

Parents and Children

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, so we're going to look this evening at the themes that parents and children from Proverbs, as I've said, it's a book that does almost exclusively in many ways deal with that, and it reminds us and brings to mind the significance of at least four things when we think of families and we think of parents and children. The first is wisdom, and that's very obvious, isn't it?

Proverbs, we've spoken about this again and again, Proverbs is the book of wisdom, God's wisdom for us in giving us the parameters in life that allow us to make the decisions.

It doesn't give us black and white decisions on most things, but it speaks of the wisdom that we look for in our lives, and therefore it's for all of us because we need the wisdom of God.

It is also hugely important for us as parents as we seek to impart wisdom to our children. It's important for children, even as we grow up and become big children, that we are constantly learning the wisdom of God in our lives.

So tonight I'm not really going to be giving many answers to children or parents, but simply give some pointers towards King Jesus and the ethics of King Jesus, the wisdom of his kingdom that comes through from Proverbs.

[1 : 2 5] So it speaks about the importance of wisdom. It also highlights the importance of society. Proverbs makes that clear that community is hugely significant and it's speaking into people who will be living their lives in community.

That community that flows from the Trinity of God himself, and therefore is reflected also within the church, the centrality of the church family and the commitment to the church family, and a recognition that the whole second table of the law, the second half of the Ten Commandments is written into society, written into how we act with one another, how we treat each other, and that can be a powerful apologetic in the world in which we live.

So society is highlighted in being significant in Proverbs, as is family. Family is very important in Proverbs, and what we're reminded of in Proverbs is not only our nature, the way that we're born, and the way that we're born into a broken and divided and dysfunctional world, which is true, but also the reality of nurture and the importance of nurture.

We see in the world in which we live that brokenness, but get it's brokenness, doesn't it? We recognize that. We're always saying that, oh well, the world's getting what, you know, they're getting what they sowed, they're reaping what they sowed, and we recognize that, don't we, that brokenness begets brokenness.

But God's word also reminds us that grace begets grace, and blessing begets blessing. So, nurture and how we nurture our children is hugely significant, because it has such a great influence on their lives, and we recognize and we see that.

[3 : 26] And family is such a crucial part of all of our lives, because probably it is the part of life for many of us that harbours most regrets, most joys, that paralyzes or influences us and others for good or for bad, that exposes stability or instability in our lives, and for us as Christians reflects our understanding of the fatherhood of God, the gospel community, the nature of grace and our own hearts.

So family comes across very significantly and is significant in Proverbs. And the fourth thing that's significant, which feeds into this in Proverbs, is the importance of forgiveness.

The importance of forgiveness in terms of the family. And that's hugely important as we will go on and look at it.

The times we feel guilty for lazy parenting, or for leaving obedience to Christ, and our responsibility to serve Christ at the front door of our homes, and not take it in.

Where often our true colours have been exposed, and our hypocrisy are an indiscipline, where we've let our kids run wild and do whatever they like, where we have done things that are hugely regretful, and where we've judged others and everyone else's parenting skills, and sometimes when as children, we have great guilt over how we treated our parents.

[5 : 11] So forgiveness within the whole concept of Proverbs and our understanding of what Proverbs is teaching, I think is very important. So I'm just going to speak briefly about three proverbial truths for parents, and then mention some proverbial truths for children.

So what Proverbs is to say, not exclusively and not exhaustively, of course, but one or two things that I think are important from Proverbs for parents and children. So the first is for parents, and this really is broader than just for parents, it would apply to us all.

The first thing in terms of our privileges and responsibility as parents this evening, the first, what does Proverbs say? Well, I would argue the three most important things that Proverbs says, principally, for how we are to live our lives as parents with our children, the first is for, guard your hearts, okay?

From Proverbs 4, 23, keep your heart, and of course this applies to us all, with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life, and then verse 20, verse 9, who can say, I have made my heart pure, I am clean from my sin.

So there's this recognition in Proverbs that for parents, the most important thing we can do for our children is to guard our own hearts. And that goes for us all, doesn't it?

