

Main Idea: We find some very practical help for the family in Proverbs 1-7. It's here that God in His grace gives moms and dads two practical helps.

- I. God gives us a practical assignment (1:8).
 - A. Proverbs speaks to parents.
 1. It says to talk.
 2. It says to teach.
 - B. Proverbs speaks to children.
 1. It says to listen.
 2. It says to learn.
- II. God gives us a practical curriculum (chapters 1-7).

As parents, we must teach about...

 - A. We must teach about *authority* (1:8).
 - B. We must teach about *temptation and peer-pressure* (1:10).
 - C. We must teach about *priorities* (2:1-8).
 - D. We must teach about *obedience* (3:1-2).
 - E. We must teach about *God's discipline* (3:11-12).
 - F. We must teach about *discernment in decision-making* (3:21-26).
 - G. We must teach about the importance of *learning* (4:1-2).
 - H. We must teach about *choices* (4:10-19).
 1. Teach them what path to avoid (14).
 2. Teach them what path to follow (18).
 - I. We must teach about *heart issues* (4:20-23).
 - J. We must teach about *resisting sexual temptation* (chs. 5-7).
 - K. We must teach about *integrity* (6:1-5).

Response: What's at stake?

 1. The issue isn't merely what's good for us.
 2. The issue is the reputation of God.

Well, it finally came. Not long ago I received an invitation in the mail to become a member of AARP, formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons. So I guess it's official now. I'm not a young man any longer, as if last month's pick up basketball game at the men's retreat didn't convince me (which it did).

A week from today is Father's Day. Let's be honest, dads. It's a tough task to be a parent. I'd like to pose a question to dads and moms. How are you doing? Here's where the frustration rises for many of us. We really don't know. I mean, if we are honest with ourselves as parents, we have to admit we could always do better. So how do you know if you're doing what you ought to be doing (and enough of it) as a parent?

My desire today is to encourage you. We can know. How? We belong to God, to the One who created us. And God has given us in His Word a very special book to help us as parents. It's the book of Proverbs.

In the 17th century, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester said this, "Before I was married I had three theories about raising children. Now I have three children and no theories."

I'm so glad that God's Word doesn't give us theories, but unchanging truth. Here we find the very counsel of an all-knowing God who does not change. The book of Proverbs has much to say to us about parenting.

This isn't the first time I've preached on the subject of parenting from Proverbs, and it probably won't be the last. To succeed as a parent it's not enough to hear God's truth.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ We addressed this passage in a similar study at WBC on 5/9/2004.

We need continual reminders of what God has said. We tend to lose focus, to get distracted, perhaps discouraged and disillusioned. And so we must go back to where we left the path.

I believe we all need this message, parents and non-parents alike. Why? Because either you are a parent or you know someone who is! And in a world where human opinions abound, God wants all of us to know what He expects of parents. That's one of the reasons He gave all of us Proverbs 1-7.

We find some very practical help for the family in Proverbs 1-7. It's here that God in His grace gives both dads and moms two practical helps. We'll look at them this morning and then discuss the implications in our Home Fellowships this evening.

I. God gives us a practical assignment (1:8).

Here it is, in Proverbs 1:8, "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching." The book of Proverbs is the Wisdom Book of the Bible. Most of the book is connected with Solomon and stems from the 10th century B.C. It's not a book intended to tell us how to have a relationship with God. Rather, God gave it to people who already belonged to Him (the Hebrews) to show them how to live in a way that pleases Him.

Consider an important disclaimer. If you are not a child of God, please don't assume you can become one by doing the things we are about to learn. You can't. Becoming a child of God isn't the reward for good deeds we might do (such as being a good parent). It is the gift of God, a gift which God gives us the moment we turn to Him in repentance and place our faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. God's salvation is by grace, not merit.

If you know Jesus Christ, you're ready for the practical instruction of Proverbs. If you don't, you're about to see another reason why you need Christ, for you are about to see a standard you lack the ability to reach on your own. Christ died for *sinners*.

When it comes to parenting, Proverbs speaks to two groups.

A. Proverbs speaks to parents. Notice again the terminology in verse 8, "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother." This is a family conversation, isn't it? A father is seeking to prepare his son for life.

