

LESSON 10

Principle Four: Individuality

Before we look at our fourth principle, let's review our first three principles for effective parenting.

Principle One: _____ has given parents the authority and responsibility to train their children for His glory.

Principle Two: Parents train primarily through _____.

Principle Three: The _____ relationship is the priority family relationship.

■ PASSAGE

Proverbs 22:6 is a foundational Scripture verse pertaining to child-rearing. It says: "Train up a child _____: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

This verse is not only one of the most familiar verses relating to child-rearing, but it is also one of the most frequently misunderstood. Most parents paraphrase this verse: "Be sure to expose your child to as much spiritual training as possible in the early years. Take him to Sunday school and church regularly, enrol him in a Christian school and get him to participate in the church's children's programs. Be sure to send him to a Christian camp in the summer. Teach him some hymns and Bible stories and endeavour to cement some Scripture verses in his mind. It is inevitable that he will sow some wild oats when he gets older; but if we pour in enough information in the formative years, when he finishes his fling, he will come back to the Lord."



This popular interpretation is both _____ and _____. First, it is false because we can all think of people we grew up with in the church whose parents did bring them to church faithfully, who did attend and graduate from a Christian school, who sang in the church youth choir and otherwise participated in church life. And yet, as soon as these young people graduated from high school and left home, they left their spiritual moorings and have never returned. Proverbs 22:6 is decidedly not a promise to parents that their wayward children will return to their spiritual roots after years of rebellion.

Secondly, the above interpretation is also faulty. What is Proverbs 22:6 saying? The Book of Proverbs was written in the Hebrew language, so let's attempt to decipher the proper translation of the verse so that we can arrive at an accurate interpretation.

The phrase “the way he should go” is the translation of a Hebrew phrase, which is literally translated “upon the mouth of his way.” The Hebrew idiom “upon the mouth of” is another way of saying “according to,” “in keeping with” or “in cooperation with.”

Thus the phrase “the way he should go” means “according to _____” or “in keeping with his _____.” The emphasis is on the child’s way or “bent.” God is not saying: “Bring up a child according to a predetermined set of rules that you establish for the child. Make the child fit your mould.” Instead, the thrust of the meaning is, “If you want to raise a wise child, observe the child, be sensitive and alert to the child so as to discover his _____ and adapt your training accordingly.”

The word “way” does not refer to a specific, well-defined, predetermined path. It refers to the child’s _____.

The same word is used in Scripture to refer to the bent or bending of a bow that an archer uses (Psalm 7:12; 11:2).

Every child that comes into the world enters with a bent, a set of characteristics _____ (not a blank slate). Every individual is _____. Of all the multiplied billions of people who have lived since the beginning of time, no two have ever been identical. Even identical twins are not truly identical!

Psalm 139:16 says that God has a book for every single person. God was interested in you even before your conception. He wrote down whether you would be tall or short, blond or brunet, artistic or athletic. He prescribed when and where and to what family you would be born. Our abilities differ, our backgrounds differ, our opportunities differ, and our personalities differ. We have different likes and dislikes. It is a self-evident truth that each individual is unique. Furthermore, each individual’s uniqueness is designed and prescribed by God.

God uses two means to accomplish His prescription: _____ and _____. Developmental psychologists agree that _____ of a child’s personality is formed by the time he is _____ years old. After age 6, all we can do is try to modify the other _____ of his personality development. Now this does not mean that a child has 0% personality at birth, and we are wholly responsible for 85 % in the first six years. Every person is born with a large percentage of his personality already set. He is not a completely pliable piece of clay; he has been bent. Do you have more than one child in your home? Are any two exactly alike? Did you grow up with any brothers or sisters? Are you exactly like your brothers and sisters?

Proverbs 22:6 says to us: “Train up a child in accordance with his individual bent or predetermined characteristics; and when he is old, he will not depart from them.” Wise parents will not seek to force a child into a predetermined mould but will seek to discover the way God made the child and then fit his training accordingly.

■ PRINCIPLE

Principle Four

Every child is a _____ individual.

Now this presents an obvious question: How do I know God’s design for my child? How do I discover my child’s bent, his individual characteristics? Let’s answer that question by asking another. How do we know anything or anybody? We might answer “time,” “commitment,” “effort” or any number of other equally viable answers.

Let's put all of these together into this single, catch-all answer: "_____". In order to know your child, study your child.

Proverbs 20:11-12 says, "Even a child is _____ by his _____... The _____, and the _____ the

Lord hath made even both of them." A child reveals himself, or makes himself knowable, through his _____. And in verse 12, God is saying that He has given us eyes and ears to observe our children's doings in order that we may know them. As the child acts and reacts, walks and talks, obeys and disobeys, you will be gathering information to use in working with him. But you must _____! (Judges 13:1-14).

As parents, we cannot afford the luxury of simply housing, feeding, clothing, providing materially for and educating our children. We must realize that God has given us an important homework assignment that will take years to complete. We are assigned the responsibility of coming to _____ our children.

