

Proverbs

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[0 : 00] I'm going to look at the subject of Proverbs and family wise words about family. We're not going to read the passages that are on our sheet, we're going to read quite a lot of them during the sermon. We did read Psalm 127 as our call to worship, so we did have a scripture reading, but I'm a bit nervous over length.

So listen to these wise words about family. If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Or again, the same Lord Jesus speaking, anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Families work on the basis of primary allegiance to themselves, to each other. No greater love exists for most people than the love of a parent to a child. Nothing else is as formative for us.

Nothing else runs us deep down into our shelves to make us who we are as our families.

And that strength of connection to our children and to our parents is what makes this topic of family both a delight for some tonight and a heartache for others.

[1 : 42] When family works, and there's nothing so sweet, is there? When families go wrong, as they sometimes do, for all of us, there's no agony like it.

We carry in both hands joy and happiness and also heartbreak and regret. We carry success feelings and feelings of failure tonight, don't we, all of us?

And so I want to begin with what Jesus says about family. Because what Jesus says to us in those really striking words is the same as what the father says to his son in the book of Proverbs.

A wise saviour. A wise saviour. And a wise father. And I want us to see how they speak with one voice about the realities of family life. Families are made up, aren't they, of different types of relationship. If you like, different lines of direction.

Husband and wife to each other. Mum and dad to their children. Children or children to their father or mother. And there's this complex web of interactions. And so my points kind of follow the lines of those relationships.

[2 : 51] We're going to make a husband and wife. Mum and dad to each other. And there'll be some more of that in a couple of weeks. But we're going to focus more on parents and children. Although within that, I want to especially direct attention to dads.

To fathers. Because that's why I think the stress lies in Proverbs. And in Jesus' teaching. Our relationship to God. And God's relationship to us. Well, first of all this. Ask to God our primary allegiance. Ask to God our primary allegiance.

When Jesus speaks about our blood relations. And the people God has placed us in family with. Jesus says that the essence, the heart, the key to proper family relationships. Is family values. What is it which a family cherishes the most? And loves the most? What is it that a family most commands their allegiance?

If you're a follower of the Lord Jesus tonight. Parent, child, husband, wife, grandparents. If you follow Christ. Then a shift in allegiance has taken place in your family.

[4 : 04] Jesus says the primary allegiance of the disciple is not to a parent. And it's not to a child. And it's not to a sibling. It's not even to themselves.

Because whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. The disciples' greatest love is not even for their own life. Never mind their family.

It is for the Lord Jesus Christ. He's not telling you don't love your mother, dad. He's not saying to you this evening not to love your son or your daughter or your grandchild. He is telling you not to

love them more than him.

Do you begin to sense already why this is the same teaching as the book of Proverbs? I want to be a wise parent. We want to be wise parents.

We want to be wise children. Our family life to work. I want to make a good go of this. So what is the path of wisdom according to Proverbs?

[5 : 02] What is it like, Lord, to sit in your parenting classes? What are you going to tell me? Well what is the answer? The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

Wise marrying. Wise anger management. Wise sex. Wise use of money. Wise words. Wise parents. Wise parents. All come from here, don't they? Proverbs says, the fear of the Lord.

So your primary allegiance, man. Your primary allegiance, dad. Your primary allegiance, children. Your primary allegiance, grandparents. Is to God and to Christ and to his kingdom. And everything in wise family living flows from that.

Look at chapter 14 and verse 26. I think it's one of the most beautiful Proverbs of them all. In the fear of the Lord, one has strong confidence.

And his children will have a refuge. I wonder if there's anything we want more for our kids than their safety. Probably not. I hope not.

[6 : 06] We as parents, don't we? We worry about financial security, education. So that they don't have to worry about it. And their mental, and their emotional, and their physical. And their spiritual safety is paramount to us.

It's important. And this father says, when the parent's primary allegiance is to the covenant Lord, who sent his son to save us. And when he says this, when he talks about the family here, do not think that the family lives within an ordinary four walls, terraced house, or the semi, or wherever you live.

They live within a castle. In the fear of the Lord, one has strong confidence. They live within an impregnable fortress. The family that trusts the Lord. Because God himself is their shield and their safety.

