

Sermon Proverbs 22:6

Introduction

A few weeks ago, Jonathan presented in his sermon the Dunning-Kruger Effect. I had never heard of this before, but it resonated with me. It felt true. Then he showed this graphic, and because of this typo, I knew I had to do more research on my own on this topic. I like this graphic is a little better. However, when it comes to the Dunning-Kruger effect, I have done just enough research to end up in the valley of despair. I feel like I understand it less well than I did after Jonathan's sermon.

Since 2008, I think it is fair to say God has been teaching me a lot about my faith through missions, seminary, adoptions, church planting, etc. Over that same time, I have been learning a lot about parenting too. It is definitely true for me that as I have learned, studied, researched, read, listened, and experienced things about Christianity and parenting, the less I feel like I actually know. Of course, there are some things that I am certain about, but there are a lot of things I used to be certain about I now have uncertainty about.

When it comes to faith and parenting, I think I am probably slowly climbing the slope of enlightenment having passed through the valley of despair. And, I don't think these kinds of doubts and uncertainties are a bad thing for our faith. They help us ask questions and grow. They help us realize we don't know everything, and we have a lot to learn. As Andy Mineo says in his song Clarity, "The opposite of faith ain't doubt, it's when I get it all figured out".

So, suffice to say, I stand here before you this morning not an expert in parenting or godliness, but as someone climbing the slope of enlightenment and hoping that wherever you are on your journey, something I offer will encourage you forward in yours. Preaching on parenting with some of your kids in the room, is dangerous, and I assure you that they think I am firmly planted on the summit of mount stupid.

Now, when it comes to the sermon passage for today, there are a lot of opinions out there on what it means. Let's read it again, but this time from the ESV. "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." You can see on my slide that there is very little difference between the ESV,

NASB, KJV, and the old NIV. Any of us who grew up in the church were probably familiar with the verse in this format.

Ten plus years ago, I became a member of the pastoral search committee at Immanuel Church. We scoured through resumes and cover letters, narrowed the field, listened to sermons, and conducted interviews; it was a very thorough process. Inevitably, at least for me, but I know I was not alone, a candidate that had three kids all serving the Lord as missionaries and pastors was seen as better than one whose kids were just “regular” Christians, and both beat the pastor who told of us a child who left the faith. We even had one candidate with multiple kids living like the prodigal son before his return. Was that fair?

I was thinking of asking people to stand or raise hands about certain things, but realizing this may be too personal a topic, so I decided to present some recent research. David Kinnaman works for Barna and he wrote a new book with results of research from 2004 to present on young people and faith. He identified four groups of 18-29 year olds who were raised in Christian homes. The groups were:

- Prodigals – Loss of faith – 22%
- Nomads – Loss of connection to the church – 30%
- Habitual church goers – Superficial connection to the church – 38%
- Resilient disciples – Disciple – 10%

To summarize simply, the prodigals no longer identified as Christians, the nomads identified as Christians but no longer attended church, the habitual church goers went to church at least once a month but were not really involved, and resilient disciples are those who are deeply involved in church and have a personal relationship with Jesus. Of course, these numbers can be spun in different ways, and depending on your definition of a Christian, can be argued about. You have about a 50/50 chance as a Christian parent of raising a kid who continues to go to church regularly from 18-29. Or, if we drop out the messy middle categories, you are more than twice as likely to raise a prodigal as you are a disciple. But, I know, these stats are for average parents, and you all are way above average. One piece of good news is that there is usually a lot of life after 29 for prodigals to come home, and God is there when they do.

I know all of us know people raised in a Christian home with good parents who no longer identify as Christians. Or, maybe they say they love Jesus but not religion,

and they haven't been to church in years, and their life doesn't show the fruit of the Spirit.

So, is our passage talking about training a child in their faith or other things like a vocation or cultural rituals? Is it a promise or is it just generally true? There are a ton of opinions out there on this passage. It is still really easy to find respected evangelical organizations that explain this passage as a promise of God to Godly parents. You do your part and your kids will follow God.

It seems clear to me from what we all observe every day and this research, that Proverbs 22:6 cannot be a promise. Could it really promise that if you do a good enough job as a parent, your kids will become and stay devoted to God. I see two major problems with this, but I am sure there are more.

1. If this verse is taught as a promise and a child turns away from God, it must be the parents' fault. This could be very damaging to a parent's psyche.
2. In addition, whether you are heavier on election or on freewill, this interpretation would seem to me to oppose both. Parents can save their kids? It isn't God that saves them and/or they have no agency in the process?

Yet, as I shared in my story about the pastoral search team, I was this judgmental person 10 years ago.

What then are we going to do with the rest of our time? Well, I am not going to dive into the Hebrew and try to provide my take on the proper understanding of this verse. Maybe next week during the education hour, we can all come prepared to discuss that. Instead, we are going to take a survey through some of the things the Bible does teach us about parenting, and we are going to look at God as the perfect parent.

