

DISCUSSION GUIDE :: WEEK 6

STRETCHED THIN
IT'S JUST A PHASE: DON'T MISS IT
PROVERBS 22:6; 23:15-26
10/23/2016



MAIN POINT

Every phase of a child's life gives fathers and mothers the opportunity to grow in the wisdom of God and teach His wisdom to their children.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What are some lessons or skills you learned from your father?

What are some things your father wanted to teach you but you were unwilling to learn?

Much of what we learn throughout life comes by way of our parents. They share with us their instructions, life lessons, experiences, and wisdom. Generally, parents are active in their children's lives for the good purpose of training them to handle life's challenges. When parents are absent or apathetic, they are teaching their children, albeit from a void, about what they can expect from the world. God's ideal for parents includes active involvement, loving presence, and godly wisdom for the benefit of their children as they grow up in a dark world. If we would be faithful fathers and mothers, we could train our children after the patterns of our Heavenly Father, with the hopes that they would share in God's holiness (Heb. 12:9-11). This is true "training for life."

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PROVERBS 22:6.

This proverb is often taken as a promise, but do you know of any examples of a child departing from God's way when he or she grew up?

How, then, should we understand this proverb?

What would you emphasize in training a child about the way he or she should go?

Proverbs, as wisdom sayings, are general rules about the way God has created the world to operate. In this sense, teaching a child about God's way will often result in a child following God's will. But that is not always the case. We should not hold this proverb as a promise with which to berate others, or to heap guilt upon ourselves. Rather, we should be encouraged to train

our children for the purpose of holiness because this way of life matches up with the way God wants His people to live. The child who is wise will learn these lessons and walk in them to the glory of God the Creator.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PROVERBS 23:15-18.

What qualities should a father or mother desire to see in their child?

How can parents work on developing these qualities within themselves?

Notice that this father's joy in his child comes from the child being wise, which would mean choosing to live in this world according to the will of God. Furthermore, the father hopes his son will speak truth and be content in the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is contrasted with envying sinners. The hope of a parent is to see a child desire what the Lord desires, even when the ill-gotten gains of sinners are tempting and appealing. The reason given for the blessing of fearing the Lord is the sure future that comes from aligning oneself with the Creator of the universe. And if parents would hope to see these qualities in their children, then they should actively be working on adding and growing these qualities in themselves.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PROVERBS 23:19-21.

What constitutes being wise and keeping your mind on the right course in this passage?

How should parents internalize the point of this section?

According to this passage, to be wise is to be careful about your associations in life. Specifically, this father instructs his son not to associate with those who get drunk and those who are gluttons. In principle, the father is asking his son not to hang out with undisciplined people, those who lack self-control. He doesn't want his son participating in these excesses or being affected by the actions of such people because the end of such living is poverty.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PROVERBS 23:22-26.

What should be true of fathers and mothers according to this passage?

How can truth, wisdom, instruction, and understanding be "bought" and added to one's life? How could they be "sold"?

For fathers and mothers to rejoice in the righteousness and wisdom of their children, they must see these qualities as valuable, not just for life on this earth but in an eternal sense. Our God is a God of truth; He does not lie (Titus 1:2). Our God freely grants wisdom to those who ask it of Him (Jas. 1:5-8). He has given everything we need for instruction and understanding in His Word (2 Pet. 1:3). In short, a parent's delight is seeing his or her child resemble Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God. In addition to seeing these things as valuable, parents must again work toward adding truth and wisdom to their own lives—asking God to grant them these things and trusting that He does so through His Holy Spirit, who lives within them.

No parent is perfect, so ultimately, all parents should point their children to look to and follow in the ways of their Heavenly Father. As parents grow in these godly qualities, they can ask their children to observe their lives in hopes that their children, too, would observe the ways of God (1 Cor. 11:1).

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How can you show honor to your parents and give them a reason to rejoice?

What are some ways you can grow in your walk with God in order to give your child a role model in the faith?

How can you work to instill God's wisdom in the lives of children who do not have such role models in their lives?

How is your view of God our Father challenged by the fatherly wisdom given by the father in Proverbs?

PRAY

Father, by Your Holy Spirit in our lives, please turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers (Mal. 4:6). Help us all—fathers, mothers, children—to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, to walk in His ways, that we might honor You as You rightly deserve. Amen.

COMMENTARY

PROVERBS 22:6

Discipline for Children (22:6). 22:6 This verse is popularly debated on two fronts. Some take v. 6a to mean, "Train a child in accordance with his nature," meaning that the teacher must take into account the idiosyncrasies of the child and customize the method of training accordingly. Others, including the NIV, take it to mean simply that one should train a child in the way he should go. A better interpretation is, loosely rendered, "Train a child in a manner befitting a child." In other words, one should train a child using vocabulary, concepts, and illustrations a child can understand. It does not mean that instruction should be tailor-made for each individual child (however valid that concept may be) but that one should begin instructing a child in elementary principles of right and wrong as soon as possible.

Another contention is whether "and when he is old" implies he will come back to the right way in later years after a period of straying or whether it simply means that he will faithfully persevere in the right way. "Old" here does not mean after he is "elderly," however; the point, after v. 6a, is that he will build on the fundamental principles as he grows up and persevere in the right way. The whole could be translated, "Train a child in a manner befitting a child, and even as he grows old he will not turn from it."

PROVERBS 23:15-26

Saying Thirteen (23:15-16). 23:15-16 The joy of giving one's parents or teachers a sense of pride and satisfaction should serve as a motivation to pursue the right path.

Saying Fourteen (23:17-18). 23:17-18 What parents fear most is that their teaching will be undermined by the child's peers or by adults who are bad role models. It probably is best to translate v. 18 as, "For if you maintain [the fear of Yahweh], you will have a future, and your hope will not be cut off."

Saying Fifteen (23:19-21). 23:19-21 Those who live like Shakespeare's Falstaff soon exhaust their resources. Christians should note that both drunkenness and gluttony are condemned. We often eschew the former and practice the latter.

Saying Sixteen (23:22-25). 23:22-25 The child is encouraged to make his parents proud, as in saying thirteen. Since both father and mother are mentioned, it is clear that these are actual parents and not the teacher in place of parents. The warning not to despise the mother (and by metonymy the father also) because she is old (v. 22) does not mean that the parents are well advanced in years, merely that the son perceives them in that way.