

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 22 August 2021. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

“Train up a Child”

In the book *The Truth Set Us Free*, twenty ladies tell their stories of how they came to know the Lord Jesus Christ. One of these ladies was a Brazilian lady named **Carmen da Mota**. The Lord used a number of people and circumstances in Carmen’s life in order to lead her to the Lord. However, the first Christian whom God used to bring the Gospel to her was a ten-year-old boy! At the time, Carmen was serving as a teacher in the city of Petropolis; and her job was to attract young people to attend extracurricular afternoon classes, where they could receive religious instruction. One day, while she was teaching the children, a blond-haired, blue-eyed, ten-year-old boy named Helio was walking past her window. Now, Carmen happened to know that Helio and his parents were born-again Christians: yet, she was impressed by Helio’s intelligence, and his respectful manner. She had often thought of how wonderful it would be if she were to convert Helio to her religion. So, on this particular day, she called to Helio and said, “Helio, would you like to study...with the others?”

He replied that he would go and ask his mother if it would be O.K.; and, to her surprise, he returned shortly, and sat down in the class. She was teaching that day about why they should pray to Mary. She said that because Mary is very close to Jesus, we can go to Jesus through her. At this point, Helio raised his hand and respectfully asked, “Teacher, where is it written in the Bible that we go to Jesus through Mary?” Carmen was very embarrassed, because she did not know the Bible; so she tried to brush off his question by saying that she would answer his question after class. A short while later, she was teaching the children that they needed to pray to the saints, because the saints could take their requests to God. When Carmen mentioned praying to *sacred images* of the saints, Helio again raised his hand and asked, “Teacher, have you read Exodus 20 in the Bible?”

From that day onward, Carmen had no peace of mind. Though she was sincere in her beliefs, she could not stand against this little boy’s knowledge of Scripture. Her beliefs began to crumble beneath her feet. Soon she couldn’t even pray to statues anymore. They seemed dead and lifeless. She would go to pray, but would instead find herself praying to God the Father, through His Son Jesus Christ, and to no one else. Now, she didn’t put her faith in Christ just yet. A while later, she came into contact with a Christian lady (a pastor’s wife), who led her to Christ. However, it all started with the testimony of a ten-year-old boy named Helio. Ten years after her salvation, Carmen looked up Helio, and found that he was now married, and that he was very actively serving God in his local church.¹

Now, how did Helio have all this knowledge of Scripture, and such a love for God? Did it happen by accident? No, it happened because Helio had parents who loved the Lord, and who had diligently taught *him* how to know, love, and serve the Lord. They had brought up a little warrior to fight in God’s army.

That should be the goal of every Christian parent: to raise up little warriors for the Lord. We live in an evil day, and there are great spiritual dangers all around; but if we conduct our family God’s way, we *can* bring up godly children for the Lord. The title of this message is **“Train up a Child.”**

I. The purpose of child-rearing: to raise up little “arrows” for God’s army.

Rearing children is one of the most rewarding things to which a person can aspire in this life. All over the world, people derive great joy from having children. God has wired into the psyche of men and women the desire to bring up a family. Yet, what is the *purpose* of rearing

¹ Richard Bennett and Mary Hertel, *The Truth Set Us Free* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2009), pp. 129-131.

children? Is the purpose of having children to find *personal* joy in having a little person who looks like you? Is the purpose of rearing children to find *personal* happiness in loving and cherishing little ones, and in watching them grow? Is the purpose of child-rearing to have the satisfaction of knowing that *you* have brought up people who can contribute to society? No, these are not the ultimate reasons. Having children *is* joyful and satisfying; but if the *reason* for your having children be to bring joy to *yourself*, then you are doing it for the wrong reason.

For the Christian, the purpose of *everything* in life should **be to bring honour and glory to the Lord**. When it comes to child-rearing, we must first have the right view of marriage. The purpose of the *marriage covenant* is to bring glory and honour to God. As a Christian husband and wife work together in harmony and oneness, with the husband gently leading, and the wife sweetly submitting and following, they are a picture of the unity and harmony of the Godhead. In the Godhead, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are co-equal: yet the Son willingly submits to the Father, and the Spirit willingly submits the Son. Marriage is meant to glorify God by being a reflection of that union. Because a saved husband and wife have the mind of Christ, they are able to understand this purpose, and to strive together toward that end.

So it is with children. The purpose of having children is *also* to glorify God. Children are not part of the marriage covenant, but they are a direct *benefit* of the covenant: and the benefit is that God can be glorified through them. In **Malachi 2:14-15**, God reminded the men of Israel of why He had given them their wives. He said that He had given the **“wife of thy covenant”** in order that He might seek **“a godly seed.”** God is *still* seeking for a godly seed. He intensely desires that every child who is born into this world would come to know Him personally, and love Him, and serve Him, and glorify Him. How has God designed for this to come about? Through godly parents, who teach their children to know the Lord.

