

Five Lessons from a Wise Father

Proverbs

Introduction:

November 29th, 2012 was a watershed day for our family. At just after midnight, 12:33 in the morning, our daughter Kay Elizabeth was born weighing in at 7lbs. 7oz. and 19.5” long. Things changed that day, the new reality of being parents slowly began to sink in and hit a fevered pitch a couple days later when the hospital decided that these two rookie parents could take a helpless, defenseless infant home with them!

That week we began the soul-searching process of trying to figure out what it meant to be parents, striving to understand what our responsibilities were and in the process learning a lot about ourselves. It’s interesting how God uses change to stretch us in life – we were just talking the other day about how much we’ve grown through being parents. You learn to trust the Lord more, you discover that you have more weaknesses than you realized or at least wanted to admit and you’re hopefully driven back to the word of God to see if you have the right lessons to pass on and if there’s any wisdom to be found that you could pass on.

Through this process we have felt the weight of responsibility to work hard to align our thinking to the Word of God. To make sure that what we believe matches up with what God says and to adjust where necessary. In our parenting, our discipling, or our relationships with others here within the church we want to think properly. Jordan concluded the book of Joshua last week...and it was great to be reminded again of the great example Joshua provides for us. Here was a man who simply did what God told him to do. He choose to serve the Lord, he was willing to do the difficult things, he was willing to do the mundane and the routine as he faithfully served his God. It was humbling to think about the first couple chapters of Judges and how quickly things can change from one generation to the next. It didn’t take long before the people of Israel weren’t serving the Lord anymore but were doing “what was right in their own eyes”.

For us the question has become, “For us, and our house, will we serve the Lord?” Have we learned the lessons of God’s word that we ought to know? Are we being faithful to pass that on to the next generation – to our kids, to our grandkids? Are the expectations of God being passed on here at this church in our children’s ministry, youth ministry, college ministry and to those younger than us in our shepherding groups? How do we do that? What do they need to know? How do we figure out what we need to know and what we need to pass on?

Background:

Proverbs, is that training manual...it’s a book from Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, to his son filled with all the instructions he needs to know. Over and over again in the opening nine chapters we see Solomon passing on this instruction. **Proverbs 1:8** – “Hear, my son, your father’s instruction...”; **2:1** – “My son, if you receive my words...”; **3:1** – “My son, do not forget my teaching...”; **4:1, 10, 20; 5:1; 6:1, 20; 7:1, 24; 8:32** – there is much that we ought to know and there is much for us to pass on to the next generations. As one theologian states, “We must know the truth, believe the truth and love the truth so we do not deviate from the truth.”

From the opening section that Tim read this morning we learn that we are to acquire wisdom. First, we are to acquire it and then we’re to pass it on. Our primary responsibility as parents (either biological or

spiritual) is to teach them holy living. That's what wisdom is...not merely knowledge of God, but that knowledge applied. Godly living is wisdom in action.

Throughout these first few chapters, wisdom personified is the call of the book. Wisdom is crying out and desires to help us – how will we respond? Will we walk in wisdom? In the midst of everything that vies for their affections will we train the next generation to respond to the call of wisdom? Or will we fail to pass on the torch and see another generation of those who do what is right in their own eyes? Proverbs calls us to more than that, it calls our children to more than that and calls the next generations to more than that – so this morning, I want to quickly unpack five of the primary lessons for wise living that Solomon gave to his son. My hope is that it will give us the opportunity to examine our own way of thinking and assist us in becoming better instructors in wisdom as we follow the instructions from this wise father.

I. Fear Your God

Proverbs 1:7 – *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”*

Proverbs 9:10 – *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”*

The first lesson is to fear the Lord - it all begins here! If we are going to be those who walk wisely, we must learn to live with a dominating respect for who God is, for His character, his Word, his power and his authority. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and of wisdom. Perhaps a helpful way to understand this idea of fear is to look at two aspects of it:

A. The Positive Side of Fear

Saying, ‘fear the Lord’ is another way to say, ‘Worship the Lord!’ Worshipping God is the positive side of fearing him. Worship is more than singing songs on Sunday morning, it's our heartfelt response to who God is, to what he has done and to how he has revealed himself to us. The primary instruction is to get to know the God of the Bible! Spend time in the Word, observe God's character and attributes and learn to fear and worship the greatness of our God!

Proverbs 3:5, 6 say, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”* What's the overarching instruction in those verses? Trust in the Lord, not in yourself! Know him, honor him, trust him, submit to him, rely on him! Learn to rest in the Lord, you learn to have a healthy view of who God is and he'll make your path straight in life.

