



TIME OF GRACE®

Leave No One Behind: Start Young

Study Notes

Summary

Based on Proverbs chapter 22, Deuteronomy chapter 6, Ephesians chapter 6, and Colossians chapter 3, this message reminds parents of what matters most—the training up of their children. What you do when they are young will probably shape what they believe when they are older. So, what should you do? God gave Moses the answer. Seek God with a personal passion, based off his unbeatable promises, and then talk about that God as often as you can.

- **Proverbs 22:6:** Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.
- Start _____.
- **Ephesians 6:4:** Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.
- Three ways to exasperate kids
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
- Give them _____!

Points to Ponder

1. Why do you think God has called fathers to lead their homes spiritually? (Hint: Consider the impact of a father, for better or worse, on a child's idea of God being "our Father.")
2. Study Deuteronomy 6:4-9. What connections do you see between these words and today's message? What additional insights do these verses give?

3. Write down the names of three fathers you know from church. What could you do this week to encourage them to embrace the sacred calling of training up their children to know and love Jesus?

Homework for Next Week

Read 2 Timothy 1:1-7.

“There is nothing more important to consistent, faithful, patient, loving, and effective parenting than to understand what God has given you in the grace of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

—Paul David Tripp, *Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family*

Time of Grace Ministry
Leave No One Behind: Start Young
Proverbs 22:6, Ephesians 6:4
February 9, 2020

Pastor Mike Novotny

Despite the fact that we have spent so much time and so much energy on the next generation, do you know that Generation Z is the least Christian generation in American history?

There is a picture in my office that keeps me passionate about the next generation. I brought that picture with me to show you and I even took a picture of the picture just in case you're sitting in the back. Here's my picture. This is my firstborn daughter, Brooklyn; one of my favorite pictures taken when she was just two years old. When we put on that cute little black and white dress, dragged her off to the mall, took pictures with her and her sister, she probably freaked out right after this picture was done but we got a good one and we captured her in all her two year old beauty.

My daughter, because she was born in the year 2008, is an official member of the next generation - what some people call Gen Z; those born between 1996 and 2012. As a dad, if there's one thing I want more than anything else in this life, is that my daughter sees the face of God. And if there's one fear I have more than anything else, is the thought that she wouldn't.

And I have a feeling that many of you feel the same way. Whether you're a father, a mother, a grandparent, an older brother or sister, whether you're the boyfriend, the girlfriend, the coworker, the teammate, the classmate, I bet you have a picture - if not in your office or your home, at least in your heart - of someone from the next generation that you really care about. And if you're a follower of Jesus like me and believe the best thing in the world for anyone is to know Jesus and be just infatuated with Jesus and give their life to follow Jesus, I know you want the same thing for the next gen as I do: That they would fear, love and trust in God with their whole heart.

So my question for you today is how do we get there? Despite the fact that we have spent so much time and so much energy on the next generation, do you know that Generation Z is the least Christian generation in American history? It's not just that the kids, you know, get a job or they're playing high school sports and they miss a Sunday or two. It's not just that they go off to college and, you know, life gets crazy and they disconnect from the church but then they have kids and come back. Did you know statistically one in three college students - 33 percent - say that they don't pray ever? They don't go to church at all and they don't even believe there is a God. Jesus once said it would break the heart of our heavenly Father if he had 99 sheep in his flock and just one wandered. So how would he feel when it wasn't one but thirty-three?

And before you think it's like some campus culture or some anti-Christian professor that shakes our children, did you know that one in four kids will make that same confession that they don't pray, they don't go to worship, they don't believe there is a God; one in four during their high school and teenage years. And that might seem like some dry statistic but that's why I left this picture up here because that's this generation. This is your younger brother, your younger sister,

your grandson, my daughter. These are the kids that sit next to us in church and that attend our Christian schools and come to the programs. These are the kids we're talking about; one in four, one in three, who perhaps one day will say there isn't even a God. What God has to say to us today is the most important thing for older generations to know so the next generation can be infatuated with God.

