

Proverbs for Life

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[0 : 00] we read together in Proverbs, Proverbs chapter 4, and take a look at some of the truths that are there. And I'm actually going to dip into other bits of Proverbs as well.

It's the kind of book you can do that, which is great. The context of the early chapters of Proverbs is that it's really royal parental advice. Solomon advising the young pretender, the young son, who might go on to take the throne.

But of course, under God and in God's inspiration, it's become wisdom, literature for all of us. And I have to say, Proverbs and Job and Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon to a lesser degree, but these other three are my favorite books in the Bible.

They're unbelievable. They're so full of wisdom and God's common sense, God opens up his mind in these books very powerfully to us.

And they're really worth reading. In fact, it's really worth reading at least one proverb every day and soaking it into your thinking because it's giving us promises and principles for living by grace and with God in our lives.

[1 : 19] And I think we find that the whole of Proverbs, and some of it in this section as well, it focuses on some great themes. Obviously, the great theme is wisdom.

This part, particularly the first nine verses, speak very powerfully about wisdom and personifies it as a woman, a mother maybe even.

And so we have this great, and it does that later in the book as well, the wisdom of God, which is so significant, I think it can also be personified in the person of Jesus who is wisdom enfleshed.

And it's such a great book for learning about who God is and what God wants from us. And the greatest wisdom, of course, of all, is the fear of the Lord.

That's the beginning of wisdom. And that then becomes a recognition of our need for the Lord and the need for King Jesus.

[2 : 21] So it all points back to grace. It's not a how-to book. It's about the wisdom of putting grace, God's grace, and depending on grace into practice.

It speaks a lot about family. We see even here, you know, I too was the son of my father, still tender, cherished by my mother. Then he taught me and said to me, take hold of my words. And there's a lot of that in these early chapters where the parents are speaking to the children, the importance of family, the importance of our example.

I'll go on to say a little bit more about that later. And not just for parents, but indeed for all of us, because not all of us here will be parents, but all of us will have had parents or have parents.

And so we, and family, and we recognize that. And we recognize sometimes how, how negative our experiences of family have been, or how positive, often the deepest joy, the deepest hurt.

Sometimes the most regrets we harbor are family related, the paralysis we feel, or the influence for good, or for bad, the stability, or the insecurity.

[3 : 31] So much of it comes from our family and our family roots. And we know also that family is the representation of our community as believers, that we are to be a people who have a heavenly father and who relate to one another as brothers and sisters.

So there's a lot of truth in the advice that comes from family and from community that flows from that, that community that stems from the first and the most divine community, the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And that our church reflects that community and that love and that grace. And you've got the, in a sense, the whole table of the law, the first half of the commandments being our love for the Father, and the second half being our love for one another, all bound up in the wisdom literatures.

And of course, it also speaks about forgiveness at different places. Chapter 17, verse 9, love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends. And we know that that's an important reality in our personal walks with God. The need for coming to Him daily for forgiveness and cleansing and renewal.

[4 : 50] But also in our relationship with one another, in our relationships, in our family. Such an important thing, isn't it? Such deep need for forgiveness within our families.

And again, I'll say a little bit more about that as we move on. So, this passage does speak about proverbial truth.

Truth in Proverbs for parents and for ourselves. So, I'm focusing as a baptismal service on our parental responsibilities, but you're all included because we are a family as a church and I'm not, is this the first baptism?

Yeah. So, you haven't had a baptism before here, but I asked the congregation to take a vow, take a vow on behalf of Caris as well. So, we're all involved in the nurturing, the bringing up of the children in the church community and we all recognize the wider truths not just for parents but for all of us as we look at this passage.

So, there are a couple of things I just want to speak about for us all. The privileges and the responsibilities as Christians to live for Christ and live in a certain way together.

