

Aiming our Children
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In my Mother's Day sermon, I spoke a little about disciplining children. I felt led this week to preach a whole sermon on raising children. If you don't have any children – don't worry – this message is for you! The points I make apply to everyone.

2 Kings 13:15-19 talks about when the prophet Elisha became sick and was dying, King Joash went to visit him and here's what happened:

Elisha said to him, "Take a bow and some arrows." So he took himself a bow and some arrows. Then he said to the king of Israel, "Put your hand on the bow." So he put his hand on it, and Elisha put his hands on the king's hands. And he said, "Open the east window"; and he opened it. Then Elisha said, "Shoot"; and he shot. And he said, "The arrow of the Lord's deliverance and the arrow of deliverance from Syria; for you must strike the Syrians till you have destroyed them."

Then he said, "Take the arrows"; so he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, "Strike the ground"; so he struck three times, and stopped. And the man of God was angry with him, and said, "You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck Syria till you had destroyed it! But now you will strike Syria only three times."

Today I'm preaching a message entitled Aiming Our Children. I felt led to use this passage about arrows because the Bible teaches that children are like arrows in the hands of their parents. Psalm 127:3-5 says:

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.

This passage shows us that children are a gift from God. Children are a reward – a blessing.

For the purpose of this message – the main thing I want you to see is -

Parents are bows, children are arrows.

A bow is useless without arrows.

And arrows are useless without a bow.

And no matter how sharp an arrow is – it gets its power and direction from the bow. No matter how sharp a child is – they still need their parents' power and direction.

Now a bow must be bent to give an arrow power and direction. The bent determines the distance and the direction the arrow will fly.

Parents have a huge role in how far and in what direction a child goes. But parents need to realize that children are already born with 2 bents - a bent toward God and a bent away from God.

The bent toward God is our destiny.

The bent away from God is our iniquity.

All of us fight this fight between God's destiny for our lives and iniquity which wants to go our way rather than God's way. We all have an ongoing war between the spirit and the flesh. We all struggle with finding our identity in either destiny or iniquity. That's why Proverbs 22:6 tells parents to-

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

Don't train him in the way he could go, but in the way he should go! What does it mean to train children in the way they should go? Some scholars believe it means we teach children the proper way to live. I agree with that. We teach morals, values and principles that guide children in the way God wants them to go in life.

But I also agree with those who say this means that we should train our children according to their individual personality, temperament, or gift. This is how the Amplified Bible translates Proverbs 22:6

Train up a child in the way he should go (in keeping with his individual gift, talents or abilities), and when he is old he will not depart from it.

Parents make a big mistake when they think they can raise each child the same. Yes, we teach the same values and morals to each of them. But they are each different – they learn differently and they respond to different discipline. So, don't ask a child, "Why aren't you more like your brother?" Because the answer is, "God made us all different." Psalm 139:13 says:

For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb.

We were all shaped by God differently. If you want to train your children in the way they should go – you must know their spiritual gifts, aptitudes, abilities and personality. Knowing these things will help you shape them according to their God-given bent – their destiny.

But remember – not only are we shaped by God and born with a destiny – we are also shaped by iniquity. Psalm 51:5 says:

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Vine's Dictionary says iniquity means "to bend or deviate from the way." Iniquity means to be twisted, crooked, or bent. Webster's Dictionary defines bent as a strong inclination toward something.

Synonyms for bent include inclination, predisposition, propensity, tendency and orientation.

Iniquity shapes us all. Since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, we are all born with a sinful nature – a sinful orientation.

Everyone is born with a bent toward certain sinful tendencies.

For some it is addiction – for others it is lying – for others it is sexual sin.

This explains why some people who struggle with the sin of homosexuality say “I was born this way – so it must be okay.” No, it’s not okay because the Bible calls it sin, just like the rest of us sin. Some homosexuals believe that since they were born that way, God must have made them that way. No way! God would not make you in a way that He calls sinful. The truth is you were shaped by iniquity, just like the rest of us.

