

Reflections on the challenge of parenting for married couples.

As parents our goal is to point our children toward Christ and expose them to His Word. Through the years that we are given them, we hope to persuade them to see the joy and wisdom of following Christ. As we all know, this is one of the most exacting challenges we will face as couples. How do we express loving discipline, gracious acceptance, and firm guidelines for the unique individuals God has entrusted to us?

Prov. 22:6 tells us, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” Far from a promise that children will turn out “good”, I believe this is a piece of instruction that parents are to discern the unique personality of each child – and lead them in a process of self-discovery so that their lives will unfold according to their bent. This verse challenges us to seriously our child’s individuality and the process of growing to develop according to that God-given personality. Still the word “train” is operative. Parents are to train their children.

Prov. 22:15 reminds us of the sinful / selfish bent within our children. “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.” We are not starting with blank slates, but with sinners bent on demanding their own way. So discipline is key: Prov. 22:18 reminds us, “Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing part to his death.” Without wise discipline we set our children up with an unrealistic view of the world.

But discipline needs to flow from a relationship of love. Parents serve as God’s representatives in the lives of their children. What a child sees from their parents is primary in developing their understanding of God. So, a parent’s discipline (ideally) reflects that of the Heavenly Father. “My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.” (Prov. 3:11-12) See also Prov. 13:24 “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.” And Prov. 29:17 “Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul” The results are joy and peace for parents and child.

While the maxims of Proverbs originate in a patriarchal society, when it comes to discipline, this is joint effort of husband and wife. “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.” (Prov. 1:8-9) Beauty and honor will come to the one who learns to listen to his / her parents. This follows from the commandment to honor father and mother (Ex. 20:12 & Deut. 5:6). An attitude of respect is to be instilled in the child toward both parents, “Each of you must respect his mother and father.” (Lev. 19:3). Children were strongly warned regarding failure to respect parents, “The eye that mocks a father, that scorns obedience to a mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures.” (Prov. 30:17). Persistent rebellion was even a capital offense in ancient Israel (see Deut. 21:18-21). United, parents were to instill a sense of respect toward God and understanding of his ways (see Prov. 6:20-23). The husband and wife work together in this venture (see especially Prov. 31)