

TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR SEPTEMBER 22 & 23, 2024

“Dedicate a child to the way he should go, and even when he becomes old, he will not turn away from it.”
(Proverbs 22:6)

It happened a quarter century ago. One morning, my wife answered the telephone. “Ma’am, this is the Phoenix Police Department. What is the nature of the emergency?” “Uh...there’s no emergency here, officer.” “Well, Ma’am, someone just dialed 911 from your place of residence. Is anyone else there with you?” “Well, my 4-year-old is at pre-school and my husband is at the office. That just leaves me and my two-year-old...” There’s a sticker on the phone with 911 in big white letters...our two-year-old son figured it out and dialed. It was one of those moments we felt two of the most common parental emotions at the same time: pride and embarrassment!

A few other things learned during the endurance of toddlerhood in our home and reinforced during our early years of grandparenting...

- When you hear the toilet flush and the words, “Uh-oh,” it’s already too late.
- Playdough and Microwave should never be used in the same sentence.
- VCRs do not eject peanut butter even though TV commercials show they do (1990s); today’s equivalent – smartphones and toddlers don’t mix, especially around water!

Property law from a toddler’s perspective:

- If I like it, it’s mine...
- If I can take it away from you, it’s mine...
- If I had it a while ago, it’s mine...
- If I say it is mine, it’s mine...
- If it looks like mine, it’s mine...
- If you’re having fun with it, it’s mine...
- If you lay down your toy, it’s mine...
- If it’s broken, it’s yours.

Let’s face it: parenting – whether you’re dealing with toddlers, teenagers, or even twenty-somethings who haven’t left home - is a tough, exhausting, never-ending job. Long hours. Low pay. Lots of aggravation. Little affirmation. Sounds like an extended version of the military’s basic training. And that’s what parenting is – basic training, laying a solid foundation for a precious life that God has entrusted to your care. This **BASIC TRAINING IS A PRIVILEGE!** No matter where you are in your parenting odyssey, God supplies specific instructions on how to make little disciples who will one day grow into adult disciples. And even if you don’t have children, you are in a position to have spiritual influence on one or more children. By way of this Word of God, let’s examine both the process and the promise of this basic training.

“Dedicate a child to the way he should go, and even when he becomes old, he will not turn away from it.”
(Proverbs 22:6) This may be the most quoted proverb, but do we really understand what it means? Let’s look at this word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase, beginning with...

“Dedicate” means “consecrate or initiate/begin.” The old NIV and the even older KJV drilled the word “train” into our heads – as in, “train a child in the way he should go.” It’s more than training; this is sacred activity, to dedicate/raise a child in the true faith. How important it is that spiritual training begins early! As we teach/train children from early on the difference between right from wrong, as we teach them about the love of God in Jesus their Savior, as we teach them/train them/show them how to love the God who first loved us, we’re really dedicating them back to the God who gave them to us in the first place. They’re His children, given to us for a time, and with proper basic training in the faith, they’re ours for eternity, too.

The next key word is loaded, too: **“child.”** In the Old Testament, this Hebrew word for child is used to describe every age of youth from infants to teenagers. Makes it real easy to apply to your situation, doesn't it? Whatever the ages of your children, the Lord's command to you is to dedicate/consecrate/train them. Whatever the ages of all the children you are able to influence, the Lord's command to you is to teach them consistently and persistently.

Train children...teach children...what? **“...to the way (they) should go.”** In the way they should go to the bathroom? In the way they should go around the screen door rather than through it? In the way they should hit a baseball? You and I have the opportunity and the responsibility to train children in many things, but none of them is as important as teaching them that God loves them, that he forgives their sins through Jesus, that they have a home in heaven waiting for them.

The word **“way”** here carries with it the idea of morality, of values rooted in one's spiritual upbringing. We are to train children in God's morality and values, more than that, in the way of salvation. Here's where we get to the tools of basic training. There are a lot of media – books, magazines, radio, video – that address the subject of parenting. There is only one Book that deals with soul-care, the Bible. Only God's Word has the tools of Law and Gospel. Use God's Law, his unchanging standard of morality, to point out sin, to condemn it. Then heal the hurt and the guilt with the Gospel, by telling them their sins are forgiven by Jesus' death on the cross.

