

# Wisdom & the Family

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Please open your Bible to the book of Proverbs and chapter 4.

We're talking about wisdom and the family today. If you're like me, you need wisdom in this area. I remember coming home from the hospital with our daughter Annie and feeling this strange new way to be in the world. I was suddenly very aware of how I drove. There's a kid now in the backseat – it's not just me anymore. I mean, I cared about how I drove with my wife, but there was sort of this sense that she can take care of herself (I'm not saying that was right, just that's just how I operated...) But now, there's this little baby in the car. Annie was six weeks early when she was born – just four and a half pounds.

I remember driving away. And like other parents, I wish I'd been given an instruction manual for our kids. Something to tell me how feed and bathe and hold this baby. Well, in some ways, the book of Proverbs is like a handbook about the home. It doesn't give us specific details like we might want, but it does speak to the important matters in specific ways.

God has given us instructions for the family. And I believe that this message will be profitable for our whole church, wherever you find yourself this morning. You may be a young person yourself or you may be married with kids in the home, so this will be more directly related to your situation. But we all have something to learn when we come to what the Word of God has to teach us. You may have to do some translation in order to apply these truths to your life, but that's true any time we come to study the Bible.

So although we'll be talking to young people – there's something here for older folks as well. And we'll be addressing parents – but there's something here for those who are not parents or whose kids have left the home. And we'll be talking about caring for those without families, widows and orphans – and there's certainly something there for all of us to learn today. We need God's wisdom for the family.

Read **Proverbs 4:1-9**

## **Intro**

I have to admit, I come to this topic with a bit of fear and trepidation. In part, that's because I so often fail at what being the kind of parent I hope to be. Even this week, I had challenges with our kids, and I had to ask for forgiveness for how I handled something. I need the wisdom that Solomon says we need to get above all else. He says, whatever you get – get this! And here's the beginning – get wisdom!

There is so much wisdom in the book of Proverbs about the family – how to live as a son or daughter, the importance of disciplining your kids, the way we should treat those without families. And if we look around in the world, there is so much out there about how we should do those things. There are lots of opinions about this issue.

There are trends in parenting styles and ways that different generations emphasize different aspects of raising kids, being more or less involved, spanking or not, what to feed your kids, or how to handle chores or an allowance – there are all kinds of things which parents need wisdom to discern how they are going to handle them in their family. And I'm not going to try to untangle those discussions this morning.

I remember when our daughter Annie was born. And it seemed that everyone had an opinion on how we should raise her. Eve told me that strangers in the supermarket would offer unsolicited advice about what we should feed her and how to get her to sleep or things that we should absolutely do or absolutely not do. And that was certainly true in the churches we've attended as well.

On the one hand, that's kind of annoying. Let's be honest. I'm not inclined to take advice from strangers out in the world about how to live my life and raise my kids. But on the other hand, I think that there's something to be said about how important this issue is that everybody has an opinion about it. Marriage and family issues are often in the news and being discussed in politics.

Most people recognize that family is important. And Christians in particular have been very adamant about our views on the family. And there's a reason for that. There are three institutions that stand apart from all others in Scripture – the family, the church, and the state or government.

The Bible doesn't give us instructions for: things like running a school or a hospital or a museum or starting a business. Though all of those things are good and important for a society, and though we do have principles from the Bible that inform how we might do those things, we don't have specific instructions like we do for family, the church, and the state (though it's less for the state).

God has specifically spoken to us about the family. And so that's why Christians hold the convictions that we do when it comes to the family and marriage. And my purpose today is to try to stick to the text as best as I can and not try to take a side on parenting decisions that are maybe unclear in the Scripture. There are many things that are clear – so let's focus on them. And we can talk about those other things at another time.

We've already addressed a couple aspects of marriage from the book of Proverbs – the idea that it's a permanent, exclusive, and comprehensive covenant between one man and one woman. Dennis Runner spoke to the idea of companionship in marriage, and we addressed sexual intimacy last week. But I want to say again that the marriage is the priority relationship in the home. We're going to talk to other aspects of the family this morning, but know the health of the marriage is fundamental to the health of the family as a whole.

So let's think about how to get wisdom. I've got three groups of people that I want us to look at together as we think about what Proverbs has to say about the family.

### **Wisdom for young people**

Let's start with what God has to say to young people. I'm talking about kids and teenagers and even young adults who are still living at home or are financially dependent on your parents.

In some ways, the whole book of Proverbs is aimed at young people – seeking to give guidance and instruction as a father and mother would to their kids. But I want to highlight a few things Solomon brings out in particular. So young people, listen up!

The first thing that I want you to see is that there are tremendous blessings that come with obedience to God and your parents.

