

What People Are Saying about  
*Raising Children on Purpose*

*Raising Children on Purpose* is very easy to read and extremely practical. At a time when people have so many activities on their plate, it brings into focus the need to purposely evaluate and structure a program for the development of our children. The mere fact that it causes one to spend time reflecting on how they can be more effective parents makes this an absolutely invaluable tool. I hope it will prove beneficial to many generations of young parents.

—*Benjamin S. Carson, Sr., M.D.*  
Director of Pediatric Neurosurgery  
Johns Hopkins

Practical, practical, full of hope!

As a window into children—and a mirror to parents—Wes helps us see and celebrate kids' God-given uniqueness, and these pages hold a powerful, practical tool for every parent who wants to raise children according to God's dream for them. A valuable, anyone-can-do resource for us as parents. Thanks, Wes!

—*Joani Schultz*  
Chief Creative Officer  
Group Publishing

Wesley Fleming delivers wisdom with such sensitivity and wit that each step of the book makes you eager to try its principles out. I learned wonderful insights for my own role as a parent, but also for how I can grow as a person, as a son reflecting on my own past.

—*Craig Keener*  
Professor of New Testament, Palmer Theological Seminary  
Author of *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*

## What People Are Saying about Wesley Fleming's Ministry

As you sit on the edge of your seat, the Scriptures come alive....Wes exhorts men and women to godly living, confronting sensitive issues with humor and insight. The result is life-changing decisions.

—*Single father with two sons*

Wesley Fleming's presentation provides practical, biblically based insights into parenting. His style is down-to-earth and humorous. The day flew by, and we came away with ideas and techniques we could apply immediately.

—*Parents of three preschoolers*

Wesley's seminar touched me personally and challenged me as a parent. We have implemented much of what we learned in our home and are seeing exciting results!

—*Mother of two teens*

# RAISING

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## CHILDREN ON PURPOSE

HELPING YOUR CHILDREN FIND THEIR GOD-GIVEN CALLING

# Dedication

*To Vicki, my wife and best friend,  
my daughters Rebekah, Rachael, Beth,  
and the following friends who believed that God  
could do a little with a lot, a lot with a little,  
and everything with nothing:  
Peg, Donald and Margaret, Mark, Louis,  
Sue, Anne, and Anna.*

# RAISING

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## CHILDREN ON PURPOSE

HELPING YOUR CHILDREN FIND THEIR GOD-GIVEN CALLING



*WESLEY H. FLEMING*



WHITAKER  
HOUSE

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**RAISING CHILDREN ON PURPOSE:**  
**Helping Your Children Find Their God-Given Calling**  
Updated and Expanded Edition

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## PREFACE

# Finding My Future in the Past

I grew up in the hills of upstate New York, on a farm my father leased to farmers in the area. I remember wishing I lived closer to my friends at school so I could play sports and have a more exciting social life. My path led me to a more contemplative life filled with day-dreams and creative play. I planted fields with toy tractors, built cities with miniature trucks and cars, and launched models of rockets and futuristic spacecraft. My favorite imaginary play activity, however, was suiting up in my father's World War II army gear. Tripping over the cuffs of his U.S.-issue combat fatigues, with my head clanging inside a Japanese helmet, I'd disappear into full-grown cornfields to take on well-defended enemy strongholds, emerging from my mission only for lunch and dinner.

Years later, I would want to join the marines as a corpsman. I even visited navy recruiters the summer before my senior year of college. But God had other plans. In my last semester, I discovered that God had His own purpose for my life.

It's uncanny how my future can be observed in the past. As a church-plant pastor, I farm spiritual fields, build spiritual communities, launch leaders into the culture, lead God's army to take enemy strongholds, and tend to wounded warriors. The childhood expressions of my spiritual passion and gifting serve as guideposts to my unique path.

## RAISING CHILDREN ON PURPOSE

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Before starting our church, I served as a minister of education (youth and children's pastor) for twenty-two years within local churches. In this role, it was my privilege to bind up brokenhearted families—parents and children who were wounded in life's battles. It was an honor to come alongside and guide teachers and parents who sought to plant seeds of destiny in their children so that each child might fulfill God's unique purpose.

As a parent, it has been a joy to help my children identify the origins of their unique paths and to prepare them for their callings. This book, and its related workshop ministry, *Coming Home Ministries*, find their beginnings in my quest to raise my children on purpose—according to their God-given purpose.

