

Series: HEADWINDS—March 26, 2006

**HEADWINDS—AND KIDS!
Luke 15:11-32**

I. INTRO

- A. I would have to admit that when I was in my early 20's, I wasn't sure I wanted to have children. There seemed to be this pre-occupation with the over-population of the world and I thought, and I thought, "Is God asking me to help create more people?" Since I lived close to New York City, my other thought was, "Do I even want to bring children into this kind of world?"
1. But I guess what really troubled me was the fact that I began to realize from some examples very close at hand--kids can seriously break your heart. Two kids raised by the same family can go in two opposite directions. And I thought, "I'd kind of like to know what the odds are before I do something that random!"
 2. Maybe I was looking for a lifetime warranty. A money-back guarantee. Over years of thinking and reading about this stuff I've come to this conclusion. Are you ready? **There are no guarantees!** God offers grace and power and love for whatever we face, and the influence of Heaven through our prayers in the hearts of those we love, but—**no guarantees.** To give guarantees, God would have to violate his most precious—and dangerous gift to humans—freedom. The power to **choose** who we will love and how we will live.
- B. In fact, as I've thought about it—parenting may bring us closer to the agony—and the joy—that God experiences in being our Heavenly parent. Loving us with outrageous love. And then watching us flip him off and take a swan dive off a cliff onto the rocks. -Parenting isn't our chance to create little robots who will worship us and make us proud. Parenting is our chance to participate in what I believe is the most demanding task in the world: shaping a human soul that will last forever.

-In fact, choosing to be a parent is the choice to experience headwind. It's like saying, "I want a really, really, **really** hard, selfless—but **satisfying** job!" At the end of this service, we're going to have a child dedication service. Child dedication is not about coming to God to get your warranty. It's about parents saying to God, "**Help!** God, if I'm going to make it—and if I'm going to do this right—I'll need your help!"

-And the best news in the world is that God understands parenting better than **anyone** else—and He says, "Of **course** I'll help—after all, I've got a big stake in this too!"

II. IF I CAN JUST DO THIS RIGHT!

- A. We live in a world of technicians. The whole field of scientific and behavioral research has implied that if you can just do "A" and "B"—"C" will automatically happen. That works with mathematics and computers and cooking—but not with people. -But we act as if it does. Ever noticed how quick people who do shows on Columbine or Nanny 911 imply, "What's **wrong** with these parents?" As if you can look at children and tell right away whether or not the parents have made mistakes.
1. There is a verse in the Bible that is sometimes used by parents—particularly Christian parents—as a kind of fail-proof technique—or guarantee. Let me read it. **Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it (Prov. 22:6 NIV).**

-Let's look at some of the phrases to get what he's saying. First, the word **train**. What does it mean to **train** someone? Give advice? Make sure they follow your list of rules? Well, think of potty training. It's quite simple, but **man**, what a hassle—especially if a kid chooses to be stubborn about it. Think of what it takes to train a surgeon, a pilot, and astronaut—and these are people who **want** to learn. Training is an **intense, hands on** word. What are some areas you can think of where children will need to be trained?

- a. They'll have to be trained to love and connect with others. They'll need relational intelligence—how to treat others like they'd like to be treated?
- b. They'll have to be trained in how to work, how to carry the burdens of life; how to take responsibility for their own behavior, life, goals and problems. That means parents have to, over time, **transfer ownership**.
- c. In short, we have to train our children on how to live in a place called **reality**. The **real world**. How to fail—and get back up. How to accept life the way it is. How to forgive. And especially, how to live in God's world. Who He is, how to walk with Him, go to Him, love Him.

2. Now, this is the tough thing. Kids are *really, really* smart and perceptive. They're **made** to be curious. To learn. The tools to learn are built right into their DNA. Anyone know **how** they learn? How many of you think it's with books, lectures, little school courses—or through nagging? NO! They learn by watching and **copying!** So they need good role models. Not **perfect** ones—but good ones. Ones who will live what they say they believe—and admit it when they goof up.

-If they're going to copy us, they need **time** with us to see how we react to life, how we show love, what we do when we're frustrated or disappointed or hurt. And the tough thing is—**you can't fake it! They know!**

3. The second thing you notice in this verse are the words, **in the way he/she should go**. This is obviously assuming that you and I know which way they should go, right? Which way would that be? In our world, it gets pretty confusing.