[6 : 08] And if you're not a Christian, I hope to be challenged by that. And be challenged by the beauty of the gospel and by the beauty of Jesus. And the first thing that I want to focus on is from chapter 4 and verse 23 which I think really sums up the whole of Proverbs, maybe even the whole of the Bible.

Above all else, guard your heart for everything you do goes from it. Now, that's the greatest outworking of wisdom. Whatever else is important in life, it's utterly critical and central that we guard our hearts.

And the only way we do that is by having a genuine fear of the Lord. That is a worship of the Lord. And that can only come from surrendering our hearts to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and following Him on a daily basis.

The power of God's grace, God's love, and God's forgiveness. You must be and I must be Calvary Christians. We never go beyond that. It's not the ABC of the gospel in any summer.

Graduates something grander and more significant and deeper. We never go beyond the gospel because we live. The gospel is our life. The gospel of Jesus Christ.

[7 : 24] And we never go beyond bowing our knee at the foot of Calvary and following the Christ of Calvary to the empty tomb and to the ascended Savior who we worship today.

So we worship someone that's unseen but we worship Him by faith and in the power of the gospel. And, sorry, I'll just take my phone out here so that I don't rabbit on.

For all of us then and particularly for, not particularly, but also for us as parents, remembering life, you know, all the things that burden us, all the things that are important for ourselves and for our children, for our families, material comfort, a good home, holidays, a strong education, whatever it might be that we focus on and none of these things are unimportant.

But above all things, your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is by far the most important thing. There's nothing that surpasses that. There's nothing that's more important that you are learning and growing in your own faith, that you are guarding your own heart and that the spiritual disciplines of your own life are very real.

In private, without the family, without even your wife or husband beside you, just that personal guarding of your heart and therefore then to take that grace into your relationship, into your parenting, from your own heart experience, you will learn from that.

[8 : 58] And we all learn from that. The patience, the sacrifice, the priority, the unconditional love, the controlled and gracious discipline, all that reflect how God is treating and is treating us.

It's so important as parents that you show your heart of faith to them and to show it to other people as well, each of us, whether we're parents or not.

So, guard your heart, tremendously important. But also, I think it's very important to, therefore, from that, watch your life as a parent.

there's verses about Proverbs. Proverbs all stand alone. They don't necessarily need to be taken into context. It's one of the nice things about preaching from Proverbs.

But in chapter 20, verse 7, it says, the righteous lead blameless lives. Blessed are their children after them. And in chapter 31, verse 28, there's this amazing passage about the wife of noble characters.

[10:04] Her children arise and call her blessed. Her husband also. And he praises her. And both of these verses, and indeed, the whole of Proverbs speaks about the significance of our example as people, or particularly as parents, to others.

And the blessing that it brings when we are those who are watching our lives and who are leading righteous and blameless lives. That doesn't mean innocent lives. It doesn't mean that we're better than other people.

It means that we're covered in the blamelessness and righteousness of Jesus and we live that way as a result of gratitude for him. And the emphasis often in Proverbs, the principle of Proverbs often is that blessing follows good example.

And these verses speak about that. It's a principle. It's not a promise. It's not an unconditional promise. It's a principle of life that as we live in a way that is surrendered to Christ and humble and following Christ, it will be a blessing to other people.

So it's a call to consistent godliness in our lives. And as parents, that's hugely significant. As it is if you're a colleague or a worker with someone, someone you see regularly.

[11:20] You know, kids see their parents regularly, most regularly than anyone. But it can work in any context. the importance then of a life that is consistently following Christ.

The significance of avoiding being hypocritical or having double standards. And maybe particularly in the home where the danger is to let your guard down in private.

As Christians, we act very carefully maybe with unbelievers in the workplace or in our neighborhood. Oh, we get into the house. sometimes the standard drops and we let our guard down in private and we speak ill in a home context either to our wife or husband or to our children.

But the way we treat one another in the home, the way we speak, the way you speak to your spouse in the home, tremendously significant as children see that and for oh my children follow your example.