A problem arises when you allow your iniquity to become your identity! That’s when you end up excusing your sin! That’s when you stop fighting against sin and start going your own way rather than God’s way! We must guard against allowing our iniquity to determine our identity.

I know it’s popular today to believe that people cannot change their sinful orientation. But the word of God says otherwise. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 says:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

This shows that an orientation to sin and please self can change to an orientation to please God. That happens when people are saved by the blood of Jesus and then sanctified – set apart from sin – by the Holy Spirit.

As parents we need to love our children unconditionally. But that does not mean we must just accept their bent to sin. We must not become passive – we must war on their behalf.

We just realize that sometimes sinful tendencies run in families. Lamentations 5:7 says:

Our fathers sinned and are no more, but we bear their iniquities.

That doesn’t make sense unless you understand the difference between sin and iniquity. Biblical definitions for sin include things like: missing the mark, falling short of God’s glory, going astray, trespassing. Sins are things we do or don’t do that are outside the will of God.

But iniquity is different. We can see this described in Isaiah 53:6

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Jesus bore our iniquity – which is described as going astray and going our own way. While sins are outward actions, iniquity is the inner motivation that drives people to sin. Sin is the fruit, but iniquity is the root! And iniquity can be passed down through generations. The Bible calls it the sins of the fathers.

Have you ever noticed that different families have different tendencies? Some families struggle with anger, others with divorce or addiction or fear or poverty or immorality or passivity. There is no limit to the issues.

The age-old question is: are these tendencies the result of nature or nurture? Is it the result of genetics or upbringing? I believe it is both of those things – plus the element of iniquity. In addition to nature and nurture, there are generational curses – sins of the fathers - that are passed down from generation to generation.

I also believe that there are demonic spirits that can attack families. The Bible calls them familiar spirits, because they are familiar with your family's history and they know what temptation works in your family. If you find yourself saying, "Well – that just runs in my family" – that may be an indication of a generational curse or a familiar spirit.

So – what do we do about it? How do we aim our children? That brings me back to Joash's encounter with Elisha in 2 Kings. Elisha told Joash to pick up a bow and some arrows.

So he put his hand on it, and Elisha put his hands on the king's hands.

The prophet of God represented the power of God. The point is this –

1- Aiming our children requires the power of God

Elisha called this "The arrow of the Lord's deliverance." This arrow had power, not because of the hands of Joash pulled the bow, but because the power of God that would fight on his behalf.

For us to aim our children correctly – we need God's hands on our hands!
 We need God training us how to train our children.
 We need God leading us so we can lead our children.
 Human effort is not enough to win this battle! This is why Psalm 127:1 says:

Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.

Yes, parents have the responsibility to build their families – but their first responsibility is to be sure that God is building.

Yes, parents have the responsibility to watch over their children – but their first responsibility is to be sure God is watching over their children!

Without that – all we do is in vain. We must have the power of God!

Through God's power we can break the power of iniquity, sinful orientations, generational curses and familiar spirits in Jesus' name!

The second thing Elisha told Joash was "Open the east window."

2- Aiming our children requires removing all obstacles

Every obstruction and possible hindrance to their destiny has to be removed. What gets in their way? There can be legitimate reasons and there can be excuses.

One of the obstacles that can get in the way of our children is our own desires for them. You should raise your children in the way they should go – in the way God wants them to go – not necessarily in the way you want them to go.

Many children have felt pressured to follow in their parent's footsteps –

To be in the military like their father

To be a teacher like their mother

To take over the family business

To pastor their father's church

But that's not necessarily the way they should go!

I think back to our kids growing up. Deb and I are both big on education. We took our children's education very seriously. We home schooled them for many years. We modeled education by getting college degrees. We expected our kids to go to college, but neither one of them had the slightest desire to. That was very disappointing to us because we had seen statistics that show the more education you have the more money you can make in life. We thought that without an education our children would never amount to much. But guess what? They both became very successful at what they do.

