

Biblical Anthropology

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion"
(Genesis 1:26 ESV)*

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in
place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?
(Psalm 8:3-4 ESV)*

Train Up A Child
February 25th, 2024
Proverbs 22:6
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Proverbs 22:6; that's on page 544 in the church Bibles. This morning we are going to talk about HOW to raise up a child in a world gone mad. You can think of this as PRACTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY. It is important for us to live WISELY in light of who we are. Samuel James in his recent book *Digital Liturgies* writes that:

“Christian wisdom is about living a life that responds correctly to reality.”¹

That's the end goal for this series! We don't just want you to UNDERSTAND reality, we want you to live a life that corresponds with reality. We want to build marriages that correspond to who we are as male and female – and we want to RAISE CHILDREN in a way that corresponds to who we are – and who they are – as human beings – and that's what the Book of Proverbs is all about! Proverbs tell us how to live WELL and WISELY in the world that God designed. Hopefully you have your Bible open now to Proverbs 22:6. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

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

¹ Samuel James, *Digital Liturgies: Rediscovering Christian Wisdom In An Online Age* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023), 20.

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Now, you might be asking: “Hey Pastor, isn’t that the passage you told us NOT to quote at you last week? So why are you quoting it to us this week?”

That is a fair question – and to be clear, I am in no way OPPOSED to Proverbs 22:6, provided that it is understood and applied CORRECTLY. Proverbs 22:6 might very well be the most commonly MISUNDERSTOOD and WRONGLY APPLIED passage in all the Bible. I received an email THIS WEEK from a lady connected to our congregation who has been wounded by the misuse of this passage. So we need to be careful here; as I mentioned last week, Proverbs are not promises. Tremper Longman III is so incredibly helpful here; he says in his commentary on this passage that:

“It sounds like a promise, but a proverb does not give a promise. The book of Proverbs advises its hearers in ways that are most likely to lead them to desired consequences if all things are equal. It is much more likely that a child will be a responsible adult if trained in the right path. However; there is also the possibility that the child might come under the negative influence of peers or be led astray in some other way. The point is that this proverb encourages parents to train their children, but does not guarantee that if they do so their children will never go astray.”²

I guarantee you that there are a handful of people in this room who needed to hear that. Proverbs are not promises – they are principles of wisdom for doing life in a GOOD but fallen world. And this particular proverb says that PARENTING MATTERS. It says that if we train our children well they will be more likely to walk in the ways that lead to life.

Parenting matters.

Parenting your kids in light of reality matters – so we’re going to talk very practically about what that looks like; drawing our insights from the whole counsel of God. I want to give you 5 Do’s and Don’ts today in terms of parenting; 3 things to do and 2 things not to do. Let’s begin with the positive.

² Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs in the Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 405.

Parenting “Do’s”:

The first WISE thing I think we can say about parenting – based on Scripture and based on reality as we find it – is that it is very important for us to do this together:

1. Do it together

Genesis 1:27-28 says:

“God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:27-28 ESV)

So marriage and multiplication go together – that’s the DESIGN – and when we work in line with that design, we can anticipate better outcomes – again, that’s how WISDOM works; and the science here bears that out. Brad Wilcox – sociology professor at University of Virginia - in his recent book on marriage and family says that:

“Men who marry before having children are three times more likely to avoid poverty by the time they hit their thirties, compared to their peers who put parenthood before marriage ... following the script of that classic nursery-school rhyme – “First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes the baby in the baby carriage” – actually pays off financially for men.”³

Social scientists refer to this as an aspect of the success formula. If you get married BEFORE YOU HAVE KIDS it is a MASSIVE LIFE ADVANTAGE. There are all kinds of financial efficiencies and attendant stabilities that result from marriage that create a much better environment for having and raising children.

There is a ton of science indicating that children do best when they are raised by a MOTHER and a FATHER. Professor and scholar Nancey Pearcey, for example, has found that:

"Boys with two involved parents are much less likely to be in crisis. Children with absent fathers account for 63 percent of youth suicides, 90 percent of homeless and runaway children, 85

³ Brad Wilcox, *Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy The Elites, Forge Strong Families, And Save Civilization* (USA: Broadside Books, 2024), 41.

percent of children who exhibit behavioral disorders, 71 percent of high school dropouts, and 85 percent of youths sitting in prison."⁴

Study after study has found that children with a mom and a dad living at the same address – living at their address - have much better life outcomes in every category. They are more likely to go to college or university, they are more likely to hold down a full-time job, they are more likely to get married and have kids of their own, they are less likely to use drugs and go to prison. Moms and dads are magic – and when they live with their kids and when they live with each other – children and societies flourish.