And I want us to notice that this proverb is specific to fathers. How often it is the case, isn't it, that mum is the spiritual driving force in the home.

So fathers, God has placed you in the home to be a fortress for the family. Not in yourself, or as yourself, but as you place yourself under Christ's rule.

[7 : 18] Are you the driving engine, the driving engine of safety in your home? Or tragically, are you the thing that your children need to be protected from?

The change of family values for the Christian is Christ first, my family second. Here actually is the most wonderful, most loving, most wise, liberating thing for us all.

For the truth is that loving anyone or anything else more than Jesus actually devalues them. And diminishes them. And means we don't treat them as we deserve.

This is the CS Lewis. When I have learnt to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now.

Insofar as I learn to love my earthly dearest at the expense of God, and instead of God, I shall be moving towards the state in which I shall not love my earthly dearest at all.

[8 : 20] When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed, but increased. Think of a triangle with God at the top.

Husband and wife in the other corners. How to get, as you love God more, you get nearer, don't you? As you love God more, you become closer together.

That's what CS Lewis is saying. If you put the weight of your deepest hopes and longings and your greatest love on the person you marry, then what happens? You crush them.

You crush them. It will distort your life and your spouse's life in a hundred ways. No person on earth can give the human soul what it needs. And so children, if your child is your greatest love, then you are going to be devastated when they fail at something and disappoint you.

If that's where you put your hopes, when they dash your hopes, it's a terrifying thing. But Jesus never will. If you love your mum more than anyone else, then you'll not be able to recover, will you?

[9 : 35] When your mum is no longer there. But you will always have your saviour. So children to parents, secondly, our greatest glory.

Children to parents, our greatest glory. Looking at the family in Proverbs, it's not a hard thing to do because Proverbs is full of family stuff, all the way through it, you see it.

Chapter 1 and verse 8, I don't put them on your sheet. Chapter 1 and verse 8, listen to my son. Listen, my son. Hear, my son. It's all the way through. Do not forsake him as a teacher. And the whole book, it unfolds as a parent to a child conversation. That's the narrative of the book. It's a dad telling the child what the world is like and how the way of the world is. And a large part of the book's wisdom is telling young people to avoid easy money and easy sex. Here's how not to be ensnared, dad tells the child. Young women out there, here's how not to be ensnared.

[10:41] And it says, doesn't it, the book of Proverbs, your greatest glory is do not forsake what you've already been taught. Share, my son, your father's instruction and forsake not your mother's teaching. To bind it onto your heart and your mind what your mum and dad have told you.

To store it up in your heart, the words that they've given you. Obedience to our parents is our greatest glory. So many of us have the joy of coming from Christian homes with believing parents. I know that's not all of you, but some of us do. And even if you don't, many of you have a growing and a living faith in Christ. And Proverbs says that a loving attitude towards the Lord Jesus is not compatible with a contemptuous attitude towards mum and dad.

If your faith is growing, then show it in your gratitude and honour and joy towards your mum and dad. Look how strong the warnings are to all of us who are children.

So chapter 20 and verse 20, it's written on your sheet. If one curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in utter darkness.

[12:01] Chapter 30, verse 70, the eye that mocks a father or scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures.

What an image that is, isn't it? It's a way of saying that despising the people who gave you life in this world is a way of heading towards certain death.

Your mockery and your despising of them will become a cancer which eats you up from the inside out and turns you into the sort of person nobody wants to be around. Chapter 15, verse 32, whoever ignores instruction despises himself.

But he listens to her proof, gains intelligence. Ignoring your parents is not a sign of maturity and ability. It's the worst kind of self-harm.

I want us to just to notice one recurring image. And children, think about what this looks like in your life.

[13:01] Let me just read these verses. I didn't have enough space to put them all on. So let me read you chapter 1, verse 9. For they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.

Chapter 3, and verse 3. Let not steadfastness, steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you. Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart. Chapter 3, 21, 22.

My son, do not lose sight of these. Keep sound wisdom and discretion and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck. Chapter 6, verse 20, 21. My son, keep your father's commandment and forsake what your mother's teaching.