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

Parent, how often do you talk about the Lord in your home? Do you talk about Him all day long, as God instructed the children of Israel to do? Does the Lord come up naturally in your conversation with your children? Is God’s Word discussed constantly? God is not pleased with anything less. In the local church, lukewarm service toward God makes God ill. God told the church of Laodicea that because they were neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm, He would spew them out of His mouth. Well, guess what? God feels the same way about the Christian home. A Christian home in which God is not intensely loved, cherished, and honoured, is a lukewarm home; and in this atmosphere, the likelihood that a “godly seed” will be produced is not high. If the children *do* come to know the Lord as Saviour, they will, most likely, be even more half-hearted and lukewarm in their service to God than their parents are. Let’s take a look at what Solomon said about raising children.

Read Psalm 127:1-5.

Solomon begins this psalm with a powerful statement. He says, **“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it.”** In other words, if parents have not invited the LORD to be the Master Builder of their home, all their efforts are in vain. If they have not allowed Him to lay the foundation of their home with the Cornerstone of Christ and His Word, and to bind their marriage together with the mortar of His Holy Spirit, and to hold them and their children up with the pillars of faith and love, then they are chasing the wind. They may **“rise up early”** and take the kids to school, and **“sit up late”** to nurse them through the flu, and work long hours to provide a comfortable living for their family; but *if God be not in that home*, it is all vain; and they will eat the bread of sorrow. They are pursuing something that is

unprofitable to God, and thus *empty*. Over time, that emptiness will be felt more acutely; and they won't be able to pillow their heads in peace. In contrast, those who love God, and who thus are "*beloved*" of Him, can sleep with quietness and contentment of mind, because they are keeping themselves in the love of God (**Jude 21**). As David wrote, "*I will both lay be down in peace, and sleep: for so thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety*" (**Psalm 4:8**).

Solomon also says that "*children are an heritage of the LORD*." Did you catch that? Solomon didn't say that children are an heritage *from* the LORD: he said that they are an heritage "*of the LORD*." In other words, children are *the LORD's* inheritance, not *ours*! Solomon also says that "*the fruit of the womb is his [the LORD's] reward*." Now, the word "*his*" is not in the Hebrew. The Hebrew literally reads, "reward (is) the fruit of the womb." However, the translators rightly understood that the reward is *the LORD's*: thus, they supplied the word "*his*" in italics in front of the word "reward." They understood it this way because Solomon had just said that children are *the LORD's* inheritance: thus, children are the LORD's "*reward*" also. In other words, it's all about *the LORD*, not us! Your children, by right of creation, belong to *Him*. Parents, God has entrusted you with *His* possession: and it is your responsibility to rear those children to be profitable to Him.

However, there is more. Solomon also compares children to arrows in a "*quiver*." (A "quiver" is a case for carrying arrows.) (**Read verses 4-5 again.**) Children who are brought up to know the Lord are like little "*arrows*." They can do damage to Satan's army. Through their testimony for the Lord, they can be used to hit the mark. They can pierce men's hearts with the conviction of God's Word, and thus push back Satan and his demons. *That* is why a Christian dad can be happy with his quiver-full of children. It's not about the personal happiness that his children can bring to him; rather, it's about the service that his children can give to *God*. As Solomon said at the end of **verse 5**, those who have a quiver-full of children will "*not be ashamed*," but will "*speak with the enemies in the gate*." What does this mean? Well, the city gate was the place where judgments were made in Bible times. What Solomon is saying is that a man with many children will be emboldened as he disputes with his enemies in matters of business and judgment, because he has a quiver-full of children to back him up.

Furthermore, the time when a father's arrows can be of use is *now*, while they are still in his "*hand*" (in other words, when they are still at home, under his care). It's not merely in the future that children can be used: it's *now*, when they are young. When people see my boys handing out tracts on the street, and they mutter something about how "dreadful" it is that children are doing such a thing, I am not ashamed: I'm encouraged. Why? Because I know that the Devil is *really* bothered by it! Satan hates to see Christian children going out on the street of their own volition, with a Bible in hand, and Scripture in their heart, to hand out Gospel tracts. He hates the fact that they are going out there not because mommy or daddy is twisting their arm, but because they *love the Lord*. He hates the fact that people's hearts might be touched by their zeal for the Lord, and that they might actually listen to the Gospel. I know a number of adults who have been saved because of the testimony of a child!

