

RESTORING YOUR FAMILY'S FOUNDATION

STUDY THREE

Do You Really Know Your Child?

Selections from Proverbs

One of the greatest things you can do for your child is to help your child know who he or she is, and, first, you have to find that out.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

YOUR child may be yours by birth, adoption, or marriage. He or she may be your grandchild, nephew or niece who lives with you. God has placed this amazing, one-of-a-kind boy or girl under your care to nurture and guide. Until he or she reaches maturity and leaves the nest, one of your top parental priorities is to *really* know your child.

Knowing your child takes time, openness, careful and sensitive observation, diligent study, and prayer. When you invest yourself in this journey of discovery, you will be amazed at the precious little one God has given you.

Oh, the wonders of your child! Her heart is so tender and pure. His mind hums like a power plant with imagination and curiosity. Her personality sparkles with laughter and joy like a multifaceted diamond. What a delight to explore the hidden universe that lies within your child! To unlock the secrets! To unleash the child's God-given potential! And then, to release your child to be the capable, confident adult that God intended him or her to be.

Are you ready to follow God's leading in the journey and joy of parenting? Let's dig into His Word to find the way.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open God's Word, open your heart to receive His wise counsel on rearing children. Reading His words may cause memories of your own childhood to surface—positive recollections as well as negative. Take a moment in prayer to invite the Lord to minister to you as you enter what may be a sensitive part of your soul.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we begin by reading the passage carefully and slowly, absorbing every word. Read [Proverbs 22:6](#) in three Bible versions, noting below the differences and similarities in the translations.



Observation: Key Features of Proverbs 22:6

Now, let's make some observations of the verse as it reads in the New American Standard Bible. The Hebrew word translated "way" in the New American Standard Bible is an important concept to understand, and in the next phase, interpretation, we will unlock its meaning. For now, simply identify the verse's features. In the chart below, fill in the words from the verse that fit the description.



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*Train up a child in the way he should go,
 Even when he is old he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6 NASB)*

Component	Words from the Verse
The command (<i>what</i>)	
The recipient of the action (<i>who</i>)	
The specifics of the action (<i>how</i>)	
The end of the action (<i>when</i>)	
The outcome of the action (<i>then what</i>)	

The observation phase of Bible study should spark some questions to answer in the interpretation phase. Here are some questions to fuel your thinking:

- What is the nature of the training?
- What is the duration of the training?
- What is the implementation of the training?
- What are the results of the training?

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Can you think of other questions you'd like to explore? Jot them down in the space below.



Interpretation: A Deeper Understanding of Proverbs 22:6

Let's look closer at [Proverbs 22:6](#) to find God's answers.

“Train Up”

What is the nature of the training? The word in Hebrew translated “train up” is *hanakh*. To explore the meaning of the Hebrew word, Pastor Chuck used a Hebrew-English lexicon, in which a root form of the word refers to a midwife rubbing the “palate of [a] new-born child with oil . . . before it begins to suck.” Also, it can refer to making “submissive . . . as one does a horse by a rope in its mouth.” The Hebrew word also means to “dedicate, consecrate [the] temple” (1 Kings 8:63; 2 Chronicles 7:5).¹

Consider these vivid metaphors: a midwife stimulating a newborn's natural desire to suck; a trainer guiding a horse; a king dedicating a temple to the Lord. What can you conclude about the meaning of *train up* from these metaphors?

Parents are to cultivate a thirst in children for spiritual things, develop an appetite for that which is right and good, while shaping their will and bringing it into submission.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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“A Child”

What is the duration of the training? The Hebrew term for “child” is *na'ar*. This word is used in the Old Testament to describe children of various ages. In each of the following verses, at what stage of childhood is the child: *Genesis 34:19; 37:2* (NASB); and *1 Samuel 4:20–21* (NLT)?

What conclusion about the duration of parenting can you draw from these references? In other words, through which stages of your child's life are you responsible to train him or her?

