wrong here? Who is at fault? How perfect do parents have to be to claim the Proverbs promise? Do we blame the church? The youth pastor? Has the gospel lost its power to cut through the doubts and arguments of their university professor?

I've seen it over and over in this church. Many parents are left blaming themselves. Not many of us live with the confidence of a perfect child-raising track record. Goodness knows there's enough parenting failure to scream from our memory. And if parents don't feel **guilt**, they surely do feel **discouragement and depression**.

I want to try to do two things in this teaching. **First**, I want to examine the Biblical teaching and assess what's promised and what isn't. We need to be sure we're using God's Word soundly with such an important subject. And **second**, I want to encourage parents who don't know how to find hope for their sons and daughters who reject the faith of their youth. How can guilt and despair be replaced with prayer and hope?

That's where we're going in this brief teaching time tonight.

1) **I'M NOT SURE WE'RE OFFERED THE BLANK PROMISE OFTEN ASSUMED IN OUR OPENING TEXT**

Let's read it across the translation spectrum:

ESV - Proverbs 22:6 - "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it."

CSB - Proverbs 22:6 - "Start a youth out on his way; even when he is old he will not depart from it."

NASB - Proverbs 22:6 - “Train a child up according to his way, even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

I don't want to belabor the point, but I think you can see the slight difference. The idea in the last two texts of ***training up a child in his own way - that is, in the child's own way - is different from training him up in the way he should go.***

The verse may be as much a ***warning*** as a ***promise***. That very literal wording of the text may be saying ***“A child stating our in his own way may well stick with that way in old age as well.”***

Don't get me wrong. I think this is a very precious text. It may be even ***more*** precious when we read it as a warning about the natural inclination of a child's fallen heart. That heart can't be left to its own desires and inclination. It needs repentance and divine instruction. You don't have to be a perfect parent. However, you ***must*** entrust your child to God's restoring grace. You mustn't leave him to his own way.

- 2) **THE FACT THAT THIS PROVERBS TEXT MAY BE A WARNING TEXT IS BACKED UP BY THE EXAMPLES OF THE SCRIPTURES**

- a) ***Look at these divine parenting words from Father God - Isaiah 1:2-4 - “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: “Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. [3] The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.” [4] Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.”***

If godly parenting always produced godly offspring these would be very strange words for Father God to say. There isn't a better father than our heavenly Father. These are the painful words of One who never made one single mistake with His beloved old covenant children. Say that to yourself. These **“children” “rebelled against”** and **“despised”** a divine Father who never did anything imperfect for them. He was a perfect Father. They despised Him.

- b) ***Consider the repeated examples of Kings in the Old Testament.*** There are too many references to begin a list. **Godly** kings were succeeded by **ungodly sons**. Then **ungodly kings** were succeeded by **godly sons**. This happened dozens of times in the record of Israel and Judah.

I know this doesn't appear as simple as we might like or even expect. This is not the way things would have worked out if godly always produced godly and ungodly always produced ungodly.

- c) ***Finally, we need to seriously consider these powerful words from our Lord Himself - Luke 12:51-53 - “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. [52] For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. [53] They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”***

And, **Matthew 10:21 - “Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death....”**

These are hard verses to read. They remind us that, at least on some occasions, the peaceful fruit of righteousness isn't going to be passed from generation to generation.

From all these texts - and other beside - I am simply saying it is difficult to make an air-tight case that godly parenting will **always** produce godly children. I believe many, many times it will. Perhaps it **usually** will. But we shouldn't pretend to have the final answer for those who ache because it might not be happening that way for them at this moment. This is not a place for simplistic lectures.

3) **WHERE DO WE FIND DIVINE HOPE IN THE FACE OF WEIGHT OF WHAT MANY FEEL AS FAILED PARENTING?**

I speak these words from the bottom of my heart. These steps are easy to number and list. You can easily read them on the screen. But for some of you this can be freeing and life producing.

- a) ***Refuse to pass judgment on your own parenting.*** The reason is simple. The situations we all face as parents are complex and difficult. There is so much we still don't see. All we know is we all who now **are** or in the past **have** raised children do so and did so as fallen, sinful parents.

Here's what we all know for sure. None of us was as faithful an example 24/7 as we could have been. None of us prayed as much as we could have. None of us was as faithful to the Word as we could have been. We all have this in common. We failed as parents many times. All of us.

And here's my point. I'm not saying these things to depress you. I'm reminding you of these things to show ***how foolish and fruitless it is to base present peace and joy on the foundation of the wonderful job we all did as parents.***

There is no grace or confidence or joy to be found there.

To place your hope for your children on the perfection of your godly parenting is to build your house on the sand. Don't do it.

- b) ***Don't run from the seemingly unbearable sorrow of wayward children - rather use it as fuel for greater intensity in prayer.***

I'm linking together two related texts here and I'm hoping you can make the connection:

Romans 9:2-3 - “I have *great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.* [3] For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”

Romans 10:1 - “Brothers, my *heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.*”

Look at the link between Paul’s *unceasing emotional anguish* and his *unrelenting reach of prayer*. Clearly Paul feels the unbearable hurt (he says “*unceasingly*”) of the people closest to his heart being unsaved. But it’s not *wasted pain* for Paul. This inward anguish pushes lesser concerns out of his mind. The source of his anguish becomes the fuel for his prayer.

4) **I HAVE ONE OTHER TEXT OF HOPE**

Philippians 4:6-7 - “....do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the *peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*”

If you're still remembering Paul's ***unceasing anguish*** from our Romans text you may wonder how he can, at the same time, talk about prayer also bringing the "***peace of God, which surpasses all understanding....***"(7).

There is no peace to be found in measuring the past imperfections of your best parenting. The prayerful peace - which passes understanding - comes from placing them in the hands of Father God who loves and is committed to them as no one else is.

This peace passes understanding because it's not based on the ***rational deduction*** of your own best efforts. It's based on the largeness of God's saving heart that never rests until He come again. There is more hope - and more confident fuel for prayer - in the Father who still leaves the 90 and 9 and can't turn down his bed until he reaches that one still outside.