

**Intro:**

Turn to Pr 22.6.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Proverbs 22.6** Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.

I have talked to parents over the years of my ministry about their sons and daughters. I have heard things like this:

- “Of course my daughter is saved, she prayed ‘the prayer’ when she was a girl.”
- “I know my kids will come back to the Lord, I raised them in the church.”
- “I trained my son in the way of the Lord, I know he will come back to it.”

Obviously, statements like this have a lot of heartbreak in the background.

Often when statements like this are made about children, it is accompanied by a citation of Pr 22.6, offering it as proof against all the evidence to the contrary notwithstanding.

One writer put it this way: “This proverb has brought encouragement, hope, anxiety and guilt to countless parents who have faced the uncertainty and confusion of child-rearing.”<sup>1</sup>

Dan Phillips fills 25 pages on the verse in his book, and begins with this: “The question I mean to pose and answer is: Is this verse a promise, or a warning?”<sup>2</sup> Or, I would add, “neither”?

Our subject is:

## Train Up a Child

**Proposition:** The path of life, once commenced, remains the path of life to the end – usually.

### I. The various interpretations of the verse

#### A. Comparing translations

<sup>1</sup> Ted Hildebrandt, “Proverbs 22:6a: Train Up a Child?,” *Grace Theological Journal* 9 (Spring 1988): 3.

<sup>2</sup> Dan Phillips, *God’s Wisdom in Proverbs* (Kress Christian Publications, 2011), 354.

KJV Pr 22.6 Train up a child in the way he should go:  
and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

NKJ Pr 22.6 Train up a child in the way he should go,  
And when he is old he will not depart from it.

NAU Pr 22.6 Train up a child in the way he should go,  
Even when he is old he will not depart from it.

ESV Pr 22.6 Train up a child in the way he should go;  
even when he is old he will not depart from it.

NIV Pr 22.6 Train a child in the way he should go,  
and when he is old he will not turn from it.

### Dan Phillips woodenly literal:

Initiate for-the-child on-the-mouth-of his-way  
even-when he-is-old he-will-not-turn from-it.

1. 'Train up' vs. 'Initiate' — will need to clarify meaning here

Will discuss this shortly

2. 'his-way' vs. 'the way he should go' — the idea that the way is the positive way of godliness is assumed by the translators

### B. Five views

#### 1. The **Promise** View

“The majority view sees Proverbs 22.6 as a promise that, if a parent will train a child well, that child will stay with that training.”<sup>3</sup>

a. The majority view

b. View of the translators (generally)

#### 2. The **Age-Appropriate** View

“This view advocates the position that a child’s upbringing should be age-sensitive. Do not expect a teenager’s

<sup>3</sup> Phillips, *God’s Wisdom in Proverbs*, 357.

capabilities in a toddler. Keep the child's level of understanding and ability in mind."<sup>4</sup>

If you do this well, the child will not depart from his training.

### 3. Adaptive Training View

"If you want your training to be godly and wise, then you must observe your child, be sensitive and alert so as to discover his way, and adapt your training accordingly."<sup>5</sup>

- a. "Child-centered" approach to child rearing
- b. Fatal flaw: 'train up a child according to his own inclinations and he won't depart from his own inclinations' — nonsensical

### 4. Warning View

- a. This is Phillips' view (and Jay Adams as well)
- b. Phillips' paraphrase of the verse
  - 1) Literal:  
Initiate for-the-child on-the-mouth-of his-way even-when he-is-old he-will-not-turn from-it.
  - 2) Translation:  
Start out a youth according to his own way; even should he grow old, he will not turn away from it.
  - 3) Interpretive Paraphrase:  
Start out a youth after his own chosen way — and he will never grow out of it.<sup>6</sup>
- c. Phillips' calls this an 'ironic imperative'
  - 1) It's the "Go ahead, make my day" view
  - 2) "Go ahead, raise a child according to his self-centered way and you will never break him of it."
  - 3) As such, it is a warning to indulgent parents

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<sup>4</sup> Phillips, 361.

<sup>5</sup> Phillips, 365.

<sup>6</sup> Phillips, 367.

#### d. Key problems with Phillips' view

- 1) He states, but does not really prove, that the child's way is "his chosen way" [pp. 359-360, 370-371]
- 2) He states, but does not prove, that the 'turning' is turning from evil to good: *i.e., he will not turn from evil to good.* [p. 372]
- 3) He states, but does not prove, that we must take this verse as ironical [pp. 373ff.]

#### 5. My suggestion: the **Proverbial** View

That is, we'll take this proverb as a proverb. How about that?

## II. The meaning of the terms in the verse

Initiate for-the-child on-the-mouth-of his-way  
even-when he-is-old he-will-not-turn from-it.