—*Wesley H. Fleming*

## A (NECESSARY) INTRODUCTION

# Beyond Food and Shelter

**A**long with food, shelter, love, and protection, a child has a basic need for a sense of purpose in life. Directionless kids tend to drift in the wrong direction. For hard proof, we have only to visit the local mall on a Friday night and observe the restless herd of young people aimlessly milling about experimenting with cigarettes and other “cool” behaviors. Kids who know that their lives have purpose and meaning strike a vivid contrast: They are enthusiastic, goal oriented, and responsible. One highly motivated teen put it this way: “Why get messed up in drugs and alcohol? I want to do something with my life.”

The Bible says that before our children were born, God put within each of them a special plan for their lives—“a way they should go.” The purpose our children are looking for lies within them! The Bible also says that we, as parents, have the distinct privilege of helping them find this calling and live it out. (See Proverbs 22:6.)

This book is dedicated to helping you, as a parent, raise up your children according to their God-given purposes. We offer practical support in two areas. First, we will help you to find your child’s unique way; and second, we will assist you in cultivating your child’s passion for living out that way.

Part I will show how you can discover your child’s calling. An easy-to-use survey tool, called The DNA (Divine Notion Awaiting) Analysis, will assess your child’s gifting and spiritual passion and then

determine where they overlap. Our premise is that your child's calling is located at the place where his God-given gifting and spiritual passion intersect.

Part II will show you how to encourage your child to stay on his unique way. What good is it if your child knows the way he should go, but doesn't want to go there? To arouse in your child a passion for God and His will, you must do two things. First, you must help him develop a healthy capacity to trust, and second, you must help him form a positive impression of God the Father.

A healthy capacity to trust is essential for a vibrant and growing faith in God. Reaching out to God in faith requires an ability to trust and depend on another to meet one's needs. This faculty can be damaged if the bond of trust between parent and child is broken in childhood. Those, for instance, who were continually disappointed in the way their parents responded to their needs will be reluctant to give themselves away to God (the ultimate parent) and His plan for their lives, for fear of further disappointment.

In addition, your children need a positive impression of God, if they are to desire Him and delight in His will. They need to know Him for who He is—a loving, strong, dependable Father. They need an accurate concept of God in order to abandon all and follow Him.

For better or for worse, our parenting model provides our children with their first impression of God. When children are young, what we say is true, what we do is good, how we respond to their needs is love, and what we require is law. Children are poor discerners but excellent recorders—our example not only provides a first impression of God, but also a lasting one.

How do we develop in our children a healthy capacity to trust? How do we accurately represent the Father's love? We must meet their emotional needs.

## Introduction: Beyond Food and Shelter

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For our children to trust in God's love and protection, they have to have experienced our love and protection. Our children reach out to us in faith to satisfy the longing of their souls. As we respond by faithfully meeting their needs, we strengthen their capacity to trust—and have faith—and also provide them with a model of God's character.

Meeting the emotional needs of your child lays a foundation for destiny. The task of the second half of this book is to identify the seven emotional needs of a child and to show you how to meet them.

God's perfect plan is for you to lead your children into their unique destinies. By discovering your children's callings and meeting their emotional needs in ways that reflect the Father's love and strengthen their capacity to trust, you can raise your children to fulfill their God-given purposes. Discover the "Jeremiahs," "Samuels," "Davids," and "Esthers" in your home, and encourage them to walk in their way!





PART I

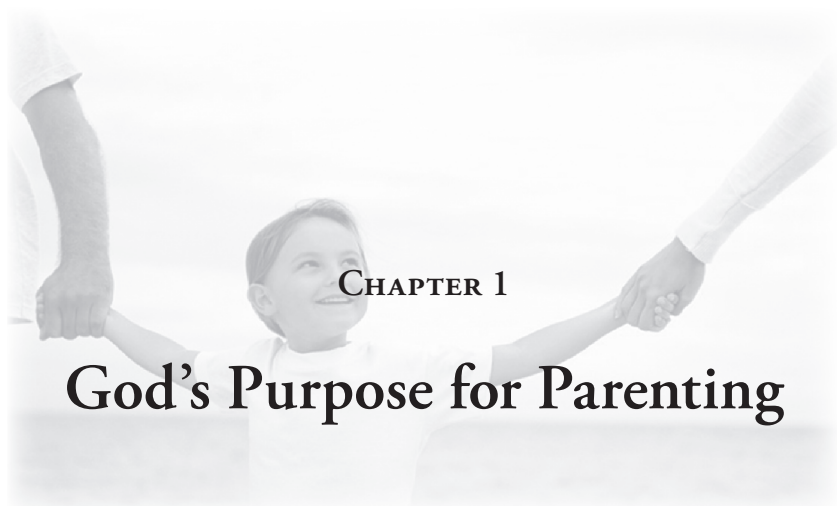
# Helping Your Child to Find His Way

Dear God,  
When I grow up I want to be just like my Dad,  
only not so hairy all over.