[6 : 45] The wisdom of Proverbs, the first source of wisdom of Proverbs is respecting, is worshiping, is fearing the Lord, is coming to our recognition that no one is righteous, that we haven't kept our hearts pure, and that we need to come to the Lord Jesus, and we need to have our hearts cleansed, and we need to guard our hearts.

And we recognize that as of supreme importance in our parenting. In other words, as a parent, the most important thing for you to do for your children isn't to consider their material comfort, isn't to give them a great home or splendid holidays, or a strong education, which are all important things, of course, but what is most important for you as a parent and for me is to, your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ stands tall above all these things.

However significant these things might seem to us, the way you live your life, the relationship you have with Jesus Christ is by far the most important thing.

The fact that you are learning and praying and growing in relationship with Christ, that you have the spiritual disciplines worked out, I'm not saying that we always act on them all the time, but that we have this routine of spiritual discipline that our children know and see as significant in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

And therefore as parents, it's vital that we take our relationship of grace into how we parent. We parent from our own heart's experience.

[8 : 29] It's a bit similar to what we were talking about this morning with Barnabas, that he knew his own heart, therefore he was a son of encouragement. And as parents when we know our own hearts, therefore that is the foundation of being patient, being sacrificial, understanding priorities, unconditional love, being controlled and gracious in our discipline and in our lives.

So it all stems from our heart relationship with God. There's no greater parent than the parent who understands that and who practices it in his or her life.

Guard your heart, that would be what I say essentially. The second thing following from that is watch therefore your life. Guard your heart, your relationship with Jesus, and then watch your life.

Proverbs 20 verse 7, the righteous who walks in his integrity, blessed are his children after him. And 31, 28, speaking about the noble wife, her children rise up and call her blessed, her husband also, he praises her.

So both of these verses speak about the blessedness of the husband or the wife, the father or mother, and the blessing that follows because of the life that they have led.

[9 : 55] The emphasis being on a blessing that follows good example. We need as parents and as believers generally to be consistent in our godliness.

Now that, if you're a parent here, you know your godliness or not will be exposed in the family home. That's what it will be noticed most.

Children will see quicker than anyone else, hypocrisy or double standards. They'll see when you let your guard down in private and you act differently with or speak differently about people in private as you do in public with others or with these individuals.

They'll understand the purity of your language or otherwise behind closed doors. They will know and grasp quickly how important Jesus is to you and how important obedience is to you.

They will quickly grasp the difference between humility and pride and between those who have control of their emotions and those who lash out in anger and in rage.

[11 : 08] And most importantly, the way you deal with mistakes and failure, that will transform a parental child relationship.

That you're willing to acknowledge mistakes, you're willing to be forgiven and ask for forgiveness and give forgiveness the walk of life that you have, your use of time, your use of leisure and pleasure, the way you spend your private life with your children, they will see and know and understand Christ in that.

As you express your love to them and your commitment to them, as you share with them your priorities, these are all important marks that we need to watch for as Christian parents.

Children are the sharpest mimics and learners and they will learn our bad habits just as quickly as they learn our good ones.

And they will share our bad temper and they will share our judgmental spirit and they will share our miserliness and they will share many of the things if we allow ourselves to live inconsistently.

[12 : 33] So watch our hearts, watch our lives and then thirdly, teach what you live. So parents have this great, Proverbs 1 verses 7 and 8 speak about that.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, those despise wisdom and instruction. Hear my son, your father's instruction for Satan, not your mother's teaching. So kind of following on from the life we live and the relationship we have with Christ, we are teachers, we are educators in their lives.

Now I would argue here that in St. Columba's all of you are educators of the children. You may not want this but you are all locus parentis of the children in this church.

You all have a role to play in teaching and we have to educate. We are teachers of our children and we have the incredible influence of teaching them the commands of God.

Now how I would say that differently, the laws of love. We are teaching them to love God and to love one another. The only place we can do that is at the foot of the cross.

[13 : 47] Teach them just morality. Don't just teach them the Ten Commandments. Remember the Ten Commandments are given to the people of God in relationship with God because He had already redeemed them.

And it's easy to develop knowledge within our children, even biblical knowledge, but we are teaching them to relate to a person.