### **Proverbs 3:1-2**

My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments,  
2 for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.

Here Solomon teach you that keeping the commandments and teaching of the Lord will result in length of days and peace in your life. This sounds really similar to the words in the ten commandments in Exodus 20. Anyone know the fifth commandment? Honor your father and mother that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

The immediate context in that day was that obedience spares you from some of the dangers a disobedient and foolish life brings – danger from violent people, from poverty as a result of laziness, from the adulterous woman, or from violating God’s law such that you were expelled from the community or put to death. Obedience literally brings longer life.

What’s more, walking in obedience brings peace to your life. There is a wholeness, a joy, a security that results when you live according to the way that God has designed this world.

My kids are a little older now, but when they are like four years old, I would tell them – you have one job: obey your parents. That’s what you are to do. Listen to your father and mother and obey immediately and joyfully as unto the Lord. That’s what you are to do. It’s pretty simple.

I’ve never been in the military, but I was talking to an older gentleman one time as I travelled around fixing printers and selling ink and toner. And he had gotten pretty high up in the ranks, I don’t remember exactly what he was. And he said that he had succeeded in the military because he just did exactly what he was told to do. I said, “like in Forest Gump?” And he said, yes. That’s exactly it. I’m not trying to be insulting to those who serve our country, but there’s some similarity between that kind of attitude and how we are to obey our parents – you’ve got one job and that’s it. As Paul says in Ephesians 6, children obey your parents in the Lord.

When the kids get older, they will start to have other responsibilities in addition to that one – but that’s where it starts. Obey your parents in the Lord.

So kids – this is what God wants from you: obey your parents in the Lord.

And we recognize as we say that, that parents are sinners too. My wife and I are seeking to raise our kids as God would have us to, but we know that we don’t always do that in the right way. But we’re seeking to please the Lord in this. No set of parents are perfect. And so if you have parents who are trying to please the Lord in their parenting, this applies to you.

Some of you may have parents who are not seeking to please the Lord. Or you were mistreated or abused by your parents. I am sorry that happened to you. That does not please the Lord. God will hold your parents accountable for how they treated you. God does not expect obedience to our parents when they are calling us to sin or suffer abuse. But we are to show honor, as far as is possible in the Lord.

So God says that there are blessings which accompany wise living when you honor and obey your parents. One of the blessings which Solomon repeats several times in this book is this - happy parents! Do you want to make your parents happy? Do you want to live in a joyful home? A home that experiences peace and rest? Then walk in wisdom.

The wisdom of a children and the happiness of their parents are connected. Listen to these verses...

**Proverbs 10:1**

The proverbs of Solomon.

A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother.

**Proverbs 17:21**

He who sires a fool gets himself sorrow, and the father of a fool has no joy.

**Proverbs 17:25**

A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him.

**Proverbs 15:20**

A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish man despises his mother.

If you want to make your father happy – walk in wisdom! If you want to make your mother sad, act foolishly. Solomon really wants to get that message across.

I saw a tweet this week that said, it should give us great encouragement that Solomon wrote Proverbs and yet had a son like Rehoboam, who rebelled and went off on his own way. Solomon knows what it is to have a son who is foolish and brings grief.

So kids, teens, young adults – know that your wisdom brings joy to your parents and your foolishness brings grief.

Let me give you one more...

**Proverbs 23:24-25**

The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice;  
he who fathers a wise son will be glad in him.

**25** Let your father and mother be glad; let her who bore you rejoice.

Here, we're not just told that these two things are connected – here God wants you to know that you should try to make your parents happy. You should seek their joy by walking in wisdom yourself.

How do you do that? How do you walk in wisdom?

Well, I'm glad you asked!

**Proverbs 13:1**

A wise son hears his father's instruction,  
but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

You have to be teachable. You have to be humble so that you can learn. A wise son hears his father's instruction. You need to be willing to learn. Don't be a scoffer. Don't roll your eyes. Don't tune out. I'm talking especially to you teenagers and young adults.

**Proverbs 19:27**

Cease to hear instruction, my son,  
and you will stray from the words of knowledge.

If you tune out and stop listening, you will stray from wisdom. You will naturally follow the foolishness that is bound up in your heart. You will bring grief and shame to your parents.

So young people – this is God’s Word for you: listen to your parents. Remember what they say and put it into practice. And it will go well for you and your parents will rejoice. Now for the parents...

## **Wisdom for Parents**

What is God’s design for the family for parents? The first thing I want to point out is that God’s plan is for both moms and dads to be involved in parenting their children.