One Good Friday many years ago, I brought my oldest son (4 years old at the time, 30 years old now) with me to church to make my preparations for the evening service. The church had a cross out by the road and it had a black cloth draped over it. Inside the cross has a black cloth draped over it and the altar was covered in black, as it is here on Good Friday. It really caught his attention...and he asked about it. We sat here all alone on Good Friday afternoon – just the two of us and our Lord. The questions came in a rush...Why the black? Did it hurt to be put on a cross? He did it for me? How? Why? Daddy, would you die for me, too? Our conversation ended with me telling him to watch how different the church would be on Easter morning – white cloths instead of black, flowers, lots of excitement. When Easter morning came, no one had a bigger smile on his face than my four-year-old son as he came up to me after church and said, “Happy Easter, Daddy, Jesus didn't stay dead!” Precious. Priceless. The power of the Word at work.

Academics, athletics, social development are all important aspects of our children's lives. But the spiritual is most important. Nothing else matters if they don't have Christ.

Basic training is a privilege. It's challenging, often frustrating, but also fulfilling and rewarding. The Lord gives us a promise. **“Dedicate a child to the way he should go, and even when he becomes old, he will not turn away from it.”** This verse does not say, “Drag your child to church and Sunday School and send him to Christian camps, and then someday when he is old and decrepit, after he sows his wild oats and has had his worldly flings, he will come back to God.” While this can happen, it doesn't say exactly that. Remember the first part of the verse – Dedicate, dedicate, dedicate, train in the Word, the Word, the Word. It follows from this, God says, that a when a child brought up in the faith grows to adulthood and later becomes a mature, seasoned Christian eligible for seasoned citizen discounts and residence in Sun City, he/she will still be a child of God.

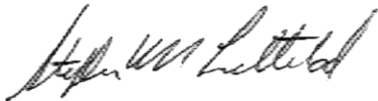
This promise is not an excuse to let up, to say, “Well, my kids are baptized and they know about Jesus, I don't have to go overboard. Go to worship? When it's convenient. Sunday School? Optional. Home teaching – did it when they were little. It's like the ABC's, you never forget.” If you or anyone you know thinks along those lines, consider this: Just because you let up, do you think Satan will let up – “Whoa, that kid's baptized; he's heard about Jesus; can touch him, I'll move on”? Do you think our culture will cut them some slack – “Oh, you're a Christian; we won't talk about evolution, or bombard you with materialism, humanism, or pornography.”

Don't let up! **“Dedicate a child to the way he should go, and even when he becomes old, he will not turn away from it.”** Pray with your children and for them. Bring them to worship. Bring them to church. Let them see you worship. Let them see you pray. Let them see you running toward the Savior...because if they don't

see and learn these things from you, who are they going to learn them from? The world will teach them it's not a priority. The world will teach them it's okay to stay away, to not pick up their Bibles. The world will direct them far off course, confuse them, and misinform them that just being "good" is enough. The world won't teach them about Jesus. That's our job/your job. Bring them to worship. Children need the Lord. They need parents and adults – you and me- to model and teach the true Christian faith.

The ultimate goal? As children grow, we have to let them go as they come into their own. But in Christ, we never lose them, because the bond is eternal. Jesus' promise is powerful: ***"Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life"*** (Revelation 2:10). A pastor friend of mine was present at the sudden death of a 13-year-old girl. The doctor removing her appendix cut an artery and she bled to death on the operating table. The grief was overwhelming, it always is when someone dies so young. The pastor read a few brief Scriptures of comfort, knowing there was little else to say. The nurses were of little help, however. One of them put her arm around the mother and literally cried out, "If!...If!...If only!" That was it. No hope. No help. Just whatever it took to wring out more tears. But the girl was a Christian and her parents will see her again. She didn't make it to old age, but she made it to heaven.

Give your children more than "If..." Give them the sure thing. Give them Jesus and his love. Lead them to the cross, show them the empty tomb. Dedicate and train them for life...now & forever.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Stephen W. Luchterhand". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand
Minocqua, WI