I was greatly challenged one day when this realization hit me. Proverbs has tons to say to parents. I invite you to do what I did. Go through the book of Proverbs and circle the words "my son" or "my sons" every time you see them. You'll discover them over and over in the first seven chapters (1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:1, 10, 20; 5:1, 7; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1, 24). Those words appear at least 17 times in Proverbs 1-7.

What does that tell us? Granted, the phrase "my son" was a customary form of address between a teacher and a disciple in Solomon's day, but it says more. It makes it clear that passing on the faith is the task of parents. Do you believe that?

Whose job is it to prepare young people to live for Jesus Christ in this world? Yes, the church can help. Yes, the youth leaders can help. But what model does God give us in Proverbs? Sadly, we do too much blameshifting about the problems in society these days. As parents, we need to step up to the plate and be accountable.

What does Proverbs say to us as parents? In essence, two things...

1. *It says to talk.*
2. *It says to teach.* God's kind of parenting involves verbal interaction. Verse 8 again, "Listen, my son, to your father's *instruction* and do not forsake your mother's

teaching." Here is a father that took time to talk to his son, and even wrote down his words. What did he talk about? Not just about sports, cars (or chariots!), and hobbies (although there's nothing wrong with that). He talked and taught his child about how to live a life that pleases God.

Chuck Swindoll talks about a time when he found himself with too many commitments in too few days. He got nervous and tense about it.

"I was snapping at my wife and our children, choking down my food at mealtimes, and feeling irritated at those unexpected interruptions through the day," he recalled in his book *Stress Fractures*. "Before long, things around our home started reflecting the pattern of my hurry-up style. It was becoming unbearable.

"I distinctly remember after supper one evening, the words of our younger daughter, Colleen. She wanted to tell me something important that had happened to her at school that day. She began hurriedly, 'Daddy, I wanna tell you somethin' and I'll tell you really fast.'

"Suddenly realizing her frustration, I answered, 'Honey, you can tell me -- and you don't have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly.'"

"I'll never forget her answer: 'Then listen slowly.'"²

Dads and moms, do you talk with your children? Do you talk to them about living for Jesus Christ in this world? If you don't, why not? There are two possible answers. One is, "I don't have time." But the truth is, we all have the same amount of time. What we mean is, "I don't have time without changing my lifestyle." Another possibility is this. Maybe you haven't been teaching your children because you *don't know how*, nor *what to say*. Proverbs can help. In Proverbs God shows us the key issues He wants us to address with our children. We'll see what they are in a moment. But first, another group...

B. Proverbs speaks to children. God holds parents responsible to talk and teach. What about children? What does Proverbs say to them? A two-fold responsibility.

1. *It says to listen.*

2. *It says to learn.* Verse 8 begins, "Listen." Hear (KJV). Chapter 2 begins, "My son, if you *accept* my words." Chapter 3, "My son, do not forget my teaching." Chapter 4, "Listen, my sons." Chapter 5, "My son, pay attention to my wisdom."

The motto of Proverbs is "the fear of God." The key verse is 1:7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline." We don't talk much about *fearing the Lord* these days. We should. Parents should. Especially with their children. Because fearing the Lord is the key that unlocks the treasure chest of wisdom.

Young people, do you prize your parents? God gave them to you. No, they're not perfect and when they blow it they need to repent and seek God's forgiveness just like you do. But do you prize and respect them? God wants to use your parents to help you learn how to live for Him. To you, God's Word is saying, "Listen. Learn."

How different our families would be, how different our country would be if we took seriously the practical assignment God has given us in the home! It's so simple. God wants parents to talk and teach, and children to listen and learn.

² *Bits & Pieces*, June 24, 1993, pp. 13-14.

At this point some parents are thinking, “Okay, I know I'm supposed to talk and teach. But about what? What specifically am I supposed to teach my children?” That's the very question God answers in Proverbs 1-7. He gives us a second practical help.

II. God gives us a practical curriculum (chapters 1-7).

Lets be honest. When the subject of parenting comes up, opinions fly. There are lots of books on the subject. There are lot of family members and "friends" who are ready to share their expertise on parenting with you. And there's value in seeking human counsel, for sure. But in the end, the best of human counsel is just that. *Human* counsel.