Bind them on your heart always. Tie them around your neck. So, I mean, children and young people, if you're not already worried about what you're wearing, you probably will be at some point, at some point.

And probably what you've said is this, what you need to wear most of all, the clothing that you most need to wear is the instruction of your parents. Because that is your glory.

[14:04] Look again, back again, just, if you're probably, have you got a point of chapter 1, verse 9? For they are a graceful garment for your head and a pendant for your neck. What is that?

We've seen that before, isn't it? The M.I.D. puts it like this, a wreath for your head and a chain on your neck when you see that. A wreath for your head and a chain on your neck is the Olympics, isn't it?

It's the Games. It's honour and success and beauty. It's exactly what the Olympians wear when they go on the podium. A wreath for the head and a medal for the neck. And Solomon is saying, Solomon is saying, children who embrace the wisdom of this book, which their parents mediate to them are like heroes on the podium.

The medal around the neck, the Olympic neck, is the glory. So when the Olympian gets his medal, he doesn't immediately pull it in his bag, does he? No, he runs around the track again with it around his neck.

And he gets into it on the TV and on the chat shows and he displays it and he keeps it everywhere. He goes. As you're growing up, as you're seeking to make your way in the world and find out who you are and to achieve success, Solomon in this book.

[15:16] Solomon in this book. Next up, where he goes.

Isn't that amazing? It found I was going in the right direction. Well, I obviously wasn't. Right, let me try and work this out. Talk amongst yourselves a minute. Solomon says, he says to you really, he says, your greatest glory is to follow what your parents have taught you.

To bind it up, to store it on your heart. Okay. So, just look at chapter 19, verse 26.

He who does violence to his father and chases away his mother is a son who brings shame and reproach. Chapter 28 and verse 24. The negative, whoever robs his father or his mother says there is no transgression is a companion to a man who destroys.

You see, there's more ways than one to rob your parents. There's gunpoint, a kind of outright takeover bid, which kind of puts them out on the streets.

[16:29] You wouldn't do that. But there's also the way of robbing your parents by what one writer has called a man who is just a boy who shaves. So, you know, we've got that generation, we are men who really are just boys who shave.

They're all grown up on the inside, but they're childlike on the inside. They live on handouts. Somebody else is paying the bills and the taxes. They constantly want bailouts. They're able to work, but they refuse to.

And so, actually, children to parents, obedience to your parents is your glory. Thirdly, parents to children are reorientated goal.

Parents to children are reorientated goal. So, as you read the book of Proverbs, what it asks you is it asks you what you must want for your children. For parents, most of life unfolds along the lines which they've laid out for trying to achieve the very best for their children.

You want to get them the right kind of house, the right kind of job, to give them the best kind of opportunity, to give them security and opportunities in life. And when you think about it, an awful lot of what parents do, what mum and dad do with themselves, is because of their goals for their children.

[17:45] But what should our goal for our children be? Here's a way to crystallise the mind. So, if you're a grandparent, there's a number of grandparents here tonight, and you're facing the end of your life, and your grandchildren are gathered around the bed, and you've got one minute to leave them a legacy, in your words, about what matters most in life.

What should you aim for? All of life comes out of this. This more than anything else in the world, what would you say? What would you say? Did you notice chapter four, verses one to six?

We've got words from granddad here. When I was a boy, hear children, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight.

I gave you good precepts, do not forsake my teaching. When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother, he taught me and said to me, let your heart hold fast my words, keep my commandments, and live.

Get wisdom, get insight, do not forget, do not turn away from the words of my mouth, do not forsake her, and she will keep you. Love her, and she will guard you. Get wisdom. So here it is, the legacy line, it doesn't even take one minute.

[19:04] Get wisdom. Here it is, our goal for our children is that they should fall in love with God's lady wisdom, court her all her days, all the days of their lives, and live with her as their guardian and as their guide.

All those images are there in those verses. Get wisdom. And that should be our parenting goal for our children. So here's how to reorientate ourselves towards that goal.

The Father in Proverbs gives us four things to do. The first one is a mindset, and the other three things are to do. So the first thing is investment.

