

Proverbs 22:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. This proverb presents a profound principle of child-rearing that has shaped Jewish and Christian parenting for millennia. The Hebrew verb "train up" (חָנַךְ/chanak) carries rich meaning beyond simple instruction—it originally referred to the dedication of a house (Deuteronomy 20:5) or the temple (1 Kings 8:63), implying a consecration or inauguration into a new purpose.

In ancient Near Eastern contexts, chanak also described the practice of midwives rubbing the palates of newborns with crushed dates or oil to stimulate the sucking reflex—creating an early taste that would shape future desires. This imagery profoundly illustrates the verse's intent: early training creates formative experiences that shape lifelong trajectories. The training is not merely informational but transformational, creating appetites and inclinations that endure.

"The way he should go" translates אֶל-פִּי דַרְכּוֹ (al-pi darko), literally "according to the mouth of his way" or "in keeping with his way." This phrase has generated interpretive discussion. Some understand it as training suited to each child's individual bent, personality, or calling—personalizing education to the unique design God has given each child. Others see it as the way of wisdom, righteousness, and godliness that Scripture prescribes universally. The Hebrew construction supports both nuances: parents must discern each child's particular makeup while consistently pointing them toward the fear of the Lord, which is the

beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7).

The promise "when he is old, he will not depart from it" uses גַּם (gam, "even") for emphasis—even in old age, the training will hold. This is presented as a general principle, not an absolute guarantee without exception. Proverbs communicate wisdom—reliable patterns observed in God's ordered world—rather than unconditional promises. The verb "depart" (יָסַר/yasur) means to turn aside or deviate from a path. Early consecration to wisdom creates deep channels that shape a lifetime, though individual human will and God's sovereign purposes also factor into each person's ultimate choices. The proverb establishes parental responsibility and divine wisdom's general reliability without negating human agency or absolving children of their own accountability before God.

Historical Context

This verse sits within the second major collection of Proverbs (chapters 10-24), traditionally attributed to Solomon. As king over Israel during its golden age, Solomon had unique perspective on education and formation—he raised princes who would govern, managed extensive building projects requiring skilled craftsmen, and established an administrative system requiring trained officials. The monarchy's stability depended substantially on proper training of the next generation.

Ancient Israelite education centered on the family, particularly the father's responsibility to teach children God's commandments (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Unlike Greek education which separated children into schools, Hebrew pedagogy integrated throughout daily life—"when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." Parents taught Torah, trade skills, and practical wisdom simultaneously, modeling godly life while explaining God's ways.

The broader ancient Near Eastern context valued education highly. Egyptian wisdom literature contains similar maxims about training youth. The Instruction of Amenemope, which shares numerous parallels with Proverbs 22-24, emphasizes parental teaching and respect for tradition. However, Israelite education

distinctively centered on covenant relationship with Yahweh rather than mere ethical behavior or social success. Training children meant inducting them into God's redemptive story, teaching them their identity as His covenant people.

The verse's agricultural imagery would resonate powerfully in ancient agrarian society. Just as a vine trained to a trellis while young grows along that support structure throughout its life, or a tree bent in youth maintains that shape when mature, so children formed by early godly training develop enduring spiritual and moral structures. Ancient Israelites understood that character formation, like plant cultivation, succeeds best when begun early and maintained consistently. The proverb thus reflects both theological truth about human nature and practical agricultural wisdom from a society that depended on understanding growth patterns.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does understanding 'training' as creating spiritual appetites and inclinations (rather than just transferring information) change your approach to raising or discipling younger believers?
2. In what ways can you balance training children in universal biblical wisdom while respecting and developing their individual personalities, gifts, and callings?
3. How should understanding this as a general principle (rather than an absolute guarantee) affect both your diligence in training and your response when children make rebellious choices despite faithful parenting?
4. What does it mean practically to integrate faith training throughout daily life rather than segregating spiritual instruction to formal teaching moments?
5. How do you guard against either neglecting the formative power of early training or placing improper pressure on yourself as though salvation depended entirely on your parenting methods?

Interlinear Text

תֵּלַחֵם	לְנֶעֱר	עַל	פִּי	דֶרֶךְ	אֵל	כִּי	וְזָקֵן
Train up	a child	H5921	he should go	in the way	H1571	H3588	and when he is old
H2596	H5288		H6310	H1870			H2204
לֹא	יֵסֹר	מִמֶּנָּה:					
H3808	he will not depart	H4480					
	H5493						

Additional Cross-References

Ephesians 6:4 (Parallel theme): And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 6:7 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

2 Timothy 3:15 (Parallel theme): And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Genesis 18:19 (Parallel theme): For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

Deuteronomy 4:9 (Parallel theme): Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons;

1 Samuel 1:28 (Parallel theme): Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there.

1 Samuel 2:26 (Parallel theme): And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the LORD, and also with men.