As Christian parents, our goal should not be to raise *self*-dependent children. I'm not saying that a child shouldn't have knowledge and skill, and be able to work a job and support a family. Obviously, they *should* be trained to do these things. What I'm saying is that they should be trained to be *God*-dependent. They should know how to "trust in the LORD with all their heart." They should know how to "lean not unto their own understanding." They should know that if they will acknowledge God in all their ways, that He will direct their paths. Dad and mum, it is *your* job to teach them this—both by telling them it, and by living it.

II. The time to begin bringing up your children for the Lord: from conception!

Read Proverbs 22:6.

Sadly, many Christian parents don't start thinking much about teaching their children the things of the Lord until they reach school age. Brethren, that is *too late!* The Bible says that sinners come forth from the womb "*speaking lies*" (Psalm 58:3). Children are sinners not only from birth, but from the time of conception. That means that the time to start bringing them up in the way they should go is from *conception*. Even in the womb, a child should be hearing loving words between dad and mum, and between parents and children. He should be hearing singing of hymns and spiritual songs—not only at church, but at home. Even in the womb, children should be hearing the preaching and teaching of God's Word; and they should be hearing their parents *reading* God's Word to them every day. Even *reproof* can be practiced before birth. In S.M. Davis's sermon "Parenting with a Diligent Hand," Dr. Davis tells about how one of his grandsons used to kick hard while he was in his mommy's tummy. Finally, his dad began to address it. He would put his hand on mum's tummy and say, "Son, this is your dad; and I want you to stop kicking right now." And guess what? He stopped! (Katie and I often talked to our children in the womb; and we saw visible response, as well.)

Solomon says, "*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*" Now, many Christian parents have a very faulty understanding of this verse. Many parents have the idea that "If I take my children to church *most* Sundays, and read Bible stories to them before they go to bed when they are little, and pray before meals, and try to watch what friends they go out with, and make sure they watch only G-rated movies, they'll probably still go off into the world; but eventually, they'll come back to the Lord." My friend, this is *not* what this verse means! As parents, we should *not* be satisfied that our child will probably go the way of the prodigal, yet cling to the hope that he will eventually come back to the Lord, after his life is marred and ruined. Our goal should be to raise a child who *will never* depart from the Lord—a child who will keep his life clean and pure, so that God can use his life to the fullest. We should strive toward this goal with our *utmost strength*.

Now, there is no absolute, 100% guarantee that a child will follow the Lord. Many promises in Scripture are *general* promises, which *usually* come to pass, but not always. For example, God promises that a child who honours his father and mother will live long upon the earth: yet, sometimes God, for His own purpose, takes a godly, obedient child home to Heaven early in life. Generally speaking, though, a child who honours his parents *will* live out a full life. So it is with this promise in **Proverbs 22:6**. Every child is a sinner; and some children, despite having been brought up by the godliest parents, and despite their parents' having done everything right, still end up rejecting the Lord. However, *generally speaking*, if parents will carefully bring up their children in the way they should go, *they will not* depart from it.

By the way, that phrase "*the way he should go*" literally means "on the mouth of his way" in Hebrew. What does this mean? Well, in Bible times, Jewish mothers would take olive oil, or crushed dates, and would put it on the palate of their infant's mouth, in order to produce in that child a desire to nurse. What is the analogy, then? Solomon is saying that if you train your child to have an appetite for the things of God, he will desire the things of God.

What are some practical examples of giving your child a taste for godly things? Well, to begin with, if you want your child to have a taste for godly things, you cannot allow him to develop even the smallest taste for *worldly* things. Early in our marriage, when our kids were still very little, Katie and I made a decision which would have a huge impact on our family: we decided

to toss out all our Hollywood movies. Now, our movie collection consisted of the “good old,” clean, family-oriented movies, cartoons, and T.V. shows from the 40’s, 50’s, and 60’s. Most Christians would think nothing of that. But you see, both Katie and I were growing rapidly in the Lord; and as our appetite for God’s Word grew, we quickly lost our taste for Hollywood. For one thing, the Lord had no part in the lives of the characters. (They wouldn’t even pray over their meals.) That began to bother us. Lying was presented as permissible and even “cute,” as long as the person was lying for a “good reason.” Outbursts of anger from husbands, or stubborn rebellion of wives against their husbands, were presented as funny. Even drunkenness was occasionally presented as funny, because the character was likable and “harmless.” In the Disney movies, witchcraft was presented as “good,” as long as it was the “good” fairies doing “good” magic. We had always been a little bothered by these things; but now our soul began to shrink in horror from these things. For a while, we would watch these “classics” on our own, when the kids were in bed; but then the thought occurred to us, “If it’s not good for our *kids* to see this stuff, how can it be good for *us*?” We knew what we had to do: we got rid of it all. At one point, we had to refuse an old Disney family movie called “Old Yeller,” which a family member had offered to send us, because in the story, there was a little boy who “had a big imagination” (in other words, “told lies”). The brothers lied and fought with each other, and got away with it; and, once, the older boy used a “sanitised” version of a swear word. (You know what I mean: using “gosh” for “God,” and so on.)