Investment. Realize that with the children in front of you, you are investing for generations to come. time. So I think one of the big mistakes we can make as Christian parents is to think of time in exactly the same way as everybody else thinks of time.

So we speak in terms of decades, the 70s, the 80s, the 90s, separate decades which just sort of follow each other, as if each part of generation is like a pond.

[20 : 16] So you have people who were born in the 50s, that's one separate pond, then you have people who were born in the 70s, another separate pond, and then you young people who were born in the 1990s, that's a separate pond.

But that's not the way the Bible views time. The Bible views time that all our generations are connected to one another. So time is a river, not just ponds.

And what we do now, a hundred years from now, will be affected. Everything upstream from 50, a hundred years affect us now, just as what we are doing will affect those downstream from us.

That is how God views you as a parent. That you can actually invest in generations to come by being a certain kind of parent. And what you want to achieve in life can be tied directly to the kind of grandchildren you invest in having.

So look at chapter 17 and verse 6. Grandchildren are the crown of the aged. And the glory of children is their fathers. If you want to crown in 40 years' time, then set to work now on the little precious subjects in your kingdom.

[21 : 35] Because what will make them a glittering crown to you is if they are wise grandchildren. Investment. Secondly, initiative. Chapter 22 and verse 6. Trade up a child in the way that he should go.

Even when he is old he will not depart from it. And the word there trade up literally means dedicate. Dedicate your child to a particular path and pattern. There is no such thing as neutral parenting.

Do you remember it was in the news a couple of years ago that Canadian parents who kept the sex of their child secret and they simply dressed the kid in white until the child was old enough to choose his gender orientation for themselves.

We want our children to be free to choose from themselves they said. The tragic blindness of that. So the fact that they are dedicating that child to a particular pattern of life in the same way that we all are.

There is no such thing as neutral parenting. And God says set the path for the child and help them to walk in it. You don't let the child choose the path.

[22 : 47] Why? Because of chapter 22 verse 15 Folly is bound up in the heart of the child. But the roar of discipline drives it far from him.

The scholars tell us this Hebrew word for trainer or dedicate comes from an Arabic verb. It was used for rubbing at the newborn palate of child.

They rubbed this stuff with date mixture. It's horrific. Date mixture. And they rub it on the gums of the palate of this little child, this little baby. And it was an initiative to get the child to suck.

And it means to custom a child to a certain taste. And to motivate them to take it in. Put a bit of marmite on your finger, rub it into the gums of the child, get them hooked on it.

Here's the thing, it doesn't just happen. No child chooses it themselves. No one chooses the gate to life and the narrow road and the words of Christ without somebody taking the initiative first of all.

[23 : 51] No child chooses to take up their cross and follow a crucified saviour without the initiative of a cross bearing parent. So initiative is tied very closely with instruction and so much of Proverbs is this.

Listen my son to your father's instruction. Do not change your back on your mother's teaching. The greatest thing we can do for our children is instruct them in the fear of the Lord.

And I think one of the most surprising and yet profoundly vitally important truths in the whole of Proverbs about the fear of the Lord is that you don't have to come to church to get it. Yes you should be here and you should be helped by church and you should fear, you should find the fear of the Lord in everything we do as a church family.

It should characterize the church. But Proverbs says God has built the world. He has wired this world in such a way that you shouldn't have to come to church to find it. It does not say listen my son to your rabbi's teaching.

It doesn't say listen to your pastor's instruction, listen to your elders' instruction, listen to your youth group leaders' instruction, listen my son to your parents' instruction, instructors.

[25 : 05] wisdom. The primary mediators of wisdom are parents and the harmony of their lives and mouths.

The home is the first threshold of wisdom, the mother's lamp, the father's need. It's how God made the world. That a life lived well and wisely flows from parent to child.

A godly home is the fount of all the world's wisdom. Finally, there's discipline. Discipline. Some of us, as you read this sheet when you get home, I hope you will, will wince at the strength of the language about the rod.

I imagine here there's a variety of things about how we've experienced or not experienced those things personally. I do think it is very hard to read proverbs not to conclude against all political correctness today that children should never be smacked.

