

Proverbs for Life

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, we're going to look this morning for a few minutes together at the book of Proverbs. Proverbs is an interesting book. It's not one that you can really go through each chapter at a time.

It's very thematic, so it has got lots of different themes throughout it. But really the context of it generally, it's a royal parental advice from the King to his son in the context of the Middle Near East to a young pretender.

And it just speaks of such wisdom for families. It speaks of such wisdom about God and about grace and about truth and about how to live.

And it's really a book of God's common sense for us all, and God's wisdom. It spoke about wisdom in the chapter that we read. And it reminds us all the time of the significance of wisdom that we want to impart as parents to our children and as people to one another.

The theme, I guess, is much about family and kids today, but also about family, Jen, not just the kind of nuclear family as it were, but the church family because it's all relevant.

[1 : 1 1] And we see that this book speaks very much into where we get wisdom, where our wisdom is sourced in the person of Jesus Christ and King Jesus and in knowing and loving Him.

And the ethics of belonging to Him and what that means, it speaks about community, about society, about how we live together as one another. It's very much often the outworking of God's command for us to love one another and what that looks like in family and in society.

So it speaks about society and it speaks about family and the importance of family and what happens in family, we recognize the significance of that.

And as parents, maybe we recognize the burden that we have of sharing truth and being an example to our children.

And that's true in a church context also, the importance of who we are, our brokenness, our need for healing and forgiveness and in relationships, whether it's the dynamic relationships of family or, for example, in church family, where there's love, we often find the deepest joys, we also sometimes find the deepest hurts and the deepest regrets that we share.

[2 : 3 7] There's often paralysis within families and we see the influence for good that we have on one another in a church context. We also see the influence sometimes for bad that we can have on one another, either in church life or in family life.

It's a place therefore that begets stability or instability and we all have a part to play as children, as parents, as members of a church family together.

And of course, what we find from God's Word and implicit in the book of Proverbs, if not often quite so much, explicitly stated maybe more so in the Psalms, we find that is forgiveness, the importance of forgiveness, the importance of forgiveness in families as parents and also accepting that as children.

It's an amazing place, family. It's an amazing place where our true colours are usually revealed very clearly, a place where we can live and expose what we are or hide what we are, and that's true in the church also.

And it's a place where we seek to train and guide our children, particularly into the ways of truth. And therefore, our example and our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ as parents is particularly important.

[4 : 02] We know we can't idolise our children nor can we ignore our children. And we know that it's important to bring them to recognise and understand who we are as believers and what that means for our relationship with them.

So Proverbs is a book of proverbial truth, I think, for parents, but also for us all. And that is the context in which we'll look at it for a few minutes this morning.

It speaks about our privileges and our responsibilities as parents and as people. And I'm not going to be saying for those who are here week to week, I'll not be saying anything new, but sometimes it's good just to be reminded of, I think, what the Bible always reminds us of what is important and what is significant.

And I'm going to begin with that very important truth for us all, which Proverbs reminds us of. We read in chapter 4 and in verse 23, there it says, Keep your heart with all vigilance for from it flows the springs of life.

You know, we could preach on that every week. We could highlight that every week. We could sing it every week. We could have it up in the screens every week. We could think about it every morning of life.

[5 : 29] Every day we get up, remember the importance of guarding our hearts, of protecting our hearts, of keeping our hearts with all vigilance. And we know that Proverbs speaks about the fear of the Lord being the beginning of wisdom and that wisdom comes from knowing who God is in Jesus Christ.

And we have to guard our hearts because that is the very core of the covenantal truth that is expressed from the Abrahamic covenant right through that we'll be looking at very briefly in baptism later on.

Is God who is a saving God and He is the one who changes our hearts and He is the one who restores us and gives us a relationship with Him.

And so it's always about as Christians, guarding our hearts under the power of God's grace, recognizing who He is, knowing His love and forgiveness, expressing that and living it in our lives.

We're talking about sharing our faith on Wednesday evenings and it's the same thing, isn't it? It's about knowing what God has done in our hearts and being able to express that and live it and share it with others.

[6 : 40] So as parents and as people, the most important thing for us is knowing Calvary and what happened at Calvary before anything else. What happened when the Son of God came and was nailed to a tree and was crucified on the cross.

And He said, Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing. He said, Father, where are you? Why have you forsaken me? My God, my God. Because there He was taking in all His justice and in all His love, He was taking our sins upon Himself on the cross so that as we trust in Him and as we believe in His resurrection power, then we will know forgiveness and life eternal.

That is the one power. That is the one grace, that is the one glory, that is the one life that we need as parents and as people.

So as a parent, we care about our children so much. We care about the material comfort, about a good home, about holidays, about strong education, all these things for our children, so important.

But your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, my relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ stands above all these things, all these things. And as a church family, when we think about how we live our lives and what we think about church and what we think about this and that with regard to church, what we think about people in the church, ministers in the church, leaders.