Proverbs 1:33 says, *“but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.”* You want to have ease in life? You want to live without dread? You want piece of mind – the answer isn't Allstate, it's fear the Lord!! Know your God, worship him, reflect on who is, remember what he has done, trust him, rest in him! Learn to be a worshipper...help your kids, grandkids, the young people of this church to know their God and to worship him!

B. The Fearful Side of Fear

There is an appropriate fearful side of the fear of the Lord as well. The benefit of which is this – where there is a healthy fear of the Lord, there is a healthy fear of sin! In your study of God's character and

nature don't avoid the holiness of God or miss his justice. Understand his displeasure, notice when he gets angry and when he exacts discipline! Listen when he says what he hates and learn from it!

A healthy fear of the Lord helps us understand his perfect nature, shows us our sinfulness and causes us to understand the absolute necessity of our rejection of sin. A proper fear of the Lord:

- Proverbs 10:27 - Fear of the Lord prolongs life
- Proverbs 15:16 - Fear of the Lord makes much of little
- Proverbs 19:23 - Fear of the Lord leads to life
- Proverbs 14:27 - Fear of the Lord provides life
- Proverbs 16:6 - Fear of the Lord turns from evil

The primary lesson we must learn, the first lesson from a wise father is Fear Your God. The second lesson flows from this, a healthy fear of God leads one to Pursue Your Holiness.

II. Pursue Your Holiness

The dominant theme in early Proverbs is the avoidance of adultery. I think Solomon knew then, what is still true today, that sexual sin is a hugely prominent issue affecting massive numbers of Christians. It is the number one issue that our young men struggle with as well as an increasing percentage of our young women. Society today doesn't have a problem with sexual sin in almost any form, churches don't seem to want to address the issue and parents, all too often, ignore it or avoid it all together. We must get better at dealing with this issue! We must offer clear, Biblical instruction while offering hope and forgiveness. Failure to deal with this in our own lives will mean failure to address it in our children's lives and we cannot afford to pay that price! Fortunately, the Bible is extremely clear and the solution, while not at all easy, is very simple. Two biblical instructions come out repeatedly in Proverbs for dealing with your personal holiness...

A. Diligently Pursue the Lord

Proverbs 2:1-4 – *“My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures,”* Notice all of the verbs in these four verses! *‘Receive, treasure up, make your ear attentive, incline your heart, call out, raise your voice, seek it, search for it.’* How bad do you want it? Is the pursuit of the Lord and your relationship with him a priority? Do you truly want to fear him? Is it clear in your priorities and your desires? *“I can teach you to play the game, but I can't teach you desire!”* Do you want this sin issue to be dealt with? Are you willing to pay the price?

It is through the pursuit of the Lord, by acquiring wisdom, by pursuing holiness and cultivating our fear of the Lord, by *“putting on”* these things we are able to *“put off”* sexual sin. Look at how proverbs shows us that a diligent pursuit of the Lord is the solution for dealing with this topic:

- **Proverbs 2:16** – *“So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words,”*
- **Proverbs 5:21-23** – *“For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray.”*

- **Proverbs 6:23, 24** – *“For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life, to preserve you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress.”*
- **Proverbs 7:1-5** – *“My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you; keep my commandments and live; keep my teaching as the apple of your eye; bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart. Say to wisdom, “You are my sister,” and call insight your intimate friend, to keep you from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words.”*

B. Enjoy Your Spouse

The second instruction and a corollary to that last instruction for avoiding sexual sin is to enjoy the spouse God has given you! That’s where fulfillment and enjoyment are to be found. Partake in it, pursue it, and enjoy it. Spend time with your spouse, engage in their interests, go out together, hold their hand, flirt every now and then.

Husbands, we know we’re to love our wives but we need to honor them too. Our kids need to clearly see that she is treasured and cherished! Let them learn indirectly as they watch us treasure, value and enjoy spending our lives with our God-given companion. Our marriage isn’t only a commitment we made and a responsibility we bear, but as the end of **Proverbs 5** instructs us, we are to “be blessed by, rejoice in, delight in, and be intoxicated with” our wives – that doesn’t just happen! They’re not statements of fact or observations about our emotions, but commands to obey! Choose to be blessed by your wife. Choose to rejoice in her. Delight in the time you get with her. Be intoxicated by the unique person God has created her to be and lovingly placed in your life.

Pursue your holiness by pursuing the Lord and then pursuing your spouse – it will keep you from gross, heinous sin.

III. Guard Your Mind

Proverbs 4:23 – *“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”*

A. The Heart Defined

The word, ‘heart’ in the Old Testament refers to the center of a person’s physical, spiritual, emotional and moral activity. It was the central organ that moved the whole body. The heart thinks, remembers, reflects and meditates. It feels and desires. Its primary purpose was to understand, discern and give insight. As the seat of our thoughts, emotions and desires it is the reasoning and decision making center for our lives.

