



Sermon Transcription • Abbotsford

June 17/18, 2017 - Matt Glezos

The Way They Should Go- (Proverbs 22:6)

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

We are continuing on in our series through Proverbs. It's called Wise Up and it's really looking at all different aspects of life and the direction of Godliness; the right way, the wise way to go. Our Proverb this morning is fitting because it is to do with parenting. I think someone might have planned it that way. It's to do with how it is, as parents, we should lead our children. So, we're going to be looking at Proverbs 22:6, but, just before we get there, I wanted to start by talking about something that doesn't seem like it's connected, but I think you'll see that it has a good point for us. What I want to talk about is an amazing achievement of humanity, actually an amazing achievement of medical science. You may not realize this, but there was a day, September 26, 1979, when smallpox-- a very deadly disease, a disease that had killed about 200 million people just in the 20th century alone-- There was a day when the World Health Organization declared that this disease had been eradicated. It was no longer a threat all over the planet. This was an amazing day. Millions of lives have been saved since then and it came about because of a lot of orchestrated effort on the part of health organizations all over the world. See, we've had a vaccine for smallpox since the 1700s, but it took a long time for different areas, different regions of the globe, to work together to vaccinate the population to a point where the disease would no longer be a threat. And, by 1967, most of the world had been vaccinated, except for Africa and Asia, which is a big part of the world. So that meant that still about 2 million people a year were dying from smallpox. It is, of course, like chicken pox, a disease of the skin, the blood vessels in the skin, but it leads to blindness and death in most of the people who contract it. So, the World Health Organization had an ambitious goal. Let's wipe it out completely.

So, they got together teams, medical teams, they put millions of dollars towards this, and they went out on a campaign in Africa and Asia, to the farthest regions of each continent, so that all the smallpox, every who has it, would be vaccinated. They had educational teams that would go into different areas and villages and communicate to people, "Hey, this is a deadly disease and we have a cure and we want to give it to you." They had posters-- you'll see some of them up there [points to screen]-- that would communicate the severity of the situation and that there was hope to come. Then they would send in the medical teams and they had people called Smallpox Detectives and they would trace the source of infection back to the most remote regions of the jungle and all parts of Africa and they would send in helicopters with medical teams that would go to these remote places. They wanted to find the last person of the continent that had smallpox and vaccinate them and that is what they did. And now, by the end of it, the only reason someone dies of smallpox is if they are working in a lab with smallpox. It's not a threat all over the globe. It's amazing! The point that I want us to see here is



that this only happened, this was only possible, because there was points of clarity on two things: 1) Everyone was clear about the severity of the situation. Everyone knew this was a deadly disease and if we can do anything about it we need to do something about it. The second point of clarity is that 2) the solution was also very, very clear. They had a vaccine. They knew it worked. So because they knew the problem and the solution, the way forward was very, very clear.

What I want us to see, what I think we'll see in our text today, is that with parenting it is very much the same. We also, as parents, need to have clarity about the essential problems in the lives of our children, and also the solution that we have, that we find in the Bible. Now, our verse this morning says there is, in fact, one way -- a solution. That solution is in Jesus Christ. Our text says, I'm going to read it, Proverbs 22:6:

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

There is a way, a way each child should go. Now, you might be here this morning and thinking, “Matt, I’m not a parent. I don’t really think I’m going to be a parent. I don’t even really like kids. There are some kids near me and they are making rustling noises and it’s kind of freaking me out.” That’s okay. Kids will rustle. They usually don’t bite. But, here’s the thing, all of God’s Word, even this passage, it speaks to all of us. My encouragement to you is to be attentive towards the things that God has for you, even in this. For we are children of God and, as we learn more about how God is calling Christian parents to lead their children, we are going to come to know Jesus more because it’s all about the Gospel. So, there are going to be two points in our time together:

1. There is a right way to go, one right to go.
2. Parents need to lead the way.

Then, from that, we are going to have a few points of application for how we actually make this happen.