[8 : 07] It is our own heart and life and our response to all that we face that is the most important, that we are a people growing and learning all the time, as Billy mentioned, in our faith, that our own spiritual disciplines are going to be the most important thing in the home and in the church family also.

So it's vital for us and it's vital for us as parents, it's vital for us as people to take your own heart experience into everything that you do.

And it's parents that you take your heart experience into your relationship with your children and we take our heart experience into our relationship with one another.

What does that mean? It means that we're patient and sacrificial, that we put others first, that we unconditionally love, that we train ourselves as we seek to train our children and that we show our children forgiveness and ask for forgiveness from them and from one another.

And everything I say about parents is true of us all together. So we have to guard our heart. But I'm going to take a couple of other verses from different places in Proverbs. I think you're allowed to do that because it's that kind of thematic book.

[9 : 28] To guard our heart, so just what we are inside, a relationship with Jesus inside, but also we have to watch our life. And there's a couple of verses there, Proverbs 7, 20 and 31, 28, where it says, the righteous lead blameless lives, blessed are their children after them.

And her children, speaking about a mother, arise and call her blessed. And both these verses stem from the fact that the parents are living lives honestly and openly before their God as their Savior.

And their example brings blessing to their children. So there's a follow on from their life that brings blessing to their children. We know that to be true, don't we? The importance of a good example, not just as parents as it can be in the workplace, it can be in the home, it can be in the university, it can be among colleagues, whatever.

Our example stems from having guarded our hearts, doesn't it? As we guard our hearts, as we live in relationship with Christ as believers, then that flows out into how we live our lives and how we consistently follow Jesus Christ.

So it's always about living lives. When it says blameless, it doesn't mean that we're innocent. It means that we are taking our failings and faults to the Lord Jesus Christ seeking His forgiveness.

[10 : 50] It means that we're not hypocritical and having double standards. It means we don't let our lives are garred down in private and we're one thing in public and one thing in private. It means we're pure inside and outside as we strive to live His way.

It means the way we treat our husbands and wives and our children in private and how we speak to colleagues and friends and people in church in public is the same.

It means that we live humbly. It means that we deal with the way we deal with mistakes and failure is the way Christ has dealt with us in grace and forgiveness and patience and long suffering.

It means that we deal with our shortcomings and our bad tempers and our failings before the living God. Our use of time, our use of leisure and pleasure, the way we express love, our commitment, our priorities, our humility is all reflective of our hearts and guarding our hearts so that we are also watching our lives.

You know it's true, don't you, that children are the sharpest mimics and learners. They learn very quickly. I think I've told this story before here about my nephew who lived a lot of his very young life on the farm.

[12 : 09] Katrina's dad was a shepherd and he lived with his grandfather. My nephew lived with his grandfather early on. He was very young. From a very young age he was out working the sheep and mimicking his grandfather.

One day he came in and someone said something to him at the kitchen table and he went like that, pardon? Because it was exactly what his grandfather would do.

You know it's funny to see a three-year-old boy going, pardon? Because it was such an old manish kind of thing to do. And yet he mimicked his grandfather in that way and that's what children do and that's obviously a very physical, simple example.

But we often, children often mimic what they see, the bad habits and the good habits. And that's not absolutely true in church also.

But you see other people doing this, Christians, oh, if it's okay for them to do that, then I can do that. It's okay to speak like that about people, then I can speak like that about people. So how we live and how we example our faith in Christ is what children see.

[13 : 15] So we need to watch our lives. But we also have a great duty as parents and with one another to teach what we live.

Then we have Proverbs 1, I think in the next slide, teach what you live. Proverbs 1, 7, 8, if fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and instruction and then listen, my son, to your father's instruction, do not forsake your mother's teaching.

Isn't that a great reality of parental responsibility? Because you are the great educators in their lives, you're incredibly influential.

And chapter 4 where we read, verse 4 says, Let your heart hold fast, my words, keep my commands and live.

And we know we can't keep the commands. What are the commands? Summarize, loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. Love your neighbor as yourself.

[14 : 19] But that's why we come to Christ, isn't it? Because He's kept them for us and it's through Him we can seek to follow and live that way.

The fear of the Lord being the beginning of wisdom. Where do we find that? Where do you go to find the fear of the Lord? It's at the foot of the cross, isn't it? That's where we find our understanding and respect and love and worship of the Lord when we see Him crucified on the cross for our sins.

And our identity, therefore, is in that. And our freedom, our individuality, our belonging and our security, our adventures and our ambitions are there.

And we take that and we educate them in that truth. We teach them and we teach our children here, all of us, because you're going to take a vow at the end of the service, you're going to take a vow as a congregation again in baptism because we all have a role to play with all the children come down to the front and all the children we see and know and all the children that we might be in contact with in our lives.