So, if we’re going to seek to fear the Lord and to pursue our holiness, It all begins with the “heart”...we make decisions based on what we think. How we think, will determine how we live. **Matthew 12:34** – *“You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”* **Mark 7:20-22** – *“And he said, ‘What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.”* How we think is critical to what we feel and what we do. We may discipline ourselves to control it for a while but eventually our compromised thinking will reveal itself in our words and actions.

Kris Lundgaard in his book, *The Enemy Within* addresses the importance of making sure we are diligent to protect what we think. He says, *“If you want to overthrow a fortress, start by knocking out the watchman—if he can’t warn the others, you will easily breach the wall and carry the day. The flesh plies deceit to knock out the watchman of your soul: your mind. Each of the faculties of your soul has duties before God. The mind is the sentinel, commanded to watch carefully over the soul by questioning, assessing, and making judgments: ‘Will this please God?’ ‘Is this according to God’s Word?’ If the mind determines that an action is right, the affections...then fall in line and desire, long for, and cling to that which the mind said was good. Last, the will puts the soul into action, carrying out what the mind said was good and the affections hungered for.”*

B. The Heart Defended

The urgent instruction given to us then, is that we would ‘keep’ or ‘guard’ our hearts, truly our minds, with all vigilance! Your mind is the crucial deciding factor that will determine if you live wisely, if you act in a way that is pleasing to the Lord or not - protect what you put in it!

We must think carefully about what we watch. We must carefully consider what or who we are being influenced by? Who have we surrounded ourselves with? What is corrupting us? Do we know? Are we aware? As a parent...I’m now a steward of my kid’s mind! I’m a steward of what they are influenced by and of who they become friends with – they need instruction and oversight in this area, not space to figure it out for themselves! The first nine chapters of proverbs are devoted to getting involved in your kid’s life!

- **Proverbs 3:1-4** – *“My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.”*

The key to success is right there! You want to be successful in this life, you want your kids to go places in this world and grow up to become the men and women they ought to be then they need to listen to your counsel and instruction! Heed the teaching, listen to the commandments, bind them around your head and write them on your heart! What’s the command? What’s the instruction in proverbs 3? Verses 4-7 tell us - Don’t be wise in your own eyes (3:7) but trust the Lord, know what he wants and fear him!

Guarding our minds requires that we begin to create a filter for our thinking, a decision-making grid that we run things through...it’s critical that we think correctly if we’re going to live correctly. We must defend our minds and ensure that what we think is what God thinks! In the midst of a culture that mirrors Judges 2 where everyone does what is right in their own eyes, **Proverbs 3:7** tells us *“Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.”* Do what 3:3 says, bind faithfulness, bind truth around your neck, write God’s instructions on your heart so that when you face the decisions of life, when your emotions are leading you towards making a decision, the sentry of your mind is not deceived but will stand firm.

IV. Love Your Neighbor

As we wisely seek to Fear the Lord, to Pursue our Holiness and to Guard our Minds we must learn to do this in the context of community with others. Proverbs has much to say about our interaction with others but a key brief passage on this is **Proverbs 3:27-31** which gives four instructions for what we’re not to do to our neighbors. The positive way to look at this would be things you wouldn’t do if you loved your neighbors.

A. Don't Turn Them Away (27, 28)

Proverbs 3:27, 28 - *"Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it'—when you have it with you."*

When you have the ability to meet the needs of someone looking for help you have a responsibility to meet their needs, and interestingly enough, to meet them right then, without delay! Don't turn them away, don't make up an excuse – if you can help them out do it and do it immediately!

B. Don't Plot Against Them (29)

Proverbs 3:29 – *"Do not plan evil against your neighbor, who dwells trustingly beside you."*

Furthermore, not only are we responsible to help them, but we're also to not plot against them. Don't manipulate people! Don't seek their favor and engage them for the purpose of accomplishing your ends.

C. Don't Pick a Fight (30)

Proverbs 3:30 – *"Do not contend with a man for no reason, when he has done you no harm"*

Don't look to pick a fight! There are certain individuals who are just always looking for a fight – there first response is to try and take things out side. Have enough prudence and discernment to avoid unnecessary conflict. **Romans 12:18** always comes to my mind, *"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."*

D. Don't Settle the Score (31)

Proverbs 3:31 – *"Do not envy a man of violence and do not choose any of his ways."*

By the same token, don't live for revenge! Don't envy the life of another and the way things worked out for them, don't choose the way that they live. Don't use violence to get your way and to cause things to work out the way you think is best. Don't stab others in the back, don't get back at them or even the score. **Proverbs 3:5** – *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart";* **Romans 12:19** – *"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"*

This passage continue with **Proverbs 3:32-35** and goes on to discuss the result for the one who follows these commands and chooses to love and care for their neighbor. They say that God's confidence, his blessing, his favor and his honor belong to those who love and care for those around them. A critical lesson in learning to fear the Lord is to care for those around us.