Now, “Old Yeller” was a movie that both of us had seen when we were growing up. However, the fact we had been allowed to watch it when we were growing up was *not* good enough reason for us to allow it in our home. We decided that we did *not* want our kids to grow up speaking the names of movie characters and movie stars. Instead, they would grow up hearing the names of the mighty men and women of God—people such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, David, Hezekiah, Isaiah, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshech, Abed-nego, Jeremiah, Esther, Elizabeth, Mary, Mary of Bethany, Peter, and Paul—and most of all, the Lord Jesus Christ! We decided that any literature or movies outside the Bible would be supportive of Biblical truth; and even then, our movie collection would be small. We decided that *this Book* would be the bedrock of our home, and that nothing else would vie for a close second place! Christian, are you doing your utmost to bring up your child in the way he should go?

III. The way to train up a child: Set boundaries and teach character.

In the next few weeks, we will be talking in much more detail about how to train up a child. This morning, though, I would like to set down some basic principles.

First of all, in order to train up a child in the way he should go, you must establish good habits in your children. The Bible says in **Proverbs 22:15**, “*Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.*” Engrave that truth in your heart, parent: *foolishness* is bound in your child’s heart. Now, the “experts” in child development in our Western world say just the opposite. They say, “Children are basically *good*. Let your children choose for themselves how they will live. Let them follow their heart. Don’t force your own beliefs and values on them, or you will hurt their psyche, and stunt their personal growth.” Brethren, this philosophy is absolute foolishness, of the highest order! Bring your children up in this way, and you will produce a selfish rebel, who will break your heart. If you have even the smallest remnants of such thinking in your mind, get rid of it! Children are *not* basically good, and they should *not* follow their hearts. **Jeremiah 17:9** says that “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*” **Proverbs 29:15** says, “*The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to*

shame.” Your child, cute and adorable though he may be, is a little sinner and rebel at heart, bent on foolishness. Leave him to himself, and he will go down a path of self-destruction. Children do *not* know the right way: they must be *shown* the right way. As parents, we must pray fervently that our children will one day *embrace* the right way in their hearts; but until they fully understand and embrace the right way, we must establish them in right patterns and habits of living. God has created the human soul with the remarkable ability to fall into patterns: so we need to be sure that we are establishing *right* habits of living in our children.

First and foremost, our children must be taught the habit of **obedience**. They must be taught to obey straightaway, completely, ***and*** *with a sweet attitude*. Otherwise, it is not obedience. The parent must *always* win. A child must not be allowed to get away with disobedience, or else he is being taught to rebel. Another habit they must be taught is **thankfulness**. They should never be allowed to receive something from someone without saying “thank you.” They should be taught the habit of **hard work, and diligence at a task**. They should be taught the truth of **Proverbs 10:4**—the precept that ***“He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand.”*** If *you*, parent, have a slack hand in instructing your child to be hard-working and diligent, you will bring up a child who has a “slack hand”—and who will be poor. A child needs to be taught to give his **tithes** to the Lord, and to give to **missions**. Make sure that when he earns a euro, he gives 10 cents to the Lord straightaway, no matter whether he thinks he can afford it or not: and when he begins to earn €1,000, it won’t be as hard for him to give €100 to the Lord, because he has already learned the truth that if you trust God with your substance, He will provide for you. Teach him early in life the truth of **Haggai 1:6**—the truth that when a believer works to save up money for his own things, and ignores the house of God, it will be as though he is putting his money into a bag with holes. (In other words, he *won’t* get ahead.) Teach your child the habit of **honesty**. *Never* let him get away with telling a lie, no matter how small. Teach him to **get to bed early, and arise early**, so that he will be prepared to clock in to work on time someday, *and* so that he will make it to *church* on time when he’s on his own. Teach him to **listen closely** to instructions. Teach him to **persevere**. *Do not* allow him to give up when something is hard. Make sure that your child **prays** and **reads his Bible** on his own every day. Ask him what he read, and what he learned. Teach him to be **faithful** to a task, and **loyal** to others. *Never* let him get by with renegeing on a promise. Teach your kids to be **faithful to church**. Teach them that *absolutely nothing* is more important on Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening, than being in God’s House. Teach them the principles of courtship early on. Teach them to wait for parental direction and providential guidance for their life’s mate. *Do not* allow them to pursue a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship *at all!* Do not even allow your children to *talk* about having a girlfriend or boyfriend. Praise your children for the *godly character* they exemplify. Teach them that having *godly character* is far more important than having earthly success. Teach them that true “success” is to be faithful to God’s Word and His commandments.