-If you want excellent, solid information on the **way we should go**—I'd take what the Jesus says about life very seriously. He even summarized it. He said, "Love God with everything and put him first—and love others like you love yourself. You won't go wrong if you do that." How many of you think that's on anyone's "**How to raise a child star**" list? I think that if you and I take seriously what Jesus said matters—and **doesn't** matter—we'll do a pretty good job and showing our children the **way they should go**.

4. Just one brief note on some additional meaning behind this phrase **the way he/she should go**. There are some pretty strong indications that this is also talking about training a child according to how they're **wired up**. Is there anyone here who's discovered that your children are all clones of one another? Man, they're **so** different, aren't they? Some kids are born easy-going about everything. **Hacuna matata!** Others

kids are born with a cocktail in one hand and a cigar in the other. They respond differently to love, to discipline, to school, to friends—to **everything**.

-The implication here is this: **Know how your child is wired up so you can help them!** And for cryin' out loud, don't assume they'll love the things you love! This is great advice; Train them in the way their DNA is coiled up—how God has made them!

5. One final set of words: **and when he/she is OLD he will not turn from it.** Notice that this isn't saying, "If you do this right, your kids will never rebel or embarrass you or break your heart." The word **old** literally means, "when they have whiskers." That happens earlier for men than for women. Don't laugh! I've kissed my grandmother—I know whiskers happen to women!
-The point? Your training in a child's life while they are still pliable is a **huge** deal. Don't wait! Don't put it off! Some estimates say that what a child believes by the time they are 13, they will believe for the rest of their life. The world **old** tempers our expectations. Sometimes we don't actually realize that what our parents taught us was right until we've totally run out of options.

B. Now, this verse **sounds** like a guarantee, doesn't it? As I mentioned earlier—it's not! Even if we were able, by some miracle, to provide the perfect home, that's **still** no guarantee.

1. Know how I know that? Because I've read Genesis. No disrespect intended, but even God couldn't pull it off. Adam and Eve had a **perfect** environment. They even had the **perfect marriage**. They **knew** their Creator—and walked with Him every day. They never struggled with an evil nature pulling them in the wrong direction. But they **still** rebelled—and took the whole human race off the rails. And the kids they raised? One son murdered the other.

-How many of you think this happened because God was not a good parent? He didn't give good leadership, He didn't have family devotions often enough—or somehow wasn't a good role model. It had **nothing** to do with Him—and **everything** to do with them.

2. So, what does God expect of us? Well, I think He expects us to turn to Him—talk to Him about our children and ask Him to touch the part of their lives we can't.
-Friends, if there's one thing we have to understand as parents—it's our limitations. We can influence, love, accept, provide great experiences, listen, coach, lead by example, help, train, provide good reinforced limits--and discipline our children, but we can't reach into their soul. We can't open their eyes when they're blinded by temptation—or driven by hormones, or the desire to be accepted by peers. We can't speak to their conscience.
In fact, nagging is usually counter-productive. What we **can** do is intercede for them—ask God to do the interior work.
-So, what can we expect when we pray? A **lot!** Praying for someone is never a substitute for training, discipline, loving and leading by example—but it is **powerful!**

- a. God is the only One who can open people's eyes and help them see their self-deception and the craziness of the path they're taking. Parents can't do that!

- b. When you pray, you can expect that God's grace and goodness will shine through the spiritual darkness your children may find themselves in so they can find the way home.
 - c. You can expect that God will help them find their way through overwhelming temptation so that obedience is at least a choice they can make. But here's the deal. Ultimately **they** have to choose sanity over insanity. As much as you'd like to—you can't make that choice for them.
3. There **are** no absolute guarantees when it comes to children. But the Bible **does** make it clear that who we are and what we do and how we engage the God of the Universe in our parenting can **absolutely** stack the deck in the right direction. And that's **fantastic** news!

