

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

Proverbs 22:6

Where have all the fathers gone?

Long time passing.

Where have all the fathers gone?

Long time ago.

Where have all the fathers gone?

Time has stolen every one.

When will they ever learn?

When will they ever learn?

I like being a dad. I'm still a dad. We never stop being parents, do we? I like being a grandfather, and I have a story to show you why.

The Franklin Institute in Philadelphia had a dinosaur exhibit that ran through the end of April. My two granddaughters had enjoyed the smaller dinosaur exhibit at the Delaware Museum of Natural History on Kennett Pike. They really liked the idea of seeing even more and bigger dinosaurs. Carole and I agreed to take them during their Easter vacation. There was a snag. Carole felt bad and didn't want to go. Hmmm?!?! Do I take them myself or not? I decided to do it.

I buckled them into the back seat, and before we left, I prayed with the girls that God would take care of us. And off we went. "Are we there yet?" "No. It's going to take a while, but I have an idea. Let's sing." We launched into "Old Macdonald." Boy, do we get a lot of mileage out of that song. We sang other songs, and before we got to Harvey Road, one girl was asleep, and the other was dazed.

They woke up near the Philadelphia Airport. I could tell them to start looking for really tall buildings and the big (Platt) Bridge. We finally reached the Vine Expressway, and I missed my exit off the Vine. The next exit was Broad Street, and the only thing I could do was to find the right one-way streets to get us to the museum. I found it, went around the block, and got in line to get into the parking garage.

I was ready to pull in only to have the attendant tell me the garage was full. I made an instant decision: "Hey, girls! How would you like to go to the zoo?" They were disappointed, but they were also excited. "Yes. Let's go." Off we went for the zoo. I could not find the on-ramp to the Vine Street Expressway going west. It seemed poorly signed. I know Philadelphia is the city that loves you back, but I wasn't feeling much love the second time I missed the ramp. I actually found myself back at the museum, went around the block again, and pulled up to the parking attendant to ask for help in getting to the zoo. He said, "We have room in the garage, if you want to go to the museum." We did.

We got our tickets and went off to experience dinosaurs. When they had seen enough, one of the girls said, "Gamper, I need to go to the potty." I had called ahead to see if they had a "family rest room." They did. But no one could find it. I went three different places. No potty. Finally, an employee walked us to the Promised Land. I was grateful to her but the room was nothing like the family rest rooms I was used to. It was just a big room with a toilet and sink. I made sure the girls knew where things were and

went outside to guard the door. The system worked, and we began to explore other parts of the museum.

Later, I needed to use the potty. I couldn't take them into the bathroom with me. I sat those girls on a bench outside the door and told them not to move. I said to a grandmother sitting on a bench on the other side of the door, "If they twitch, bang on this door, and I'll be out faster than fast." The system worked, and we continued exploring. The highlight of the day was not the dinosaurs or the potty but the face painting.

I have inflicted this story on you for a reason. I was tired when we got home; not just my body but also my mind. The energy it took to stay focused on those girls and our surroundings was enormous. I replayed the day several times in my mind. A few days later, several things stood out, which have a bearing on Proverbs 22:6. First, I kept my promise to them about going to see the dinosaurs. Keeping promises matters to children. Second, we prayed in the car before we left. Prayer is not just for Sunday worship. Third, I didn't lose my cool, when the car ahead of me was the last car they could park in the garage. Life throws unexpected things at us. It's how we handle them that matters. Fourth, being able to go to the museum after we had given up on going to the museum made the dinosaur exhibit even sweeter. The death of a wish makes the wish even sweeter, even more memorable, if it comes to pass. Fifth, they trusted me in that museum by obeying every direction I gave them. We came home safely.

Did those five- and four-year-old granddaughters of mine learn those lessons that day? No. That's not how child-formation works. Shared experiences with our children leave little marks on their young souls. As we leave the same marks over and over, then we shape the way they look at the world. They are great imitators. The two questions we face in rearing children are: 1) who are your children imitating? and 2) How deliberate will you be in what you train your children to be?

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

The Way He Should Go

Five words in that proverb lay down the challenge for parents: **the way he should go**. That implies standards and the discipline and resources to build those standards into your child's behavior. It also brings parents into conflict with a prevailing and powerful philosophy of education. Lean back for a minute, and let me tell you a story of our time.

Lawrence Kohlberg was a professor at the University of Chicago and at Harvard. He established moral development as an academic discipline. "Kohlberg's most influential finding was that the most morally advanced kids . . . were those who had frequent opportunities for . . . putting themselves into another person's shoes and looking at a problem from that person's perspective." (Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 21) That sounds good. It is good. Kohlberg drew some conclusions that were not so good.

It's hard for a child to put himself into his parents' or teachers' shoes and look at a problem from their perspective. Kohlberg and his school of moral psychology drew the conclusion that "parents and other authorities were *obstacles* to moral development." (ibid) "If you want your kids to learn about the social world, let them play with other kids and resolve disputes; don't lecture them about the Ten Commandments. And, for heaven's sake, don't force them to obey God or their teachers or you." (ibid) His research offered scientific justification for the secular, liberal moral order we have today.

For those of you who care about these things, Jonathan Haidt at the University of Virginia among others is challenging the moral theories of Kohlberg's school of thought academically. I welcome the challenge, but I have to tell you that academic theories one way or the other will not bring the salvation of the world; and there is reason to think they can damage people. One comedian (Mark Lowry) spoke sober truth when he said that amateurs built the ark, and experts built the Titanic.

We are still laboring under Kohlberg's spell. You can see it when parents give their children choices, when they should be giving them instructions. We, guided by Proverbs, believe there is a way children should go, and if you don't train your children to go there, someone else will train them to go where they think they should go. No one really leaves children to resolve disputes without the help of someone with authority.