The time covers infancy through young adulthood. During those years while they are under our roof, we are to train our children. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

“In the Way”

What is the implementation of the training? The NASB offers an insightful footnote translating literally the Hebrew phrase for “the way he should go” as, “according to his way.” Most English versions emphasize the word *should*, implying a wise and proper direction in which to lead the child. But the Hebrew idiom emphasizes *his way* and *in accord with*, pointing to characteristics that emerge from within the child, namely, his or her God-designed personality, abilities, or natural interests.



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So which interpretation is correct? Should we train a child in the wise way he or she should go? Or according to his or her way? Or perhaps both?

For a clue to the answer, read Proverbs 22:6 in the Amplified Bible, Classic Edition:

Train up a child in the way he should go [and in keeping with his individual gift or bent], and when he is old he will not depart from it. (emphasis added)

In the amplification, the *way* of the child refers to his or her characteristics, manner, or “bent.” What does it mean to train up a child according to his God-given “bent”?

To further explore the meaning of this concept, we’ll compare the word with other Proverbs in the correlation phase. Until then, let’s consider the final line in Proverbs 22:6.

“Even When He Grows Older”

What are the results of the training? “Even when he grows older he will not abandon it.” The root meaning of the Hebrew word for *older* suggests an age of maturity when children become young adults and are able to make it on their own.

The Hebrew word for *abandon* means “to turn aside.” When you help your children know their bents, they will follow their God-given “way” and not turn aside from it. Why would they? They are living in harmony with how God made them.



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Correlation: The “Way” in Other Verses

Compare *way* in Proverbs 22:6 to the same word in *Proverbs 30:18–19* (NASB). In the space below, write down the phrases in verse 19, and substitute the word *characteristic* for *way* to highlight the metaphorical meaning.

The ways that eagles soar, snakes slither, ships sail, and even the way that a boy romances his sweetheart are all one-of-a-kind wonders . . . and so is your child!

No two children are alike; even identical twins are unique. God did not sketch Jacob, a homebody, in the likeness of his twin, outdoorsman Esau. Your children’s personalities, interests, relational styles, strengths, weaknesses are different (not better or worse, just different). Measuring one child against another is like nitpicking a da Vinci painting because it’s not a Rembrandt. Both are masterpieces—and so are your children. So don’t compare siblings.

Pause to put together the interpretation of Proverbs 22:6, as you have discovered it. Review the meaning of each part of the verse, and then write a sentence or two in the box below that summarizes God’s plan for parenting.

“Train up (the *what*) . . . a child (the *who*) . . . in the way he should go (the *how*)” (Proverbs 22:6 NASB).



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Train up, that is, cultivate an appetite for spiritual things within your child according to his or her own individual interests, inclinations, and giftedness. When he or she reaches maturity, there will be no departure from what he or she learned during such healthy and wholesome training. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Start the Journey of Discovery

If training involves stimulating your child's spiritual thirst, latent talent, and gifts, what lays hidden within your child's God-given nature? Perhaps some particular interests? Needs or longings? A yearning for a close relationship? Or a spiritual desire? What hidden gems have you seen in your child?

When you were a child, did the adults in your life seek to know your God-given nature? How might your childhood experience impact your parenting style?

How can you discover your child today? Start by tuning in to his or her deeds: "It is by his deeds that a lad distinguishes himself" (Proverbs 20:11 NASB). A child speaks through the megaphone of his or her deeds. If you listen, you can hear him or her saying, "This is me. Please notice. I'm not him. I'm not her. Let me be me."



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Reflect on what you've observed in your child's deeds. Be sensitive. Watch closely. Listen intently. What have your child's deeds been communicating lately?

Biblical parenting involves training our children *according to their bents*, not shaping them like us or squeezing them into a mold God never intended for them. In what ways can you encourage your child's spiritual thirst and natural bents—his or her personality, interests, pursuits, possible vocation, relational style, gifts, and strengths?

Knowing your child is an adventure! Don't forget to discover yourself along the way. God has great things in store for your family as you follow His plan for parenting.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me to see Your fingerprints on my child's soul. Your handiwork began at conception, and You continue to shape and mold. Unite me with Your creative work in my child's life—and help me to grow as well, to be the person You made me to be. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Frances Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 335.

