

Proverbs on Parenting

When I was growing up, I often heard it said that children don't come with an owner's manual, a book telling you how to raise them

Well, I disagree!!! The Bible is SUFFICIENT for the raising of a child, and of all the books in the Bible, none give a greater quantity of practical insights into the art of godly parenting than does the book of PROVERBS

As we study Proverbs on parenting this morning, I want to entice you to listen carefully no matter what stage of life you're in

- Obviously, if you are a new parent or a parent of preschoolers, you may feel you have the most to gain from a sermon on parenting... just be encouraged at all the practical wisdom Proverbs will give you
- If you are a parent of teens, I believe that Proverbs FITS BEST as advice given from a father to a teenaged son about to leave home and face the dangers of the world; so for parents of teens, the topics covered across the whole book of Proverbs is incredibly applicable... you can use Proverbs to get your sons and daughters ready to go away to college or strike out on their own
- If you are an empty-nester, you still have a lot to gain: perhaps soon you will be grandparents and your kids will be seeking your advice for raising kids... at least you can use the topics in this sermon as points of prayer for them... so also if you are a GRANDPARENT already
- If you are single, or a college student or youth, you may think "Why should I need to listen to a sermon on parenting?" let me encourage you in two ways: 1) it may be a lot sooner than you think that you will be a parent... it's not too early to learn; if only simply to know that Proverbs is the world's greatest handbook on practical parenting; 2) even if you NEVER HAVE CHILDREN, you should still care very much how the next generation is being raised and be willing to PRAY about these themes for your friends and fellow church-members who are parents

I. The Urgency of Good Parenting: Life or Death

A. "What Would It Profit" a Parent...?

B. Fundamental Insights for the Soul Come in Parental Language

1. A father to his son... instruction for life now and eternally
2. The fear of the Lord

Proverbs 1:7-9 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. ⁸ Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, ⁹ for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.

3. Trust in the Lord

Proverbs 3:1-6 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. ³ Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man. ⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

The greatest thing a godly parent can ever do is to saturate his children with the GOSPEL of JESUS Christ

Mark 1:15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

C. "Train Up a Child...": The Most Famous Parenting verse in Proverbs

^{ESV} Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

1. Most famous verse on parenting in Proverbs: often misunderstood resulting in false hope
2. My Hebrew professor: What the Hebrew actually says
 - a. Train up a child "according to his way, and even when he is old he will not depart from it"
 - b. Every English translation has a moral imperative sense: "the way he SHOULD go"... but the Hebrew doesn't say that... it just says "according to his way"
 - c. Hugenberger pointed out that Proverbs has a very pessimistic view of a child's "own way"...

Proverbs 22:15 [Foolishness] is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.

- d. So he reads this Proverb as a warning to permissive parents: "Give the little brat whatever he wants, and he'll be demanding it the rest of his life."
3. My own analysis:

- a. The Hebrew word “train up” frequently has the sense of “dedicate”... it’s used of the dedication of a house (Deuteronomy 20:5) and of the temple (1 Kings 8:63); it has to do with the initial use of something for its intended purpose (like the first time a temple is used for sacrifice, or a house is used for living)
 - b. The idea of this verb is to give a child over to the Lord, to initiate him well into the things of God, to start him off on a path in a certain way
 - c. The Hebrew “according to” is literally “on the mouth of” and it means “in accordance with” or “according to the measure of”
 - d. What then is meant by “his way”???
 - i) The word “way” is used almost seventy times in the Book of Proverbs
 - ii) It refers to the choices and directions one takes in life... both the overall journey of his life and the daily lifestyle by which he lives - e. This verse then I think admonishes parents that significant life patterns are started EARLY... habits are set up at an early stage, for good or for evil
 - f. Dedicate a child in accordance with his way** means that whatever direction we set a child on, they are likely to stay on that course their whole life and never depart from it
 - g. Parents then should be extremely diligent to look after both minor details—early habits formed—and overall life path
4. Proverbs speaks in tendencies: children reared in godly homes whose parents trained them carefully and biblically have a strong tendency to walk with Christ their whole life; children allowed to grow wild, whose sinful pride and rebellious hearts are not addressed early tend to struggle with those sin patterns their whole lives
- a. A child who is trained to have a daily quiet time—prayer and bible reading—will probably struggle far less with that discipline than someone who was never trained that way
 - b. A child who selfishly snatches other kids’ toys and acts like a bully may have trouble relating to the rights and possessions of others his whole life
5. **THUS** good parenting at an early age is an **URGENT ISSUE**