So today, I want to tell you what that thing is with just two passages; one from the Old Testament and one from the New. And while there are no guarantees in the next generation, we can't force anyone to believe anything, this is the best chance we have to connect the next gen with Jesus. So here's the first passage I want to share with you. It comes from Proverbs 22. It says, "Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it." Train a child, the Bible says. The best thing in the world for an older generation to do is not to wait until they're college age or high school age, driver's license, or even a teenager, but to train up the next generation when they are children. If I was going to summarize this passage in a two-word sentence, I'd have you write it down in your program, it'd be this: Start young. Raising a child is kind of like pouring cement and it's messy and it's difficult but you can shape that cement when it's first poured. It gets much, much harder as the time and the years go by.

Now there's three things I want to tell you specifically about this passage and the first one is to tell you that this is a proverb and not a promise. Many Christian parents and grandparents are kind of confused with this passage because they did bring their kids to church and they did read the kid's Bibles at home and they did teach their children to pray before every meal but then they kind of wandered and they strayed away from it. And that's why it's really important for you to know the Proverbs in the Bible are not like 100 percent guaranteed promises; they're just wise probabilities. Has anyone every taught you that? Proverbs are not promises; they're probabilities. Like we say the early bird gets the worm. It's not a promise like you're guaranteed to get rich if you get up early and do hard work in the morning. Sometimes lazy people sleep until 10:00, buy a lottery ticket, and they get a lot of worms. But normally, when it comes to being successful, what does it take? You avoid laziness and you work hard; that's what the Proverbs are. So parents, if one of your kids has strayed from Jesus, please don't feel guilty. God knows the effort that you put in, he knows how much you care, and he knows how hard you tried. God is a perfect Father and the bulk of his children have turned away from him. And it's not because of a flaw in his character; it's because of free will. And so we do our best and we pray that the Proverb's true and probable, so if we train our children in the way that they should go they won't turn from it.

A time is coming when they meet someone who's incredibly kind, who doesn't believe there is a God. And whether the kindness of that friend draws them away from the cross of Jesus or just reminds them that people believe different things in this world will depend if they've been trained. And I could give you a thousand more examples. They'll have an opportunity for a promotion, their first paycheck will be put into their hands, someone will say, "You want to party with us?" Someone will offer them a drug that will lead to another that will lead to a third that will lead to an overdose. And all of it depends, that race, on how they've been trained.

Let me suggest just one practical tip to train up our kids. It's a little game that I call "This and That." This and That is just my way of taking all the really good things that happen during the

day or all the really bad things that happen as an excuse to talk about God. Some of you who've been listening to my teaching for a while know that I love the word "this." It's like my one word cue to think if this food, if this joke, if this show, if this experience, if this movie, if this moment, if this vacation, if this sight, if this sound, if this can make me feel this good, just imagine what it's going to be like to see the face of God? Like this is some pop star, this is some human director, this is some chef who made this food. If this can make us feel so good can you imagine, kids, how good it's going to be to see the face of God? Parents, this is a reason that we don't have to wait until Sunday to talk about Jesus. We can use all the good meals, we can use all the amazing toys, we can watch a funny clip on YouTube that can have an amazing goal, the celebration, all the good things in life can just be your excuse to talk about the best thing in life; the presence of God.

And "that" are for the other days. That is my one word reminder that that pain, that frustration, that suffering, that grief, will never happen again when we see the face of God. When we go to a funeral for grandma or grandpa and our hearts are heavy, when marriage doesn't make it and we really wish we could go back five years. When the kids are cruel at school, when everyone on Instagram and Snapchat is having a party and you didn't even know there was one and you definitely weren't invited. For all the heartbreaking moments, we can say, "But that will never happen with God." And we can make our kids long for the things that last and for the God whose love is unfailing. Mom, Dad, Grandma, Grandpa, I don't care what you do - this, that, or some other thing - but train up a child in the way they should go because it's probable that when they're old, they won't turn from it.