1. What does Proverbs say about parenting?
 - a. Since we are studying proverbs, let's first take a look at what Proverbs has to say about parenting.
 - b. Proverbs is largely a father imparting wisdom to his son. So, I think it is fair to say that the first, and largest theme of parenting in Proverbs is that parents should teach their children and pass on wisdom.

- i. This clearly starts with teaching children about God as “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” Proverbs 9:10

c. Selections from Proverbs on discipline:

- i. Proverbs 13:24 Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them.
- ii. Proverbs 19:18 Discipline your children, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to their death.
- iii. Proverbs 22:15 Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away.
- iv. Proverbs 23:13-14 Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish them with the rod, they will not die. Punish them with the rod and save them from death.
- v. Proverbs 29:15 A rod and a reprimand impart wisdom, but a child left undisciplined disgraces its mother.
- vi. Proverbs 29:17 Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire.

- d. Proverbs seems to tell us that the most important things for a parent to do is to teach our children the way of the Lord and what is right (impart knowledge) and discipline them for doing wrong. However, there must be more.

2. What else does the Bible say to parents?

- a. Like proverbs, the Bible is clear that we must teach our children about God and his laws.
 - i. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. Deut 6:6-9
 - ii. We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he

commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. Psalm 78:4-7

- b. Like Proverbs, the Bible is clear that we must discipline our kids, but we begin to see in the New Testament further instruction with the discipline.
 - i. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4 (ESV)
 - c. Scripture also commands that we provide for our family.
 - i. Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 1 Timothy 5:8
 - d. Scripture at large backs up what we see in Proverbs that we are to train our children, to teach them, impart wisdom, which means primarily teaching them about God and his laws. Secondly, Scripture backs up that discipline is a part of parenting, but includes a reminder not to exasperate or provoke our children to anger. Third, Scripture adds a command to care for the physical needs of our children.
3. What can we learn from the Character of God, the perfect Father/parent about being a parent?
- a. Teaching and imparting wisdom. God does this through his word in the Scriptures. He has also done this in the person of Jesus Christ modeling for us wisdom in the flesh. What could be better as a parent in addition to providing instruction than perfectly modeling the behavior you expect from your children?
 - i. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

- ii. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. John 13:12-15
- b. Discipline: God disciplines his children because he loves them and desires them to be made holy. Yet, he does it perfectly without exasperating his children.
 - i. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:7-11
 - ii. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Revelation 3:19

When the punishment would be too much, he took it himself.

- iii. “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” 1 Peter 2:24

This is both grace and mercy. God is perfect. He knows when to discipline and when to offer grace or mercy. For earthly parents it is tough to know when to discipline and when to offer grace or mercy. And, if you are fortunate enough to parent with the help of another parent, it gets even harder. In our house, I can tell you that there are many times when I feel it is time for mercy and Keri feels it is time for

discipline. And, there are times when those roles are reversed. Both can be important in raising children. Both reflect the character of God. Probably the only thing we can all agree on is that a parent that has zero mercy or zero discipline would not be a good parent.

- c. God provides for his children. But if we look further at those passages, he doesn't want us to just look for him to give us stuff or even worry about it. He wants us to seek relationship with him and trust he will provide everything we need. Isn't that what parents want from their children too?
 - i. "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! Matthew 7:9-11
 - ii. "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Matthew 6:28-30

Now we can move beyond the three things that matched up with specific parenting passages in scripture to see how else the character of God makes him the perfect parent.

- d. God is patient (2 Pet. 3:9) , good/kind (Ps. 34:8), loving (1 John 4:7-8), gentle (Is. 40:11 & Matt. 11:28-30), unchanging (Mal. 3:6 & Rom. 8:35-39), always there (Ps. 139:7-10), wise (Rom. 11:33), faithful (2 Tim. 2:13), just (Deut. 32:4), merciful (Rom 9:15-16), gracious (Ps. 145:8)

Imagine if we were all these things as parents without ever failing? So, how do we become better parents? We need to become more like God.

The more we become like God, the better parent we will become.

Conclusion:

Parenting isn't always an easy task. We need wisdom. God's wisdom.

James 1:2-5 says "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."

My conclusion is that the only way to become a better parent is to become more like God. How do we do that? Ask God. Pray. Pray more. Read the Bible. Read more. Understand how God has treated you as his child and seek to treat your children the same way. I am not saying we should neglect our children and devote ourselves solely to praying, reading our Bible, etc., but I am saying that we need to make sure we have enough time set aside for that each day, and if we do, it will reflect in our parenting.

Look at 1 Corinthians 13 and put in parents for love. Parents are patient, parents are kind. You get the idea. And, with just two listed so far, I can tell you I am not always patient, and I am not always kind. I have a lot to work on.

The more we become like God, the better parent we will become.

Please pray with me.

Prayer, and don't forget the offering.

Benediction: Ephesians 3:20-21 "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."