III. LETTING GO...

- A. I want to close, this morning, with a story and a principle. The story is very straightforward and well-known. Jesus told the story. Let me read it.
- ... "A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now, instead of waiting until you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.**
- "A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and took a trip to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money on wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him to feed his pigs. The boy became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.**
- "When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired men have food enough to spare, and here I am, dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired man." ' "**
- "So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.'^[a]**
- "But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger, and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening in the pen. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began (Luke 15:11-24 NLT).**

1. If you had lived in the culture where Jesus told this story, you'd have gasped at what this kid did. It wasn't just a kid running away from home--it is a story of outrageous, insulting behavior. This is the question: Does Jesus blame the father in this story for the son's actions? Was he a bad Dad? No. Actually, the father represents God.

-The fascinating part of this story—and the part I want to emphasize--is that as great as the pain was this Dad felt, he **let his son go!** He just let him go. When his son started smearing the family name in the far country by living like a pig, his Dad didn't send Mongo, the big servant, to get him and straighten him out.

Anyone know why? If Mongo had forced him to come home, he would've been filled with hatred and resentment. ***I was just about to make it big in pigs—but you wouldn't let me! No, you have to control EVERYTHING!***

2. What's clear in this story is that God will **not** control us—even though He could. He **made** us, but He sets us free to choose which direction we'll take.

-John White, in his book ***Parents In Pain*** calls this principle, ***relinquishment***. It means that we need to ultimately open our hands and let our children go. Set them free. Friends, this is a ***profound*** issue in parenting. Now, please understand—this doesn't release us from training them in the way they should go—it simply means to relinquish our desire to control.

- a. For example, ***we need to relinquish our right to be proud of our children***. That may happen, but it's not a right!
- We live in a world where parents train their children to perform like little circus ponies—and a lot of times, it's really not about the kids, it's about the parent's bragging rights. "That's ***my*** boy out there on the ice! That's ***my*** girl singing!" There's ***nothing*** wrong with children learning skills and doing well, but there ***is*** something wrong about parents pushing them for the sake of their own ego. My guess is that a lot of kids get more training in how to perform than they do in how to live.
 - We need to make sure we're training them in the ***way they should go***—not the way ***we*** want them to go so we can feel better about ourselves. That can put all kinds of pressure on a child that they ***will*** grow up to resent.
- b. We have to relinquish something else. ***We need to cancel all their debts*** to us for what we have done for them. None of this, "You ***owe*** me" stuff! We do what we do because God has called us to do it—and that's it. If you cling to your right to be repaid with gratitude—or visits—or control—for what you've done, that is a sure path to disappointment.
- c. ***We need to give up our right to uninterrupted tranquility***. Someone made the smart comment that parents spend the first 2 years of their child's life teaching them to walk and talk, and the rest telling them to "sit down and shut up."
- The bottom line is—you ***will*** have problems. Kids do not pay attention to our plans. They are not worried about our convenience, our schedule, our health, our headaches, or our finances. If you want peace, raise turtles. John White said it like this: "Children are not a gentle stream trickling through the well-ordered garden of your life!" Fall on your knees and be grateful for every moment of peace in your home—but remember: it's not your ***right***—it's a ***privilege!***
- d. This next one's a tough one. ***Let go of your right to respectability!*** Truth is, you can control your own actions, you can keep your own nose clean—and you should. You can teach your own children right from wrong—and they can still humiliate you. That's what happened to the guy in this story. And that's what happens to God all the time.

-Let's just do a poll. How many of you think God is proud of how his people acted in the crusades—where they put his name on all kinds of atrocities? How many of you think God is proud of the way the church has treated people of different races; or how they have treated women over the years—who were created as equal partners with men?

-In making a way for sinful people to come home that is **unrelated** to performance—God took a huge risk on how He would be perceived by people who claimed to be his. If one of your biggest concerns in life is your image—how cool and good you look, don't have kids—because having children can be **very** messy.

What children can do for us is force us to break through our own snobbishness and pride and stupidity—and that's a **good thing!**

- e. One final thing—and this is maybe the toughest thing. Relinquishing your rights—letting go—means **allowing your children to face pain and tragedy—the consequences of their own actions.**

-How many of you think the father in Jesus' story was shocked when his son blew his inheritance, took a flying swan dive into the cesspool and rammed his life into the guardrails? I think he **knew** what the far country was all about. Most parents do. And yet, he let him go. Another question. How many of you think the son would've come to his senses without spending time in the pigpen—drooling over the swill? Think he'd have ever come home if his Dad had kept sending him checks in the mail?