So that's the first thing God wants you to hear today. But did you know statistically, the next passage I'm about to share is the most powerful? When they do the surveys and they run the data and they talk to the kids who stuck with the church and the ones who didn't, do you know what the number one factor is that keeps a kid connected? I'll show you in Ephesians 6: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children." Which sounds bad, doesn't it? Don't exasperate. And to help the current fathers and the future fathers here not make that same mistake, I'm going to show you three things that I think are really common among Christian dads; three ways we can exasperate our kids. So if you're filling in the blanks, here's the first one - by hypocrisy. It can scar a kid spiritually when his Christian dad is a hypocrite. Do you know what a hypocrite is? A hypocrite is not a Christian dad who struggles with sin. In fact, it's not a Christian dad who really, really struggles with sin. The word hypocrite in Greek literally means an actor. The hypocrites in Greek drama were the men who would come on stage and they'd be wearing masks so what they look like on the outside was not exactly how they looked on the inside. And hypocrisy is deadly for the Christian church. Fathers, when you come to church and you fake it, your kids see it. If you're a different man and have a different tone when you're in this place instead of the place where you spend most of your time, your kids hear it. And they are learning very, very quickly; they're soaking up this message like a little sponge whether church is the place where you fake it or you're real about it. Where we talk about the things that are actually happening in our home or where we smile, shake the pastor's hand, and lie to his face?

So dads, I want to tell you this: You don't have to be a perfect man to come to church. In fact, according to the Bible, you don't even have to be a good man. You could be the worst sinner that you know but here's my plea: Don't fake it. If things are not good at home, tell us. If you

had a fight and everyone was screaming at each other in the car when you pulled into the church parking lot - whew – you took a deep breath, walked through the doors, and I said, "Hey! How are you doing?" Tell me the truth. Because if you say, "Good, Pastor, how are you?" That kid's going to look at me; he's going to be like, "What? No." "Dad, were you in the same car that I was in?" But he's not going to say that. What he's going to do is he's going to learn; when the pastor's there, you lie to him. The church is the place where you don't talk about the bad stuff. Dads, I'm begging you, don't do that.

If you have anger problems at home, tell us. If things aren't going well in your marriage, tell us. If you drink too much, if you swear too much, if you're so infatuated with work that you're forgetting about the things at home, tell us. When you come to group, when you come to a Bible study, when you walk in a church, we want your kids to know and they're listening and they're watching that when they mess something up really badly, this is the best place in the world to come. This is the place where we don't give people moral lectures on just being better; this is a place where we raise up the cross of Jesus and we say there's forgiveness for that, too. So please, don't hide. You come here a mess; you shed tears in this place. You cry out for help. We would love to help - don't be a hypocrite; be real. Dads, sometimes you can only impress one person when you walk into a church but don't let that person be the pastor. Let it be the kid God gave you!

There's a second thing I want you to avoid - no love. If there's something this next generation values way more than my generation or the older generations that came before us, and that's love. Gen Z has an incredible antenna up for compassion, for tolerance, for listening, and for loving people who are not like us. They're the most diverse generation in American history; the most religiously diverse, the most diverse sexually, the most diverse with everything. When it comes to gender, when it comes to politics, they have an incredible like passion and love for people who don't fit the mold of their parents or grandparents. And so if our kids come home and they hear from us, just like this crotchety, Christian attitude towards the world, towards people who aren't straight, or people who don't vote in this way, or people who don't belong in this religion, guess what our kids will probably choose? To love the people that we don't. And so when we talk about the transgender men and women in our community, when we open our mouth and speak about the government and Trump and Pelosi, when we're talking about the Muslims who live next door or the Hindus at work, our kids are listening. You don't have to agree with everything; you don't have to believe everything is right but God so loved the world that he gave his Son and he wants us to love them, too. So I pray that your heart would be filled with compassion, with humility, with the willingness to listen and learn before you speak. If Christianity was meant to be defined by the way we love each other, let's let our children see that. Let our homes, behind closed doors, not just what we post publicly but what we say at the dinner table, let it be defined by love.

Number three: I want to caution you about being a father who is all law. Many, many, many, many Christian dads make this mistake; that they think if they can keep their kid to like know the commandments and not drink and not have sex before they're married, I've succeeded as a father. And those things aren't bad; they're just not what Christianity is really about. There are many religions that talk about self-control and kindness and compassion and humility but there is only one that talks about a cross and an empty tomb. And so when we discipline our children, the

goal is not just to get them to be nicer to their brother or sister; the goal is to get them to know there is forgiveness when we're not. And guys, if you ever worked for a boss who always just like raised the bar of expectations and you always had to be better and work harder and make more for the company, you know it's exhausting and, eventually, you leave. And if all our kids know about the Christian faith is that there's these rules and laws and you should be nicer and better and more humble and more gentle and don't talk like that and don't drink that and don't smoke that and don't sleep with her and don't go back to his house, like if that's all this is, that burden will crush our kids and they'll run from it. And so, make sure when we discipline, it doesn't end with the law. We take God's standards very seriously but our final word always as Christians is, "But you know that God loves you, right? And you know Jesus went to the cross for that, right?" Fathers, be careful. God's given us an incredible responsibility but it is easily sabotaged. Don't exasperate your children.