[There is A Right Way to Go]

The Bible is very, very clear that there is one right way for each child to go. Anywhere in the world, any culture, any time, for all children, there is one right way to go and it’s not philosophy, it’s not a methodology or an ideology, it’s a person, his name is Jesus. Jesus Christ is the right way for every child to go, in fact, every human being to go because He is the answer to our essential problem. We all have the same problem and that problem is sin. The Bible talks about it in lots of different terms. It talks about it as disobedience, crimes against the rules of God — that we are breaking His laws —, and also as foolishness. In fact, in Proverbs we often see this term “folly”. But, the Biblical idea of foolishness is not kind of a bumbling fool, it’s a tragic flaw that every human being has. The apostle Paul talks about this in Romans. He wants to make clear the depths of sin, kind of the nature of the human heart, and so he says this in Romans 1:21-23, of all humanity:



"For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles."

So there we have Paul talking about idolatry. That all of these things that people make, these statues, they are idols. What's going on there is that instead of worshipping God and glorifying Him and hoping in Him, humans turn and look to the things that God made and sometimes we make statues...whatever it is. We worship other things even today. Probably not many of us have idols in the home, although that is still an issue. But, the reality is we all have idols. We maybe can't see them, they may not be on our mantel, but we have idols. We have things that God has made, gifts that He has given us, that we tend to hope in and look to rather than looking to God Himself. We are all born with this foolishness, this sinfulness, and it's essence is one of pride, that we know what is best. We see this from a very, very young age. The Bible says that we are born with this sin and for those of you who have children, have young children, this is very, very apparent. It's certainly the case in my children and children that I have worked with. It's very, very clear that for a young child, a two, three, four-year-old, they are the masters of the universe. If you would just acknowledge that, if you would just do their bidding, then they would not have to be so wrathful with you. They would not scream and cry. They don't want to do that, but, because you are not listening, they are going to inflict whatever they have, which is mostly their vocal chords, on you. That's a sinful heart. It's kind of cute when they are little, but when they are 20 and 30 and 40, it's not cute anymore. That essence of sin, of "I want things my way! I know what's best!", that is what drives us away from God because we don't want anyone else to be in authority over us. So, what's the answer? How do we deal with this? Because it's not just wrecking our lives here. The Bible says very clearly that because God is just, He is going to punish all sin. It's the only hope we have for a universe that's free of evil, is that God will one day deal with all evil and wickedness and sinfulness and that includes us. So, we need an answer, we need a solution. Jesus says that He is the answer. He says this in John 14:6:

"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"

Meaning, the only way that you can be right with God, right with the God of the universe, is through Me. Jesus isn't saying, "I know the way to life," he's saying, "In me you will find life." That's because He laid down His own life on our behalf. He came from Heaven, He lived the life that we couldn't live -- perfectly. And then He went to the cross, in grace, in love, to atone for, to pay for our sin. And then He rose from the dead showing that he conquered sin and death and that, when we have faith in Him, we also have that same hope. We have that same eternal life that can never be extinguished no matter how much we sin, it's all by the grace of God. So, the question is: How is it that our children are going to know about this solution, this hope? Jesus has told us to go to all the nations, to proclaim, to baptize, to tell people what He has commanded. That includes our homes. Parents, moms and dads, if are here, your primary calling is to share the Gospel with your children. That is the blessing of a Christian family, that children from a young age will know the answer to their essential problem.



But, for us to lead our children in that direction, we have to be very, very clear about the way forward. We have to be convinced about the answers to those big questions. What is the essential problem of your child's life? There are many other things that we could look to and that, in the day to day life, we tend to look to. Is it really the case that the essential problem in your child's life is that the teachers in your child's school don't really appreciate how brilliant they are, that they don't really realize how unique they are? Is it really the case? Is the essential problem the school itself, that the education system is failing them? Is it even the diagnosis that they may have? Some challenges? Maybe learning disabilities, maybe ADHD, maybe something that is a real challenge, but is that the essential problem? Or, is it that they have a rebellious and sinful heart? We need to be really clear about this. What about the solution? What is your hope for your child? Is it that they will get a good education, that they will have opportunities that you never had? Is it that you want for them to truly know themselves, to explore themselves in every experience so that they know they can choose their own way forward in a way that they feel comfortable with? Is that the hope that you have for them? Or is your hope for your children that they come to faith, faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus? There is a pastor from a few years back, J. C. Ryle, and he says this to parents:

"First, then, if you would train your children rightly, train them in the way they should go, and not in the way they would. Remember, children are born with a decided bias towards evil, and therefore if you let them choose for themselves, they are certain to choose wrong...If you cannot make up your mind on this first principle of Christian training than it is useless for you to [go] any further."

It's really true. I mean, think of the smallpox epidemic. If they hadn't been absolutely sure about the problem and the solution, then there wouldn't have been anyway forward. No one would have been climbing into helicopters and going into the remotest regions of the jungle, if they hadn't been sure that they had a rock solid solution. So, in compassion and love, they went there because they knew the truth. Our text this morning says start off a child in a way they *should* go, not in a way they could, or one of a few different possibilities. This is the one way they *should* go, the *right* way to go. So, you need to ask yourself: Am I clear about this? Do I really believe that a relationship, a faith relationship, with Jesus Christ is the essential part of my child's future happiness, hope, and life? Now, the fact that you are sitting here, in a church building on Father's Day, would lead me to believe that most of us, many of us, would say, "Yes, that's what I believe! That's what I'm trying to do." The challenge, of course, is that knowing that is one thing but actually making it happen is another.

[Parents Need to Lead the Way]

So, that brings us to the second point. There is one way that every child should go, but parents need to lead the way. We can't simply point the way to Jesus and say, "Hey, go that way," we need to lead our children in that direction. And, again in the text, we get sort of a hint of this. The beginning part, the phrase "Start off a child" is often translated train --train up a child. The root of that is an Arabic verb. It was a custom, back in the day, for mothers with children who had trouble nursing. I don't know why, this is our experience too, but some kids need food but they just don't want to nurse. They don't know how to latch, it's very frustrating, it's the middle of the night, and everyone's crying. So, what



they would do, back in the day, is the moms would get a mixture of dates, a sweet mixture, and they would rub it on the tongue of the child and the child would start to suck and that would prepare them for their mother's milk. It was a way to entice them to do something that they needed. It was vital for their survival. That is the same idea here. Parents are being called by God to entice their children, lovingly and effectively, in the right direction because they don't know the right way to go. They would go all sorts of other directions, but we, as parents, need to lead the way. We need to say, "This is the way that you should go. Come this way, believe me, and watch me as I go this way." Now, the challenge is that we are being called to lead our children to Jesus, but, Biblically speaking and theologically speaking, this is an impossibility because we cannot change the hearts of our children. We see this throughout Scripture. It is God alone who can give the gift of faith. We see this in Ephesians. Ephesians 2:8-9 says,

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."

So, God is saying to parents, "Lead your children to Jesus," but we are also seeing that it is only ever the Spirit of God, by the supernatural power of God, that a sinful heart turns from worshipping idols and turning our back to God to following Jesus. So, what are we actually being asked to do? Well, we are being asked to prepare the hearts and minds of our children for the point where God gives them faith. I think a helpful analogy is that of a campfire. If you want to build a campfire, you need a lighter, but, first, you need to stack the right kind of wood. Right, you need to get dry wood, good kindling, small pieces, big pieces, you want to put some newspaper in there and leave spots for the air to get in. You want to build a nice mound, teepee, or log cabin, whatever, and then you get the flame, the spark, and then the fire goes up. In terms of our faith, only God has the lighter. He is the only one who has the spark. The Spirit of God is the only one who can bring faith into the heart of any human being, *but* we have the opportunity to stack wood, to stack good wood, so that, when that spark comes, our children will really be able to live a life that is burning bright for Jesus. And, by good wood, I mean Biblical knowledge. I mean a clear understanding of the Gospel. I mean them seeing in us what it means to really follow Jesus. That as we do it we do it faithfully and consistently. All of that is good wood, so that when our children believe then they will have some resources, they will know what it means to follow, and they will burn brightly.