What you want to know and what I want to know is this. How can I tell if I'm measuring up as a parent *in God's eyes*? What are the issues God wants me to address with my children? God tells us in Proverbs 1-7. Proverbs is like a yardstick. As I examine Proverbs, I discover the issues that this biblical father deemed critical to address with his son.³

He mentions some eleven issues. We won't take time to read all eight chapters. I merely want to put the eleven issues on the table. This will be brand new material for some. For others it will be review, but needed review. We must take inventory regularly to make sure we are addressing these eleven issues with our kids. And even if we're not parents or kids ourselves, we need to look carefully at these eleven issues for God says we should have learned them and ought to be living in light of them.

As parents, we must teach about...

A. We must teach about *authority* (1:8). "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck."

Whose job is it to teach children how to listen, learn, and submit to authority? It's the parents'. Dads *and* moms. Did you notice that in verse 8 both the father and the mother were involved in teaching? None of the far too prevalent macho-male cop-out, "I'm no spiritual giant. I leave the spiritual care of my kids to their mother." No! No! No! Thankfully, there have been tremendous changes in the past two decades, and more and more men are getting out of the bleachers and into the game.

Here's the first issue parents need to address according to the Proverbs' model—*authority*. My child enters this world with a problem. And I gave it to her. It's a sin nature, a will that insists on doing what it wants. My job as a parent is to help my child learn how to live under authority. She's not free to do her own thing, and if I let her grow up thinking that, I'm setting her up for a life of heartache. Like Solomon, I must urge my child to listen to instruction (8).

What's more, I need to help my child see that submitting to authority is good for her. That's what Solomon does in verse 9. He puts two rewards in front of his son (a garland and a chain) and says, "Son, these can be yours if you learn to live under authority."⁴

By the way, verse 8 is not a blanket endorsement. It authorizes parental authority, not parental tyranny. Parental authority is *delegated* authority. As a parent, I am under

³The reason I narrow my focus to chapters 1-7 is because that's where the "my son" narrative ends.

⁴When is a piano player truly free? When he does his own thing and pounds the piano keys? No. It's when he learns to discipline himself to learn the scales and rules of music. Then he's free to make the piano sing! True freedom is not doing my own thing. It's willfully placing my desires under authority.

authority, too. Whose? God's (7). I have no right to insist my child do something that is a violation of God's authority.

Much has been said about the mother of John and Charles Wesley, Susannah Wesley. Here were "Susannah Wesley's Rules For Raising Children":

1. Subdue self-will in a child and thus work together with God to save his soul.
2. Teach him to pray as soon as he can speak.
3. Give him nothing he cries for and only what is good for him if he asks for it politely.
4. To prevent lying, punish no fault which is freely confessed, but never allow a rebellious, sinful act to go unnoticed.
5. Commend and reward good behavior.
6. Strictly observe all promises you have make to your child.

Susannah understand what a lot of moms and dads today miss. God expects parents to teach their children, first of all, about living under *authority*.

Who's in control in your home, the parents or the children? Now issue #2...

B. We must teach about *temptation and peer-pressure* (1:10). The next "my son" section begins in verse 10, "My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. If they say, 'Come along with us; let's lie in wait for someone's blood, let's waylay some harmless soul'..." What is that? That's peer-pressure. The father is giving his son a hypothetical situation, a "what if" scenario, followed by this counsel in verse 15, "My son, do not go along with them; do not set foot on their paths." Why not? Verse 16 explains, "For their feet rush into sin." And verses 18-19, "These men lie in wait for their own blood; they waylay only themselves! Such is the end of all who go after ill-gotten gain."

Have you explained to your children how temptation works? Have you told them that there is a shortcut to pleasure, that the quick thrill is there waiting? It's there, all right, but have you told them the price? Verse 18 says they will pay with their own blood.

As parents, we can learn from Solomon's communication. He didn't just lecture his son. He gave him word pictures like this one (17), "Temptation is like bird-trap. You don't see the net until it's too late to escape."

I'm also challenged by how Solomon used the "what if" conversation approach. Do you talk to your children about what to do if... 1) They're watching their favorite TV show and a suggestive commercial comes on? 2) They're invited to a friend's house for a party, only to get there and discover the friend's parents are gone but the alcohol isn't?

