

## **“Wet Cement”**

### **Proverbs 22:6**

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Stone Mountain, Georgia  
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### **Children’s Sunday**

“Children are wet cement,” says author Anne Ortlund. About this my good friend, Allen Walworth writes, “Indeed, they are malleable. They tend to fill out the molded forms into which their young lives are poured, and once set, they harden into permanent adulthood based upon the early settings.”

It seems to me that Solomon was saying something similar when he wrote, “Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not turn from it” Proverbs 22:6. Few verses give us more hope or remind us of greater responsibilities.

**To whom was this command given?** I have no doubt it was intended for family members, including parents, grandparents and others. If family members were faithful in their responsibilities, Solomon surmised, there was a fair expectation that good results would follow.

At the same time, everyone in a village was responsible for the welfare of its children because the whole community would suffer if a child was neglected. This was why neighbors, friends, community and religious leaders were included in this command. It took a village then to raise a child. It still does.

**What was Solomon instructing family and friends to do?** I believe he was asking them to be mentors to their children. It was their duty to mold, shape, lead and guide the most vulnerable among them.

**How were they to do this? They were to teach them the ways of God.** Nowhere was this more clearly stated than the last book of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them upon your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”

Last Tuesday I attended the funeral for Dick Pepper’s Mother and Jeff Paul’s grandmother. She turned ninety-nine a month ago. Abby Paul and Dick spoke of their grandmother and mother and touched our hearts with their kind words. I smiled when Dick said, “I know she loved the Lord because she taught her children to love Him. You can only teach what you know and believe.” Without stating it, he described a mother that took Moses’ words and Solomon’s advice seriously.

**Training children involves more than speaking appropriate words, however. There is no substitute for setting a good example and being a reliable role model.** It is impossible to overestimate the power of linking word and deed. One without the other is insufficient. Dr. Robert Sloan, Jr., the former President of Baylor, reinforces this in his article, “On Raising Abel.”

“Parenting is more a test of the parents’ own character than a test of parenting skills or wisdom. Conversations, actions, reactions and the stewardship of time are not only the very best commentary on our intentions and goals as parents, but what parents do may very well be the best teaching tool of the gospel. If we want our children to possess virtue, then we must be serious students of our own souls. If we want our children to embrace a way of life that is consistent with the gospel, then we must connect our inner life with God to the way in which we act. If we pray that our children mature to dream dreams worthy of the Kingdom, then we must allow a Kingdom vision to guide our lives. In other words, we must be examples of faithfulness to our children. We must mate our words of parental wisdom with the deeds of our discipleship.”

Recently, I attended a conference titled, “At Table with Brueggemann.” Twenty of us gathered around tables for two days with Dr. Walter Brueggemann and listened to him teach and talk about life, past and present. I told the staff it was like sitting at the feet of Socrates. One of the participants said it was like drinking from a fire hose. He was right.

Dr. Brueggemann is a renowned Old Testament scholar and author. He has written 58 books, several Old Testament commentaries and hundreds of articles. He has been a teacher for forty-seven

years, the last twenty-one at Columbia Seminary in Decatur. I do not know of a more revered Old Testament scholar.

He began each of the four sessions we had by telling us his most influential teachers. He named four, one for each session. He saved the best for last. After naming three prominent scholars, he mentioned his dad.

Dr. Brueggemann grew up in a small mid-western town where his dad was the pastor of one of the churches. His dad, however, was poorly educated and barely made enough money to take care of his family. Life was tough.

Dr. Brueggemann shared two memories of his father. This was not the first time he had done this, I'm sure, but he was still visibly touched when telling them.

There were eleven boys in Dr. Brueggemann's little high school. Ten played basketball. The other had heart trouble and was unable to participate in sports.

Each time the team won a game, one of the fathers, for whom winning was everything, bought cokes for each player. They celebrated royally. When they lost, though, no cokes were purchased by this man.

When Dr. Brueggemann's father found out about the "coke policy," he was incensed. From that point on, if the team lost, he provided the cokes. There was no way he could afford to do this, but neither could he afford not to do this. So, somehow he did it.

Secondly, there was another preacher in town that despised Dr. Brueggemann's father. He felt like Brueggemann's dad was a heretic and never spoke to him. He happened to be, however, the only man in town that knew Latin.

Dr. Brueggemann's dad wanted his two boys to have the finest education the community offered. Taking Latin was mandatory, according to him. No one at school taught it, though. That did not stop Dr. Brueggemann's dad from acquiring lessons for his boys. He contracted with the preacher that despised him to teach his boys Latin. They were his only students.

From these two examples, Dr. Brueggemann said he learned the importance of rewarding effort, not success, the necessity of making sacrifices for those we love, the need to be humble and the value of an education. "Those," said Dr. Brueggemann, "are some of life's finest virtues."

As I listened to him tell these inspiring stories, I could not help but think of all the fine teachers he has known. No doubt he has rubbed shoulders with life's best.

None of them, however, made the top of his list. That was reserved for his father, a poor, undereducated preacher that struggled daily to make ends meet. What a testimony to the power of a consistent Christian witness.

I believe this is the task of every parent, family member and friend of a child. This is what will be cherished and remembered. This is what will mold and shape lives. This is what will speak to children when they become adults, facing difficult choices. This is what will guide them down the right path, even if they have strayed away for a period of time.

If your children were naming their most influential teachers, would you be on the list? What memories would they share from your time together? Do you need to make some changes?

The staff is talking a lot these days about the needs of our children and their parents. Kellie, Kara and Amanda are addressing these needs through their new Wednesday program, "Family Fusion." This program is designed to equip parents with the skills they need to become their children's spiritual mentors.

Last week, Kellie, Kathy and Ernie talked to our young adults about the importance of passing along a spiritual heritage to their children and ways this can be done. They encouraged the parents to evaluate the heritage they received and its impact upon them. They discussed things they can do with their own children to give them a strong spiritual foundation.

Perhaps you need this kind of training. You need to know more about being your children or grandchildren's spiritual mentor. Talk to Kellie, Kara, Kathy or Ernie about this. They will be glad to help you.

So will the Lord. They are His children, too, and He knows they are wet cement.