

Training Wheels

What do people mean when describing something as "like riding a bike?" They mean that the skills are ingrained into them no matter how long it's been since they've done an activity — snowboarding, speaking a foreign language, or whatever. They didn't forget! But little kids don't just jump on an adult-sized bike and know how to ride. Instead, they have training wheels to get them started. Then the parent carefully takes them off, holding onto the back of the bike until they're stable enough to venture out on their own.

Well, in some ways, teaching our children is like that. We start them off carefully, keeping a close eye on them as they learn to balance for themselves, and then we let them go. The wise writer, Solomon, put it perfectly:

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

Two caveats to consider first:

- This verse is a principle, not a promise (cf. Prov. 16:7).
- Be careful not to measure parents by their kids' choices (Isa. 1:2).

The Big Idea: We can't save our kids (Phil. 2:12) or protect them from every danger, but we can give them momentum in the right direction.

Momentum

What does "train" mean in Prov. 22:6? It's probably not as simple as what it seems. The Hebrew word is **Hanok** — to "Dedicate" or "Start" (Deut. 20:5; 1 Kings 8:63). It means "to start the youth off with a strong and perhaps even religious commitment to a certain course of action" (B. Waltke).

- God will use our kids to "go out" and spread his kingdom (Matt. 28:19).
- Satan will try and slow them down, and some will fall (1 Peter 5:8).
- Give them deeply ingrained training to revert to (James 1:21).

Correction

What is the "way" in Prov. 22:6? Well, first, in the Hebrew, the word "should" doesn't appear. Literally, the verse says, "Train up a child in his way." This could mean training them "in a way that fits the child." Or, it could be a warning: "Start them off getting their own way, and they'll always think that way!" Either way, the result is the same. We need to give our kids boundaries and correction.

- Our children need correction, since "folly" is their default behavior (Prov. 22:15).
- Our job isn't to give them *their* way (Judg. 21:25b).
- Our job is to narrow their way, pointing to God (Eph. 6:4b).

Direction

How do we apply Prov. 22:6? Consider another helpful verse about the home:

"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." (Deut. 6:6-9)

- First, we build *Stable Foundations* in our homes, making sure we're the kinds of husbands and wives we should be.
- As the kids come, we *Shepherd and Shape* them with our love, listening, and leadership.
- And then, once we've given them everything we can, we *Send Them Out* into the world, where hopefully, our Lord will become their Lord.

We'll continue this study in a few weeks, considering each of these aspects of the home and what we can do to train up the next generation.

Conclusion

Our leadership throughout our children's lives ingrains the truths, traits, and habits they'll need. So let's take on this great responsibility, praying for parents everywhere in the difficult work we do for the Lord!