Sunday School Rally Day
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IN NOMINE JESU

Proverbs 22: 6 Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

WHERE DID WE FAIL?

Where did I fail? lamented a mother when both of her children turned ou differently from what she had hoped. Her son married while he was in military se vice and five years later was in debt, drinking heavily, and divorced. Her daugh was experiencing great difficulty in a second marriage. Where did I fail? she wrote a nationally syndicated counselor. I must have failed. I am their mother. The children went to church and Sunday School. They earned Bibles for perfect attendance, and they had love. Yet, both children fell disappointingly short of the fond expectations their mother had for them.... The pathetic question, Where did we fail? is more common than most of us like to think. Adam and Eve must have had similar thoughts when the tragic news reached them that their first-born, Cain for whom they had such high hopes, had murdered his brother Abel in cold blood. Some of the saddest words in the Bible were spoken by David after his rebellious son was killed, leading an insurrection against his own father: O my son Absalom, m son, my son Absalom! Would that I had died instead of you. O Absalom, my son, my son! The anguish, the heartache, the bitter disappointment, the unrealized hopes and dreams of David's plaintive cry can be felt by every concerned parent - especially those who know the pain caused by willful and wayward children.

Parents seldom desire evil for their children. Normally, they want thei children to grow up as responsible, successful, hard-working citizens. Yet, no matter how hard some parents try, sometimes things just don't turn out as they had planned. As a father of three children, I am keenly aware of the problems that cor front parents. I am well aware that advising other people on how to bring up thei children may be considered presumptuous. I am reminded of an un-married post-graduate sociology student who prided himself on a lecture he had prepared, entitle Ten Commandments for Bringing Up Children. After he married and had his first chil he decided to changed the title of his lecture to Ten Suggestions for Bringing Up Children. After his second children, he changed the title of his lecture to Some Hints for Bringing Up Children. After the third child, he stopped giving the

lecture altogether.

I do not pretend to have all the answers. It is fairly easy, however, pinpoint the reason for many parental failures. Some children rebel because thei parents are inordinately and unreasonable strict, composing rules that make no sense whatever and enforcing them as if their children had no feelings whatever. Strictness carried to the point of tyranny is no virtue in any household. Over-strict parents are generally afraid of their children, and the children of such parents all too often become juvenile delinquents because they have acquired no ability to arrive at a moral judgment of their own. The Scriptures advise wisely when they tell parents to correct their children in order that they may become responsible men and women, but not in such a way as to cause them to rebel against duly constituted authority, either inside or outside the home.

The chief problem of our age, however, is not over strictness but over indulgence. Many children today grow up so pampered and so coddled by their paren not to speak about being doted upon by their grandparents, that no child expert is needed to predict how they will turn out. They become the kind of spoiled brats which this kind of education is bound to produce. Raised without control, such bo and girls grow up thinking that they can do just as they please and resenting any restrictions, no matter how beneficial they may be. Over protection and smother-love produce children that are scarred for life - never having grown up emotionall and often stunted morally.

There are instances, however, where parents have tried hard. They have done all they could. Still something went wrong. We all know the story of the black sheep in a family, one boy or girl who went wrong to the mortification of his parents as well as of other children in the family. I am not here to pass judgment on such cases because each one is different. It is too easy to blame parents for everything that goes wrong in a family, and sometimes it is too easy to call one child a black sheep just because he did not live up to all the expectations of his brothers and sisters.

Without attempting to provide an easy answer to every family difficulty, let me point out what many parents today overlook: a child born into this world is

not all homogenized sweetness and innocence, which only later on becomes sour aft it is put into life's dirty bottle. No matter how beautiful babies may be, child are still born sinful - that is, with the inclination and disposition to break an rule, and eventually to flout any law and commit any crime if given sufficient opportunity or put under enough pressures to do so. Every child, in other words, is a potential juvenile delinquent!

Children need to be trained, not just in the facts of life, but in the ways of life. If parents have not been trained themselves in the ways of life, their children are in a bad way. If parents think that children will learn the right way without training, they are badly mistaken. Taking into account all the facts of life, including the physical, mental, and spiritual makeup of a child, th Bible says, Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. Giving your child every material advantage of home, school, clothes, and money is no guarantee that he will grow up in the right way. The reason is obvious. Children need something more than a roof over their heads and food on the table. It is just as true of children as it is of grownups: Man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. More important than the size of a man's bank account is the kind of father he is, and more important than the size of the home is the kind of woman a mother is. Fathers and mothers become mature parents when they recognize sin for what it is.

Christ came into the world to deal with sin, whether found in children o adults. He exposed the rebelliousness, pride, stubbornness, self-centeredness tha separates people from God and from each other. Christ dealt with sin on His Cross. He died for the sins of the world. He bore our sins in His own body on the Cross that we might make a clean break with sin and live unto righteousness as responsible people of God. Into this living relationship with God in Christ parents are to bring their children, training them in the way they should go. It isn't enough to say that you believe in God. The Bible says the devils believe too, but they wouldn't make very good parents. It isn't enough just to have good intentions. Th road to hell is paved with good intentions. Here action is required of the right kind. Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not

depart from it.

This training should begin at home. The Church plays a supportive role here, but it is no substitute for parental responsibility. Too many parents feel that a little exposure to religion will do their children no harm. In fact, it might do them some good. So they send their children to Sunday School and even t church while they stay at home. More important than a perfect attendance record Sunday School is a good understanding of what life is all about. Here one good father is worth a hundred good Sunday School teachers. A vibrant, living Christi faith, practiced in a Christian home where honesty, integrity, and love are not merely words to be found in a dictionary, will do more to change our world than a hundred organizations designed to pick up the pieces after a boy or girl has gone wrong. A family counselor has said, The home is the place where the seeds of whol some attitudes and right behavior are sown - or not sown. Parents are the gardene The heart is the seedbed and what is sown there is most important. What your chil becomes depends largely upon the kind of person you, the parent, are. He learns t love by being loved. He learns to trust by being trusted. He learns to be friend by experiencing friendliness.

Parenthood is demanding. Parents have to pay the price of infinite patience, endless corrections, steadfast love, sympathetic understanding, and consistent teaching for moral development and spiritual growth. They have to exercis discipline, both upon themselves and their children - with the conscious purpose o providing a home where children can develop and grow, not as weeds in an uncultivated field, but as plants in a garden, useful and beneficial to the world. To help parents in this task stands the Church with its dedicated teachers.

Still, because of human failure, in spite of the most conscientious efforts, children may still go astray. In that case, there must be a genuine Chris tian effort to pick up the pieces and a genuine attempt to put them together again - with penitence, faith, and love. No matter how deeply their boy or girl may have failed them, in spite of humiliation or blot on their family name, Christian parent will keep the door of forgiveness open to their child. They won't disown their

boy or girl. They won't refuse to speak to him or to see her again. Children do come to their senses. Remember the Prodigal Son. It is the Christian way to receive wanderers back in a spirit of forgiveness and love. That is Christ's way. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger...be put away from you, with all malice, ar be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

There is no need to become preoccupied with human failure. All of us have to admit our mistakes, and to go on from there with the assurance that we our selves have been forgiven. With full assurance of God's forgiveness in Christ, ar with the sustaining power of God's Holy Spirit, we must take a firm hold on what i surely true, despite all the obstacles put in its path by our own weaknesses along with those of our children: Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it - with firm undergirding from God's Word and a firm faith in Christ and His Cross. When that child grows up, he will thank you for it - he will not depart from it. Amen.