

Twenty-second Day

Training

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

THIS promise is the Scripture expression of the principle on which all education rests – a child's training can decide what his afterlife is to be. Without this faith, there could be no thought of education; when this faith is elevated to a trust in God and His promises, it grows into the assurance that a parent's labor will not be in vain in the Lord.

Education has been defined as developing a child's faculties, fitting him to fulfill his destiny, and developing in him all the perfection of which he is capable. Such definitions have their value, and yet their application is dependent upon the further statement of what his faculties and destiny really are and where his highest perfection would lie. It is only when the aim of education is grasped that its work can be successful. Just as everything will depend on a correct view of what *the way he should go* is, only then can the training assure the divine fulfillment of the promise.

There have been so many failures in religious training, that

a spirit of doubt has grown as to whether a principle like this can be regarded as holding universally good. With such doubt we undermine God's covenant. Let us rather believe that the failure was man's fault: *For God is true, and every man a liar* (Romans 3:4). Either the parent did not make *the way he should go* his one aim in the child's training, or the training in that way was not what God's Word had ordered. Let us see what the Word teaches us on each of these points.

As to *the way he should go*, we need have no doubt. The names Scripture gives to this way make clear what it is. God calls it *the way of the Lord*, when He speaks of Abraham training his children; and we often read of *walking in His ways, the way of His footsteps, and the way of His commandments*. It is called *the way of wisdom, the way of righteousness, the way of holiness, the way of peace, and the way of life*. It is *the new and living way* opened by Christ for all who will walk in His footsteps; it is Christ Himself, the living Way, of whom Scripture says, *walk in Him*.

Many religious parents are most anxious to see their children saved, but do not choose this way for them; they do not decide on it to be the one and only way in which they are to walk. They do not think they should expect the children to walk in it from their youth, so they do not train them in it. It is not their first goal to train wholehearted, devoted Christians. They are not always ready to walk in that way themselves – in the narrow way; they have chosen it, but not exclusively and finally. They have their own thoughts as to the way they and the child may go. No wonder their education fails; a mistake here is often fatal. There may be no doubt or hesitancy; *the way of the Lord* must be heartily accepted as the *only way he should go*.

Train up a child in the way he should go. Train is a word of deep importance for every teacher and parent to understand. It is not telling, teaching, or commanding, but something higher

than all of these, without which the teaching and commanding often cause more harm than good. It is not only telling a child what to do, but also showing him how to do it and seeing that it is done, taking care that the advice we give is put into practice.

We can understand what is needed for such training if we look at the way a young horse is trained. It is made to yield its will to its master's, until at last it is in perfect harmony with him and yields to his slightest wish. It is directed and accustomed to do the right thing until it becomes a habit, a second nature. Its own wild native tendencies are checked, but it is encouraged and helped to the full exercise of its powers. I have seen a coachman watch his young horses and sit ready to help them lest they should lose their confidence or be overcome by some difficulty. And I have thought, If only parents bestowed this care on training children in the way they should go.

Training may be defined as aiding the child to obey easily and willingly. Doing from choice is what we aim for.

Doing. The parent who wishes to train not only tells but also sees that the thing is done. To this end, he seeks to engage the interest and affection of the child on the duty to be performed. Knowing how naturally thoughtless and fickle a child's nature can be, the parent urges or encourages until the thing is performed. He is careful not to give too many commands or give them hastily; he begins with requests to which submission is most easily secured, so the thought of obedience might not be linked with the thought of something displeasing. But the great thing is that the parent watches the child learn to consent until the will has become deed and action.

Doing habitually is an element of training. Success in education depends more on forming habits than on inculcating rules. What the child has done once or twice he must learn to do over and over again, until it becomes familiar and natural. When there is a danger of slipping back, the parent helps and

confirms the habit until its mastery is secure. Going on from a first and a second command in which obedience has been secured, the principle is extended until the child comes to feel quite natural that in all things he should do the parent's will. And so the habit of obedience is formed, which becomes the root of other habits.