D. Wisdom: A Life or Death Issue

Proverbs 13:14 The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death.

Proverbs 15:24 The path of life leads upward for the wise to keep him from going down to the grave.

E. However: Good Parenting is Not Required for Heaven!!

F. AND Good Parenting is Not All that is Needed for Heaven

II. The Goal of Good Parenting: Heartfelt Obedience to the Lord

A. Basic Cry of a Parent

Proverbs 23:26 Give me your heart, my son, and let your eyes delight in my ways.

B. All Obedience to the Law Must be HEART-FELT Obedience

Proverbs 3:1-3 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. ³ Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart.

1. The godly father and mother is seeking a heart after God in their children
2. This is the gift of the New Covenant... and it is the great evidence of being born again... when your children obey from the heart what God has commanded
 - a. Whenever a child sins, and the time comes for godly discipline, the desire is to bring the child to heart-felt repentance before Christ
 - b. The child must be told that the blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient to cleanse him or her from this sin
 - c. Every time of training is a chance for the child to learn the depravity of their own heart and their need for Christ as Savior
 - d. Whenever a child is tempted to fear or to doubt or to run after some earthly treasure, the godly parent will be there to work on the heart, to teach them to trust in God

The whole focus is on the HEART!!!

III. The Core of Good Parenting: Loving Persuasion

A. God a Reasoning Father

Isaiah 1:18-20 "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. ¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient, you will eat

the best from the land; ²⁰ but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

B. The Father in Proverbs: Constantly Reasoning and Persuading

1. The verse we just saw a moment ago:

Proverbs 23:26 Give me your heart, my son, and let your eyes delight in my ways.

2. Many other such persuasions

- a. General persuasions to listen to the father's wisdom

Proverbs 1:8-9 Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, ⁹ for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.

Proverbs 2:1-5 My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, ² making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding ...then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

Proverbs 3:1-4 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. ³ Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.

Proverbs 4:10-11 Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many. ¹¹ I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness.

- b. Persuaded not to join in with thieves

Proverbs 1:10-16 My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.

- c. Persuaded to guard your heart

Proverbs 4:20-23 My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings... Guard your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

- d. Persuaded not to fall in with an immoral woman

Proverbs 5:1-8 My son, be attentive to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding, ² that you may keep discretion, and your lips may guard knowledge. ³ For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, ⁴ but in the end she is bitter as wormwood... ⁷ And now, O

sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. ⁸ Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house,

e. Persuaded to avoid a bad business deal

Proverbs 6:1-5 My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor, have given your pledge for a stranger, ² if you are snared in the words of your mouth, caught in the words of your mouth, ³ then do this, my son, and save yourself, for you have come into the hand of your neighbor: go, hasten, and plead urgently with your neighbor. ⁴ Give your eyes no sleep and your eyelids no slumber; ⁵ save yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the hand of the fowler.

The time-consuming life of the godly father and mother: constantly reasoning with the child, explaining the truth system behind the commands

YES: there are times when the child needs to obey simply because the parent commands it... God doesn't ALWAYS explain Himself of His command to us; but he OFTEN does

C. The Antidote to the Parental Abuser

1. In a moment, we'll discuss "the rod"... corporal punishment
2. BUT the rod only works in the context of a general approach of loving persuasion... a chastisement given apart from loving reasoning actually hardens a child's heart
3. Furthermore, the parent that just constantly says "Because I said so..." and never gives reasons is not preparing the child for a life of following God's reasoning in the Scripture

IV. The Resolve of Good Parenting: Loving Discipline

A. How God Disciplines His Children

Hebrews 12:5-7 "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." ⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?