The person that they must come to for salvation. We need to know that they are sinners that will come to Jesus Christ for salvation. And the foot of the cross will be the best place that we can teach them.

And if they find that identity in Christ, they will find their freedom and individuality and belonging and security and adventure and ambition.

So we need to know the Bible. Know its stories. We are starting at the end of August. A series in the morning worship of the great Bible stories.

[14 : 49] It's going to take us right up to Christmas. I think sometimes we've stopped preaching or talking about the great Bible stories. Maybe we are not teaching our children that very much either.

But teach them the great Bible stories. Teach them the ethics of God's word, but teach them in the context of grace and relationship. Teach them in a way that we are open with our hearts and honest and confess our own need for forgiveness and the boundaries and the vistas of grace.

And it takes time. It takes energy and it takes effort. And it takes intentionality to do that with our children. Now the Proverbs are full of God's wisdom.

It has lots to say about children and about teaching children about obedience, about loving others, about guarding our minds, about watching, about listening, about selecting friends, about self-control, about watching how we speak, about how we use our money, how we use our resources.

It speaks about hard work, it speaks about laziness, it speaks about marriage, the kind of people you should marry. It gives lots of different advice from God's word. And why they are beyond Proverbs.

[16 : 02] There's all kinds of things that are principally taught in Scripture about sex and about imaging, about ambition and about drink and about drugs. And we need to equip our children to understand the power of God's living word that applies into all of their lives.

So we need to teach them that. But we also need to, the dirty word, we need to discipline them. Proverbs 22 verse 6, train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old, he will not depart from it, or 29, 17.

Discipline your son and he will give you rest, he will give delight to your heart. Important role for children that we warn them, we correct them, we rebuke them, we do so in a prayerful, controlled, wise, loving, but firm way.

And when we lose the heed, we ask for forgiveness. And we make sure that we are careful to learn the significance of being in control of our own lives. You need to know, children need to know, and they love to know what's right and wrong.

They know and love to know parameters. They want to know what's acceptable and what's not acceptable. And it's vital that we discipline our children and we tell them what's right and wrong, because we believe in truth and we believe in God's word and we believe in God's parameters.

[17 : 42] There's nothing worse, is there, than thankless, rude, uncontrolled, spoiled kids. Nobody wants them. Nobody wants to see children growing up that way, because we recognize their responsibility to teach them.

And as we teach them, it reminds us of the importance of prayer. That we need prayer because we want to set parameters for our children, not walls, principles, not prisons.

That we want to equip them. It's the hardest thing to do and we don't have any training for it. But we want to equip them to what we are doing, what we do, we're equipping them towards independence and maturity.

Isn't that the hardest thing for the people you love most in the world? You want them to become strong enough to fly free and safe on the currents of grace.

That's what you want for your children. You want to entrust them to the Heavenly Father in towards independence, which is what we're called to do. We're not called to smother them. We're not called to keep them by our side.

[18 : 52] To flick them out of the nest. To let them swim. We're let them fly. Let them grow. Let them go. That's what we're encouraged to do. And as we pray, praying for forgiveness that will not be paralyzed by regret, but that we will be able to prioritize love.

So, one or two things. And very briefly, some proverbial truth for children. And there are some children here, so no sleeping at this point.

You've got to listen well. I'm going to come at the end of the service and check that you've listened to what Proverbs says for children. Love your parents. That's what you're asked to do. You're asked to love your parents.

Proverbs 3 verse 3, I think it says that. I'm not sure if I asked. Yeah. Let not steadfast loving and faithfulness forsake you. Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart.

Right, your parents, I know, they're boring. They stop your fun. They make you do your homework. They're grumpy. They take social media off you when you're just most wanting to speak to your friend.

[20 : 00] They make you do exercise when you don't want to and eat green beans, which is desperate. They make you go to bed when you want to stay up. They're unreasonable. They don't understand you. They're unfair. They're old and ancient.

But love them because they would die for you. They would die for you. Love them.

And love Jesus because he did die for you. And remember that. So love your parents and listen to them. Listen to your parents.

One verse 8, I think we've maybe done that before. Hear my son, your father's instruction, forsake not your mother's teaching and his son and daughter. It goes for all children here, of course. Listen to them because they're older than you.

