

BIBLICAL PARENTING STUDY ONE

Discovering Your Child . . . and Yourself

Proverbs 22:6

Wise is the parent who understands, “I need to spend time with my child. I need to observe. I need to dialogue so that my child grows up knowing his or her unique, God-given design.”

—Charles R. Swindoll

YOU are embarking on the most fascinating journey of life—the journey of discovering your child. Your child may be yours by birth, adoption, or marriage; he or she may be your grandchild or nephew or niece who lives with you. This amazing, one-of-a-kind boy or girl whom God has placed in your life to nurture and guide is *your* child.

Oh, the wonders of your child! Her heart is so tender and pure. His mind hums like a power plant with imagination and curiosity. Her personality sparkles with laughter and joy like a multifaceted diamond. Your task is to explore the hidden universe that lies within your child. Unlock the secrets. And then release your child to be the mature, confident adult that God intended him or her to be.

Along the way of discovering your child, a surprising second discovery will unfold. You’ll discover yourself! Chuck Swindoll realized this parenting benefit, “It wasn’t until we began to have children that I fully began to understand how *I* am put together.” As you reveal to your child the wonders of who he or she is, God will do the same for you. As you parent, God will parent you, encouraging you to blossom right alongside your child. You can—and will, with God’s help—grow with your child!

Are you ready to follow God’s leading in the journey and joy of parenting? Let’s dig into His Word to find the way.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open God's Word, open your heart to receive His wise counsel on rearing children. Reading His words may cause memories of your own childhood to surface—positive recollections as well as negative. Take a moment in prayer to invite the Lord to minister to you as you enter what may be a sensitive part of your soul.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we begin by reading the passage carefully and slowly, absorbing every word. For helpful instruction from Chuck, consult our online instructional web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)." This page provides you an introduction to four important methods in Bible study—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—along with other helpful study tips. You can also follow the link to purchase a copy of Chuck's book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, on which our studies are based.

Now read [Proverbs 22:6](#) in three Bible versions, noticing the differences and similarities in the translations.



Observation: A Closer Look

The Hebrew word translated "way" in The New American Standard Bible is a key concept to understand. Below, we will ask the question, "What does *way* mean within the context of this verse?" Before we attempt to understand the meaning of the word (which is the task of interpretation in our *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study), let's make some observations of the passage.

*Train up the child in the way he should go,
Even when he is old he will not depart from it.* (Proverbs 22:6 NASB)



Discovering Your Child . . . and Yourself

Proverbs 22:6

By observing closely, you can identify five components of thought. In the chart below, fill in the words from the verse that fit the description.

Component	Words from the Verse
The command—the <i>what</i>	
The recipient of the action—the <i>who</i>	
The specifics of the action—the <i>how</i>	
The end of the action—the <i>when</i>	
The outcome of the action—the <i>then what</i>	

The observation phase of Bible study should spark some questions that you'd like to answer in the interpretation phase. Here are some questions to fuel your thinking:

- What is the nature of the training?
- What is the duration of the training?
- What is the implementation of the training?
- What are the results of the training?

Can you think of other questions you'd like to explore? Jot them down in the space below.



Discovering Your Child . . . and Yourself

Proverbs 22:6



Interpretation: A Deeper Understanding

Asking a good question is like using a sharp knife when you're preparing food in the kitchen. Just as a paring knife in a skilled hand can slice away the peel to reveal the delicious fruit, so too can a finely honed question expose core scriptural truth. As a parent, you need answers to questions like: What does training my child look like? How is training different from instructing or lecturing? How many years should I train my child? These questions cut to the core of the issue. Let's look closer to find God's answers.

“Train Up”

The word in Hebrew translated “train up” is *hanakh*. To explore the meaning of the Hebrew word, Chuck used a Hebrew-English lexicon. The authors of the lexicon associate the word to an Arabic root, which, in one source, means to “rub [the] palate of a child with chewed dates.” In another source, it refers to a midwife rubbing the “palate of a new-born child with oil . . . before it begins to suck.”¹ Also, the Hebrew word *hanakh* is used three other times in the Old Testament, all with reference to dedicating a building (see Deuteronomy 20:5; 1 Kings 8:63; 2 Chronicles 7:5).²

A midwife stimulating a newborn's natural desire to suck by rubbing the baby's palate with something sweet is a vivid image. What can you conclude about the meaning of *train up* from this metaphor?

If training your child involves stimulating a latent talent or gift within your child, what may lay hidden within your child's God-given nature? Perhaps some interests or talents? Needs or longings? A thirst for a close relationship? Or a spiritual desire? What hidden gems have you seen in your child?



Discovering Your Child . . . and Yourself

Proverbs 22:6

“ . . . A Child . . . ”

The Hebrew term for “child” is *na’ar*. This word is used in the Old Testament to describe children of various ages. Let’s examine three of these uses. In each of the following verses, at what stage of childhood is the “child”: *Genesis 34:19; 37:2* (NASB); and *1 Samuel 4:20–21* (NLT)?