### **Proverbs 1:8**

Hear, my son, your father’s instruction,  
and forsake not your mother’s teaching,

So when we read about a father and a son, we can reasonably include mothers and daughters in here as well. I think we can also take from this that moms and dads ought to both be involved in the teaching of their children. Both of you should be involved and you should both be united in what and how you teach your kids.

As a church, we encourage families to talk about God and the Bible together on a regular basis. I know that this is hard, and honestly, I wish I was better and more faithful at leading our family in this than I am. But one way to do this is to read the Scriptures or a devotional book together at the dinner table or before bed or in the morning before you go to school. Talk about Jesus and the gospel. Pray together. It doesn’t have to be long or super-involved.

But teach your kids. We also encourage families to do this ‘as you go’ or during the normal events in your life. That means as you watch TV or while you play games or do chores – talk about who God is and what He commands us to do. One of the best times I’ve found is while you’re in the car together. I often try to have conversations with our kids about how to be a good teammate or friend at school in the car on the way to some event. Don’t leave spiritual things to Sunday only. Talk about God throughout your week.

Your kids need your instruction. They need you, mom and dad to be teaching them.

There is this repeated refrain in the book of Proverbs. Solomon wants us to know that we must parent our children because if we do not, then they will naturally head toward foolishness.

#### **Proverbs 29:15**

The rod and reproof give wisdom,  
but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

So the rod and reproof – discipline and instruction give wisdom to your kids. But if you leave a child to his own way. If you let your kids run their own lives without discipline and without teaching, that will end up bringing you shame. They will not live with wisdom.

Why is that? It's because the natural state of a child is foolishness.

#### **Proverbs 22:15**

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

Folly or foolishness is bound up or tied together in the heart of a child. That's their default state. It's how they come out. Their foolishness is not easily undone. It will take time. And discipline. And correction. And time. And discipline. And correction.

The idea of foolishness here doesn't just mean that your kids are naturally ignorant or sometimes do silly things. While that's true, foolishness in the book of Proverbs is most often a category of sinfulness. It's the rejection of the wise path and the pursuit of things that are against God's Law and His good design for the world. To say that a child is foolish is to say that he or she is a sinner.

And notice that this foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child. We are all born as sinners by nature and by choice. We have all rejected God and gone our own way.



Kids are naturally selfish and proud and lazy. Now, kids can also be wonderfully loving and kind and generous – but we all were born with a tendency toward rejecting God and seeking to do whatever is right in our own eyes.

So parents teach your kids. And when necessary, discipline them. Use the rod.

#### **Proverbs 13:24**

Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

Be diligent, moms and dads. Be consistent and thoughtful about how and why you discipline your kids.

The rod has been given by God as a means to discipline a son or daughter who needs correction. Don't spank your kids in anger. Don't punish your kids because of your own embarrassment or pride or out of vengeance. Be intentional and grace filled, even when you give correction and consequences for disobedience and rebellion.

Your kids need that from you. They need your teaching *and* your discipline. I love this one...

#### **Proverbs 23:13**

Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die.

He won't die. He may act like it. Foolishness doesn't want to leave our hearts without a fight. In his commentary on Proverbs, Derek Kidner writes, "It will take more than words to dislodge foolishness."

So yes, our kids need instruction and discipline to walk in wisdom. So hear this word from Solomon: your kids need parenting. They will not drift toward godliness.

And Proverbs calls to parent toward the hearts of our kids. We aren't just trying to make sure our kids are safe or successful by worldly standards. We want them to live differently than the world – to pursue godliness and live for Christ.

That means that when we teach and discipline, use the gospel. When you do discipline, do the gospel. Remind your kids that our sins are not just horizontal – we have also

sinned against God. But Jesus died for all of our sins. And we can experience His forgiveness when we confess them and turn from them in faith. Reassure your kids that Jesus has sent His Spirit to help us in our battle with sin. That Jesus loves us, even when we sin. That Jesus is stronger than our sin. That He is always there. Remind your kids of the gospel.

So how do you have these kinds of heart conversations with your kids? Again, you may have to translate this to whatever age your kids are, but you could ask questions like these that I stole from Paul Trip:

- What have you been learning in church? What has impacted you most in our recent sermon series?
- How are your devotions or prayer life?
- Is there a specific sin that you need my help in addressing?
- In your own words, what is the gospel?

Or some more personal questions:

- Are you more aware of my encouragement or my criticism?
- What are Mom and Dad most passionate about?
- Do I act the same at worship on Sunday as I do at home all week?
- Is there some way that I've sinned against you that I have not confessed and repented of?
- How am I doing as a dad or mom?
- Does my relationship with Mom (Dad) make you excited about being married?
- What's it like to be my son or daughter?

