

A Bent Toward God

Two years ago, my wife, Bonnie, and I had the privilege of accompanying a group of nearly 100 people to Branson, Missouri. While we were there, one of the attractions we visited was Dogwood Canyon. Dogwood Canyon is an 11-mile-long canyon that runs from Missouri into Arkansas. The canyon property is a beautiful series of waterfalls along a mountain stream, and a paved road runs along the stream for the entire length of the property. The road allows guests to tour the 11-mile stretch in the comfort of sheltered trams pulled by four-wheel-drive vehicles. The tour is an interesting blend of natural beauty and man-made developments.

Midway through the tour, a tree is readily noticeable because of its unique appearance. The tree's trunk, having a diameter of 12 inches or more, is literally bent over about 4 feet up the trunk at a 90-degree angle! Even more amazing is the fact that this tree actually points to a cave about 100 feet up the cliff!

Our guide explained to us that Native Americans often wrapped leather bands around the tiny trunks of young saplings to give them a "bent," which in this case pointed to the entrance to that particular cave. As the tree grew older, the leather would be worn away by the elements. Thus the leather had less and less of an influence over the tree until finally the leather had entirely disintegrated. But what the leather left behind was a tree trunk with a bent that was due to the influence of the leather bands while the tree was young.

This is an illustration from nature of the truth behind the words of Solomon in Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (NKJV).

Many Bible scholars believe that this proverb about training up a child means that as parents educate their child "in the way he should go," the child, like the tree in Dogwood Canyon, is given a bent that will stay with him throughout his entire lifetime. In other words, as parents notice their children's gifts, skills, and personalities, those parents give each of their children a bent as they provide encouragement and direction based on those traits.

My dad was an avid fisherman. In fact, there is still a poster in my mom's garage that reads, "God created the earth with 70% water and 30% land. This means that God intended for man to fish twice as much as he works!" I can remember fishing as a young boy with my dad almost every Saturday, all summer! This instilled in me a natural bent, or love, for the water. To this day, boating, waterskiing, and swimming are a few of my favorite hobbies. I still love to spend summer days on the lake.

As parents walk with God and encourage their children to follow in their footsteps, they give their children a spiritual bent. Sold-out disciples of Jesus Christ produce sold-out disciples of Jesus Christ! This claim is not always true, but it is generally true.

One of my favorite authors is Jerry Bridges. In his book *Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts*, Bridges writes, "We must depend upon God to do *for* us what we cannot do for ourselves. We must, to the same degree, depend on Him to *enable us* to do what we must do for ourselves" (1988, 112; emphasis in original). In other words, Bridges writes, some of us Christians are tempted "to think that God's sovereignty negates any responsibility of ours to live responsible and prudent lives" (105). Contrary to this thinking, Bridges says, "God usually works through *means*, and He intends that we use the means He has placed at our disposal" (110; emphasis mine).

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Many parents have weighed the cost and chosen Christian schools as a primary *means* to the end result they have established as a priority—that their children walk in truth (3 John 4).

Is attendance at a Christian school accompanied by a promise that all Christian school students will walk in truth? Certainly not. Children, like adults, have free will. Parents cannot crawl inside their children's hearts and press a button that will automatically result in their children's choosing truth.

Is it generally true, however, that Christian school education—kindergarten through college—is one *means* God can use to the end—that children walk in truth. You can count on it! And as a father of four precious children, I need all the help I can get!

Reference

Bridges, Jerry. 1988. *Trusting God: Even when life hurts*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.



Brian S. Simmons, President
Association of Christian Schools International