

The Book on Parenting

Proverbs 1:1-7

FBC Waynesboro

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The Book of Proverbs was brought into being by God as a parenting manual. The formal part of the book begins in chapter one verse 8 where God speaks first to fathers as the ones who are raised up by God to take the lead in establishing both the spiritual context and content of the home and then God speaks to mothers. The book ends with that beautiful passage in Proverbs 31 that opens with the question, “who can find an excellent wife?” And the rest of the book is a description of this beautifully godly woman. The beginning and the ending are no accident. A man is to take the lead in leading his family toward being a family that honors God in worship and obeys God in witness. The father is the one who leads the way in establishing the context and expressing the content that makes it clear that the commitment of his family to God is foundational to everything else. But in order for that to happen, he has to have alongside him a godly wife. Pray for the man who wants to be a godly man and lead his family as a godly husband but whose wife does not support him in this endeavor. Oh, she may or may not come to church; what is clear at home, however, is that she is more committed to the things of this world than she is the things of God. This man lives in a very difficult place. So pray for him and for his wife that our heart may be changed. And pray for our young people who are dating that they would understand that if they are serious about loving and serving God that the first requirement of anyone they would date is simply that this person be deeply devoted to Jesus. This issue matters more than any other for all of us who call ourselves the children of God. So, the formal part of the book begins and ends with a focus on a father and the father in relationship to the godly wife and mother.

But the book opens with the series of statements that set the foundation for parents. Seven realities are set before us in these opening verses that form the focus for all parents who want to parent from God’s perspective. If we could, we would write over these words: Please Read First before Proceeding. And we will. Look at the opening verse. I love the definition of a proverb that John Kitchen gives us in his very brilliant commentary on this book, “a proverb is a compactly constructed sentence packed with practical insight. It is a stubby sentence pregnant with meaning. It is college in a cup. It is wisdom that you can carry with you as you walk through life.” And these proverbs come from Solomon who was the son of David. Now that encourages me because I have read their biographies. And they did not always act wisely. When David brought Bathsheba to himself and used her for the gratification of his own desires and killed her husband to attempt to cover his sin, that was not wisdom. And Solomon would come to have many wives and much wealth and pursue pleasure to its full extent and would himself conclude that it was a vain and empty way of living. So, I am a bit encouraged when I read

where these proverbs come from because those who were raised up by God to relate them to us were themselves not always wise. Nor are we. Not only will we make many mistakes as parents, we will find as so many of us as learned that we learn from our foolishness and our being fools what helps us in being wise. Now this is no reason for you to go out and act the fool or to compromise the standards; it is all the more reason to celebrate the great grace of God which sets before us a high and holy standard and gives to us who are his that which we need to live toward that even as He grants His grace to forgive us when we fail.

Did you hear that? Particularly any of you who are not believers. Those of you who have not surrendered your lives to Jesus and so submitted your lives to His authority that you live daily with the desire to please Him. God's standard by which He judges us does not change, but what you do not have as an unbeliever is the grace of God either to forgive you or to give you what you need to be faithful. But you can have that. You can have that today if you recognize your sinful separation from God and your need for His presence and power in your life and you turn from your sinful, selfish ways and cry out for His salvation. He will save you today. And He will begin to live in you today. Won't you do that today?

Now what is not clear at all in the NIV and much more clear in other and better translations is the structure of the next verses. Each verse begins with an infinitive that states the purpose of the proverb and the proverbs here, seven of them, lean into each other to take us down the path toward the proper place for proper parenting. So, let's look quickly at these seven sentences. The first one opens with the phrase, "to know," 2a. The word here does not have to do with our heads but with our hearts. It is about our relationship with God. And that relationship comes through wisdom and instruction. The two words are critical. Wisdom is the gift of God by the grace of God through the word of God. It was not then nor is it now tied at all to age. Some who are older are wise and some are not. Some who are younger are wise and some are not. Wisdom is the gift of the grace of God given to the children of God by the Word of God. And it produces for us "instruction" or the word that has to do more with context than content. Our receiving the Word of God into our hearts develops our intimacy with God which gives us the capability of establishing the right environment in our homes. A father or mother who is not reading and studying and learning the Word of God has not even arrive at first base for faithful parenting. To teach your children you must know His word because it is through the knowledge of His Word that you deepen your relationship with Him.