In order to bring up a child in the way he should go, you must show your child the right path, and *not let him get off* the path for any reason. From the earliest days, *boundaries* must be set up. A child should not be mollycoddled whenever he makes the slightest whimper. He must be taught that when mommy and daddy put him down to bed, he is to go to sleep, and that mommy isn’t going to come running every time he screams. Put him on a blanket, and make him stay on it for a little while, until mommy and daddy say he may get off it. Teach him that because mommy and daddy love him, they are giving him *boundaries* for his protection.

Of course, from day one, your child needs to hear what the right path *is*. He should be taught the Gospel from day one, and should be lovingly entreated to respond to it. He must be taught that there is a strait gate and a narrow way, and that *Christ alone* is that Way. He must be

taught that going to church with mommy and daddy isn't going to save him from hell: he must personally repent of his sin, and trust in the sacrifice that Christ made for him.

Read Matthew 7:13-14.

Read John 14:1-6.

Now, you cannot make your child get saved. That is a decision that he must make for himself. What are you to do, then? Do you wait to show him the Christian way of life until *after* he gets saved? No! You teach him the way that he should live from day one, and protect him from the world; and then when he *does* get saved, the right way of living won't be foreign to him. He will already *know* how to live: and, he won't have painful wounds and scars from sin. He won't have a broken life to repair. Years ago, Frederick Douglass (an African-American statesman) said this: "It is better to build strong children than to *repair* broken men."

Parents, protect your child from the world with all your might! Set high standards. Be extremely careful about who their friends are. (Yes, you *do* have the right to say, "This person will *not* be your friend.") Be extremely careful about whose houses your children visit—especially in regard to staying overnight. I am going to make a blanket statement here and say, "Don't allow your children to go to slumber parties." I know a number of Christians (even pastors) who, when they were children, were exposed to something wicked (such as Rock music, or a wicked movie) while at the house of a Christian family who they *thought* had parental control of their kids; and it took them a long time to overcome the destructive influence of that one exposure. I would strongly urge you not to allow your children to have a smart phone until they are young adults. (And even then, there should be strong accountability and restraint.) There is a world of evil at their fingertips, to which the enemy would love to introduce them. There are "facts of life" that your children do not need to know until they are in their teens (and *dad and mom* should be the ones to tell them). As for evil, we should shield our children from even the *knowledge* of evil for as long as possible.

Read Romans 16:19.

God says, "Be simple concerning evil." Parents, if this command apply to us, how much more does it apply to our children? I don't want my children's curiosity to be aroused as to what's "out there" in the world. Many Christians would object, "Oh, but if you don't expose them to a little worldliness, they'll fall into sin when they *do* go out into the world, because they won't be able to handle it." Folks, this is not God's way. God's way is not to put your children out with the wolves when they are tender and helpless, so that they will get "used to" the wolves. God's way is to *protect* them from the wolves, and strengthen them in God's Word, so that they'll be able to *identify* and *fight* the wolves. Teach them to love God and His Word, and to love fellowshiping with godly people, and to "love not the world": and, by God's grace, they will recoil from the world with disgust. I can testify that I never had the slightest desire to drink alcohol, or to smoke a cigarette, or to listen to Rock music. Why? Because my parents first taught me to hate and recoil from these things; and as I grew in the Lord, I *personally* developed a godly hatred for these worldly things. That was *my* parents' desire for me; and as a parent, that is now my desire for my children. They are "arrows" in my quiver: and it is my prayer that God will use them mightily in His army. May that be the desire of every one of us!

Conclusion: We parents have our children for only a short time. We have *one chance* to teach them the ways of the Lord. Of course, there are no perfect parents in this world. As a parent, I am still making mistakes, and am still learning. However, we should be striving, with all our might, to train up our

children in the way they should go. Christian parent, seek wisdom from God's Word as to how to train up your child: and then *follow God's way*, no matter what anyone else may think, and no matter what the cost may be. In closing, I would also ask this: **Are you saved?** I ask this of child and adult, parent and single alike. There is no other way to God than the way of the cross. If you are trying to work your way into heaven, then you are like a thief and a robber, trying to get into heaven by some other way than through the Door of Jesus Christ. Repent of your sin, and trust in Jesus Christ *alone* to save you!