Instead, if we go back to Ephesians 6:4, the apostle Paul says, "Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." Okay, dads, here's the good part: We get to bring up our kids to know the Lord Jesus. What we can offer them is better than anything their friends, their professors of this world could ever dare to give them. We can bring them up to know the unconditional presence, power, and grace of God. If I was going to summarize Paul's teaching just with a couple words, it would be this - my last fill in the blank - to give them Jesus. Don't just give them church, don't just give them "here's what you say before you eat the first bite of your chicken nuggets." Don't just say the 27 words or whatever we say every night before we go to bed. Give them Jesus. Give them a Jesus who's so big and so beautiful and so wonderful that even if their other friends don't believe it, they'll wish that they did because we have a Savior unlike any other.

That's the Savior that a pastor that I know gave to his son. And it was on the day that his son told him that he had gotten his girlfriend pregnant. If you don't know, being a pastor's kid is not easy. Whether we intend it or not, sometimes people in a church expect a lot; they expect the pastor's kids to be perfect, to never get drunk, to never sleep around, to never look at porn, to never swear, to never talk back. And so when they do, when they sin like all of us do, it can be hard. And that's why this pastor's son was afraid. I mean, he messed up - he was going to get engaged, and get married, you know, do things in God's order - but he didn't and she got pregnant and they couldn't hide it. And they knew they had to tell his father, they had to tell his mother, but they didn't know how to say it. And so one day, they just sat down at the kitchen table and it came out: "We're pregnant." And they expected the worst. What they didn't expect was Jesus. The father's gut reaction was not a lecture, it was not to scold him, it was not to say, "What will people think of me? What will happen to my ministry?" His gut reaction was to give his son the grace of God. And this father got up and he was just a dad who wrapped his arms around his kid in incredible compassion and he loved him. And he brought him back to the cross of Jesus. He led him there; the same place where he found his own forgiveness. And this mother didn't look at her future daughter-in-law in judgment, "You messed with our Christian family." Instead, she embraced her in love. And then the wedding day came and her family, who's not Christian, expected the worst, right? The judgmental, holier than thou, we're better than you Christians. And they were surprised to find something else; to find Jesus. This wasn't like an illegitimate child; it was a child. One that they loved and one that God loved.

And dads, this is what we get to do with our kids every single day. When they cross God's boundaries and lines and break his rules in big ways and small, when they can hide the consequence and when they can't, we get to bring them back to Jesus. I love doing this with my kids. I love it when they're crying and they feel sorry and they're sad and they don't even want to look you in the eye. You get to tell them, "Hey, daddy loves you and more importantly, God loves you." You can do this when a kid stubbornly pushes his little sippy cup off the end of that plastic tray for the seventeenth time and you have to say, "That's not how we respond when mommy tells you to do something but Jesus forgives you." We can do this when the kid throws the tantrum and he finally calms down and you can talk and you can say, "That's not how we behave in our family but Jesus forgives you." When a kid gets his first device and you find something in the search history you wish wouldn't happened until 10 years down the road, you can say, "This is toxic for your soul but I want you to know that Jesus still forgives you." And this digital age where so many of the next generation feel anxious that they won't be invited to the party, be included, that their reputation will be gone with one comment that all of their classmates see, we get to tell them something ridiculously amazing; that there is a Jesus whose love is so profound and so deep that he always wants us. He always listens to us. He always chooses us, he always includes us. The boys might come and go, the job opportunities might be offered or taken away, but there is a God whose love never fails, who never leaves us, and never forsakes us. This is the God we get to give to our kids. So together, let's beat the odds. The statistics do not inspire hope but we don't have to be shaped by the statistics and the stories and what the average American does. We can follow these passages and reap the benefit.

