

Caring for the Children – Proverbs 22:6

It was in the year 2000 that the native band north of Kamloops started to search the grounds of the former residential school in their area. Though the official records said 50 students died in that school, families and friends of those who attended there knew that was not the whole story. They secured special equipment that could outline what was under the surface of the ground.

And just over a week ago the headlines declared that the remains of 215 students had been found at that site. This sent a shock wave through our country and around the world. Other sites will now be searched for bodies, and grief once more travels through the villages of First Nations people.

Back in 1870's, as the Government of Canada was making treaties with the Indian bands, education was an essential piece of the agreements. The chiefs believed their children may adjust better to the Whiteman's world if they had an education. They also believed they would have more opportunities. So the early treaties included schools for the children.

What these chiefs could not have imagined was the shape these schools would take. By 1880 the first residential schools were formed, where children were taken from their families, tribes and territories and taken to a strange new world where they were not only taught to read and write and do arithmetic, but they were stripped of their culture, language and identity.

Over 150,000 children were taken from their homes and put in these schools from 1880-1979. 6000 of those children never returned to their homes, and of the 145,000 who did, many were scarred emotionally, mentally and even physically.

September 30th is known as orange t-shirt day, a chance to remember the many children who were negatively impacted by these schools. September 30th was the day when the government agents would round up the children from the villages and take them to the residential schools. On September 30th, 1973 Phyllis Webstadt went to the Williams Lake Residential School, proudly wearing the orange shirt her grandmother had given her. The school authorities took the orange shirt from Phyllis that day and it was never seen again. She lost more than a shirt through her experiences at the Residential School.

So today, each September 30th many students choose to wear an orange t-shirt to stand in solidarity with those students who lost so much at the Residential schools.

The schools were an attempt to "raise up a child in the way he should go so when he grows up he will not walk away from it." They were a miserable failure. Sadly, intimately involved in this failed education experiment was the church, for the government commissioned churches to run the schools that spread from Quebec to British Columbia, and north to the Inuit.

Today, we, as the people of God, grieve for these lost children, and the families who will be impacted by the discovery of these remains. Our prayers go out to the communities affected by this news. We pray that the God of all peace will comfort them, and may they come to know the true Jesus, not the angry God of the Whiteman they heard of at the schools.

This morning as I reflected on this story I looked again at that simple verse in Proverbs 22:6:

**“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”
KJV**

“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” NIV

If the Residential Schools were such a failed experiment, how should a child “be trained up”? Is it still important – this verse was written 3000 years ago. Does it make a difference what we teach a child?

One wise person said, “It is easier and better to build boys than to repair men.”¹ It is important that we train up a child in the way he/she should go...

Now, this verse is well known, oft quoted, and usually mishandled. As Chuck Swindell says:

“One classic interpretation of this proverb goes this way:

Be sure your kids attend Sunday school and church regularly. Teach your children to know and obey the Ten Commandments; teach them to pray at mealtime, bedtime, and for emergencies. And be sure to feed them a steady diet of Bible verses. Do this early on because—watch out!—teenage rebellion, where they will sow a lot of wild oats, will detour their spiritual journey. When their fling is over, they’ll come back to God. You can count on it because this verse has God’s promise on it.

The classic interpretation has two major strikes against it. First, it fails to appreciate the very colorful, intricate word-pictures used by the Hebrew poet. Second, it doesn’t hold true experientially. Some young people have rebelled and returned, but many others never returned, choosing instead to pursue their sin to the grave.”² Sad but true.

The first word in the verse is translated “Train up” or “dedicate,” and speaks of helping set the right direction for the child in their life. As noted in the video at the start of the service, even a child’s heart is infected by the curse of sin, and they need a transformation through the grace of God.

The very best thing we can do is introduce them to the Gospel truth that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and the wages of sin is death... but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If anyone is in Christ they are a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come.

Simply put, we need to share the Good News of the Gospel to our children. They get it.

¹ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (p. 231). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

² <https://www.insight.org/resources/article-library/individual/a-better-way-to-train-up-a-child#:~:text=Train%20up%20a%20child%20in%20the%20way%20he,your%20kids%20attend%20Sunday%20school%20and%20church%20regularly>. Accessed June 6, 2021

I was only 8 years old when I realized my sins put Jesus on the cross and I had to repent, ask God's forgiveness and invite Jesus into my life.