But, sadly, I mean, we know that is not always the case. We know that there are many families where the parents would say, "We want to lead them to Jesus," but if you were to look in the hearts of the children, you wouldn't see good wood. You would see kind of green wood; damp, wet wood that doesn't burn well. This is a lack of Biblical knowledge. This is not really being clear about sin or why Jesus died for them. This is seeing a life that is lived inconsistently for Jesus, not really many conversations about Biblical things. All of this, hear me, it's not that God can't bring a spark, it's that the burning will be slow. They will be hindered because they don't really know their faith. You see, as parents, we can't start the fire, but we can stack the right wood. So with the remainder of our time, I want to talk about some of the wood that we can stack in the lives and hearts of our children to prepare them for faith; to walk the right way in life. So we are going to have four pieces of good wood.



[Don't Assume They Believe]

Don't assume that your children believe. There is sometimes this idea in Christian circles that as soon as a young child, a two, three, or four-year-old, expresses some desire—maybe we ask them, "Do you want to follow Jesus? Do you want to accept Jesus?"—that we, as soon as possible, jump on that, we pray with them, and then we kind of check that off our list and we assume then that they are a believer. The problem is that, very often, the child, themselves, is not actually able to articulate what they believe. We maybe haven't even asked them really in-depth questions about *Who is Jesus?*, *What is sin?*, and *What do you believe in?* This does our children a disservice because we start to treat them as if they are believers, when they themselves are not very clear on what it means to be a Christian. What we need to remember is that, if as we see in the Bible, the spark of faith—new birth, new spiritual life—is from the hand of God then we don't have to rush it. Our children are not going to miss it. We can be patient. We can look for evidences of spiritual growth. We can have conversations, multiple conversations, about the Gospel. We should, in fact, make very sure and help our children to be very sure that they understand what they believe before we start to talk to them as believers.

In our home we had a couple of instances like this. And one example, for one of our boys, it was a time when some of our boys had professed faith in Christ, and we had conversations, but one of them had not yet. We weren't talking to him as if he was a Christian, we were talking to him *about* Christianity, talking to him *about* Jesus, telling him about our faith. And there was one evening when we were coming home, it was really, really late, it was one of those nights where it's just, "Get out of the van, don't brush your teeth, don't get changed, just get into bed. Everyone was tired. Dad, in particular, was very tired so it's okay to have cavities." So, everyone was getting into bed and one of my sons leaned over and whispered, he said, "Hey dad, I want to become a Christian." And I said, "Oh, wow! That's fantastic! That's great! We've been talking about that! Man, I'm so glad to hear that! Listen, though, it's really, really late right now, and so let's—why don't we talk tomorrow, because I want to have a bit of a conversation with you and I want to make sure that we, you know, really—So, is that okay? I'm just going to pray for you now but then tomorrow we'll talk." So, I put them to bed, prayed for them, and went in and was talking with Dawn in our bedroom, getting ready for bed, and we heard a knock at the door. We opened it up and there he is! And he says, "Dad, I want to become a Christian." And there, I felt like the most horrible dad that ever has walked the earth. So, I said, "Well, man! Yes!" So, what we saw there for Dawn and I—we prayed with him, we talked with him, we asked him questions—but what we were seeing we felt was the leading of the Spirit of God. Here was a young boy who had heard the Gospel, who was coming to an understanding of his own sin, and was feeling an inner compulsion to accept Christ. We're looking for that kind of spiritual fruit. It's a decision not done out of compulsion not to please parents but because they really want it, they believe. So, we asked the questions, "What is sin? Why do you believe? Who is Jesus?" We asked these gospel questions and he came to Christ, he prayed, and that's a fantastic thing. We celebrated, we told all of the family the next day, but we want to make sure that there is an understanding—a clear understanding—in each child before we start to treat them as believers. Otherwise, they think they're believers and they don't even know what they believe. So that was number one, don't assume they believe.