Dads and moms, listen. We can't prevent our kids from *facing* temptation, not all of it, but we can help keep them from *falling* into temptation. How? By teaching them.

C. We must teach about *priorities* (2:1-8). Notice the repetition of "if" in 2:1-4, "My son, *if* you accept my words and store up my commands within you...(3) and *if* you call out for insight...and *if* you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, *then* you will understand the fear of the LORD."

What's Solomon telling his son? This. You can't do everything in life. Life is full of choices, and our choices are determined by our priorities.

You can't party until 1:00 Saturday night and be fully alert to worship the Living God on Sunday morning. There's a choice to be made.

You can't fill your mind with MTV all evening and then have a meaningful study of God's Word at bedtime. You must make a choice.

You can't pursue the way of the world *and* the way of wisdom. You must choose. That's the point of 2:1-8. If you want God's wisdom, you must search for it as you would for hidden treasure (4), which means you won't have time for some other pursuits. That's true for adults as well as children, too.

The issue is priorities. What priorities do your children (and grandchildren) see you modeling? As a parent, we need to settle something early on. I can teach my child to seek the impressive career with the big salary and luscious lifestyle, and I can urge him to pursue the prestigious education at the big name school that makes it possible, *or* I can urge my child to seek the fear of the Lord and the path of wisdom. It's a choice, for those two paths don't cross.

D. We must teach about *obedience* (3:1-2). "My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart."

Have you ever played with play-dough? Our daughters used to have a Playdough Factory. You'd put a glob in one end, and it came out the other end in a specific shape. When you think about it, parents are in the molding business. We're molding a child's values and behavior. That's why we must teach them about obedience.

"My son, forget not my law." Why does Solomon say that? Because children are like parents. We're prone to forget. Listen, it's a cop-out to say, "Well, I told my child once, and that's enough." Yes, once is enough to expect obedience, but children need constant reminders to obey. Just like we adults do. That's what church is all about (Heb. 10:25).

E. We must teach about *God's discipline* (3:11-12). "My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline [AV "chastening"] and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in."

Don't despise. That command implies that we're inclined to do it. When hard times time, when life doesn't go as we planned, what do we tend to do? Complain. Get irritated. What should we do? What Solomon told his son to do. Look for God's hand.

Beloved, what are you teaching your child about hardship? Some teach their kids how to run from it. Others teach them how to blameshift and avoid it. The Bible tells us hardship is inevitable and unavoidable in life. Instead of teaching our kids to complain about it, our task is to show them how to trust God and learn from it. Issue #6...

F. We must teach about *discernment in decision-making* (3:21-26). "My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment." And in the following verses he explains.

G. We must teach about the importance of *learning* (4:1-2). "Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding." Notice verse 3, "When I was a boy..." Aren't you glad your children don't have to repeat your failures? God can use your experience as a teaching tool for your child. Help your children learn from your past. And young people, remember, listen and learn.

H. We must teach about *choices* (4:10-19). The late humorist Erma Bombeck once reflected on what she had learned about parenting after her children left home: "I talk too much. I had good material, but I used it indiscriminately. I used the same two-hour speech on filling their glass too full of milk that I used when they stayed out all night without coming home. The speech lost its effectiveness."⁵

A big part of parenting is teaching our children how to make God-honoring choices, which is the issue Solomon addresses in this section. We need to teach about two paths.

⁵Leadership Journal, p. 79.

1. *Teach them what path to avoid (14)*. "Do not set your foot on the path of the wicked..."

I did some research about the effects of television on teens. In a study published in 2009 in which 4,000 adolescents were tracked for seven years, there's a direct correlation between the amount of television watched and the development of depression later in life.⁶ Said the study, "Those reporting more television use had significantly greater odds of developing depression for each additional hour of daily use."

A 2004 study published in the journal *Pediatrics* says that teens who watch the highest amount of sexual content on TV are twice as likely to engage in intercourse as those who watch the least. "In effect," write the study's authors, "youths who watch the most sexual content 'acted older': a 12-year-old at the highest levels of [sexual] exposure behaved like a 14- or 15-year-old at the lowest levels."⁷

Parents, we need this reminder. There are a lot of voices seeking to influence the choices your children are making. Where's your voice fit in the mix? Are you helping your kids see that God says there is a path to avoid? But warnings aren't enough...