One of the most famous martyrs of the church, Polycarp, who lived in the first and second century, came to faith in Christ at 9 years of age. He was killed for his faith at age 85.

Count Zinzendorf became a Christian at age 4. He founded the Moravians, who helped influence John Wesley to faith in Jesus.

Jonathan Edwards, powerful evangelist, became a Christian at age 7.

Matthew Henry, Bible Scholar and commentator, became a Christian at age 11.

Charles Spurgeon became a Christian at age 12.

To train up a child is more than just bringing them to church, reading them Bible Stories and teaching them to pray. All that is good – very good – but they can understand the Gospel message. They need to hear that Jesus loves them and wants to forgive them, and come into their lives by faith. They need to be asked to make a decision. But this can never be forced on them. They must be inspired, not coerced.

Swindoll suggests that "Train up" also means we find the unique gifts and talents in our children and develop that so they can be all God created them to be. We need to really get to know them so we can help them succeed. And remember, they will learn from us – their parents, Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, the adults in their lives. They will follow our example.

If a child lives with criticism
He learns to condemn;
If a child lives with hostility
He learns to fight;
If a child lives with ridicule
He learns to be shy;
If a child lives with shame
He learns to feel guilty.

BUT

If a child lives with tolerance
He learns to be patient;
If a child lives with encouragement
He learns confidence;
If a child lives with praise
He learns to appreciate;

If a child lives with fairness
He learns justice;
If a child lives with security
He learns to have faith;
If a child lives with approval
He learns to like himself;

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship
He learns to find LOVE in the world!

—Dorothy Lawe Holt³

The next phrase, “in the way he should go” speaks about the unique way each child learns and grows. Each child is treated differently because each child is different. Some learn early the meaning of responsibility and privilege. Some take a long time.

Each is shaped differently. When I was a boy, if mom wanted to discipline me, she did not send me to bed – I loved having a mid day nap. A spanking worked well with me. My older sister was quite the opposite. You could spank her all day and she just got more defiant. Send her to bed in the middle of the day and you would think you had thrown her into prison. That was the worst punishment for her. Mom learned this and disciplined us accordingly so that we could be pointed in the right way for our lives.

This shaping in your life, the love of mom and dad showing a child how to walk with Jesus, worship and minister to others will stay with the child all their life – until they are old. They may or may not choose to act on it – but it is there.

The church – not this church – but churches were involved in the Residential schools, and they failed in the task of “raising up a child in the way he should go so that when he is old he will not depart from it.” In fact most survivors of residential schools want nothing to do with churches or Christianity. Sadly, this also means most want nothing to do with Jesus.

May we as parents, leaders and teachers in the church, and adults in our community never forget the awesome responsibility that is ours – to raise up a child in the way she will go...

In closing, let me read “A Parent’s Prayer” from Dear Abby, the newspaper columnist:

“Oh, heavenly Father, make me a better parent. Teach me to understand my children, to listen patiently to what they have to say, and to answer all their questions kindly. Keep me from interrupting them or contradicting them. Make me as courteous to them as I would have them be to me. Forbid that I should ever laugh at their mistakes, or resort to shame or ridicule when they displease me. May I never punish them for my own selfish satisfaction or to show my power.

“Let me not tempt my child to lie or steal. And guide me hour by hour that I may demonstrate by all I say and do that honesty produces happiness.

“Reduce, I pray, the meanness in me. And when I am out of sorts, help me, O Lord, to hold my tongue.

“May I ever be mindful that my children are children and I should not expect of them the judgment of adults.

“Let me not rob them of the opportunity to wait on themselves and to make decisions.

“Bless me with the bigness to grant them all their reasonable requests, and the courage to deny them privileges I know will do them harm.

“Make me fair and just and kind. And fit me, Oh Lord, to be loved and respected and imitated by my children. Amen.”⁴ Help us Lord to train up the children so when they are old ...

³ Tan, P. L. (1996). [Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times](#) (p. 236). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

⁴ Tan, P. L. (1996). [Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times](#) (p. 234). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.