And we teach one another that the Bible isn't just stories, it's not just about morality but it's about grace and relationship.

[15 : 39] The gospel is good news, it's not good advice. And we need to teach our children that the ethics, the morality, the truth of the gospel has to be bounded in the relationship with God.

It's not a philosophy. We live it, our lives are changed by it. We have open hearts that are honest, confess our need for good.

And I think one of the greatest things we can do as parents particularly is to say sorry when we make mistakes and in the church, one of the greatest things we can do with one another is to say sorry when we make mistakes and seek God's forgiveness because that is teaching what we believe is at the core of our lives.

What we do teach, all our children God's wisdom for them and the Proverbs are full of it. They're full of the need for obedience, for loving others, for guarding our minds, for what we watch and what we're watching, what we're listening, the friendships we have, self-control we need, how we speak, the use of resources, our money management, hard work, laziness, marriage.

The Bible speaks into all of these things. It speaks into the friendships we have, the sexuality we have, the image we have, the ambition, what we do with alcohol and drink and drugs, how we equip ourselves and how we equip one another and how we equip our children to live in this life.

[17 : 04] I know that in school longer than sometimes it seems that they're at home, but you are the great educators. They are far, they are much, much more influenced by what they see in the home than what they see in school and what they take is what they see in that loving relationship of trust and grace.

So we teach them and at the same time we're also, I think, training them in Proverbs 22, very famous words that many of us are, train up a child in the way he should go, even when he's old he will not depart from it.

That great responsibility, I think for each of us, for one another, warning, correcting, rebuking, loving, strong, training in God's Word and in His truth, thoughtful, persuasive and above all grace-filled.

We're teaching one another and teaching our children right and wrong. What is acceptable is we believe it to be through God's truth and what is unacceptable.

You know what it's like, don't you? We all know what it's like to be in the company of children who have never grown up or who have never been taught and who have been allowed rampant freedom because very often they are thankless, rude, uncontrolled and spoiled and none of us want that for ourselves and we certainly don't want it for our children because that's so important.

[18 : 51] And what therefore we pray for, both for ourselves and for our children and within a church context is to take it right back to the beginning as for God's wisdom as we rely and trust in Him because our children, above all, they need parameters, they don't need walls, they need principles, they don't need prison.

They need to be equipped towards independence and maturity. We want to flick them out the nest so that they will fly and we want to give them wings.

We want to give them independence and freedom but we want it to be founded in that beautiful relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and the maturity He gives.

There may be lots of mistakes, there will be lots of things that we will grieve over but we entrust them to our Heavenly Father and we will see them flying free and safe where on the currents of grace.

That's where we want them to be, that's where we want them to soar, that's where we want them to run, where we want them to walk, we want them to walk in the relationship with Jesus Christ that we have.

[20 : 12] They can't rely on our relationship. They need to trust themselves as we will see. We talk very briefly about baptism but that is our hope.

And we live in that light then with a sense of forgiveness, not a sense of paralysis or regret, but with the Holy Spirit's help we will prioritize forgiveness and grace and moving forward.

And that absolutely goes for us as a church as well. It's absolutely significant and important that all of us hear these truths because the proverbial truths that we have are obviously not just for parents, not just for children, they're for each and every one of us in that greater church family and with our Heavenly Father as our Lord and guide.

I'm going to finish with some words from Mother's Prayer which I actually read here once before but probably not that many people are still here from the time I read it by Mother, it's by Kirsten Getty, before you close your eyes to sleep I have a promise still to keep as I hold you in my arms.

I knew this with Ham. I pray your little frame grows strong and faith takes hold while you're young.

[21 : 40] 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.

This world is not as it should be but the Savior opens eyes to see all that is beautiful and true. O 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. 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. Whether hear my ceaseless prayer will keep her in your care. These are the kind of prayers that we offer for one another, I hope, as we consider our church family.

[22 : 52] And as a family and as a church, we seek to support our parents, especially in their roles and the pressures which are very great.

We hope we equip you and support you. We also encourage families and marriage and the longings and fears and insecurities and false expectations and the tiredness and the chaos.

We hope we encourage and support you. But as we live as a church family, we also value every single individually, equally. And we think of all of us as a community, as a family.

As individuals, a child, a teenager, someone who's single, someone who has been married and loved and lost, married couples, families, all equally critical to this church, all loved and all supported in their different battles.

And we do have a special consideration for our children and we do pray for them and we care for them. We do love when they run around here in church and we just want them to be safe.

[24 : 04] So I try not to have them run around in here when there's coffee and tea in case one spills on their head. So I am the ogre sometimes with them, but only because I love them.

And they can run in the corridor and in the hall all day long. We do love them and we reach out to the gospel, with the gospel to them and seek to show them what we know and what we love and who we know and who we love and the difference it makes.

Amen.