Now, let me speak a word of hope and comfort to those young people who do not come from homes like the ones being described here. Remember, as we said last week, these are FACTORS not FATE. We're talking about things that GENERALLY LEAD TO BETTER OUTCOMES – and the Bible is very clear that working in accord with our design will lead to better outcomes - but we serve a God who is very skilled at rescuing people out of unwise and sub-optimal conditions. So even if you don't have a married mom and dad at home, you have a heavenly Father who knows how to preserve and promote his people. Just like we offered comfort to moms and dads last week who did all the right things and whose kids still went astray, the flip side of that comfort can be offered to the young person whose parents made some terrible mistakes – in both situations we need to understand that all human beings are responsible for the choices they make and there is a God in the heavens who knows how to turn curses into blessings - so there is HOPE.

A broken family is not a death sentence – but an intact marriage IS A GIFT and a blessing we should all aspire to give to our children. There is wisdom in acknowledging that fact.

When it comes to parenting, you ought to do it together and you ought to do it with us. That's the second principle of wisdom here.

2. Do it with us

⁴ Nancy R. Pearcey, *The Toxic War On Masculinity: How Christianity Reconciles The Sexes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2023), 193.

As we've noted a few times now, the first thing God said about human beings is that:

“It is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18 ESV)

We were created for community – that applies to US as adults and it applies to our children. We are social creatures. We NEED community and we are AFFECTED by community. The Wise Father presses that point on the Royal Son again and again and again in the Book of Proverbs. He says:

“Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.” (Proverbs 13:20 ESV)

The billionaire businessman Dan Pena created a modern version of that proverb saying: “Show me your friends and I'll show you your future.”⁵ This is why wise parents do everything in their power to raise their children within a community that reinforces their beliefs and values. The Bible tells us that it is wise to do this and the social sciences tell us that it works. Brad Wilcox again is helpful here, he says:

“Children from religious families are rated by both parents and teachers as having better self-control, social skills and approaches to learning than kids with non-religious parents, according to a nationally representative study of more than sixteen thousand children across the United States.”⁶

In attempting to explain why church raised kids tend to have better life and marital outcomes, he says that a lot of it comes down to the social pressures they experience from their religious community. These religious communities, he says:

“are more likely to exercise what social scientists call “social control”, discouraging behavior that can derail a relationship – from infidelity to excessive drinking or drug use.”⁷

Friends, NEWSFLASH, kids raised in a Christian home are just as attracted to things like binge drinking and premarital sex as their secular peers. The difference is that when a 17-year-old boy

⁵ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/10834469-show-me-your-friends-and-i-ll-show-you-your-future>

⁶ Brad Wilcox, *Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy The Elites, Forge Strong Families, And Save Civilization* (USA: Broadside Books, 2024), 178.

⁷ Brad Wilcox, *Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy The Elites, Forge Strong Families, And Save Civilization* (USA: Broadside Books, 2024), 180.

HERE engages in those behaviours he is likely to receive significant pushback from the group. The other kids are going to tell him to knock it off. If he doesn't knock it off, then his friends are going to come and talk to US – the grown-ups in the faith community. I can't tell you how often I have had conversations like this in our church. A teenage boy or girl will come to me and say: "So and so has been binge drinking and I'm worried about them, or they've been having sex with their girlfriend and I'm worried about them." We'll give them counsel on how to respond and what to say. They'll go back and apply some positive peer pressure and hopefully give some good advice. If that doesn't work, they'll come back and talk to me or Pastor Ryan and we'll intervene – or we'll talk to mom and dad. That's what the sociologists call "social control" – and by and large, it works. Positive peer pressure, combined with parental involvement and prayer can pull a teenager out of just about anything.

Moms and dads – you will need this SUPERPOWER at some point in the future. So invest in church community NOW. Because this only works if you are here on a regular basis. If you are here once a month – this doesn't work, because the ties are too thin. But if you are here every Sunday and even better, if you are here every Sunday and your kids are here mid-week, then these ties can pull your children out of the ditch.

I have seen it.

I have lived it!

As a former teenage boy – I can testify to the SAVING and SANCTIFYING POWER of these sorts of "social controls". I have no problem admitting, that if were not for the Holy Spirit, my mom and my home church I would not be standing in front of you this morning. These things work. I can't give you my mom, but I can commend to you the Holy Spirit and the church.

And that leads me to my third "do". Do raise your kids as a married couple, do raise your kids in the church, and do raise your kids with a purpose.