[Fill your Home with Grace]

We need to fill out homes with grace. It's very, very hard to convince a child that God is loving, God is tender-hearted, God is gracious, if we are hard-hearted, if we are harsh as parents, if we are unforgiving. If that kind of disconnect exists, it's very difficult because we are the effective authority in the children's life, especially when they are young. So, if they see in us a real harshness, it will be very, very difficult for them to see that God is the authority, the ultimate authority, and also very, very loving. Those two things will not go together very well. But we have the opportunity to show them the opposite. So, what I encourage you to do is to think of those areas in your life where you have really struggled with sin. I mean those areas of your life where it has taken years, maybe decades, for you to come to a place of genuine repentance, where you have changed your habits of mind and heart, and just think of how God has treated you in those times. Think of how patient He's been with you. Think of how gracious He's been, that He's always had his arms open wide, no matter how much you've fallen back into sin, you've turned to the Lord in repentance and He's always said, "Yes, my child. Yes, I'm glad that you're here. I forgive you." That's the way that we can be with our children. By the grace of God, even though we are sinners, even though we have short tempers. By the grace of God, we can be quick to forgive. That can be the climate of our home, that there's grace, that even when they fail we're quick to forgive, quick to be gracious. This is something that I've struggled with. But, in that, as we pursue that, we also can ask for forgiveness, and we should. We should be quick to say, at the end of the day, "I'm really sorry for how I talked to you. I shouldn't have been that harsh. Can you forgive me?" When we have a home where it's filled with grace, it will be very, very easy for them to follow the road of grace to the cross because they will see that God, in fact, is loving and gracious and, yet, the authority in their life. So, we need to fill our homes with grace.

[Focus on the Heart]

We need to focus on the heart. This is a good way to prepare the children's hearts for faith because, for the most part, as parents, we know that it's much easier to focus on the externals because the externals are what aggravate and annoy us, right? The internal mood and grumpiness manifests itself in sulky dispositions, in screaming, and yelling in ill-temper. We see all of those things and, man, they drive us nuts! So, that's what we get on them about, "Stop doing that! Stop doing all these bad things. Start doing all these good things, then I will be happy and the whole house will be happy and we can move forward!" And the problem is that if that's all we do, we don't ever talk about the heart. We don't ever talk about the reason why there's all these manifestations of selfishness and that. So, look, it's good that we have rules in the home. It's okay that we have star charts up on the wall. I like a good star chart where we can encourage good behaviour. But we should look for those rules, and that whole system of discipline, whatever you have, look at it is an opportunity. You can leverage that to have gospel heart conversations with your kids. There's been more than a few times in our home where one of our boys has- it's just been a difficult time. Like all of us, in our sin, we're just in repetitive sin. And yet we've had conversations where they say, where they come to the point of seeing that and they say, "Dad, I just— I can't stop sinning!" And I don't know what to do because I'm in my room again and I'm talking to them and they know that they're going to get disciplined. And that's a great point, a great opportunity for a gospel conversation to say, "Yeah, man, I know. I've been there too! I also struggle with sin. Aren't you so glad that we have a saviour who has kept all the rules perfectly. And that that burden isn't on us anymore. We don't have to do that to be right with God, we don't



have to do that to have heaven to look forward to. By the grace of God, Jesus did it for us, and we have faith in Him and that means that we have the hope of heaven, even though we are still struggling with sin.” Those are heart conversations— Gospel conversations— we need to have those kind of conversations so that we can actually lead the hearts of our children and not just their behaviour. Because the heart is the essence of who we are.

[Prepare Them for Suffering]

Last thing, we need to prepare our children to suffer. If we are going to lead them to Jesus, we are leading them in His ways and His ways always end up at the cross. That means that the life of every Christian will be filled with suffering. Jesus is really clear about this. He says to His disciples in Luke 9:23,

“Then he said to them all: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.’”