2. *Teach them what path to follow (18)*. "The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn..." We need to teach our children how to make choices, how to think through options, for indeed, we won't always be there.

Are you talking with your children about the key choices of life? There's a road to take and a road to avoid. That's true every time they turn on the television, or their computer, or listen to music. It's true when they choose friends, and especially true when they choose a life-mate. And of course, it's ultimately true in the choice they make regarding Jesus Christ.

I. We must teach about *heart issues (4:20-23)*. Verse 20, "My son, pay attention to what I say..." Verse 23 is critical, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." We are not mere behaviorists. If you merely change your child's behavior without addressing the heart, do you know what you've created? A Pharisee. A hypocrite. Jesus said, "As a man thinketh in his *heart*, so is he."

Parenting involves addressing heart issues. That includes motives, attitudes, and thought life. Issue #10 is certainly related.

J. We must teach about *resisting sexual temptation (chs. 5-7)*. Are you talking to your children about purity? It's not coincidental that Solomon devotes more ink to this subject than any of the other issues. And he does it tastefully, using a series of word pictures.

5:15-18 "Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth."

Hear this dad. Son, devoting your life to one God-given woman is like drinking water from a beautiful fountain, but playing around with sex outside of marriage is like gulping down stagnant water from a river that overflows its banks. Which drink would you prefer?

⁶ "Teens, TV Viewing, and Depression," <http://www.suite101.com/content/tv-watching-and-depression-a101751>

⁷ http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/Health/20040907/sex_teens_040907/

Too often, we're negative. We tell our kids, "You better not blow it by messing around!" But we don't help them see why messing around is blowing it. There are reasons why it's foolish to play with sex before marriage and outside of marriage, whether that's sex with an actual person, or with an image on a screen, or verbally through texting. Let's tell our sons and daughters, like the dad in Proverbs does, that sex is so much better when it's enjoyed as God intended, within a marriage relationship.

In Proverbs, the wise father gives his son a gallery of pictures. He wants the young man to think of these pictures as he develops. Illicit sex is like a man who has scooped fire into his lap (6:27). It's like an ox being led to the slaughter (7:22). It's like a deer stepping into a noose (7:22). It's like a bird in a snare (7:23). It's like driving on a road that leads to a freshly dug grave in a cemetery (7:27).

Friends, we're living in a sex-crazed world. But again, the problem isn't sex. Sex itself is a good, God-given gift designed for marriage. Who's going to tell our children that message if we don't?

K. We must teach about *integrity* (6:1-5). Someone has described property law from a toddler's perspective as follows: If I like it, it's mine. If I can take it away from you, it's mine. If I had it awhile ago, it's mine. If I say it is mine, it's mine. If it looks like mine, it's mine. If I saw it first, it's mine. If you're having fun with it, it's mine. If you lay down your toy, it's mine. If it is broken, it's yours."⁸

Whose job is it to teach young people to pay their bills, to keep their appointments, to show up for work on time, to speak the truth and honor commitments they make? Proverbs 6 says, it's ours, parents.

So according to Proverbs, these are the issues God wants parents to address with their children. Are there others? No doubt. But if we address these issues, the Lord is pleased and our children will be prepared for life in the real world.

But what happens if we don't. What's at stake?

Response: What's at stake?

1. *The issue isn't merely what's good for us.* God didn't give us this practical advise merely to make family life more pleasant for us. Sure, that's a by-product, but what's at stake is nothing short of the glory of God. The reason we must seek to have these kinds of families is because that's what God deserves. It brings honor to Him.

That's why He sent His Son, Jesus, into the world. Jesus died on the cross for sinners not merely so sinners wouldn't have to go to hell. That's a by-product. Jesus died for sinners so that they could become holy and start living for God's glory.

So what we've learned today isn't merely what's good for us, though it certainly is. The stakes are far higher.

2. *The issue is the reputation of God.* Remember, the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge (1:7). Do you fear the Lord? That's where we begin if we want to know Him and the life He desires. I urge you today to give Him the place He deserves in your life and family.

⁸Leadership Journal, p. 79.