You know that. They're much older than you. But they've been there and they've made the kind of mistakes that they want to keep you from making. So just listen to them and what they have to say.

[21 : 04] Then, this is much harder. You've got to respect them and obey them. Proverbs 6, 20, my son, my daughter, keep your father's commandant, forsake not your mother's teaching.

There, your God's given them to you and you're to obey them as children. They'll shepherd you. They'll love you. They'll protect you and they'll guide you.

Do what they ask and not after they have to ask you 45 times. Do it maybe the first time they ask you and do it willingly and even sometimes with a smile.

Dishes, bed, tidy up your room, do your homework, all the things that you don't want. They do it because they want you to learn and grow and understand.

And when you struggle with that, ask Jesus to help you. Just pray to Him and ask Him to help you to do what your mums and dad want you to do.

[22 : 15] And I speak to some of the grown-up kids here who maybe have older parents who they no longer live with. Proverbs 23, verse 22, listen to your father who gave you life.

Do not despise your mother when she is old. So, remember older young children, it's payback time.

It's time for you to give back all the years of sacrifice and commitment and love and blood and sweat and tears for your children, for your parents.

And remember sometimes, interestingly, if they, for example, suffer from dementia, they will return to being like children in their behaviour.

And you'll need a renewed patience and you will see the kind of hassle you cause them. And you'll be asked to be patient. I'm really disappointed, none of my kids are here, so I can get them to, you know, feel a sense of spiritual guilt and look after me when I become demented.

[23 : 26] But take time with them, love them, care for them, remember who they are. And as a church, we should remember people who are looking after parents, particularly those who have a great burden to do so.

And we should support and love and pray for them. So very briefly, for Saint See's, remember to support parents in the church. We need to do that in our preaching and our teaching, we need to encourage families and marriage, the longings, the fears, the insecurities, the false expectations.

We need to speak to one another about these things, it can't all be done from the pulpit. But in the same context, we need to value singleness within the church, in and of itself. You're single, you're not second best, you're not just there to support the nuclear families in the church, you're not there just to be babysitters.

You have your own gifts, your own battles, your own needs, your own opportunities. But we are all part of a family together and we need to remember to support and pray for one another.

Support the children in the church. I'm really keen to develop that, it seems strange maybe after 16 years, but things develop within the church. We have so many children, develop links with parents, links with kids' church, involve them more in the service.

[24 : 51] We invite them to come more in the evening, have tables at the back and have worksheets for them so that they get used to being under the word. There's lots of things we can do, maybe have a buddy systems for our baptised children so that one or two people are always praying for one or two of the children in the church beyond their families.

And may we seek to encourage that family spirit within the congregation in all that we do, which we've sought to do, the importance of rising up in godliness together.

And recognising the mission of the church, which is into a broken world with many broken homes and great dysfunction, and some of that within the Christian community.

And as we reach out, we recognise all kinds of alternative families, that there are alternative models that are in many cases reaping a whirlwind and a harvest of chaos.

But may we love and seek the healing of the gospel into these situations, which will take time and commitment and love. And may God's grace be with us as we do so.

[26 : 05] I mean, I'm going to close with a prayer, which is also a song, which I'm not going to sing, you'll be pleased to know. But it's called a mother's prayer, and it is a beautiful prayer to make, particularly for our children.

So let's bow our heads and pray. Before you close your eyes to sleep, I have a promise still to keep.

As I hold you in my arms, I pray your little frame grows strong and faith take hold while you are young. This is my prayer for you.

Hold my hand, I'll teach you the way to go through the joys and through the tears, the journey of these years. May you trust him till the end. The world is not as it should be, but the Savior opens eyes to see all that's beautiful and true.

Oh, may his light fill all you are and the jewel of wisdom crown your heart. This is my prayer for you. You'll travel where my arms won't reach as the road will rise and lead your feet on a journey of your own.

[27 : 27] May my mistakes not hinder you, but his grace remain and guide you through. This is my prayer for you.

Take his hand and go where he calls you, and whatever comes, seek him with all your heart. This will be my prayer for you. Father, hear my ceaseless prayer.

O keep them in your care. Amen.