This is the expectation He’s giving us, “That you will suffer for my sake.” Now, there are many children growing up in Christian homes throughout the world that are very, very well acquainted with suffering. They just look around them in their daily life and they see suffering, they see famine, they see disease, and they see persecution. The way that they’re living their life, they look at their parents and they see them struggling. They see the circumstantial difficulties of life and they see their parents on their knees all the time, praying, “Lord Jesus, we need help. We’re not going to have enough food today if you don’t provide. Jesus, please protect us.” In all of this, they are getting a very clear example of what it means to follow Jesus, what Jesus is talking about. That we live in a world that is mired in sin and that there is opposition and that if they are going to follow Jesus they are going to need to rely on Him. But, we also know that where we live, in Abbotsford and beyond, it’s very, very possible for a child to grow up and not have any hint of suffering, to not even hear it talked about.

You can imagine a young girl growing up in this area and her family loves her and they provide for her a great home, a great spot to play, and all the things that she would need in life. They love her and, so, they bring her to a church. They love her and, so, they put her in Christian school because they want the best for her. They love her and, so, they tell her about Jesus. They tell her that Jesus loves her and that Jesus died for her and she accepts Jesus. She says, “Yes, I believe that. I’m thankful for that,” and she starts doing the things that the kids around her are doing. She’s reading her Bible, she’s going to church, going to youth group, and going on missions trips. But, what she doesn’t realize is that there’s this subconscious connection in her mind between the good things that tend to happen in her life—generally good things— and the blessing of God—what it means to follow Jesus. The problem is that as she gets into adulthood, bad things start happening. She has a friend that gets sick very early, she gets cancer, and she’s struggling with that. She has a relationship that she thought was going to end in marriage and it totally breaks down. At her school, no one is very excited to hear what she has to say anymore. She is at college and they actually ridicule her for her faith and for the things that she is saying and she starts having all these questions about *Why is my life like this? Why is it so hard and so difficult?* She has lots of questions, but she doesn’t have the answers she needs. She needs the answer that because God loves you He will lead you into trials and temptations—not temptations, but



trials— difficulties, suffering. Because God loves you, He is going to lead you into situations where you need to truly trust in Jesus, where you need to really- you are at the end of your rope. It's so difficult, that you don't know what to do, your on your knees daily. God loves us and so He puts us in those situations because He wants to grow Christ-likeness in us. If no one has talked to her about this, this will be something that is totally foreign. She won't be prepared for actually walking in the ways of Jesus. She won't understand that the world around her is still mired in sin because God is delaying the return of Christ because He wants more and more people to come to Jesus. She can't see the big picture of what God is doing and so she is left unprepared.

Parents, we have a great opportunity to prepare our children in this way. To be honest about some of our own sufferings, to allow them to see us struggle with areas, to talk about our dependance on God, and how we need Jesus daily. As we do that, they will learn that this road that we are travelling is not smooth, it's not wide, it's narrow, it's difficult, and it's rocky. But, in it, we will come to know Christ more and so we will actually get that which we truly need. So, four things, four pieces of wood, for us to stack in the hearts of our children: We should not assume that they believe, we should have grace-filled homes, we should focus on their heart, and we should prepare them for suffering. I hope that you see that all of these things come out of a conviction about the right way forward. That's because we have answers, we know the essential problem in the lives of our children, we know the solution that we find in Christ, and so we have a way to point them. And that, by the grace of God, they will continue on long into the end of their life. Proverbs 22:6 says,

"Start a child off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."

My hope and prayer is that that is true for all the children of our church. Let's pray together.

Lord God, thank you for Your love and for Your grace. I thank you, God, that there is answer to our essential problem. And, God, I pray for all the children here, all those represented by the families here, God, I pray that each one would come to know you, Jesus. That would have a faith that is genuine and true, and that, Jesus, they would persevere through the trials and sufferings by Your grace and by Your strength. I pray for the parents represented here, God. I pray, Lord, that you would give them great strength and wisdom, Lord. Please God, give us wisdom in this day and age to raise our children on the way that leads to the cross. God, I pray that you would help us in that. I pray that you would bring strength. And, God, I pray that today we would find blessing in Your Word. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.