—Sam (age 6)







## CHAPTER 1

# God's Purpose for Parenting

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### WITHOUT A VISION

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As I write these words, I am being summoned to an overflowing toilet in the upstairs bathroom. One of our children used too much toilet paper (again). “Where is the plunger?” I scream as water pours over the edge of the commode. “In the downstairs bathroom,” my wife yells. I consider how easy it would be to write a book about parenting if I didn’t have children.

Let me commiserate with my parent friends for a moment. (By “commiserate,” I mean whine...)

Mom, wouldn’t it be great if you could finally complete that college degree or just finish that cup of coffee you started? Aren’t there times when you feel like your life is on hold, that your talents lie dormant, and that you have more to offer than cleaning up spills and changing diapers at two in the morning?

Dad, of course you’d do anything for your kids. Of course they mean the world to you, but now and then, between you and me, doesn’t it seem like no matter how much you give it’s never enough? Don’t the constant demands of parenthood slow down your career progress, not to mention the love life you once shared with your wife?

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Am I the only one who wonders what this parenting thing is about when dry cereal crunches beneath my bare feet as I make my way to the coffee pot in the morning? Am I the only one who needs to know that there is more to parenting than removing peanut butter from my pre-school daughter's hair and chauffeuring my teens around town every Saturday afternoon? No, I think not. I believe that many of us need to know that what we are doing is not in vain—that there is great purpose for doing what we do on a daily, and nightly, basis.

Chances are you already have a purpose for parenting. You may not have articulated it, but you probably have one. What would you say it is? Circle the response that most closely reflects your own.

Your purpose for parenting:

- a) I just want my kids to be happy and healthy.
- b) I just want my kids to be happy and healthy, go to an Ivy League school, and make a six-digit income.
- c) I just want to be happy and healthy and left alone for five uninterrupted minutes.
- d) I just want to survive the next twenty years without hurting anyone.

Certainly Christian parenting is more than this—but what? Until we answer the question, we will parent more by accident than on purpose. In the absence of long-term goals, our daily parental concerns (in order of urgency) will be:

First: Are you bleeding?

Second: Where is your brother?

Third: What happened to the cat?

Is this the extent of your vision? Is crisis management the reason you sacrifice sleep and sanity?

## God's Purpose for Parenting

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The Bible says in Proverbs 29:18 that without a vision, the people will perish. Without a vision for parenting, our children's potential is likely to perish. Clean bedrooms and clean bottoms are noble aspirations, but if they constitute the full measure of our vision, we will surely limit our children's future.

So if there is a higher purpose for parenting, what is it?

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### GOD'S PURPOSE FOR PARENTING

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Lucy asks that great philosopher of the comic strips, Charlie Brown, what her purpose is in life. He answers without hesitation: "Be kind. Don't smoke. Be prompt. Smile a lot. Eat sensibly. Avoid cavities, and mark your ballot carefully. Avoid too much sun. Send overseas packages early. Love all creatures above and below. Insure your belongings, and try to keep the ball low..." Before he can get out another platitude, Lucy interrupts: "Hold real still," she says, "because I am going to hit you with a very sharp blow upon the nose!"

To get beyond the platitudes and to the truth about parenting we need to consult the one who wrote "the Book." God, after all, is the ultimate parenting expert. He's been raising kids, ages one to one hundred one, for thousands of years. Among all the books on the subject, it's my opinion that the Bible is the definitive text on how to raise children. Even the language in which it was written offers insight.

The word for parent in Hebrew is *horeh*. The word for teacher is *moreh* and the word for God's teaching or instruction is *Torah*. These three words are derived from the verb *yarah*, which means "to throw, to cast, to shoot as an arrow." Our task, as parents, is revealed in the etymology of these words:

Parents (*horeh*) are teachers (*moreh*) who train their children in the Word of God (*Torah*) to fly like arrows (*yarah*) to a strategic and predetermined target.

The purpose of parenting is to train our kids in the Word and then send them to fulfill a specific kingdom purpose. Wow! Now that's a cause worth losing sleep over.

Psalms 127:4 supports the idea that parents are to send out their children like arrows. *“Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one’s youth”* (Psalm 127:4). The implication is this: *Parents are like warriors, in that they send their children (yarah), like arrows, to strike a strategic and predetermined target.*

What about the familiar verse, Proverbs 22:6? *“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”* Some mistakenly believe this verse teaches that if we inculcate our children with

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*The purpose of parenting is to train children to fulfill specific callings in the kingdom of God.*

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Christian beliefs, they are unlikely to go astray. If they should fall away, a parent need not be concerned, for it is only temporary. At some point, their moral training will reemerge and persuade them to return to their Christian heritage.