### A. Train up = **Initiate**

1. Used only 5 times in 4 verses in OT
2. Every other use has to do with some kind of building as the object of the verb
3. Train-up your house! (Dt 20.5)
  - a. Translated 'dedicate'
  - b. Verse speaks of an exemption from war
    - 1) New 'undedicated' house (5)
    - 2) New 'unharvested' vineyard (6)
    - 3) New 'unmarried' wife – marriage not 'initiated' (7)
  - c. It is not that the house needs a 'dedication ceremony': that is no reason to exempt from war
    - 1) A ceremony could be dealt with fairly quickly and the man be off
    - 2) The idea is that the house may be built, but it is not set up, not equipped, not lived in, not 'initiated' or 'started'

#### 4. Train-up your temple! (1 Ki 8:63, 2 Chr 7:5)

- a. Verses speak of Solomon ‘dedicating’ the temple
- b. Really, Solomon was inaugurating it into its use as a temple, he was putting it into operation

**hānak** —“The verb occurs infrequently (five times) with the object ‘house,’ either private (Deut 20:5) or religious (e.g. 1 Kgs 8:63). Although usually rendered ‘dedicate’ a more accurate translation is ‘begin’ or ‘initiate.’ See Prov 22:6 for *hānak* translated as ‘train’ (a child).<sup>7</sup>

“*hānak* is best understood as ‘inaugurate.’ There is not in the term itself the notion that dedication is to someone or to something, though that concept is present in the synonyms. With one exception (Prov 22:6, where the meaning is ‘start’; cf. neb), *hānak* and its derivatives refer to an action in connection with structures such as a building (1 Kgs 8:63), wall (Neh 12:27), an altar (Num 7:10), or an image (Dan 3:2).

“*hānak* is almost certainly a community action which in the case of cult structures involves offerings. The ceremony of dedication (*hānūkkâ*) for Solomon’s altar extended over seven days (2 Chr 7:9). Dedication of Solomon’s temple as well as the temple at Ezra’s time was marked by numerous sacrifices (1 Kgs 8:63; Ezr 6:17).

“Judging from Israelite practice, the initial use of a religious structure was given special significance. The completion of a project was observed with an inauguration of the structure, an event appropriately accompanied by sacrifice and joy. Rites of inauguration have their place.”<sup>8</sup>

You know the noun from the same root: *hānūkkâ*, that is, Hanukkah. It refers to the celebration after rededicating the

<sup>7</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, “693 הָנַךְ,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 301.

<sup>8</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, “693 הָנַךְ,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 301.

temple when it had been defiled by Antiochus Epiphanies. Jesus celebrated Hanukkah in Jn 10.22.

Thus: word seems better to be “initiate, inaugurate, start,” rather than “train”

5. We can translate: ‘Inaugurate’, ‘initiate’, ‘dedicate’, or ‘start’: ‘Train up’ is still OK, but it doesn’t have the idea of ‘start’

## B. Child = naïve or untrained

### 1. Wide range of meanings

- a. From a babe in the womb
- b. To a young man (Joseph at 17)
- c. In Proverbs, the child is parallel to ‘the gullible’ (1.4, 7.7)

### 2. The emphasis is on immaturity and impressionable

## C. In the = On-the-mouth-of (according-to-the-mouth-of)

### 1. Idiomatic expression

- a. Some relate this word to an Arabic root
- b. Root idea of Arabic word is mothers getting a child used to solid food by rubbing their gums with the juice of a date

Or, as I have heard preachers say, mothers chewing the baby’s food first, then ‘touching the palate’ of the baby with the mashed up stuff as they are weaning them.

- c. Problem: no idea if this word is related to the Arabic root!

### 2. Scriptural uses

- a. Literal: ‘mouth’
- b. According to the mouth of a sword (Gen 34.26) – *i.e.*, killed ‘with the edge of a sword’
- c. According to the mouth of the years (Lev 27.18) – calculations based on ‘years remaining till Jubilee’
- d. According to the mouth of his way // On the mouth of his way [here, Pr 22.6] – *i.e.*, in the beginning of his way as it opens up before him

We could say it means “start him at the start of his way”

Idiom = **at the start**

D. His-way (The way = **His way**)

1. Not, the way he chooses or the way he should go
2. But simply, ‘his way’
3. Two ways in Proverbs; could be either one
  - a. Context cannot determine which
  - b. Ambiguity likely intended [more later]

E. He-will-not-turn (He will not depart = he will not **turn**)

1. Turn from evil to good? Turn from good to evil?
2. Context cannot determine which
3. Ambiguity likely intended [more later]

### III. The importance of starting out well

A. We have been teaching about the **proverbial** nature of proverbs

1. A proverb is something that is generally true
2. A proverb is not necessarily universally true
3. Some proverbs say opposite things and both are true – as proverbs
  - a. Not declarative sentences
  - b. Insight into general state of things
4. Ambiguity is a big part of proverbial use
  - a. Proverbs can have multiple applications
  - b. Not a declarative sentence

B. The lad who is initiated in evil at the mouth of his way will tend to **evil**

1. The course of life is set on a bad path
2. Bad consequences lie in store
3. It is very hard to turn this lad to the right, even if he becomes a man – mature in body, crooked in soul

- C. The lad who is initiated into good at the mouth of his way will tend to **good**
1. The course of his life is set on a good path
  2. Good consequences lie in store
  3. It is hard to turn this lad away from the right path (but not impossible)
    - a. The 'not impossible' is not in our proverb – but it is true
    - b. Sin nature can trap a man in his maturity if he lets his guard down
- D. **Usually**
- E. **Grace** is needed for both
1. The lad who is initiated in evil needs God's grace to change his path (such were some of you)
  2. The lad who is initiated into good needs God's grace to stay on the path (all of you who profess faith stand in this spot)
  3. The more exercised you are in the good path, and the earlier (at the mouth of your way), the likelier you will be to stay on the way

### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** The path of life, once commenced, remains the path of life to the end – usually.

When it comes to raising children, it helps to set them on the right path.

And it hurts to set them on the wrong path.

This is the proverbial view of the proverb: I think it fills out the meaning fully.