

## ***Better Sundays Make Better Families*** – Proverbs 22:6

Welcome to week three of *I Love Sundays!* We are learning these days how to make Sunday the best day of our week. More importantly, we are learning to live more balanced lives by living at a better pace and rhythm.

Last week we learned that God wired us up for work as well as for rest, challenge, and leisure, and we work best if we practice both in the right order and proportions. The ancient book of Ecclesiastes says that “**there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.**” We’re learning that Sunday can be the best day of our week because God designed it as a Sabbath for us to rest, refuel, and refocus.

**NEED:** One of the great challenges of our day is to raise great kids in the midst of a ninety-mile-an-hour culture. We move so fast and have so many opportunities and obligations, it’s hard to find time to be together as a family, much less enjoy your family. And when we are together, we’re usually driving to a soccer practice or some type of performance. Or, while we’re driving, every kid in the car has their earphones in and is listening to something other than the family’s conversation. I want to help you with that today. And so does the Lord.

**FORECAST:** Last week we focused on making Sunday the best day of the week. Today I want to help you learn to use Sundays to build better families. Some of you live alone, but you’re going to find this message incredibly helpful as well. I want to give you seven practices that will help everyone you love, whether you’re related to them or not. Primarily we’ll be focused on families, but every principle I give you can apply to helping nieces and nephews, grandsons and granddaughters, and every other member of the next generation you have influence on.

**SCRIPTURE:** Take a look at the verse on the screen - Proverbs 22:6. This one little verse we’re about to read contains one of the most important principles ever given in the history of parenting. The proverb was composed by Solomon, who was purported to be the wisest man who ever lived.

"Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." ESV

"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it." NIV

"Point your kids in the right direction and when they're old they won't get lost." MSG

“Start children off on the way they should go.” If you were to pull out a compass, then take me by the shoulders, point me due north, and say, “Start walking,” where am I more likely to end up: at the North Pole or the South Pole? It’s far more likely that I’ll end up at the North Pole, isn’t it?

In this verse, Solomon is saying that the first push is the most important push. We might not always end up precisely due north of wherever we started, but chances are good we’ll end up mostly due north, won’t we?

Years ago, Sir Isaac Newton identified what we call the First Law of Thermodynamics. He said, “An object in motion tends to remain in motion, with the same direction and speed.” I think of it as the Law of the First Push, and it comes from Proverbs 22:6.

### **ANALOGY:**

How is it that Peyton and Eli Manning wound up being NFL quarterbacks? Their father, Archie Manning, was an NFL quarterback. What direction do you think he pushed them in?

The direction you start your children determines the destination where they are likely to arrive. If you can see that, then you understand why practice number one is the most important of the seven practices I'm going to give you today.

The first practice of successful parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and discerning leaders is to . . .

**1. Put God first (Matthew 6:33).** You know the phrase “first things first”? God wants to be the first of all firsts in your life—for your sake, and for the sake of those who follow you as well. In Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount, He said, Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33)

Parents and grandparents, the best gift you can give your children and grandchildren is not to love *them* first but to love *God* first. Your children are far more likely to follow the direction you set than the directions you give. Put God first, and your children will more than likely do the same. You’ve heard the expression, “The acorn never falls far from the tree”? Your little acorns are going to grow up to look a lot like you.

The first commandment is, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). God wants to be first in your life, because whatever you put first in your life will have the most influence on your life. And He wants to be the one who influences you most.

Once God is first, your second practice is to . . .

**2. Let your kids see your relationship with God (Deuteronomy 6:6–9).**

When Moses was preparing to send the Israelites into the Promised Land, he wanted them to know how to pass on their faith to their progenies. So he decided to spell it out for them very carefully. He said . . . These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on 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 (Deuteronomy 6:6–9).

If you go to Israel today, you’ll see a little box on the doorframe of every Jewish house. It’s a Scripture box. The Jews take this passage so seriously that they literally put Scriptures on the doorframes of their houses.

Jesus said, “**Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also**” (Matthew 6:21). So if you are going to start your children out right, it will help them to see your heart and your budget. The third practice in raising healthy children is to show them how to allocate and spend money in a healthy way. The only real way to do that is to . . .

**3. Let your kids see your spending (Luke 6:40).** Jesus said in Luke 6:40, “Everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.” At about seventeen or eighteen years old, when your kids are fully trained, chances are they’re going to be a lot like you. So teach them your best skills, your best practices. Their best chance for learning how to give, save, spend, and invest is to see how you give, save, spend, and invest.

One of the most important pieces of wise money management is generosity. How much you give not only indicates the size of your heart but it *develops* the size of your heart! Malachi 3:10 says, “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.” This is so important to God that it’s the only time He gives a command with permission to “test me in this.” God promises that when you faithfully bring the full tithe to your local church, He will throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough to store it.