Though that is a popular interpretation of this verse, it's wrong. Many Scriptures advocate teaching our children the Bible, taking them to Sunday school, and memorizing the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 6:6–7, for instance), but this is not one of them.

Hebrew scholars agree that an accurate translation of Proverbs 22:6 is literally, “Train [start] a child according to his [the child’s] way.” This understanding implies that a child has a unique, God-given purpose in life. It suggests that each child has his own particular bent, talent, and disposition—in effect, his own calling or “way he is to go.” Isaiah referred to this ordained way or course of life when he said, *“And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it”* (Isaiah 30:21 KJV).

## God's Purpose for Parenting

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Respected Bible translator and commentator Derek Kidner supported this rendering when he stated that the verse implies “respect for [the child’s] individuality and vocation.” Kidner also observed that the word for “train” is elsewhere translated “dedicate” and may have that meaning here.<sup>1</sup> In this case, the verse suggests that parents are to set their children apart for God’s calling.

Proverbs 22:6 instructs us to raise our children to enter their God-given callings—not whatever we may have chosen for them. Once our children have found their unique ways and are equipped to walk in them, the verse suggests that wild horses can’t drag them away from them. A paraphrase of Proverbs 22:6 might read,

Set your child apart for his God-given destiny, and when he matures and enters the path God has ordained for him, he will not want to leave it.

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### A UNIQUE CALLING

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The Bible indicates that every child has a distinct calling upon his life—a predetermined target. God encourages Jeremiah, for instance, that before he was born, he was called to a special purpose. *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations”* (Jeremiah 1:5).

Paul states in Ephesians 2:10 that our children were born for a purpose—a predetermined work. *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

Perhaps, like many, you believed that only clergy could be “called.” This may come as a shock, but the term *clergy* does not even appear in the Bible! It wasn’t until the dark ages that the term was used to describe those who held office in the church. In all likelihood, those who sought to make a self-serving distinction between church leadership and the

laity made its current meaning popular. (Incidentally, the term *laity*, which means “those of uniformed opinion,” is not found in Scripture either.)

Though you may not be clergy, you are, according to Scripture, “called”—called to Christ (Romans 1:6), called out from those whose sole ambition is personal success and comfort (1 Corinthians 1:1–2), and called to an ordained and eternally significant purpose (Romans 8:28). In terms of parenting, we are called to help our children recognize their unique purposes and to send them to them. (See Psalm 127:4.) We are to help our children make their mark!



From the age of three, Karen had wanted to be a nurse. When she gave her life to God as a teen and the desire persisted, she concluded it must be a calling. Her family, however, vigorously opposed her interest in the medical field. Her Mom and Dad were dedicated teachers. They insisted that education was the only way to change the world. Not only did they refuse to support Karen financially, but they also tried to discourage her by withdrawing from her emotionally.

After years of confusion, Karen finally decided that she would endure her parents’ scorn and enroll in nursing school. She loved every minute of her studies and thrived in the hospital environment. Ironically, she did so well in her training that she not only got a full-time job as a nurse, but she was also asked to teach nursing part-time.

During a *Raising Children on Purpose* seminar, Karen was grateful to learn that the Bible taught that no man is to plan out the course of his or anyone else’s life. According to the Bible, parents are to train a child according to the way God has created him to go. They are not to impose their desires upon their children, but to discover His will for them. A parent’s wishes are not always God’s will. The Bible says children should honor their parents, not blindly obey them. Karen

## God's Purpose for Parenting

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honored her parents by considering their advice carefully, but they were not to determine her destiny. God alone put in her the “way she was to go.”

We must be careful not to live vicariously through our children. Many armchair quarterbacks mandate an NFL draft upon their sons. Many middle-aged moms burden their daughters with unrealistic standards of fashion and beauty. Unreasonable parental expectations can devastate a child who dearly wants to please her parents and simply be loved for who she is.

A parent's role is not to mold but to unfold a child's potential. God gave our children unique purposes. Who are we to suggest different ones? Our goal as parents is to help our children to discover their God-given purposes and to train them to live them out, not to conform them to our plans for their future.

Good parenting recognizes a child's unique calling and sets him apart to fulfill it. It honors the child by customizing training to meet the child's specific needs and equipping him to fulfill his particular purpose.

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*A parent's role is not to mold but to unfold a child's potential.*

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God has a special plan for you as well. As David said, “*All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be*” (Psalm 139:16).

