

Part 31: How To Parent

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There are few things which we can universally say are shared among humanity but our text today in Proverbs 23 includes one of those shared experiences. Today we are going to talk about parents, children, and the relationships which develop (for better or for worse) around those titles.

All of us have parents. Some of us have parents who have harmed us in ways which still have consequences today. Abuse, abandonment, and negligence are unfortunate realities which many of us have experienced in our youth and in our homes.

For others, we have parents who do care for us and yet that care looks different. Some of us grew up in the age where kids ran the streets free like outlaws in the wild wild west. Others grew up, or are growing up in an age of lo-jacked kids and helicopter parents.

All of us are in some way shaped by the relationship we had with our parents. In this way today's sermon is not just for parents, nor is it only for children still in their parent's home. Instead the relationship we had with our parents, and the relationship parents have with their kids, is actually a glimpse into how we might actually view God himself (for better or for worse).

You see beauty of having a God who is Trinity—that is a God who is one God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—is that God has always and eternally been a Father to the Son, and the Son eternally and always been a Son to the Father.

Which means that when God made parents and children here on earth it was meant to image, reflect and imitate the relationship the Father had with the Son for all eternity. But what's even more wonderful is that Christians have this privilege of not just standing back and observing the textbook relationship of Father and Son, but it's actually through the work of Jesus that rebellious sinners like us get brought back into the family of God through faith. Christians not only get to see the perfect relationship between the Father and Son, but our redemption through the Son invites us into that relationship.

To talk about parenting from a Christian perspective is to reflect on how God loves us as his own children through Jesus Christ. God has given us everything we need to parent well by showing us what parenting should look like through the gospel.

While each of us has been shaped by our earthly parents, our salvation in Jesus Christ reminds us that we can be re-shaped and renewed by our relationship with our eternal Father. So as Solomon is talking today as a metaphorical father to us as his metaphorical children on the verge of adulthood, he is going to unveil for us the heart of a wise parent towards his child, and he's going to make a plea that the child understand the deep love his parents have for him.

Behind our passage today is not only words for human parents and children, but the heart of our heavenly Father towards all of his children. While shaping our own parenting, Solomon wants us to see

God's great heart for us. What we are going to see today is this: **God's heart for us as his children shapes our response to him, and our hearts for our children.**

We are going to see this in three ways in Proverbs 23 today. First in verses 13-18 we are going to see **Parenting With the End in Mind**, then in verses 19-25 we are going to **Parenting for the Greater Joy**, and lastly verses 26-28 we are going to see **Parenting for the Heart**.

Proverbs was used as a training book for young adults who were on the verge of leaving the parent's home and going into the world.

It's in light of this transitional stage that Solomon is going to open this passage by speaking to his son giving him advice for when the son himself is a father, while also speaking to the son's heart in this very moment. But as Solomon encourages us too look forward, and to look out into our immediate choices today, we see two bookends of hope.

Let's see this for ourselves as we read **Proverbs 23:13-18**.

So here we see instruction for parents and future parents, and also a plea for those who are children. But what ties each experience together is a longing for hope. This is our first point today: **Parenting with the End in Mind**.

Sarah and I just started some pre-marriage counseling for a young couple, and God in his providence has given them a unique opportunity at the beginning of their relationship to process marriage with the end in mind.

The future bride was a caregiver for an older Christian couple, and as they dated, the future husband was also brought into this an intimate way. The relationship between the two couples became really sweet and beautiful as the younger couple has watched as elderly saints process declining health, pandemic fears, hospitalizations and a keen awareness that their time on earth is growing short.

Sarah and I love doing pre-marriage counseling, but this one has been so distinct because as they talk about the excitement of the joys which surround the wedding, they are already considering and talking through how they will follow Jesus and love each other when their health and their bodies begin to fail.

They are pursuing marriage with the end in mind.

It's this similar perspective that Solomon wants us to have with parenting.

Now, most parents have an end in mind for our children. Throughout history kids have been born with an itinerary for life handed to them the moment they are born. Good parents, loving parents want their kids to grow up to be successful in sports, in their careers, and good contributors to society.

But Solomon here wants both parents and kids to think bigger than that. He's after the eternal hope of the child. In speaking to the parents he says in verse 14, "discipline the child in hopes that you might save his soul," and in speaking to the child he calls them to walk in the wisdom of the parent and in the fear of the Lord for, "surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off."

Why should we care about what God says about parenting? Because we care about the eternal end of our children. One theologian in the early days of Christianity reflected once that his father opened up for him every door of success he ever dreamed possible. But in looking back on his childhood his biggest regret was that his father didn't prepare him to love the Lord. He had success available to him at every turn, but he had no encouragement to "fear the Lord all the day."

Solomon wants us to parent our kids in light of their eternal souls. For this is how God parented us! What a mercy! God our Father doesn't parent us in terms of what is easiest for him. Instead, through the costly work of Jesus and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, the Father promises that everything we encounter in life is meant to conform us more and more into the image of Jesus. Look at **Romans 8:28-30**. God's good for us is shaping us to be like Jesus in light of eternity.