What conclusion about the duration of parenting can you draw from these references? In other words, through which stages of your child’s life are you responsible to train him or her?

“ . . . The Way He Should Go . . . ”

The Hebrew phrase for “the way he should go” can be translated literally, “upon the mouth of his way,” which is an idiom meaning, “in accord with his way.” Most English versions emphasize the word *should*, implying a prescribed and proper direction in which to lead the child. But the Hebrew idiom emphasizes *his way* and *in accord with*, pointing to characteristics that emerge from within the child, namely, his or her personality, abilities, or natural interests. So which interpretation is correct? Should we train a child in the way he or she *should* go? Or according to his or her way?

To help solve the puzzle, let’s return to the question we posed earlier: What does *way* mean in the context of this verse? For a clue to the answer, read Proverbs 22:6 in The Amplified Bible:

*Train up a child in the way he should go [and in keeping with his individual gift or bent],
and when he is old he will not depart from it. (emphasis added)*



Discovering Your Child . . . and Yourself

Proverbs 22:6

In the amplification, the *way* of the child refers to his or her characteristics, manner, or “bent.” Let’s use the *Searching the Scriptures* correlation method to further clarify the meaning.



Correlation: Comparing Verses

Compare *way* in Proverbs 22:6 to the same word in *Proverbs 30:18–19* (NASB). In the space below, write down the phrases in verse 19, and substitute the word *characteristic* for *way* to highlight the metaphorical meaning.

The ways that eagles soar, snakes slither, ships sail, and even the way that a boy romances his sweetheart are all one-of-a-kind wonders. And so is your child!

God has painted with nuance every child according to his or her own color palette. No two are alike; even identical twins are unique. God did not sketch homebody Jacob in the likeness of his twin, outdoorsman Esau. Your children’s personalities, interests, relational styles, strengths, weaknesses are different (not better or worse, just different). Measuring one child against another is like nitpicking a da Vinci painting because it’s not a Rembrandt. Both are masterpieces—and so are your children. So don’t compare siblings.

Pause to put together the interpretation of Proverbs 22:6, as you have discovered it so far. Review the meaning of each part of the verse, and then write a sentence or two in the box below that summarizes God’s plan for parenting.

“Train up (the *what*) . . . a child (the *who*) . . . in the way he should go (the *how*).”



Discovering Your Child . . . and Yourself

Proverbs 22:6

Now the final section, “Even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). The root meaning of the Hebrew word for *old* is “hair on the chin,” which suggests an age of maturity when children become young adults and are able to make it on their own.

The Hebrew word for *depart* means “to turn aside.” When you help your children know their bents, they will follow their “way” and not turn aside from it. Why would they? They are living in harmony with how God made them!

As long as you have a child under your roof, you are responsible for making the things of God palatable, meaningful, important until this young girl or this young boy is of marriageable age. You never stop parenting. Throughout those years we continue to cultivate a taste, to dedicate, to inaugurate, to initiate, to consecrate. We’re giving time to our child during those growing-up years. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: The Starting Place

How can you discover your child today? Start by tuning in to his or her deeds: “It is by his deeds that a lad distinguishes himself” (Proverbs 20:11 NASB). A child speaks through the megaphone of his or her deeds. If you listen, you can hear him or her saying, “This is me. Please notice. I’m not him. I’m not her. Let me be me.” Reflect on what you’ve observed in your child’s deeds. Be sensitive. Watch closely. Listen intently. What have your child’s deeds been communicating lately?



Discovering Your Child . . . and Yourself

Proverbs 22:6

In what ways can you encourage your child's bent—his or her personality, interests, pursuits, possible vocation, relational style, gifts, and strengths?

Discovering your child is an adventure! Don't forget to discover yourself along the way. God has great things in store for your family as you follow His plan for parenting.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me to see Your fingerprints on my child's soul. Your handiwork began at conception, and You continue to shape and mold. Unite me with Your creative work in my child's life—and help me to grow as well, to be the person You made me to be. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Frances Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 335.
2. Chuck used another source to define the word *hanakh* as “dedicate, inaugurate, initiate.” See R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 301.



Discovering Your Child . . . and Yourself

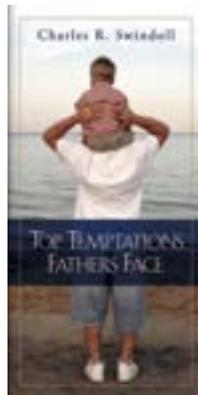
Proverbs 22:6



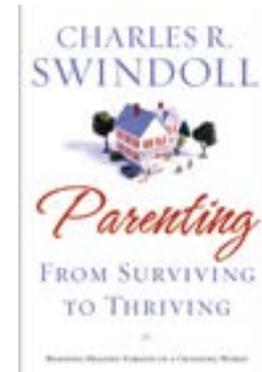
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For the 2020 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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