So, practice number four is . . .

**4. Let your children tithe (Malachi 3:10).** The simplest form of a healthy budget that I know of is called “The 10-10-80 Plan.” Under the 10-10-80 Plan, you tithe your first 10 percent, save your second 10 percent, and live on the other 80 percent.

If you want to teach your children this plan, start them off with an allowance that divides easily by ten. If you give them a \$1 dollar allowance, don’t give them a dollar bill—give them coins that include at least two dimes, so they can put the first dime in their “tithe envelope,” the second dime in their “save envelope,” and the rest of their allowance in their “spend envelope.” If you give them a \$5 allowance, give them four \$1 bills, and change so they can put fifty cents into their tithe envelope and fifty cents into their save envelope. You get the idea.

Because of our affluence, generosity is one of the biggest challenges for our society. Studies show that the more money Americans earn the smaller percentage we give. But the sooner you start giving, the easier it is to give. Children who learn to give before they spend rarely have trouble being generous later in life. Teach your children to tithe, and then make it easy for them to tithe by setting up a 10-10-80 Plan with them, celebrating every time they bring their tithe to church and helping them figure out what they are saving their second 10 percent for.

Practice number five is . . .

**5. Serve at church together.** This is where the Sunday part of child rearing comes into your practices.

A few years ago Eric Swanson of Leadership Network published a study about children who grew up in church and wound up loving God when they were adults. Leadership Network’s study found that these children experienced two things in their families of origin. The first was, *their family served God somewhere together in church*. According to Swanson, children whose parents served at church and found ways for their children to serve with them were much more likely to grow up to love God than children who didn’t.

At our church, there are several ways adults and children can serve together: VBS, Manna Market, Midweek Meals and ushering in worship services, are just to name a few. Today, the church is one of the few places where a child can truly contribute and feel valued. And the results are eternal, as well as great for your family’s sense of health and identity.

This leads to our sixth practice.

**6. Serve together in the community or on a servant or mission trip.** Take service together outside the church walls, whether it is shopping together for Operation Christmas Child boxes, or serving at Feed My Starving Children, or going with or sending your children on a servant or mission trip.

An amazing thing happens to kids when they help others less fortunate than themselves. They discover how blessed they! They also realize they can make a difference in other people’s lives, giving them a new perspective about making their life count, no matter where God leads them in their adult career.

The final practice is to . . .

**7. Help your children find godly mentors.** Parents, what do you do when your children don’t want to listen to you anymore?

Mark Twain once gave this bit of advice about raising teenagers. He said, “When your child turns thirteen, you should stick them in a barrel and feed them through the knot hole.” Then he said, “When they turn sixteen, cover up the knot hole.”

Probably not the greatest parenting advice. But somewhere between ages eleven and fourteen, something happens to every child. They start to be cool, and have parents who aren't. A gap starts to open in communication and influence. This is where the church can shine—encouraging older teens, young adults and other to be mentors.

During the preteen and teen years, a young person needs a role model they can both look up to and relate to. Church becomes such an important part of a teenager's character formation because it can supply you help, by introducing your middle schoolers and high schoolers to young people and other adults who have great values and are willing to mentor younger people.

Finally, brothers and sisters in Christ, Sunday should be the highlight of your week, and the highlight of the week for every member of your family. So, here my four suggestions on how that can happen for you. The first one is . . .

### **1. Make Sunday family day.**

Anchor your Sundays in church; then continue spending quality time together at home and beyond. And make it fun. Play, connect, and seek balance between scheduled events and the freedom to relax and choose spontaneous activities.”

Suggestion two:

### **2. Talk meaningfully.**

Have a list of great questions you can ask over Sunday lunch or dinner. Questions like,

- What was most interesting about the sermon/class lesson at church today?
- If you could pick your own name, what would it be?
- What is the nicest thing a friend has ever done for you?
- What is your earliest memory?

I hope you'll try this later this afternoon or this evening. It could be a significant way to bond and build family identity, as well as have fun together.

### **3. Explore God.**

Take a walk. Look at the stars. Seek God's beauty in creation.

### **4. Serve together.**

Find something to do around here regularly as a family. It would help our entire church family and really benefit your family for a long, long time.

Let me read you this verse one more time: Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it (Proverbs 22:6).

One of the great things about God is that His mercies are new every morning—so it's never too late to start. If your kids are still in the home, start something with them today. If your kids are grown, give them a call and tell them you love them sometime before the sun goes down.

I love Sundays because Sundays are so helpful for families!

Let's pray. Father, thank you for creating us for rhythm and rest. And thank you for creating children and entrusting them to us. Help those of us who have children in our homes to start them off on the way they should go. And help all of us to make the Sabbath a delight. In Jesus's name we pray, amen.