1. The Lord REBUKES his children: speaking harshly and strongly to them when they do wrong... like what Jesus did to Peter when Peter said Jesus would never be crucified

Matthew 16:23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

2. The Lord also “chastises” or “scourges” or “disciplines” every one of His children... He puts them through extremely painful experiences to teach them to hate sin

B. So Also Godly Parents Must Discipline Theirs

1. It is not loving for a parent to wink at the sins of their children
2. It is not loving to overlook those sinful habits: the laziness, or the disrespect, or the selfishness, or the sinful anger
3. Loving parents MUST discipline their children: by harsh consequences they are trained to hate sin as God does

C. The Commands Restated

Proverbs 13:24 Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

Amazing: our modern day and age looks on corporal punishment inevitably as child abuse; the modern credo is that any parent who uses corporal punishment is really hating his child

The Bible teaches the exact opposite: it is in withholding corporal punishment that you express hatred for your child

Notice the phrase “diligent to discipline”: consistent, loving discipline takes remarkable diligence

Proverbs 23:13-14 Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. ¹⁴ If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.

Proverbs 19:18 Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death.

Again, the idea is that it is MORE dangerous to the eternal welfare of a child NOT to discipline him; the link here is between corporal punishment and the grave itself... the loving administration of the rod SAVES HIM FROM DEATH

Proverbs 29:15 The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

This passage teaches that children left to themselves inevitably go bad; parenting is NOT FOR COWARDS!!!

D. The “Rod”: Both Symbol and Reality

1. The Rod represents BOTH a real manner of discipline AND a symbol as well

2. Most Christian parents throughout the ages have realized there is a time and a place for the loving administration of corporal punishment
3. The Rod then represents an actual physical chastisement... a spanking tool or some such device to render temporary, non-damaging pain to a child
4. The Rod also represents a metaphor for painful consequences for sinful actions
 - a. When a child grows beyond the spanking stage, the parents can still administer the rod in other ways
 - b. Perhaps a teen is so excited to go to some event, perhaps a football game or a camping trip with friends; but the teen disobeys in some significant way—perhaps some rebellious attitude surfaces toward his mother; the “rod” then is the loss of the privilege of going to the event

E. The Need for the Rod: Original Sin and Actual Sins

1. Folly bound up in the heart of a child... the doctrine of original sin

Proverbs 22:15 Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

2. So also specific sin habits begin crop up, and a wise parent will address those patterns diligently

F. The Administration of the Rod

1. Done with a loving motive
2. Never done in anger
3. Always done with respect for the child as a special creation of God

G. The Difference Between Loving Discipline and Child Abuse

HOWEVER... most clear thinking Christian parents (AND their children) acknowledge there is a vast difference between corporal punishment rightly administered and child abuse

Generally the difference stems in HOW the discipline is administered and WHY... not so much WHAT was done

If the discipline is done in love, characterized by the fruit of the Spirit, with a genuine heart to INSTRUCT the child and an eagerness for rapid reconciliation, and if the corporal punishment is brief, high in pain but low in impact, and if it is directed toward a part of the body that readily accepts such a high sting low impact discipline (the rear end seems well fitted for the job!), it's hard to see it as child abuse except by some extremist ideologue

NOTE: There is an increasing threat to the rights of parents to train their children by these convictions

In November of 2007, the state legislature of Massachusetts considered a bill that would have made it illegal to spank a child even in the privacy of your own home!

In 1979, Sweden became the first country in the world to ban spanking. ... in the 1960s 53 percent of Swedes backed corporal punishment of children. By the 1990s, that number was less than 10 percent.