3. Do it with purpose

And that purpose, as we talked about last week, is to guide your children towards a right relationship with God through the person and work of Christ. We want our children to be reconciled to their Creator.

That's the goal.

That's always been the goal. The THEME verse for the Book of Proverbs is Proverbs 1:7 which says:

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7 ESV)

The Wise Father in the Old Testament has his priorities straight. He understands that every other good outcome will flow from this one. The beginning of wisdom, the beginning of stability, the beginning of blessedness is this: TO KNOW and FEAR the Lord.

Now, the word “fear” strikes us as a very Old Testament word, and so many in the modern-day evangelical church try to tone it down a bit but that's not accurate and that's not helpful. The biblical scholar Douglas Stuart pushes back against that inclination, saying:

“The fear of the Lord is enjoined throughout Scripture, demanding that God's people stand always in awe of him, appreciate his supremacy and greatness, fear the consequences of disobeying his will, and not treat lightly any aspect of their covenant relationship with him, lest the consequences be severe or even fatal. Attempts on the part of some in modern times to define fearing the Lord as merely respecting him distort the biblical evidence.”⁸

To fear the Lord means to stand in awe of God; to understand him as the fundamental fact; to respect his word; to fear the consequences of disobedience and rebellion. It is to understand that he is the Judge and that we will have to give an account to him for how we have lived our lives. It is to therefore to make decisions that accord with reality – that is the fear of the Lord, and it is the MAIN THING in both the Old and New Testaments. The gift of GRACE in the New Testament does not eradicate the fear of the Lord – on the contrary, it empowers us to live our lives in light of it. The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 7:1 says:

⁸ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus* in Volume of 2 of The New American Commentary, (Nashville: B&H Publishers, 2006), 240.

“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”
(2 Corinthians 7:1 ESV)

Paul says that the grace of the Gospel helps us to GROW UP. It helps us to bring holiness to completion IN THE FEAR OF GOD. That’s what we should want for ourselves and that is what we should want for our children.

We should want our children to organize their lives around the FUNDAMENTAL FACT OF GOD. We should encourage them to be reconciled to God through the person and work of Christ. We should encourage them to be transformed by the ministry of the Holy Spirit – by one degree of glory to the next. We should encourage them to bring holiness to completion in the fear of God.

Old Testament and New – that is our primary purpose as moms and dads. The goal is not happiness and the goal is not Harvard. The goal is HOLINESS – through Christ, with the help of the Holy Spirit, in the fear of God.

Make that the object and aim of your ministry as a parent.

Those are our DO’s. We want to do this as a couple – as a husband and wife team; we want to do this in community – in the church, with the help of the church – and we want to do this UNTO the end of holiness in the fear of God.

Now, in the time we have left, let me give you a couple of “don’ts”.

Parenting “Don’ts”:

The Bible of course, contains positive and negative messaging, we see that even in the 10 Commandments.

“Honor your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12 ESV)

“You shall not commit adultery.” (Exodus 20:14 ESV)

There are “DO’s” and “DON’Ts” all over the Bible – they work like guide rails pushing us back toward the ways that lead to life, and so it is with parenting. In terms of the NEGATIVES or the “DON’Ts” one of the most important of those has to do with discipline. The Bible tells us:

1. Don’t withhold discipline from your child

There are multiple versions of this encouragement in the Book of Proverbs; I’m thinking specifically here of Proverbs 23:13-14 which says:

“Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.” (Proverbs 23:13-14 ESV)

Now, the word ROD makes many of us uncomfortable. Tremper Longman again is helpful here, he says:

“The sage is not talking about a rigorous beating, but rather something equivalent to a spanking. This may be surmised from the matter-of-fact statement “They will not die” as well as this book’s general emphasis on moderation, kindness, and gentleness.”⁹

So we’re talking about KIND, loving, FIRM discipline – that’s the kind of discipline that the Bible is telling us not to withhold from our children and it repeats this encouragement time and time again because it knows that this is not an easy thing for us to do. We talk ourselves into discipline-less approaches to parenting because discipline is hard. No one likes it. Even if we SEE the long-term benefit, we FEEL the short-term cost.

There is an approach to parenting right now that is very popular – even amongst Christian young people – called “Gentle Parenting”. It emphasizes listening and processing and validating the FEELINGS that children have – and obviously there is some benefit in that approach – but I just want to remind you that as a believer you should never be more committed to a parenting fad

⁹ Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs* in the Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 426.

than you are to the teachings of the Bible. And the Bible says: Do not withhold discipline from a child.

