

Coach House Church BEACONS

START AS YOU MEAN TO GO ON

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Do you remember?

Milk in glass bottles, warm, with a thick layer of cream at the top that you were keen to drink, even though it had been in a warm classroom for half a day?

School dinners where there were always seconds and your friends were happy to give you the tapioca and prunes that they weren't keen on?

The school nurse who searched heads, and without any concerns for personal and emotional well-being, declared you had nits in front of a whole line of children?

School premises that had no security doors, signing in systems, lanyards with ID, so that any child who didn't want to stay all day could leave and run home?

How times have changed, particularly in education, some of it for the better and some not. What many will remember from school is that there is a level of behaviour that is acceptable and expected. There are rules for the greater good which are based on the ten commandments, given by God to Moses.

In Deuteronomy 5, after the ten commandments were given to Moses, he called all the people together to read them out so they knew what was expected of their behaviour and attitude to each other but, most importantly to God. After listing the 10 commands from God he follows this with:

32 So be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left. 33 Walk in obedience to all that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.

In other words, stick to the rules and don't compromise. There is an advantage in having a set of rules because it will be to your benefit, allowing you to have a

life that has a quality and purpose. In addition, in chapter 6, he emphasizes how important it is to:

7 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.

The importance of learning and acquiring essential skills and attitudes from a young age is widely accepted. Many people will know the saying from the Greek philosopher Aristotle who once said, "Give me a child until he is 7 and I will show you the man."

In the bible, Proverbs 22:6 says

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

I have enjoyed following a series on TV that started with the title '7 UP'. Its purpose was to follow the lives of a group of 7 year olds from across different social backgrounds, to test out the saying above, to see whether you could predict their life paths. For instance, would the articulate, upper class child attending a private school, with his educational journey already mapped out for him, from prep school to university, progress confidently along life's path? Would the subdued, shy boy from the Barnardo's children's home enjoy a positive future?

What became clear as the series progressed, filming their journey every 7 years, 14 Up, 21 Up and so on to 63 Up was that they all experienced ups and downs in their lives. Some were more resilient at times and some were able to reflect on how they had changed in their attitudes as they matured. Having watched the series, though, I realised that the often carefree 7 year old turned into a different creature at 14, the age at which physical and emotional change can be a challenge. Yet by 28 years old they had all changed again, into calm human beings, many being established in careers and with families, but often with questions about life and its purpose, and very sceptible about the premise of the programme suggesting their life chances were mapped out by their starting point on the social ladder. What was most noticeable, in the latest programmes, was being able to see the 7 year old reflected in the 63 year old. It was almost as though they had returned to their original self. The inbetween years of self- doubt or self- reflection, of angst or disillusionment had disappeared and the original personality showed through. In my mind, the quotes from Proverbs and from Aristototle appear true, certainly in personality and attitude. This seems to reinforce the necessity of instilling the right attitude at a young age.

In the Old testament, the people of Israel and Judah had been exiled, removed from Jerusalem and their temple. After years in captivity, they were allowed to return and rebuild the temple and city walls. This was a huge undertaking, under the watchful gaze of their enemies who did not hold back in their abusive comments and threats of attack. Nehemiah records the final part of this challenge:

Nehemiah 6: 15

15 So on October 2[d] the wall was finished—just fifty-two days after we had begun. 16 When our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened and humiliated. They realized this work had been done with the help of our God.

They wasted no time in welcoming people back within the repaired city walls and the surrounding area of Judea and six days later Ezra the priest brought out the book of the Law. This momentous task, of re- establishing Jerusalem and bringing the people of God back together was celebrated firstly with reading the law given by God to his people. It was a reminder of their shared values, their shared worship. It was a way of going back to the beginning, of remembering their roots, of re focussing on Almighty God. Nehemiah 8 says:

1 all the people assembled with a unified purpose at the square just inside the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had given for Israel to obey. 2 So on October 8[a] Ezra the priest brought the Book of the Law before the assembly, which included the men and women and all the children old enough to understand. 3 He faced the square just inside the Water Gate from early morning until noon and read aloud to everyone who could understand. All the people listened closely to the Book of the Law.

So, to be clear, they stood and listened for around 6 hours! Such was the importance of remembering and re- establishing the laws that their whole belief and faith was built on. If you read further on in the chapter, you'll see that they spent a few more hours being taught on these readings so that they fully understood the significance and implication for their lives.

This reflects the view voiced in Proverbs 22:6 which could be paraphrased-start as you mean to go on.

Having a solid base, a firm moral foundation is so important in an ever changing society. Even more so, putting out hope, our trust and faith in Jesus is vital as he promised to support us through life, able to forgive us for our failings and

mistakes, able to guide our steps and bring a peace of mind and deep contentment in all circumstances.

Proverbs 16 says:

Those who listen to instruction will prosper;
those who trust the Lord will be joyful.



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