

The Principle of Nurture

by J. Hampton Keathley III

The sermon emphasizes the importance of nurture in parenting, highlighting the elements of love, instruction, dedication, discipline, and example, and encouraging parents to aim for happy obedience in their children.

Scripture: Proverbs 29:17

Topics: "Christian Parenting", "Child Discipline"

Description

J. Hampton Keathley III preaches on the importance of nurturing children in a way that promotes healthy growth and development, emphasizing the need for happy obedience that stems from a right relationship with God. He discusses the expectations of nurture, highlighting the significance of addressing both attitudes and actions in parenting to cultivate happy obedience. Keathley also delves into the elements of nurture, drawing from Proverbs and Ephesians to outline the essential components of God's training corral, including love, instruction, dedication, discipline, and example.

Transcript

Definition of Nurture

Nurture refers to that environment in which children are to be raised and that brings together, like a corral gate, all the sides and ingredients for the training corral.

In Ephesians 6:4, the words, "bring up," are from the Greek word *ektrefw* which means, "to nurture, nourish, provide for with care that nourishes, feeds, or trains." In other words we are to provide the kind of care that will promote healthy growth and development. Of course, the context is dealing with spiritual and moral development that flows out of a right relationship with God, walking under God's control, but it is the fruit of the loving care of godly parents.

Expectations of Nurture

When we provide the right kind of nurture, when we use God's training corral, we can and should expect both happy and obedient children. Many parents would settle for simply obedience, but happy obedience should be the goal. Happy obedience is not too much to expect. Note the verses above such as Psalm 100:2, "serve the Lord with gladness," and Colossians, "joyously giving thanks to the Father."

In his book, *You and Your Child*, Charles R. Swindoll has an excellent comment regarding attitudes. He writes,

We deal as severely with attitudes in our home as we do with actions. A sullen, stubborn spirit is dealt with as directly as an act of lying or stealing. The way you deal with your sons will, in great measure, determine how they will respond to the way God deals with them.⁴

An illustration: Mother and little Jimmy are in the supermarket and Jimmy sees the inviting candy display (cavity makers) at the checkout stand:

Jimmy: "I want some candy, Mommy."

Mother: "No honey, not today."

Jimmy: "But why? I want some candy. I'm hungry."

Mother: "It's too close to supper and you have had enough candy for today."

Jimmy: "But I want some candy, I WANT some candy . . ."

Mother: "No Jimmy, now come along. Do you hear me?"

And so goes the battle. Jimmy proceeds to flop on the floor crying and kicking his feet, or he grabs a handful of candy anyway. Finally, in desperation and because people are looking, mother says, "Oh all right, have some candy, but come on, I'm in a hurry." Jimmy has manipulated his mother. He has not been made to mind, much less with a happy obedience. He has also learned that if he makes a scene in public, he can get his way.

Not every parent will act the same way to such stubbornness, so children quickly learn what it takes to get what they want. Some will pout and whine; others may cuddle up and bat their eye lashes, but if the parent gives in the results are the same. In any case, these children are not learning happy obedience, submission to authority, nor respect or honor for what is right. Instead they are learning to get their own way and to act selfishly and disrespectfully toward their parent's wishes and wisdom.

Because the disobedience of little children can be cute (at least to their parents and grandparents) the tendency is to laugh and say, "Isn't she cute?" or "Isn't he a mess?" But when we do this (and I find this an even greater temptation now that I am eight times a grandparent), we are helping to reinforce disobedience. Parents need to raise their level of expectation to the point they demand and expect obedience but with a happy face.

Roy Lessin tells this story.

One evening we visited some friends for dinner. After dinner the children ran off to play and we parents visited in the living room. Soon it was time to leave, so I called out and told the children that it was time to go. "Okay daddy," came the quick reply. And within a few seconds both children were in the living room ready with their coats on.

"Did you see that," my friend exclaimed to his wife. "Yes, I did, that's amazing," she replied.

"What's amazing," he asked.

"Your kids," the friend replied. "When you said it was time to go they obeyed without a fuss."⁵

What these friends saw as amazing, the other father had come to expect. This was normal behavior because this father used God's training corral.

God wants children to be happy. Happiness is part of the blessing God wants for our children. God also wants children to be obedient. This is God's order and plan, and it's important to realize that disobedient children are never truly happy. These two things go together. Happy obedience includes both happy attitudes and obedient actions.

The Elements of Nurture

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

Ephesians 6:4 And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up (nourish them) in the discipline (training, nurture) and instruction of the Lord.

What kind of nurture or training provides those ingredients that, when properly brought together act like a corral to contain, control, and train children so they joyfully obey? Scripture promises and teaches that children can be a blessing. Parents do not have to wait in anxious concern and fear in anticipation of those 'horrible teenage years.' But neither can they wait until those teenage years to apply the principles of the training corral. So what are the biblical ingredients that make up God's training corral? Though each will be discussed in the material that follows, God's training corral contains five necessary sides: love (the all-important context), instruction (the vital content), dedication (of parent and child), discipline (in words and actions), and example (parental reality).

Let's note a few key verses:

(1) Proverbs 29:17 Correct your son, and he will give you comfort, He will also delight your soul.