How much they follow your example is amazing. The importance of recognizing the living consistently in private and in public.

[12:41] I think that's one of the things that was very powerful in my own life because my dad was a minister so I heard him getting up and preaching every week. But my testimony would always say that he wasn't any different than the pulpit to what he was in the house.

And that was a very powerful witness to me and meant a lot to me because it made me see that what he preached he lived and now we're not all preachers in a pulpit but the same principle is true for us all.

What we say we believe and how we live that particularly in the home by what we do and what we say in our use of time our leisure our pleasure the expression of our love our commitment our sacrificial concern for them our humility our never abusing or power playing in a home context all very important and significant realities.

Children as you know are the sharpest mimic and the sharpest learners. Their brain is like a big sponge and they take in so much and what they learn in the first 10 maybe 8-10 years of life will stick with them forever in many ways recognising God's grace obviously to change when things are needing forgiven and changed but it's tremendously important that as a community we live and individually that we live consistently and that we show grace consistently and I think it's very important in the home to be willing to be forgiven of parents to ask for your children's forgiveness because we don't get it right there's no kind of practice time for being parents you just end up bang you're there and there's no crash course there's plenty of crashing but there's not much coursing and so we do make mistakes but as your children recognise that you're willing and humble enough to apologise it breeds a particularly grace filled atmosphere so guard your heart watch your life and then I think teach be teachers teach what you live and what you know listen my son verses 1 and 2 to a father's instruction pay attention gain understanding

I give you sound learning so do not forsake my teaching and so much of proverbs is about parental responsibility of teaching what you live and what you know you are as a church the importance of this as a church as well please don't divide I don't think it's good to divide things into you know as the families in the church and I let the children do their own thing I'll have no part of what's going on with the kids where I don't have kids but you're just as important in being an influence and being a

witness in a community context as well as the parents in a home context but the amazing thing about being a parent is you are the great educator in their life not the school I know that in school for many more hours in some ways than they are awake at home but you're the great educator it is to you that they look and to you that they learn their ethics and their morals and their understanding of God and of grace and the incredible influence of teaching them sound learning and teaching them take hold of my words with all your heart he taught me keep my commands and you will live this great imperative of teaching the commands of

[16:37] God and you know what these commands are and we often forget this we talk about law as if it's some kind of legal thing but we know that the commands of God are the commands are the laws of love they are love for something it's loving God and loving one another we often forget that when we talk even when we think about the ten commandments legal Jesus came as love but they are his laws of love and that's the amazing reality and so it's so important to teach them their identity in Christ the freedom the individuality the belonging the security the adventure the ambition of being in Christ make it exciting for them shouldn't be dull shouldn't be you shouldn't be dragging their feet into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ should be something that's good I know that's a challenge but we have to make it living and real before them so teach them teach them the Bible it's really important and church is great for that but so is home must be really important for that

Proverbs 22 21 says buy the truth and do not sell it wisdom instruction and insight as well the truth of God's word buy it make it cost take it into your life and remember I think we've got a tendency sometimes to just think the kids want stories that's all they need from the Bible and to think of our stories even Goliath Samson now these are all great stories and they're important but it isn't just about stories and morality it's about grace and relationship and teach them these things it's good news the Bible not good advice and we teach them that teach them to open their hearts teach them to be honest to confess their sins to be forgiven to know the boundaries and the vistas of grace and that takes time and commitment for us to do that but like the book of Proverbs is great because it's God's wisdom it's just about kids learn so much watching and learning and listening help them to do that

Proverbs is a great way to teach the children about Jesus and how he wants them to live it's got all kinds of things it talks about selecting friendships it talks about self control it talks about how watching how we speak it talks about using our resources and our money management about hard work about laziness about marriage about friendships about sexuality about image about ambition about drink and drugs it's equipping our people it's equipping our children it speaks into their lives it speaks into this very postmodern culture in which they are challenged to live and grow in and it equips them through Jesus and through their relationship with Jesus teach them the Bible and train them in the truth of the gospel that famous verse start children off the way they should go and even when they are old they will not turn from it and that's a great reality isn't it that God's timing is different from ours and it may be that we have heartache with our children they might walk away from the