So let me speak very directly to you for a second: If you're a dad here today, a grandfather, would you stand up for just one second? And if you're a guy, let's say, who's under 40 and you think maybe one day in your future you'd like to have a kid years down the road, would you stand up and join the fathers among us? Alright guys, let me tell you something that the world will not: It's better to be mediocre at work. I feel really, really blessed that right before I started my career as a pastor, which burns men out and turns many of them into bad fathers, my home pastor gave me this advice: Don't work too much. As much as you love your church, as much as you love your people, people come and go from our careers. Not everyone from your church will come to your funeral but every one of your kids will. So dads, let me tell you the same thing. If you have to disappoint someone, let it be the boss who only hired you so you can make him money. Don't let it be the kids who will only ever have one biological father. So I give you permission - in fact, I ask you in the name of Jesus Christ - to be mediocre and average and unimpressive. I give you permission to not win the award, to not be first team, to not be noticed by your colleagues. I give you permission to be regular at work so you can be a rock star at home. And one day, many years from now, as the next generation is gathered around your bed, they won't talk about the award you won or that you trip you got for so many sales. They'll talk about the times you talked to them about Jesus. Guys, be great at home. We only get one chance and with the help of God, we can.

Alright, brothers, you can sit down and I want all the rest of you to stand up. So mothers, sisters, older men, if you didn't stand up before you should be standing up now. You can't opt out of my little exercise here. Alright ladies, let me tell you something that the guys standing up never will: They can't do it without you. As men, we crave being respected and it's much, much easier to be respected at work than it is at home. At work, people only see a little bit of us but at home

you see all of us. At work, there are awards and trophies and prizes but we don't get that at home and so we need you. We need you to remind us that every time we come back to our house, every time we say no to an opportunity to love our kids, we made the right choice. We need you to remind us when eternity comes what's going to matter more than anything else. We need you to pray for us, we need you to text Scripture to us, we need you to remind us that the little souls that God has put in our care are the greatest job we will have in our entire lives. And more than anything, we need you to remind us that we have a Father, too. A Father who forgives us when we mess up as dads. A Father who has patience with us when we get things backwards at work. A Father who's incredibly compassionate when we don't get this whole work-life thing down as well as we should. There's a Father that we can come back to every day. Would you lead us to the cross of Jesus where we can find the strength that we need to be great dads?

Ladies, why don't you have a seat because this is coming; a decade, like that; another decade is that close. And I hope one day when the 35 wrinkles on my face, which Brooklyn counted again when I put her to bed, when they double and triple, I pray that her knowledge of God's compassion and love has doubled and tripled, too. It's not going to be easy but it will be beautiful and with the help of God, it will work. Let's ask for his blessing and pray that God makes us different and that this next generation loves Jesus even more than we do.

Let's pray.

Dear God, thank you for loving us so much. For some of us who didn't have great fathers who modeled compassion and grace for us, it's kind of hard to believe how good you are. And so, I pray that every Sunday - in fact, every day that we open up your word - that we realize that you are so faithful and you are so good and you are everything that our hearts really crave. God, help us to find all the affirmation that we need in the fact that you, as a Father in heaven, have chosen us to be your kids.

And now I pray for all of us who care about the next generation, for our nieces and nephews, for the kids in our class or the people that we're dating. God, we don't want to take anything from them; we want to give everything to them. We want them to have a rock to stand on. We want them to know a Jesus who is full of unconditional love and forgiveness and, for that, we need your help - to know what job we should take, to know which career we should pursue, to have the strength to say no to a boss that we really love if they were pleased with us. To be wise about how many hours another project, another client, another opportunity will cost us at home. God, we need so much wisdom and you've promised that if we lack wisdom, we can reach out to you and you'll give it. And so we pray, God, make us wise, make us passionate about your name and about your glory. God, we pray that your name would be hallowed among us and your kingdom would come. So work through our efforts. Bless every father who is here today and thank you, God, for every father who is because we know they're pursuing you and they want their kids to do the same.

We ask this with confidence and hope because you've said that if we call upon you in the day of trouble, you will deliver us. So deliver us, God. Connect our kids, the next gen, to Jesus. We pray in his powerful name, Amen.