-Friends—the hard part of parenting is our willingness to let our children—the ones we'd gladly give our lives for—find out that fire burns. Go to 2X4 University. At its very core, relinquishment—letting your children go—means trusting God with your children rather than your own ability to manage and control their lives. It's understanding that wise counsel to older children is just that. **Wise counsel.** And like people do every single hour of every day with **God's** brilliant counsel—they can refuse it and say, "Nope! I'd rather learn the **hard way.**"

-But, see, ultimately, **relinquishing** is not letting go of your children—it's letting go of your delusion that you have the power to determine their destinies. You don't.

- B. The problem with using Jesus' story of the prodigal is that everyone knows how it ends. It's probably the most famous story in the world. It's a story with an ending that every parent with a child who's gone off the deep end longs for. Reconciliation. A child who comes home. It's the ending that every person who's ever flipped off their parents and waded deep into the cesspool longs for. Forgiveness and grace.

1. The question is—what do you do as a parent when your standing on the roof, waiting, but no one's on the horizon?

-I'm going to keep this very simple, but there are three enemies you have to really watch out for. And it's not drug dealers and loose women. Fear is the first enemy. When we see our children taking a detour—the inner theatre running horror flicks turns on. Every 20/20 show, every Oprah and Dr. Phil and Jerry Springer session comes to mind—all the headlines, all the police shows.

-And I'm telling you—you **have** to look fear in the eye on this one. You have to be willing to say, "I'm scared to **death!**" And then you have to remember, "God wants me to find peace—even in this storm." God is looking for me—and my child. God wants to show me the right path—and **He's** protecting me in this valley of the shadow of death. And He is responsible to bring me to a place of blessing—and work in my life.

-When telling us how to face fear, Jesus said, "Save your respect, your awe, your reverence for the One who holds **all** power—God—not the cheap imitations of it on this planet.

2. The second enemy to watch for is guilt. A lot of parents think, "This is **my fault! If only...!**" Truth is, friends, we earthly parents are imperfect. It is impossible as a sinful parent to not make mistakes. Whatever mistakes you made—there is forgiveness. And, whatever mistakes **you** made, your children **still** made choices in how to respond to life—just like we do. When you're struggling—take your feelings of guilt to the highest court in the universe—God's—and you'll find that they're paid for—or at least they can be. And God can give you power to confess your mistakes—and not keep making them!

3. The worst enemy is shame. It's shame that nails our lips to the floor when we need to ask for prayer—or help—or companionship. Shame is what causes us to, in bitterness, turn our backs on our kids when they've had enough and want to come home. And let's be honest, shame is based on our fantasies of what we **think** others think about us—when we really have no idea. And you need to know—whatever rebel path your children choose—God is not ashamed of you or your children. In his eyes, we are all too valuable to lose. And He can fix anything. He can!

-I want you to notice that the story ends with a son coming home. And He didn't just show up to take advantage of his Dad for the rest of his life by getting a room and free meals.

He was a changed person. See, truth is, wherever your child is—or goes—God is there. If you've trained you child—and modeled for your child—the way they **should** go, God will use that training to work them over. God alone has access to the places of their hearts that you can never touch—not in a life-time. And you can pray in faith for that—and **know, KNOW** that He will. Cause He's the only One who wants them home more than you do.

IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

I want to close with a principle I mentioned several weeks ago. It's the **loaves and fishes** principle. Remember the story? 5000 hungry men and their families—waiting to eat. And a little boy and his bag lunch—5 pieces of pita bread and a couple of sardines. But someone stood between the bag lunch and the crowd. Jesus. And all this boy had to do was offer his little lunch to Jesus.

-It's a powerful principle—and it still works. That's exactly what these parents are doing this morning as they dedicate their children. They bring their bag lunch. Their great qualities, their love, their good intentions, their homes and cars and money—which will **never** be enough. Not for **this** job. And they also bring their deficits. Their scars and insufficiencies and even their tendency to be a bad role model. And they simply say, "Jesus, I need a miracle. I need **You** to make up the difference between what I am and can offer---and what my children need. **Please!**" And the miracle happens. God never asks us to give what we **don't** have. He just says, "Will you give me your bag lunch?"