Lord they might drift completely there might be separation we hope and pray not and we plead for God to be gracious to us but we recognise the importance of trusting in God and leaving their lives in his sovereign care even when it's difficult I know many people who have been brought up in a Christian home who have come having drifted from him come back including my own sister for many many years drifted completely away from the Lord Jesus and is now following him again in love and in grace it's a great thing wonderful thing and God's timing is not our own I was telling the guys before the service I've got such a great service to do next week back in St.

Columbus I'm going to be baptizing my brother in law now he didn't come from a Christian home it's a slightly different story he was brought up in an atheistic home and has been an atheist for many years but married my sister 25 years ago and grudgingly came to church every so often moaning and groaning and full of arguments against it but over time the Lord has been working we've been praying very hard and I have the privilege of baptizing him next week he came to faith recently it's just reminded me that God's timing is not ours and sometimes my poor mother I'm sure prayed for him every day of our living days and she's now home with the Lord so she never got to see that answer and that may be true for many of us at different times but God's timing is always powerful so we train our children no matter leaving the result to God we warn them we correct them we rebuke them we lovingly and caringly give them parameters we give them good times and fun we show them what's acceptable and what is unacceptable we seek to bring them up so that they are not

thankless or rude or uncontrolled or spoiled because we know that

[22 : 26] God uses our training so it's a fantastic book the book of Proverbs just we've dipped into it just very briefly for a few moments and I think what's so important in conclusion is that it all stems from having a relationship with God through Christ and therefore knowing his wisdom not our wisdom it's not our knowledge it's his gift to us in Jesus Christ when we come to him for salvation I love that that great verse 7 the beginning of wisdom is this get wisdom that is the beginning of wisdom and though it costs you all you have get understanding and that just it sounds like a parable in the New Testament where the people the woman who finds the pearl of great prices she sells everything she has to get wisdom everything she has to buy this pearl and it's similar in it's thinking it reminds us that there's nothing more significant than finding the Christ who is the giver of wisdom who is the giver of understanding and who is indeed wisdom personified as our

Lord and saviour so we are reminded that in our lives and as parents for ourselves and also for others that we set parameters not walls that we give them people and our children principles not prison we're equipping them towards flicking them out of the nest so they will fly on their own to independence and maturity it's the hardest thing of all seeing your children leave the home but it's our job our job is never done really but in many ways our job is done when they're flying themselves we want them to fly free and safe on the current of grace and we put them into the hands of the saviour always entrusting their lives to him giving them forgiveness not paralysis or regret and prioritising love love and all things I'm going to close with a poem which is actually a song I don't know if people sing it in church to me do it's a Kirsten Getty song but it's called a mother's prayer I heard a number of years ago in the Usher Hall when Keith and Kirsten Getty were playing there bawling my eyes out listening to it very powerful so I'll probably do that again but I'll try not to but it's a great prayer and it summarises I think what our prayer should be as parents and I hope what your prayer as a congregation is for Carus and indeed for all the children before you close your eyes to sleep I have a promise still to keep as I hold you in my arm I pray your little frame grows strong and faith take hold while you're young this is my prayer hold my hand I'll teach you the way to go through the joys through the tears the journey of these years may you may you trust may you trust him to the end this world is not as it should be but the saviour opens eyes to see all that's beautiful and true oh 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 to 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 what he calls you and whatever comes seek him with all your heart this will be my prayer for you father hear my ceaseless prayer will keep her in your care great father god we ask and pray that you would help us to understand you and your grace and your beauty and our we are called to be childlike in our faith not childish but childlike and dependent on our father who showers on us good gifts remind us of that we pray as we come to baptize this morning we ask it in Jesus name amen