"Correct" is the Hebrew *yasar*, which means "to admonish, discipline, instruct." It is correction in the form of admonishment, discipline, or instruction that results in education, true understanding. As used in the Old Testament, this word spoke of chastening, correcting, instructing, and providing all that is necessary for the training of children. But all of these ideas are to be expressions of interpersonal relationships of love and caring. This word is used of God's loving care with Israel and of a father with a son (cf. Deut. 8:1-5).⁶ The general promise God gives for correcting a child is comfort, rest, and delight. To "correct" is to apply the training corral.

(2) Proverbs 19:18 Discipline your son while there is hope, And do not desire his death.

A better translation is "because there is hope" or "confident expectation." Compare Job 11:18 and 14:7 where we have the very same construction, but where it is translated, "because there is hope."

"There is" in the Hebrew refers to the idea of absolute existence. God is telling us this is an absolute of God's Word to be believed and applied. This is a promise, not merely a warning.

"And do not desire his death" is literally "but unto his death do not lift up your soul." With this second clause, we have a slight problem of interpretation. There are two possible views: (a) It provides a warning against improper discipline, such as discipline out of revenge, impatience, or uncontrolled anger. In this case we would translate it, "but do not be carried away (i.e., in your discipline) unto his death." Or, (b) the second clause provides a warning against the consequences of leniency. Derek Kidner, in his

commentary on Proverbs, titles this verse "deadly leniency."⁷ By their translations, the ASV, KJV, NIV, NASB, and other versions seem to understand this second clause in this way, though NASB could be taken in the sense of the first interpretation. "To lift up the soul" is a Hebrew idiom that means, "to will or desire something, to set one's heart or volition on something." (The NIV "do not be a willing party to his death." NASB "do not desire his death".)

The second clause provides a contrast to the first. To neglect discipline because of a lack of confidence in God's methods, or because of the pain the child's crying brings, or because of the parent's laziness, or sentimentality, or whatever, is in essence to desire the child's death. Leniency allows attitudes and behavior patterns to grow that could cause a child's death because of his lack of discipline and spiritual controls. Far better should the child cry under loving and healthy correction than the parents should cry under the bitter fruit of a failure to discipline (cf. Prov. 23:13-14).

(3) Ephesians 6:4 And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

"Discipline" refers broadly to the whole process of training, but particularly in the form of discipline. "Instruction" is a word which literally means to put sense in the mind. It refers to encouragement by words and assurances if that is needed or to admonishment if that is needed.

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

In this one little verse there is a command to obey, "train up," and a promise to claim, "and when he is old (mature) he will not depart from it." In this we have both God's charge and His promise to every parent. Parents need to know what this means and believe and trust in its methods. The issue, of course, is knowing what the verse says and fulfilling the command. May I suggest that this verse means far more than what immediately meets the eye and nothing at all of what most think. The verse is not talking about mere forced parental conformity. It is not saying, send your children to Sunday school or have them memorize the Ten Commandments and everything will work out. It goes much deeper than that.

The word "train" is the Hebrew *chanak* which, according to its usage in ancient times, had four important ideas that are instructive for understanding and illustrating God's training corral. Obviously, the context must determine how *chanak* is being used in any given context, but the various uses do provide some striking suggestions and illustrations of what is involved in training.

First, *chanak* could mean "to dedicate." It was used four other times in the Old Testament and in each case the primary idea is to inaugurate something through a service of dedication which usually involved sacrifice (Deut. 20:5 [twice], 1 Kings 8:63; and 2 Chron. 7:5). More will be said on this below under the aspect of a parent's dedication to raising children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Second, another idea in *chanak* is "to throttle, make narrow, or discipline." In Arabic, a sister language, this word was used of a rope in a horse's mouth, like a bit in a bridle to make the animal submissive and bring it under control. This certainly illustrates how training includes the use of discipline, the application of external controls, in order to bring a child under control, which ultimately means God's control.

Third, another idea in *chanak* is of that of "instruction." How does it get this meaning? In its most fundamental meaning it meant "to initiate, start," or "introduce someone to something or to someone."⁸ From that it came to have the idea of "to train" because in instruction, we are introducing our children to

God and to His Word and starting them in God's path or way of life.

Fourth, another idea in chanak is to "initiate, create an appetite." This source was from outside the Old Testament, but at least by way of illustration it has application to the process of training.⁹ The word actually meant, "palate, roof of the mouth." Related to the basic idea of initiation was its later use in Arabic of the action of a midwife who would rub the palate of a newborn with olive oil or the oil of crushed dates in order to give a taste, to create an appetite and get the baby to suckle. Certainly, one of the necessary ingredients in training children is that of giving children a taste of the reality of God by the model or example of the parent. We can't expect our children to be real with God if we are phonies. They pick up on our attitudes and patterns whether we like it or not. What we are is vital, indeed, even determinative to what they become.

4 Roy Lessin, How to be Parents of Happy and Obedient Children, Omega Publications, Medford, OR, 1978, p. 81, quoting Charles R. Swindoll in, You and Your Child.

5 Lessin, pp. 55-56.

6 Theological Word Book of the Old Testament, R. Laird Harris, editor, Gleason L. Archer and Jr. Bruce K. Waltke, associate editors, Vol. I, Moody Press, Chicago, 1980, p. 387.

7 Derek Kidner, Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Tyndale Press, London, 1964, p. 134.

8 Theological Word Book of the Old Testament, Vol. I, p. 301.

9 A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, editors, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1907, p.335.

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