A government official is available to children in Sweden to report allegations of corporal punishment. Parents face jail time if it's found they've stepped out of line

Nineteen European countries have banned corporal punishment...

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children issued a policy statement on corporal punishment, making it a goal to eradicate it from all nations... amazingly, they had no such policy on abortion

All of this exposes a fearsome trend of the government to get increasingly involved in the parents' training of children... such a trend would include eliminating a right to homeschool or even religiously educate children

Some have proposed a Constitutional Amendment protecting the rights of parents to train their children... the problem is that the US Congress is extremely reluctant to Amend the Constitution... there have only been five amendments passed in the last 50 years

The answer at the present time seems to be to fight these kinds of extremist initiatives as they come

V. The Delight of Good Parents: A Godly Child

A. No Greater Joy

3 John 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

B. Many Proverbs Hold Out this Joy

Proverbs 15:20 A wise son makes a glad father

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.

Proverbs 27:11 Be wise, my son, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him who reproaches me.

Proverbs 29:17 Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.

C. BUT Though God Uses Godly Parenting, True Wisdom Comes from Him

1. This is not a machine... get all the parts adjusted and godly children get cranked out like a factory
2. Genuine repentance and faith in Christ are gifts of God, not the results of some parenting system that works every time

John 1:12-13 to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

“God has no grandchildren”... godly parenting does not GUARANTEE that a child will be born again

3. A number of parenting curricula I have read or ministries from which I have otherwise benefited openly state or at least give the implication that, if you follow their methods, you will automatically have godly children... there is no such automatic machine!! It is ultimately only the grace of God that can do this

VI. The Heartbreak of Good Parents: A Wayward Child

A. The Misery of a Child Gone Wrong

Proverbs 17:25 A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him.

Proverbs 19:13 A foolish son is ruin to his father

B. Godly Parents Acutely Aware of their Failures

C. Godly Parents Do Not Automatically Produce Godly Children

1. A son may be too opinionated to learn

Proverbs 13:1 A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

2. A good home may produce a sluggard

Proverbs 10:5 He who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame.

3. A good home may also produce a profligate... as in the Parable of the Prodigal Son

Proverbs 29:3 He who loves wisdom makes his father glad, but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth.

4. Bottom line... good homes do produce apostates sometimes

D. The Prodigal Son Described in Proverbs

1. Despising parents

Proverbs 15:20 A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish man despises his mother.

2. Mocking parents

Proverbs 30:17 The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures.

3. Cursing parents

Proverbs 30:11 There are those who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers.

4. Heartlessly using up parents' money

Proverbs 28:24 He who robs his father or mother and says, "It's not wrong"-- he is partner to him who destroys.

5. Even turning a widowed mother out of her home

Proverbs 19:26 He who robs his father and drives out his mother is a son who brings shame and disgrace.

E. Two Remedies: One Delightful and One Terrifying

1. The delightful remedy: the prodigal returns repentant

Proverbs 14:27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.

Proverbs 16:6 By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil.

2. The terrifying remedy: the prodigal dies suddenly

Proverbs 20:20 If one curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in utter darkness.

Proverbs 29:1 A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed-- without remedy.

VII. The Only Perfect Parent: God the Father

A. The Book of Proverbs is Ultimately God's Fatherly Word to ALL His Children

1. Yes, this sermon is about parenting from the Book of Proverbs
2. But Hebrews 12, quoting Proverbs 3, says it is really God addressing you all as SONS and DAUGHTERS of the living God

Hebrews 12:5-6 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

3. God deals wisely with each of us, training us to be righteous

Hebrews 12:10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.

4. The author to Hebrews shows us the final end of God's perfect parenting:

Hebrews 12:11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

B. When God is Done Training Us, We Will Spend Eternity with Him in Heaven

Revelation 21:7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.