And when we say, "Know your child," we do not have reference necessarily to the amount of time you spend with your child playing ball or doing other things. Rather, we have in mind the idea of making a definite study of your child and from this standpoint "knowing" your child.

So, in addition to the principle we have already stated, Proverbs 22:6 teaches us two other extremely important truths.



Two Truths From Proverbs 22:6

- Parents must _____ each child to _____ that child and then train him in keeping with his individual _____.
- While there are general rules of child-rearing, which apply to all children, no set _____ or group of _____ uniformly administered will work for every child.

To support this second truth, note the following biblical examples.

- _____ and _____ were born into the same family and had the same type of training. One of them turned out to be a murderer, and the other was murdered (Genesis 4:1-6).
- _____ and _____ were raised in the same family with the same environment. Jacob was so spiritually inclined that God referred to him as a "_____." Esau was so uninclined to spiritual things that God referred to him as a "_____ man" (Genesis 32:28; Hebrews 12:16).

- Consider two of David's children. One of his children was referred to as the wisest man who ever lived — _____. The other was a murderer — _____. They had the same general background yet turned out very differently.



Of course, there are many other examples and many other character differences in the examples that we have cited that could be noted. The point of emphasis is that it is vitally important to recognize the individuality of each child.

Because children are unique individuals, it is difficult to categorize them. However, in order to give you some guidance and get you "jump-started" in your study, I want to suggest two broad ways in which you can "know" your children that will help in discerning how to deal with them.

■ Knowing Your Child By His

The first thing you need to discern about your child to know him is based on how he responds to authority. Children are basically _____-authority or _____-authority. We shall label these two categories as _____ (pro-authority) and _____ (anti-authority). Into which category do you think most children fit? (Hint: It's not even close!) Almost every Christian psychologist, psychiatrist and counsellor asserts that the vast majority of children fall into the _____ category. In addition, strangely enough, if there are two children in the family, one will usually be defiant and the other compliant. Let's look more closely at these two categories.

☐ The defiant child

The defiant child is _____ anti-authority.

He tends to be very _____. He comes into the world with nose uplifted swaggered strut and complaining about the temperature in the delivery room, the way the delivery room is being operated and the competency of the hospital in general. He expects meals to be served the instant they are ordered and to be perfectly prepared. He demands every moment of Mother's time — and everyone else's. You never need to ask his opinion; he will readily give it — unsolicited. He becomes _____ when told what to do. He learns things the _____. This child wants to _____; thus, he possesses

more _____ potential and strength of _____ than a compliant child if his parents help him channel his impulses and gain control of his will. Unfortunately, while most children fall into the defiant category, most parents also fail to properly harness the child. No one told the would-be parents that parenthood would be this difficult. They had planned to be loving and effective parents who would have obedient, submissive children who loved to sit quietly by the fireplace, listening to Dad read stories. The difference between life as expected and life as reality is a shock.



The defiant child loves to play “_____” _____.” Parents will face an exhausting _____ of will with this defiant child. The defiant child does not accept adult leadership _____. The defiant child must _____ adult leadership and find it

_____ of allegiance before he will submit to it. When a parent refuses to accept the child’s defiant challenge, the whole structure of the family changes. The role factor is abrogated. The youngster begins to look at his father and mother with disrespect; they are unworthy of his allegiance. The ultimate paradox is that children need and desire strong parental leadership but insist that parents _____ to lead them.

If parents do not properly control the defiant child, they invite a life of pain. Defiant children tend to become angry and develop a “_____” attitude, which will surface. They will get even by rejecting _____, your _____ and your _____.

☐ The compliant child

The compliant child is born with a need to be _____ authority. He is _____ and outwardly _____. He is patient when dinner is overdue. He smiles sixteen hours a day — even when being disciplined. He never spits up or cries on the way to church. Later on, he loves to keep his room clean, especially enjoys homework and will entertain himself for hours. He spends most of his time figuring out what his parents want and how he can make them happy. He never _____ and tends to be _____.

Whatever you say is okay to the compliant child. He wants somebody to tell him _____ and to _____ his _____ for him. He



wants someone to make _____ for him. So, to the casual observer; the compliant child would seem to be an easy child to raise. All you have to do is tell him what to do, set the time for him to do it, tell him when to quit doing it and then praise him for having done it.

Given these characteristics, most parents would choose to work with the _____ child. But the compliant child has some “_____” characteristics that can pose problems potentially greater than the

surface characteristics of the defiant child. Defiant children tend to be independent enough to act and think for themselves. Thus, they will quickly learn to bathe, dress, feed and take care of themselves. They will tend to say “_____” to drugs, immorality and other inappropriate activities. They will tend to be less influenced by peer group pressure. The compliant child, on the other hand, must be _____ to think for himself. In fact, he must be told what to do. He must be told and shown how to bathe himself and dress himself and make his own sandwich far longer than the defiant child. Compliant children tend to follow strong leadership. Thus, they are much more susceptible to joining cults, being used, submitting to peer group pressure and engaging in inappropriate activities.