Doing from choice. This is something higher – the true aim of education. You may have good, obedient children, in whom there never has been much resistance to a parent's training. They render habitual and willing obedience, but when left to themselves in later life, they depart from the way in which they were trained to go. The training was defective; parents were content with habits without principles. The training of the young horse is not complete until he delights, full of joy and spirit, to do his work. The training of the will is the aim of education. Beginning with *obedience*, the parent must lead the child on to *liberty*. The apparent opposites have to be reconciled in practice – to choose and will for himself what his parent wills, and find his happiness not only in obedience to the parent's command but also in approval of the thing commanded. And here is indeed the highest art, the real difficulty of training a child in the way he should go.

The training of the young horse is not complete until he delights, full of joy and spirit, to do his work.

But here the promise of divine grace comes in. No mind has yet comprehended the wondrous interplay of God's working and our working in the matter of our salvation. But we do not need to understand it to be sure of it, and we do not need to understand it to depend on God's faithfulness. The believing parent seeks to form the habits of obedience; while in prayer and faith to mold, guide, and strengthen the will of the child in the way of the Lord, he may count on the workings of God's Holy Spirit to do what God alone can do. He reckons on a

divine wisdom to guide him; he counts on a divine strength to work with him and for him; he trusts in a divine faithfulness to make the Word true and sure in all its fullness. *Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it.* (See Appendix B for a summary on training.)

A Prayer for Parents

Holy Lord God, with fear and trembling I bow before You in view of the work to which You have called me. O my God, I feel deeply that I lack wisdom; I come to You, who gives liberally. Your Word has said it shall be given.

Lord, give me the spirit of wisdom, that I may understand the wondrous nature of that immortal spirit that has been put into my charge with its power of mind and emotion and will. Give me wisdom, that I may know the way in which the child should go, even the way of Your footsteps, and let me walk in it that he may learn from me that there is no other way pleasing to You, so there is no other way that can give us true pleasure. And give me wisdom that I may know how to guide and influence the will, that it may give itself first to my will and then to Yours, to always choose Your way. Lord, give me wisdom to train my child in the way he should go, even the way of the Lord.

And, O my God, strengthen my faith to hold fast the blessed assurance that Your promise is sure, and Your power is infinite. Amen.

Appendix B

It may be helpful to parents, to young mothers especially, to give a short summary of the principles on which all training rests. Let them meditate carefully and prayerfully on what it implies: they will find that it is a work that cannot be performed without careful thought and earnest purpose. They will feel urged to plead the promise: *And if any of you lacks wisdom, let them ask of God (who gives abundantly to all, and without reproach), and it shall be given them* (James 1:5).

- *Training is more than teaching.*

Teaching makes a child know and understand what he is to do; training influences him and sees that he does it. Teaching deals with his mind; training, with his will.

- *Prevention is better than cure.*

Not to watch and correct mistakes, but to watch and *prevent mistakes*, is true training. To lead the child to know that he *can* obey and do right, that he can do it easily and successfully, and to delight in doing it is the highest aim of true training.

- *Habits must precede principles.*

Habits influence the person by giving a certain bent and

direction, by making the performance of certain acts easy and natural, and thus preparing the way for obedience from principle.

- *The cultivation of the feelings precedes that of the judgment.*

The early years of childhood are marked by the liveliness of the feelings and the susceptibility of impressions. The parent seeks to create a feeling favorable to the good, to make it attractive and desirable. Without this, habits will have little value; with it, they have a connecting link by which they enter and grow into the will.

- *Example is better than precept.*

Not in what we say and teach, but in what we *are* and *do*, lies the power of training. Not as we *think* an ideal to train our children for, but as *we live*, do we train them. Not our wishes or our theory, but our will and our practice, really train. It is by living a thing that we prove that we love it, that we have it, and that we influence the young mind to love it and to have it too.

- *Love that draws is more than law that demands.*

To train needs a life of self-sacrifice, of love that seeks not its own, but lives and gives itself for its object. For this God has given the wonderful mother-love: it needs only to be directed into the right channel as the handmaid of God's redeeming love. Law alone always works sin and wrath. It is love that gives itself with its thought and strength to live for and in the other and breathes its own stronger and better life into the weaker one. Love inspires, and it is inspiration that is the secret of training.