Your child NEEDS to be taught about consequences – because we live in a world filled with consequences. Your child will grow up and eventually enter into an environment where bad behaviours result in bad outcomes – so they need to be prepared for that, early on, by mom and dad.

And they need to learn self-control – because if your child grows up feeling a liberty to express all the BIG FEELINGS they have then they’re going to find it very hard to hold down a job or to maintain a relationship because there are a lot of times in life when it is better NOT to express your big feelings; so teach your child self-control.

And you need to teach your child about limits because if you DO everything you WANT TO DO – you will end up addicted, or unemployed, or divorced, or in jail. Or you in hell.

We live in a world that has lines and limits – so if you love your kids, you will teach them about that.

And a good place for you to start would be in the area of technology. Many of today’s technologies have been designed specifically to attract and addict teenagers. Chris Anderson, the former editor of *Wired* magazine said about today’s tech that,

“On the scale between candy and crack cocaine, it’s closer to crack cocaine. ... this is beyond our power to control. This is going straight to the pleasure centers of the developing brain. This is beyond our ability as parents to understand.”¹⁰

He goes on to say that this has led him to enforce limits for his kids that include: no phones until high school, no iPads, no social media until age thirteen and no phones in the bedroom.¹¹ This from a guy who writes professionally about the newest and greatest tech. Even the people who INVENTED these technologies impose limits on their children’s use of them. Steve Jobs, for

¹⁰ Chris Anderson as cited in New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/26/style/phones-children-silicon-valley.html>

¹¹ Same article cited above.

example, who invented the iPad, was asked once how his kids like the iPad and he said, they haven't used it, adding,

“We limit how much technology our kids use at home.”¹²

Brothers and sisters, if the people who invented these technologies are limiting their children's access to them, then so should we! We need to impose screen discipline. If we don't do this, then, as the Bible says, we might as well hate our kids, because our GENTLE and PERMISSIVE approach is doing them long-term harm.

If you love your kids – you will find the courage and the will to discipline them. They won't thank you for it today, but they will thank you for it later and you need to be mature enough to accept that deal.

Don't withhold discipline from your kids, and then lastly:

2. Don't make an idol of your kids

Parenting is important – we've spent the last two weeks talking about that – but it cannot be the core of your identity. Remember, an idol is a good thing we treat like a GOD THING. It's good to prioritize being a parent. It should be important to you – but it should not be EVERYTHING TO YOU – and it is everything to a significant number of parents. Not surprisingly, this is more of a risk for moms than for dads. A 2023 Pew Research study found that:

“While the vast majority of mothers and fathers (88% and 85%, respectively) say being a parent is the most or one of the most important aspects of who they are as a person, a larger share of moms (35%) than dads (24%) say it is *the most* important aspect.”¹³

To state the obvious, parenting should NOT be THE MOST important aspect of who you are as a person because before you are a mother or a father – you are image and likeness of God – Genesis 1:27. Therefore, who you are before GOD should be the most important aspect of who

¹² Steve Jobs as cited in New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/11/fashion/steve-jobs-apple-was-a-low-tech-parent.html>

¹³ <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/01/24/gender-and-parenting/>

you are as a person – and who you are with respect to your spouse should be the second most important aspect of who you are as a person. Who you are as a parent should never rank higher than number 3.

Listen, if you can't say NO to your child, even when you know you should, then your child has become an idol in your life.

If you can't recover from a parenting disappointment – if you can't have JOY in the Lord while you are feeling sorrow as a parent – or as a parent to be - then parenting has become an idol in your life. Your number 3 has become your number 1. Your child or the child you desire to have has become the fundamental reality in your life. That's idolatry.

Here's another test: if you can't leave your child behind in order to invest time and effort in your marriage, then your child has become an idol. Your number 3 has become your number 2 or even your number 1.

Moms and dads – listen to me, your child would rather you didn't get divorced in the long run – so do your child a favour and prioritize your marriage. Go on date night. Leave your kid home with Grandma. Grandma knows more about parenting than you do anyway and sociologists have found that:

“regular date nights are one of the strongest predictors of marital happiness”¹⁴

So get out of the house. Leave your kids behind and go on a date. It is good for your marriage and that is good for your kids. The best gift you can give to your child is to raise them in a properly ordered universe. They need to see you loving God, loving each other and leading them. In that order.

That's how you train up a child in the way that they should go. It doesn't guarantee outcomes – but it does position them for faith and blessing – O God, help. Let's pray together.

¹⁴ Brad Wilcox, *Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy The Elites, Forge Strong Families, And Save Civilization* (USA: Broadside Books, 2024), 107.