Compliant children are _____ to please. They desperately want to make Mom and Dad happy. Their greatest fear is that of _____ someone or doing something _____. They tend to be _____; they want everything to be right. Often, as children, they will _____ repeatedly to ensure that they act properly and please. But because of these tendencies, their feelings are easily _____. When they are _____ or not sufficiently _____, they are hurt. They redouble their efforts to please. Compliant children are prone to _____ for not measuring up.

Unfortunately, many parents use _____ to control their children. These parents purposely refuse to lavish commendations upon the child, choosing instead to point out areas that could be better. These parents then take pride in their wonderfully disciplined children. They boast of their children who always do what they are told, never giving anybody a difficult time. But motivating a compliant child with guilt carries a high price tag.

Compliant children tend to keep their _____ to themselves. They are extremely _____. They feel that no matter how hard they try, they can't do anything right. No matter how hard they try, they still _____. A compliant child has such high expectations of himself that every day is a _____ to him, because he is not perfect. If he can do ninety-nine right things in a day and one wrong thing, the one wrong will ruin his day and stay on his mind. Such a child is prone to _____, which is brought on by suppressed _____ at himself for failing.

It is devastating for parents not to understand the “beneath the surface” needs of the compliant child. The needs to be loved unconditionally, to know that he belongs and where he belongs are _____ in the compliant child personality.

As they enter the teen years, compliant children will cope with their guilt or apparent failure and frustration by behaving in a variety of different ways, which may include involvement with drugs, stealing, sex and otherwise deviant lifestyles. This discussion leads us into one other area that we must address in this lesson on individuality.

● Knowing Your Child By His _____.

It is crucially important for parents to understand that children are extremely sensitive emotionally. They communicate with their world primarily on the feeling level. Thus, when they soil their pants, they will not clear their throats and whisper in subdued tones: “Excuse me, Mother, I seem to have soiled my pants. If it wouldn't be too much trouble, would you mind cleaning me up and fitting me with a fresh, clean pair?” That's not going to happen. Instead, a child will communicate the problem through his

emotions. He will _____!

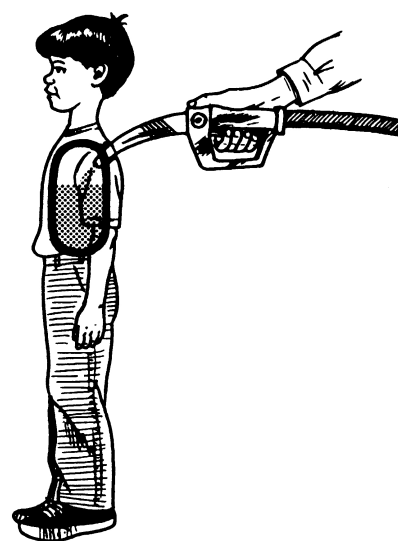
Children are constantly asking the question, "_____?" They don't ask the question verbally, but by their

_____ and their _____. A child tells us what he needs, whether it's more love, more discipline, more time, more understanding or more of ourselves by _____. It is important that parents answer this important question with a loud, unequivocal "_____!" If we love a child _____ he feels the answer is yes. (We will discuss the specifics of how we can convey unconditional love in a later lesson.) But if we communicate _____ love, problems lie ahead.

Just as a child asks the question with his behaviour, we answer primarily with our behaviour — not only by what we _____, but also by what we _____.

We can summarize this concept by saying that every child is equipped with an _____. But while every child has an emotional tank, the _____ or _____ of every child's emotional tank is different. Some children have greater emotional needs than others (a larger tank). Thus, because the needs are different, how we meet those needs will be different for each child. Some children need more _____ allotment than others; some need more _____ than others; some need more _____

_____ than others. While all children have these needs, some have greater needs than others, thus requiring more of us to meet their needs.



For example, spending 20 minutes with one child may fill his emotional tank because he has only a 10-gallon capacity. Spending 20 minutes with his brother may not meet his needs (fill his tank) because he has a 25-gallon tank.

As we have discussed in this lesson, every child is unique. The wise parent will study his child in order to know the child's individual bent so that the parent can effectively meet each individual child's unique needs.

■ PRACTICE

Let me emphatically restate that every child is unique and that the two categories we have suggested are broad indeed. Within each category is an infinite array of individual personalities. It is important that we realize that neither category is good or bad, and each has its own strengths and weaknesses. If we are to be effective stewards of what God has given to us — our children — then it is foundational that we know our children's "bent" before we can successfully train them.

Let me close this lesson by stating that regardless of the amount of information we gather in an effort to do a perfect job of child-rearing, we will make mistakes. God expects us to learn and to do our best, but He does not expect infallibility.

One single mistake like one tree in a forest won't do much harm to our children. In fact, they can tolerate quite a few parental mistakes and turn out quite normally. It is only when pestilence sweeps through the entire forest that a depreciated crop results. Realistically we must understand that we will make mistakes and that we will never

completely eliminate parental errors because we are human. Our goal is to minimize those mistakes and to be always learning and improving in our role as parents. More important than where we are, is the direction in which we are moving. So, no matter where you are as a parent, if you are applying the principles you are learning in this class, you are accomplishing the most important feat by moving in the right direction