



The Trinity Pulpit

One More Word for the Future Proverbs 22:6, I Corinthians 13:13

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If you were to choose a word to describe your family what would it be? For some of us it would be happy. Your family is filled with smiles, laughter and happiness. For others it would be contentious. It seems that there is always tension, contention and conflict in your family. Others might choose compatibility. Your family gets along. You have found a way to coexist. It is not happiness and it is not contention, it is just compatible. You have found a way to avoid conflict and most of the time avoid each other. Some families are dysfunctional. There is within the family system a problem that has not been addressed. This hidden or ignored issue permeates the relationships of your family and you are either aware of it or you not, but it really does not matter because the issue effects the whole family.

I have been thinking about some words that should describe our family life. As we conclude our series Family Matters, I wanted to think of a word for our future as families. Our text today is the word from Proverbs that gives every parent hope. We read this Proverb as an iron clad promise of the Bible, and when our children go astray from the Lord we repeat it and hold on to it like a life line. It is the word that keeps our heads above water when we would surely drown in the sea of regret, disappointment and pain. We say to the Lord and to ourselves "Train up a child in the way they should go and when they are old he will not depart from it." That is our word! That is our promise.

We all know that this is not always true. We know by experience that many times and actually most of the times, when a child is taught and trained in faith, they remain in faith. Now that does not mean that their expression of faith is exactly like ours, it just means that in their

hearts they are aware of the presence of God. This verse not only gives parents hope, but can also be heartbreaking when it does not turn out to be true in their lives. The problem with this verse is that we cherry pick it from the Bible and do not lay it alongside other theological understanding.

We know that it is important to raise our children in faith and we realize that it is important they come to a relationship with Christ as a young person. In fact, statistics tell us that after a child turns 18 the possibility of them coming to Christ falls dramatically. In our culture most adult Christians were raised in the church and taught faith as a young person. It is important to train a child. However, the Bible also teaches us that there is free will. Every person will choose whether to receive or reject Christ and the good news they have been told. As parents we have already learned through this series that we are not in ultimate control of our children's spiritual life. We are a part, a very important part if not the most important earthly part. Yet, the work of salvation ultimately belongs to God. It is the word of the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, lead us to Jesus and salvation.

With all of this in mind let's go back to our verse from Proverbs. It is a promise and it is an observation. It can bring guidance and it can bring disappointment. Is there another way to look at this verse? That is what I want us to do today. I want us to look at this verse and see if there is not some word or words that emerge for our family's future.

As I read and re-read this verse, there was another verse that came to mind. It is the crowning verse what we refer to as the love chapter, I Corinthians 13. The crowning verse from this chapter written by the Apostle Paul reads "now these three remain: faith, hope and love and the greatest of these is love. I wonder if Proverbs 22:6 is about faith, hope and love.



Let's go back and read it again and see if these three words do not emerge from this verse, and see if these are not the words or word we need for the future of our families.

First, there is the word love. It is the foundational word. The Proverb begins train up a child. The first part of this verse is about discipline. We have already established that the disciplining of a child is not done out of hatred or anger or frustration, but it is done out of love. True Godly discipline is done intentionally and out of love. In fact, we are told that the parent who withholds discipline hates their child. Discipline and training a child is an act of love.

Love is the first word for our future as a family. Love is not only the first word, but it is the foundational word. Most of us, if asked, would say that love is a part of our family. In fact, no matter how contentious or difficult some of our relationships within the family might be, we would say that we love one another. What does love look like in our family? The Bible gives us some insight into the evidence of love. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13 about the qualities of true love. Let me read this verse to you slowly and I want you to reflect and determine if these qualities are found in your family.

¹If I speak in the tongues^[a] of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames,^[b] but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸Love never fails.

Thomas D. Peterson tells of a young pastor who was working on a sermon on love. He was so intent on his theme and thoughts that he had little patience for his children as they ran in and out of the study. Exasperated, he shouted at them, "Get out of here you are driving me crazy cant you see I'm working on a sermon on love!" In the words of Mark Twain, "I hate it when I see beautiful theories trampled down by ugly facts."¹

Love is more than a word it is has evidence. Just like discipline is an act of love, so our families need love.

The second word from Proverbs is the word faith. The Proverb says train a child in the way they should go. The way they should go is an assumption. There is an assumption that there is a right way and there is wrong from right. Every family needs faith. Now when I use the word faith I am speaking of belief. Every family needs something to believe in. We need a faith.