The second word is "to discern," 2b. Remember that these truths lean into each other. As the parent pours himself or herself into the Word of God so as to develop deeper intimacy with God, he or she begins to be able to recognize the Truth of God. You begin to see that the Truth of God is eternal and everlasting truth and most of all you begin to see that the Truth of God is different from the Truth of this world. You begin to be able to sort truth from lie rather than mixing and mingling the two. Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 11:25ff. There is a wisdom that is of this world that is in fact foolishness to God. And you and I will

get clearly confused in our parenting if while we are spending the bulk of our time in the world, we do not have a firm foundation built upon the Truth of God. What the enemy loves and uses to attack you and your family is to get you so busy with whatever is going on in the world that you let go your quiet time, you don't have time for a Bible Study, Sunday School Attendance slips and you sit in worship so tired from your involvement in the world that you can barely keep your eyes open. You grow distant from God and are less able to discern His truth and thus distinguish what is true from what is false.

The third word is, "to receive," 3a. The whole idea here is to receive the revelation of God through His Word so that we can know what is right and why it is right. We can have reasons for the choices we make and the life we live. The fourth word is, "to understand," 3b. This is the center of the seven. And like what happens in so many lists in the Bible what is at the center is the most critical. We get into God's word so that we can deepen our intimacy with God, so that we can recognize Truth and be able to distinguish truth from falsehood so that we can understand the way of righteousness and walk in it. And a very key word here in the original is not brought over in many translations: true righteousness. True righteousness is that which is revealed in the Word of God not that which we believe for ourselves based on where we live. It is one thing to consider ourselves right with God because we do not kill and we do not steal, but what if you throw into that mix prejudice and gossip. The Bible does. So that it is just as unrighteous in the eyes of God to kill as it is to gossip or to steal as it is to practice prejudice. Parents who want to parent God's way refuse to let values and beliefs be shaped by the culture in which they live because every culture has values and beliefs that are valued that are not biblical. It is the intimacy of our relationship with God that comes through His Word that shows us what is truly right.

The next word is "to give," 4a. The word here points us toward roots. And the focus is on the simple. The word for "simple" portrays people who are easily influenced by other people or by different environments so that they become whatever they need to become depending on who they are with or what context they find themselves. Let me say this again: there is no more deadly disease for parents than to practice this kind of duplicity. I believe this so strongly that is better to be a practicing pagan than to profess to be a Christian who acts like it in church but does not act at all like a Christian when away from church. I can say that because such a life style is worse than pagan because the only people who can live such a lifestyle are those who are both self-deceived and deceiving others. We need roots so that we are not tossed about by every wind of doctrine. We need roots so that we do not believe everything and everybody. We need roots so that we recognize what a real relationship with God looks like as it leads to a revolution in the heart that produces radical changes in the life the center of which is a real investment of time and energy in the church as the body of Christ.

The sixth word is, "to develop," 4b. And the focus here is on the right course for the young. This is so critical. This word makes it plain that parents are not producing finely polished, finished products. We are simply establishing a context

in which we teach the right content so that we can set our children on the right course. It does not mean that they will not take detours. It does not mean that some will not lose their way completely. Doing it God's way is an act of obedience to God; it is not guarantee that your children will be godly. What is guaranteed is that they will know the way if you show them and speak that way into them. That is the whole thrust of Proverbs 22:6. So how are you mom and dad going to be able to establish this course?

Verse 5. Three very key concepts are here. First, you must seek to learn all you can of God as He makes Himself known to you through His Word. This means secondly that you must study. Throw your secular parenting books away. There are some good ones written by some godly people, I will put three or four in the outline next Sunday; but even read them as supplementary to your study of the Bible. And submit to those who are raised up by God to be your teachers. Let them guide you into a deeper understanding of the Word of God. If you are a believer and your depth of learning is Scripture is beyond those who are your teachers particularly in the pulpit, then you ought to find teachers that can challenge you. Test what I teach not against what you believe, but against what the Bible says. Read it. Study it. Immerse yourself in it. Because the final word of the seven is that God wants us to understand both the simple and the complex truth of the Bible, 6. The word for riddle is "enigmata." There are those things in the Bible that are hard to figure and no man will ever understand it all, but God has raised up those whom He has called to help us to understand His Holy Word.

But here is the foundation for it all, 1:7. Not the love of God. Not faith in God. Not the grace of God. Not the mercy of God. The fear of God. The awareness that this God could kill you and if He did it would be perfect justice. The awe of this God who has called you unto himself and wants to live in your life and lead you in His ways and give you what you need to be a godly parent to your children. My friend, do you know that you will never love God before you fear Him. You will never draw near until His manifest holiness causes you to draw back. When someone says, "how can God love me?" that is not a bad thing. He shouldn't. But He does. So much that He gave His one and only Son that if you believe in Him even today you will not perish but have everlasting life.