Those are convicting, aren't they? Hebrews tells us that God parents us. He teaches us and disciplines us as a father does to the children whom he loves.

And there is hope for imperfect parents. The gospel that can save our kids gives us hope as well. There is forgiveness for lazy parents, for angry parents, for disillusioned parents, for parents who need to know there's grace for tomorrow.

## **Wisdom and the Vulnerable**

Finally this morning, I want us to consider what God has to say about wisdom and the vulnerable.

What does God want us to know about living wisely in relation to those who have lost their earthly family? Particularly, the widows and orphans?

There's not a lot in the book of Proverbs about widows and orphans, but there are a few verses that speak to this issue.

God has concern for the vulnerable. In the Law of Moses, there were provisions made so that those who lost their husbands or children who did not have parents in their lives would be cared for. And God's plan is that His people would care for them. That's always been God's plan – that His people would be those who would care for the widows and orphans among them.

So listen to what Proverbs says,

**Proverbs 23:10-11**

Do not move an ancient landmark or enter the fields of the fatherless,  
**11** for their Redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against you.

Orphans or the fatherless, were in a vulnerable position. They could not defend themselves. So Solomon warns against doing evil against them, just because you can get away with it. Don't take advantage of them. Why not?

Because the Redeemer is strong. That word 'redeemer' is used to talk about the next of kin who would take up the cause of the fatherless. And it's also used of the Lord Himself as the one who will defend the defenseless. That's what the translators of the ESV believe is in view here – notice the capital "R" on Redeemer.

Here, the Redeemer will execute justice on anyone who tampers with these property lines. The land was hugely significant for people in that day. It's how God ensured that generations would not fall into abject poverty forever. God had established the property rights of each tribe, and when thieves or predators try to move those lines, He says that He will take up the case against them. It's God Himself who will plead the cause of the fatherless.

The idea here translates pretty easily to today. God still cares about the fatherless, and He opposes those who would prey on them. God wants us as His people to care for the needs of the vulnerable among us.

I know that some of you have been involved in the process of adopting kids or pursuing foster care or supporting these efforts in some other way. There are several ways to get involved in that kind of ministry, through organizations like CarePortal, to help meet the needs mothers in our community. There are ministries like Bravely and Gifts of Grace who stand for life and help connect those without parents with Christian homes for adoption. There is Safe Families, who seeks to make those kinds of connections for short term stays, usually between a couple days and a couple weeks to help families in need. There are many ways to get involved in helping to minister to the fatherless.

What about widows? Listen to...

**Proverbs 15:25**

The LORD tears down the house of the proud  
but maintains the widow's boundaries.

Here God is undermining arrogant people and helping the vulnerable. Widows have always been a targeted group – by scammers and thieves who seek to prey on the defenseless. But we see that God knows them and sees them and that He will have the last word. Psalm 68 tells us that God is Father to the fatherless and the protector of widows.

Again, what we are called to do is simply apply the spirit of this Proverb. So in applying it, we are to care for and minister to the needs of those around us. I think this would include single moms. I am in awe of the single moms in our church who are doing a wonderful job seeking to raise their kids in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. One way to get involved is by helping meet the needs and showing love and kindness to the single moms and dads in this church or in your small group. What would be a blessing to them? How can we help bear one another's burdens?

In the New Testament, we read particular instructions in 1 Timothy five about how the church should care for widows. In Acts 6, the early church was faced with the problem of caring for the widows among them. Remember, a few months earlier Jesus had some pretty harsh words against the Pharisees for devouring widows houses, so now the early church was seeking to step in and do what should have been done all along – care for the widows.

The church is to be a family for all, including those who have lost their spouse or their parents. This is one of the things that marked the early church. It's one of the things that made them stand out from the culture around them. And it's something that should mark our church today.

Of all people, the church should be those who step in to these areas because we know what it means to be orphaned. You see, we're not better than orphans. We were orphans, spiritually speaking. God in His amazing kindness, came down and redeemed us out of our slavery to sin and adopted us into a new family.

#### **Galatians 4:4-6**

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, **5** to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. **6** And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" **7** So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

At great expense to Himself, God has made us sons, full heirs to the promises. He sent His Spirit so that we can call God our Father. He has made us now brothers and sisters in the church.

We should be those who care for orphans and widows because we were spiritually helpless and God saved us.

He sent Jesus to deliver us from our sin and give us a new family. So let me ask you, are you in God's family? Can you call God your Father? Can you call those in the church around you your brothers and sisters?

And if you have, then live as though that's really true. Allow the new identity that you have as a son or daughter of God to empower you to walk in obedience to your parents, to instruct and discipline your kids, and to care for the widow and orphan.

Let's pray...