

Train a child in the way he should go

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In honor of the recent bass tournament and fisherman fathers everywhere, I would like to share this story. On the day before bass season opened in New York, a boy and his father were fishing early in the evening, catching sunfish and perch with worms. Then the boy tied on a small silver lure and practiced casting. The lure struck the water and caused silvery ripples in the moonlight. On the third cast, his pole suddenly doubled over, and the boy yelled with excitement with the expectation of something big on the other end.

And big it was. His father watched with admiration as the boy skillfully worked the fish alongside the dock. Finally the boy lifted the exhausted fish from the water. It was the largest one he had ever seen, but it was a bass.

The boy and his father looked at the trophy fish, gills playing back and forth in the moonlight. The father lit a match and looked at his watch. It was 10 p.m. -- two hours before the season opened. He looked at the fish, then at the boy. "You'll have to put it back, son," he said.

"Dad!" cried the boy. "There will be other fish," said his father. "Not as big as this one," cried the boy. He looked around the lake. No other fishermen or boats were anywhere around in the moonlight. He looked again at his father.

Even though no one had seen them, nor could anyone ever know what time he caught the fish, the boy could tell by the clarity of his father's voice that the decision was not negotiable. He slowly worked the hook out of the lip of the huge bass, and lowered it into the black water. The fish swished its tail and disappeared. The boy suspected that he would never again see such a great fish. \

That was over 34 years ago. Today the boy is a successful architect in New York City. His father's cabin is still there on the lake. He takes his own son and daughters fishing from the same dock.

And he was right. He has never again caught such a magnificent fish as the one he landed that night long ago. But he does see that same fish again and again every time he comes up against a question of ethics. For, as his father taught him, ethics are simple matters of right and wrong. It is only the practice of ethics that is difficult. "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." (Proverbs 22:6)