Do you know the way your children should go? Do you have stable moral and spiritual convictions that you learned from the wisdom of the Church that guide you in guiding them in the way they should go? The Church is your friend. The Church has 3000 years of experience and wisdom that you can tap into.

Two Obstacles

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

We parents and grandparents face two other obstacles, which are fed by this liberal bias against authority, hierarchy, and tradition. In today's toxic youth culture teenagers use certain strategies of intimidation against parents.

One of them goes like this: "Everybody is doing it." It doesn't always work, but it works more than it fails. My question to parents is, "Why don't you fight back?" Do you ever watch nature shows that film a pride of lions hunting prey? They show zebras or water buffaloes in packs of hundreds being stalked by three or four lionesses. It's amazing to watch the big cats work. It is dispiriting to watch the water buffaloes work. I want to say to them, "Guys, why don't about 15 of you turn on the lions and charge them from all sides? They will leave you alone."

I want to say to parents, "Are you talking to other parents? Is everybody really doing what your daughter says everybody is doing? Talk to each other. Strategize. Fight back. You are bigger. You have all the money. Assert yourselves." I wonder if we have been neutered morally by the doctrine that authority, hierarchy, and tradition, including your own, are evil, and that teenagers have the right to gang up on you and intimidate you into abandoning what you know is right?

Are you that unsure of what you think is right? Do you have a clear idea of the way your children should go? Do you have stable moral and spiritual convictions that you learned from the wisdom of the Church that guide you in guiding them in the way they should go?

A second strategy of intimidation goes like this. "You don't trust me. If you really trusted me, you'd let me . . ." and you fill in the blank. The unspoken assumption behind that form of adolescent hardball is that you have really failed as a parent. "If you had succeeded, you would trust me to do what everybody else is doing." As a parent, you can feel about an inch high, when your teenager throws that in your face.

Here's what you say, when they do that. "You're right. I don't trust you, but not because you are a bad kid. I know what happened to me when I was 15. If I can

prevent some of that from happening to you, I'll do it. I don't want you to find yourself in situations that force you to do something you will regret."

Are you talking to other parents? I guarantee you that you are not the only parents who feel the way you do in telling your teenagers they can't do something. Put your parental heads together. Offer your kids alternatives. You still have to have the conversation with your child. It will still be hard. But you can push back in a way that teaches your children what the moral structure of the world is like.

The real question is this: Are you that sure of what you think is right? Do you have a clear idea of the way your children should go? Do you have stable moral and spiritual convictions that you learned from the wisdom the Church that guide you in guiding them in the way they should go? The Church is your friend. The Church has 3000 years of experience and wisdom that you can tap into.

Strength for the Journey

I am serious about this church's being a refuge for an endangered species. Nearly half of all children in Delaware live in a single parent home, and the vast majority of those single parents are moms. Fathers are increasingly absent from kids' lives. Making babies is the most outrageously successful, unskilled labor on the planet. Nurturing those babies into responsible adults is a long and different and demanding task, and dads are indispensable for that task.

You dads here give hope that your endangered species will survive and thrive. My dream is not a BVBC where dads are flawless but where you are faithful. My dream is not a BVBC where dads have all the answers but where your gentle, enduring presence in your family is the answer to many of the woes children don't ask for and don't deserve.

I have some counsel for you dads as you partner with your wives in the nurture of children. First of all, set aside some personal down time, ask God for help, and in agreement with your wife write down five words that describe what you hope your son and daughter will be like at their graduation from college. Then, ask yourself what you are doing today to help them become what you hope they will be. It can set your agenda for the next two decades. And be sure some words are uniquely biblical and Christian.

Second, stop trying to make your children like you. Trying to do that is not a pretty sight. Have you spent time lately in a high school? Kids can make you feel about as welcome as a federal agent in a Mafia planning session. It can be intimidating for parents who desperately hope their children to like them. That's not your job. Your children don't need you to be their friend. They need you to be their guide. The world has been around a long time, and your child has a lot of catching up to do. You'll get some help with that, but nobody matters more than you do. You never love your children more deeply, when you help them to make grateful sense of the world they are growing up in.

Third, don't be neutral about matters of Christian faith and say that you are letting your child make his or her own decision without your guidance. Your alleged neutrality is not neutral. It only communicates in the most powerful way possible that Christian Faith doesn't matter much to you. So why should it matter to your child. You never love your children more than when you help them make sense of the world they are growing up in from the perspective of a rich, Christian faith.

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

Where have all the fathers gone?
Long time passing.
 Where have all the fathers gone?
 Long time ago.
Where have all the fathers gone?
Time has stolen every one.
 When will they ever learn?
 When will they ever learn?

Where has all the dads' time gone?
Long time passing.
 Where has all the dads' time gone?
 Long time ago.
Where has all the dads' time gone?
Work has called them everyone.
 When will they ever learn?
 When will they ever learn?

Where has all my dad's strength gone?
Long time passing.
 Where has all my dad's strength gone?
 Long time ago.
Where has all my dad's strength gone?
He always gone, or he's always tired.
 When will they ever learn?
 When will they ever learn?

Where can we the fathers find?
Long time passing.
 Where can we the fathers find?
 Long time ago.
Where can we the fathers find?
They father children, then they leave.
 When will they ever learn?
 When will they ever learn?

Where are all their children gone?
Long time passing.
 Where are all their children gone?
 Long time ago.
Where are all their children gone?
Time has stolen everyone.
 When will they ever learn?
 When will they ever learn?

(With apologies to Pete Seeger)