V. Do Your Work

Finally, the fifth lesson from a wise father is that we must do our work. **Proverbs 6:6-11** says, *"Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest. How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man."*

A. The Lesson from the Ant

Two insights about working hard are learned from the ant in these verses that introduce us to the sluggard.

- The first is found in **verses 6 & 7 – the ant works with initiative**. He needs no oversight, no leader or boss telling him what to do. He sees the work and does it. The ant is a hard worker who takes the necessary initiative to get the job done. By comparison, the sluggard is lazy. He must be prodded and stood over to ensure that the task is being completed. He will not work without be urged and pushed along. He needs instruction to start or he won't begin and even then will only start when it can't be avoided any longer.
- The second insight is seen in **verse 8 – the ant works faithfully**. The ant views each day the same and knows what is at stake. Summer and harvest run together...the tasks may be different but regardless of the task or time of year he goes about his work all the same. Every day is a work day, there is too much at stake for it not to be. The sluggard does not work this way or think this way...summer is the time for fun and enjoying life – long, summer days of relaxing and enjoying the beautiful weather. Autumn is too cold and chilly to be working hard outdoors. He is unwilling to acknowledge what the ant knows, that summer is the crisis time when the battle against winter is decided.

B. The Lesson from Experience

The sluggard is directed to the ant in verses 6-8 in the hopes that he will change his ways. If the sluggard will not learn while there is still time, he will learn from his own experience. **Proverbs 6:9-11** looks ahead to where he is headed. Sadly, the lesson of experience comes to late...the sluggard awakes to find that his poverty has arrived and it is not going away. The opportunity he once had, has slipped him by and his life is in ruins. The picture of the sluggard in Proverbs is a sad one. His character is defined as being lazy, full of excuses and generally helpless to act on his own initiative.

- **Will Not Begin Things**

Verses 9 & 10 here show us that he is not willing to begin things. Having to answer the question of when he is getting out of bed is too much for him – it's too definite, he doesn't know! He enjoys his sleep and his delicious drowsiness, the warmth found under the sheets. He is too lazy to answer in verse 9 and even refusing the opportunity he has is too much work and commitment for him in verse 10. He is the chief procrastinator and is self-deceived in the smallness of his surrenders...'a little, a little, a little' says verse 10. Opportunity is slipping him by a little at a time.

- **Will Not Finish Things**

Proverbs 12:27 – *“Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth.”*

Proverbs 19:24 – *“The sluggard buries his hand in the dish and will not even bring it back to his mouth.”*

On the rare occasion when the sluggard actually leaves his bed and begins something, the effort to complete it is too much for him and the impulse dies. He made it to the table but the thought of cooking the food or lifting the fork is too much for him and he is finished! He is incapable of finishing what he was started.

- **Will Not Face Things**

Proverbs 26:16 – *“The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly.”*

There is little to be done for the sluggard since he is the last to see his own predicament since he has no idea that he is lazy! **Verse 13-15** clue us in to his view of himself...

- **Proverbs 26:13** – *“The sluggard says, ‘There is a lion in the road! There is a lion in the streets!’”* He is not irresponsible or shirked his duties – he’s just being realistic! He’s bought into his own excuses...how could he possibly travel outside when it could be dangerous – you are asking too much of him! What you request is simply not practical.
- **Proverbs 26:14** – *“As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed.”* He’s not lazy, self-indulgent or lacking discipline – he’s just not a morning person! It’s unnatural for him to get up before noon! Just like a door naturally turns on its hinges so he belongs in his bed – why would you force him to be someone different than who he is?! Why can’t you just accept him for who he is?
- **Proverbs 26:15** – *“The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth.”* It’s not that sad he argues. It’s not a lack of initiative – I’m just moving at my own pace, I’ll get there eventually. Why do you insist on rushing me?
- **Proverbs 26:16** – *“The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly.”* His inactivity, his laziness, his slothfulness are not problems – he’s thought it through, has a reason for what he’s doing and is sticking to his guns. You all just don’t understand me – it’s the principle I care about!

The sluggard has made a habit of taking the soft choice and his character suffers as a result. Proverbs describes him as being restless, unsatisfied, helpless, and useless to employ. **Proverbs 24:30-32** reads, *“I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. Then I saw and I considered it; I looked and received instruction.”* The wise man learns while there is still time. The mistakes of the sluggard were making too many excuses, too many refusals and too many postponements...it happened to him as subtly as falling back asleep. Learn from the example of the ant and the example of the sluggard and do your work! The sluggard describes many of our kids and sadly all too many of us!