To be a person of faith means to be a person with beliefs. Every person and family needs convictions by which to live. We live in a world of relativism. The post-modern mind lacks conviction. We have concluded that there really is no such thing as right or wrong. It really does not matter what you believe or even if you believe. Yet, the Bible teaches us that it really does matter what you believe. There are some foundational beliefs that are important if we are going to be pleasing to God. We need to have convictions by which we live.

Rachel Starr Thompson, in her article Conviction Life, suggests that every day we are faced with how we are going to live. She says we can live by default, reaction or conviction. If we choose to live by convictions then we must recognize three things. First, we must recognize authority. If I am going to live by conviction then I have to admit that there is an authority in my life. God is in control and God's ways must become authoritative in my thinking and my living. Second, I must think about life. She states that a life of conviction is a thinking life. She writes "As one who is committed first to God's reality, I should question my culture, my education and most especially my own assumptions. And, I remind myself as I begin to be carried away by the grandness of it all, I should ask questions not out of rebellion, pride or love of debate, but out of a sincere desire for truth — especially when it challenges me." Finally she says, "A life of conviction is a life of action. A conviction is not a conviction, unless it affects my actions."²

Every family needs to live by faith that is convictions. A conviction is defined as Merriam-Webster defines conviction as "the state of being convinced of error or compelled to admit the truth; a strong persuasion or belief; the state of being convinced." Conviction is not based on stimulus, rebellion, or going with the flow. It requires thorough exploration of a matter, concentrated thought, and committed practice. Living by conviction means living in accordance with what I believe to be true — according to what I've been *convinced* is true.

The Bible is full of moments of conviction. God says to the people of Israel choose today whom you will serve. I set before you life and death. As for me and my house we will serve the Lord. The three Hebrew boys say to Nebuchadnezzar in the fiery furnace God will deliver us and even if He does not, we will still not bow down to your golden image. Paul says I know who I have believed in and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day. Convictions... train up a child in the way they should go. Every family needs the word of a living faith.

The last word is hope. Train up a child in the way they should go and when they are old they will not depart from it. If this verse is not a promise it is more than an observation then what we can say for sure is that it is a word of hope. It is interesting that most of the time we read this passage and believe that the promise is about when our children are of old age. But the truth is that this word for old means hair on the chin. It could be interpreted to mean when one reaches puberty. If we remember in the Hebrew home a boy was a man at the age of 12. There was a passage of rites into adulthood. Now it is impossible for us to compare our current adolescence with that culture's adolescence, but this common ground can be found. There is hope for the child raised in faith and in love.

In the home where there is love, where there are convictions of faith, then there is hope. A family filled with hope believes that the best days are still to come. A family filled with hope knows that they can count on each other when things go bad. A family filled with hope is not surprised when blessings come and they are not deterred when there are trials.

A family filled with hope not only believes in each other, but they trust God for the future. Paul writes of Jesus and our salvation saying it is a hope that is an anchor for our souls.

Listen to a few quotes about hope:

Hope means to keep living amid desperation and to keep humming in the darkness. Hoping is knowing that there is love; it is trust in tomorrow; it is falling asleep and waking again when the sun rises. In the midst of a gale at sea, it is to discover land. In the eyes of another, it is to see that he understands you. As long as there is still hope, there will also be prayer. And God will be holding you in his hands. --Henri Nouwen, With Open Hand, 85.

Hope is believing in spite of the evidence and watching the evidence change. --Theologian/Activist/ Sojourners Editor, Jim Wallis

As a family what is your greatest hope? Some of you are hoping that your child will be well. Keep praying and believing, keep hoping. Some of you are hoping for an old emotional wound to finally be healed in your family. Reconciliation is possible. Some of you are hoping for a rebellious teen to finally choose to be a part of the family. Keep hoping. Some of you are hoping that your marriage can again be filled with trust, respect and intimacy. Keep hoping.

Hoping is believing in spite of the evidence and with prayer and faith believing the evidence will surely change.

We have been reminded these past four weeks about the importance of the family and faith. We have been reminded of teaching our children with intention and love. We have been reminded that every family needs only one God. We have been reminded of the importance of discipline. We have been reminded that our faith is something worth passing to the next generation. As we conclude today, let us take these three words for our future as families.

Let's build our families on love. Let's have convictions which will last and let us never give up hoping the best about each other and God. That is a good word for our future.



¹Doing the Best Things in the Worst Times: Serving the Unexpectedly Interim Church (Lima, Ohio: Fairway Press, 1990), 47.

²Rachel Starr Thompson "Conviction Life" Boundless.org. January 20,2009.