I think that's very hard. If you read proverbs, I don't think you can come to that conclusion that children should never be smacked. And yet, of course, we've got to say this, haven't we? The reason for the rod in the Bible is fundamentally because parenting is a goal orientated towards wisdom.

[26 : 24] And the Bible's view of ultimate destiny is very different, isn't it, from the world's view of ultimate destiny. there are only two ways to live. There are only two roads to walk.

There is the broad road and the narrow road. And this father's view is that his son, left to his own devices, will choose the broad road which leads to death.

Left to his own devices, the son in proverbs will choose the easy money where men lie in wait for the blood of others. Left to his own devices, the child in proverbs will tick the easy sex where the seductive woman offers him a fantasy world which is actually a date with death.

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child. And the father says that all fathers and parents choose the route of protection from a death which lasts forever through the sting of discipline which lasts only for a minute.

Chapter 19 and verse 18 is so very striking. Discipline your son for there is hope.

[27 : 34] Do not set your heart on putting him to death. Do you see what that is actually saying? If you do not discipline you are a willing party to your son's death.

To not discipline is the will to death. Do you remember B.B.P.? B.B.P. Peter Connolly known as B.B.P. during the trial of his parents was a 17 month old baby in London who died after suffering over 50 injuries during an 8 month period.

During that time he was repeatedly seen by healthcare professionals who failed to notice the harm he was enduring. He was left at home of unspeakable abuse and trauma by people with the power to rescue him.

In Birmingham another toddler called Christiana Lutina died of septic shock after her mother held her under a scalding shower as a form of punishment. She lived with injuries for two weeks and eventually she died because her parents refused to seek medical help.

They're horrific aren't they? Horrific. And Proverbs says that is not the only way to harm a child. Such hatred of children is appalling to us and yet a home without discipline is a home filled with hatred.

[29 : 03] And so finally here is where the lines of family relationships come back to God. Although not this time us to God but him to us. Because where does the ultimate model of parenting come from?

God our Father. A father who does not discipline his children cannot be like God. For this heavenly father disciplines those children whom he loves.

And I think one of the main things that we need as parents is models. Examples to imitate. We need people to ask and open ourselves up to and say how do we do this?

How should we approach this? Maybe say where do you think I'm getting it right here or wrong? And maybe mums are better at it together than dance or coffee or around each other's houses or around the table and the pub.

But we all need help. We all need help. And we all need someone to imitate because parenting is hard, hard work. And Jesus says that the dignity of parents, parenting, comes from a humbling source.

[30 : 21] It comes from the ultimate role model. It comes from God himself, our father. And God has called us to be like him in our parenting.

There's a lovely little bit in the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe where Aslan brings the statues back to life. As he brings the white witch's spell. And one of the statues he brings to life is another lion.

And then Aslan talks about Aslions. The most pleased of the statues was the other lion who kept running about everywhere pretending to be very busy but really in order to say to everyone he met,

did you hear what he said?

Aslions. That means him and me. Aslions. That's what I like, Aslan. No side, no standoffishness.

Aslions. That meant him and me. God, the father, calls us fathers as well.

And so he says tonight, he says be like me. What words did we use this morning in the Lord's prayer? Together as a family we prayed, give me, forgive me, lead me, deliver me.

[31 : 39] A father who does not provide for his children cannot be like God. God gives bread to our tables. A father who forgives, a father who never forgives, cannot be like God, can he?

Because God the father is an ocean of mercy and grace. A father who does not protect his children from harm, harm within their hearts and harm without their homes, cannot be like God because God the father delivers us from the evil one.

And so we come to the end of the sermon tonight and we ask who is equal to this task? Who has been an earthly father like this?

Who has had an earthly father who is perfectly like this? No one. And so for all of us it's great to come to the table, a table where fathers come as children, loved and forgiven, cleansed and renewed.

Here is a table where children too find the grace to forgive and be fed from their father's rich bounty.

Here is a table where the fatherless come as adopted, included, and made heirs.

[33 : 07] let's pray together the words of, the prayer of humble access it's called. It's on your sheet. And then we'll sing number 640.

Just read this prayer in silence. Let's pray any of any of any of any!