On the day you were conceived, God in heaven sat down to write a beautifully illustrated story. He drew pictures of a child growing up into adulthood and wove a gripping story line beneath each illustration. The angels were amazed at the detail and beauty of the pictures. They gasped in suspense as the plot unfolded. Unable to contain themselves, they stood to their feet and cheered as the child defeated his foes and arose victorious over his enemies. As the book came to its finish, all of heaven rejoiced over the happy ending.

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Your life is a story, and God is the author. No two stories are the same—each has a special message to share. And every story was written on purpose—there were no mistakes or accidents.

Our children's lives are ordained. Our job is to help them get onto the right page so that their story unfolds into a beautiful adventure.

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### ARROWS OF DESTINY

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Moses was like an arrow in the hand of a warrior. His parents sensed he was born for a divine purpose and did everything in their power to help him enter into it. They fearlessly opposed the most powerful man on earth and devised a plan to release their son's destiny.

*By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.* (Hebrews 11:23)

Like warriors, Moses' parents aimed their arrow straight at the enemy. Their careful aim helped to set their nation free from its oppressor and fulfilled God's purposes for their generation.

Israelite warriors in Bible times were committed to advancing God's purposes. Their arrows carried God's purposes forth toward a vital end. Our children are called to carry out God's purposes today. God has put in them a calling to advance the kingdom of God in their generation.

Psalms 127:5 confirms this. It says, referring to parents, *"They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate."* In Bible times, a city's gates were places of public business and litigation. Here a righteous man and his sons would fight for justice, truth, peace, morality, and generosity. Today, the gates of our cities are overwhelmed with corruption, lust, and fear. By raising children who fulfill their callings, these enemies of God will not prevail.





## God's Purpose for Parenting

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John's parents saw in their son a gift to teach the Bible from a young age. "Even as a preschooler, he had to know everything," his mother recalls. "He'd never settle for a simple answer like, 'Well, that's just the way it is.' He had to know the reason for everything."

Besides an insatiable curiosity, another clue existed. At eighteen months, he was speaking in complete sentences. John not only needed to know the answer, but he needed to tell others. His mother recalls, "John has always been very vocal."

As John grew up, he was deeply drawn to spiritual things. His questions about God and the Bible were frequent and earnest, according to his parents. His parents fed his curiosity and gave him a steady diet of the best Christian authors and teachers they knew.

John's father prayed for his children every day to ensure God's plan for their lives. During his daily prayer walk, he'd routinely stop to kneel at a log along an old set of railroad tracks. There he would pour out his heart to God for his children.

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*How quickly the cause of Christ  
would triumph if every Christian  
home raised children who  
assumed their God-given callings.*

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Today, believers, church leaders, and even members of city government esteem John as an unusually gifted leader and powerful teacher. Currently, his church is building a library with Disneyesque features for the poorest inner city school in the district. Pillars with hieroglyphs and Egyptian-style statues will flank the entranceway. Inside, pupils will do research on the Internet in a lab that looks like a space shuttle. Students will study at tables in a "Renaissance cathedral," where light streams in from stained-glass windows. For group discussion, pupils will take a seat in a "Roman amphitheater." Books can be found in a prehistoric jungle complete with volcano, foliage, and dinosaur.

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Last year, the church installed one thousand fire detectors in the homes of needy families, and periodically church members return to change the batteries. Twice each month food is taken to families in need all over the city. John is restoring the city gates. His success is due, in large part, to his parents' willingness to identify his calling and encourage him to pursue it.

Like warriors, John's parents sent their son, like an arrow, into the spiritual center of their hometown. Far from ashamed, they proudly watch him establish kingdom purposes for his city.

How quickly the cause of Christ would triumph if every Christian home raised children who assumed their God-given calling. Such a feat would release a flurry of divine purposes into the world, which would ignite a generation for Christ. Children raised to fulfill their calling as ministers of the New Covenant would bring God's kingdom to the church—revival would break loose! Children raised to fulfill their calling as businessmen would practice capitalism with a conscience. Children raised to fulfill their calling as scholars would challenge their colleagues with a logically consistent Christian worldview. Children raised to fulfill their calling to leadership would offer wise and moral guidance to our communities and nation. Our churches, our places of business, our educational system, and our nation would be restored! Raising children to fulfill their callings is a work of redemption:

*They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.*

(Isaiah 61:4)

The glorious purpose of parenting, according to the Word of God, is to raise children on purpose—their purpose. We are to help our children identify their callings and train them accordingly. This is God's vision for parenting. May it be our own.

### Chapter Notes

1. Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 147.