We learned that the way our children should go is not always the way we think they should go. We also learned that just because they do it differently does not mean they are doomed to failure! Please – don't force your child into a mold that does not fit them! You might become the obstacle that is holding them back.

Then comes this very interesting exchange between Elisha and Joash.

Elisha said, "Take the arrows"; so he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, "Strike the ground"; so he struck three times, and stopped.

And the man of God was angry with him, and said, "You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck Syria till you had destroyed it! But now you will strike Syria only three times."

What this means is that effort must be sustained to be successful. One blow never won a battle. The king stopped after three blows and the prophet was upset because he should have hit the ground more. He was upset with Joash's half-hearted, lifeless obedience.

Evidently Elisha saw some weakness or deficiency in Joash. Maybe Joash was lazy or too easily contented. Maybe he lacked confidence or zeal or perseverance. Maybe he had little faith and didn't believe that God would do for him what the prophet promised. Whatever the reason, Joash set his sights too low!

But we cannot settle for a few victories – we must win the war! We cannot give up after a few struggles - God is showing us that we need persistence in raising our children.

3- Aiming our children requires passion and persistence

Some people give up way too easy!

We must be passionate about our children – not passive!

We must never stop fighting for our children!

We must always pray and never give up!

We must strike again and again until every enemy is defeated!

Elisha was angry with Joash for stopping because the king failed to trust God to give him as many victories as there were arrows. And God wants to give you as many victories as you have arrows – as many victories as you have children!

Joash failed for lack of persistence. There is no greater danger to the Christian than lack of persistence.

There is also great danger of being too easily satisfied. Maybe King Joash thought that three victories over Syria were enough. Maybe he was like Hezekiah who didn't care what happened to future generations as long as there was peace in his lifetime.

Many of us are like Joash – stopping short of total victory – satisfied with a little win here and there. We must learn from the passivity of Joash and set our sights high!

Parents have a huge responsibility! Blessings come to your family or may be missed by your family - based on your conduct – your faith – your prayers – your actions! We cannot afford to be passive! We cannot shoot some of our arrows; we must shoot all of them! We must not be half-hearted in anything!

We can't get rid of some sins and leave others around!
 We can't get a little Bible knowledge and leave the foundation unfinished.
 We can't have faith for something and not trust God with the outcome!
 We can't pray once and then give up on prayer!
 We can't give God leftovers and expect the windows of heaven to open!

Joash struck three times and then stopped and because he stopped, the blessing stopped! So, we need to be like Jacob and tell the Lord, "I'm not giving up and I will not let you go until You bless me and my family!"

We don't stop praying when it seems like our prayers are not answered!
 We pray through! We pray until the answer comes!

We don't stop tithing and giving when we go through financial struggles.
 We keep sowing seed to meet the need!

And we don't give up on our children just because they disobey or go astray!
 We keep on believing – praying – warring!

I want to close with this - remember I told you earlier that we all sin because we are all born in iniquity. That's why Isaiah 53:5 says this about Jesus:

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

Jesus was wounded *AND* bruised for a reason!
 Jesus was wounded and bled outwardly for our outward transgressions.
 That's how our sins are forgiven.
 But He was bruised and bled inwardly for our iniquities – our bents - our inward tendencies – sins of the fathers – and that's how we get set free!

You don't have to know how these iniquities and curses got into your family, but you and your children do need to know the way out!
 And the cross is the way out!
 The blood of Jesus is the way out!

Regardless of your past, Satan cannot dictate your future!
 Regardless of where you came from, Satan cannot control where you are going!
 Regardless of what you've been through, Satan cannot hinder you!
 Regardless of your origination, Satan cannot dictate your destination!
 Regardless of your iniquity, Satan cannot control your destiny!

You can break the power of iniquity and generational curses in your life!
 You can achieve greater things than anyone in your family ever has!
 And you can aim your children toward the destiny God has for them!