Or consider another analogy Paul gives not of parenting, but of marriage: **Ephesians 5:25-27**. Just as Jesus as the true bridegroom is preparing the church for eternity, so too is the Father as the ultimate Father conforming us more and more into what we will be like in glory

So what does it look like to parent in light of the end? Well, Solomon points us to what seems most distasteful in the immediate: discipline.

If there's one perspective that has changed the most moving as a son to a parent is my perspective on discipline. Growing up you think that your parents discipline you because it's the easy and effective way to get you to fall into line.

But what I've realized as a parent is that discipline is almost never easy. It's often the most inconvenient action given my time, and the most costly for my relationship with my child. It's impossible to parent well without a view of the end. The Bible assumes this tension and says, "When it comes to disciplining your child, you might feel that at some point someone is going to die. Your kid might act like you're about to kill them, and you might think that it's going to kill you, but in the end the opposite is true."

You discipline your children not to cause them to die, but to hopefully save their souls from death. That is meant in two ways. First he's simply talking about Sheol which is the Hebrew word for the grave. Disciplining your child means that your child will hopefully not do foolish and dangerous things which might kill them.

But there's also a spiritual level here when he speaks of saving the soul from the grave. The hope is that discipline not only extends the physical life of the child, but that it plays a role in saving the eternal life of the child.

Discipline is not meant to be a means of shaping your child into who you want your child to be. Discipline is a means of shaping your child into the child God wants them to be.

Solomon talks here of discipline with a rod. I know that spankings are a taboo topic today. That's partly because of how our sinful hearts are prone to abuse things when they are detached from God's desire.

My goal here isn't to tell you that you need to use a rod, or use your hand, but what we do see here is that Solomon intends the discipline of the parent to cause pain to the child. Not enduring pain, not damaging pain, but correcting pain.

This is really important for us to understand. It's often easy for me to parent with only my displeasure because largely my kids respond to it. If say to one of my daughters, "You should not be doing that" most of them break down and cry. And it's often easier for me to think that simply voicing my displeasure is sufficient to discipline.

But here's the problem with that. It is true that our sin displeases God. It's true that your child's sin will displease you. But if all we discipline with is our displeasure then what we are actually teaching our children is the most important thing in life is to manage the emotions of your parents. This not only affects how they view us, but it affects how they view God.

This means that we can begin to think that God's emotions towards us, or our emotion towards our kids are generally arbitrary. Who is to know what makes them upset and what doesn't? We just know we want them to not be upset.

But God disciplines us, and parents should discipline their kids because sin is dangerous to them. We discipline them not only because we want to be pleased with them, but because we want them to live!

If we discipline without something that causes pain we teach our kids that sin isn't painful. But what God wants discipline to show us is that sin, even if you can hide it from your earthly parent, is always painful. It hurts. It destroys. And it's better to have the loving and nurturing discipline of a parent show you that than for the world to harm you eternally in your disobedience.

So what we see in this text is call for our discipline to show our children the dangers of sin so that they know their biggest problem isn't managing their parent's emotions, but the sin that wants to kill them. But we also see that a biblical form of discipline not only punishes what is disobedience, but it praises what is obedient!

Look at **Proverbs 23:15-18**.

If we want to parent our children in light of eternity we want them to not only know where the boundaries are, but where the joy is. Here Solomon exults, delights and rejoices in the obedience of his children.

He wants them to not envy sinners, but instead to faithfully continue to fear the Lord knowing that it is a reliance upon God which provides a future worth getting excited about.

What does it look like for you as a parent, or you as a church member to share in the joy of the obedience of those around you?

One thing we do as parents, and we look really silly doing it, is we often cheer with our young children when they obey us. We want them not only to fear what harms them, but to trust that obeying, even when you don't fully understand, is worthy of celebration and excitement.

If you want your children to have a bright future, our discipline reminds them of the dangers of what would rob them of it and the promise of God's grace to those who repent and run to him: **Proverbs 4:18-19**.

In the midst of discipline a child should not only know the danger of sin, but they should also know the way in which they experience a future. As a church do we have a similar culture of this? We will have cases of formal and informal church discipline as we grow together, this is biblical even when it's hard. But we also want to be a place where we celebrate the small ordinary acts of obedience when we see it in the lives of others.

This is what discipline is meant to produce, a renewal of joy. Look at how the author of Hebrews puts it, **Hebrews 12:11-13**.

At the heart of God's parenting of us is actually an invitation into his joy. And this is where we see Solomon's next point today: **Parenting for the Greater Joy**.

Read with me **Proverbs 23:19-25**.

So here we see the return of Proverb's theme of two paths or two ways. Dad is sitting down with his son and he's preparing him to go out into the world and he says, be wise, stick to the way of wisdom, direct your heart in it, do not turn from it.

But then he warns us that there will be those who want to call us from other paths. Here Solomon sets up the two paths: the path of the drunkard and the glutton, and the path of mom and dad.

Solomon calls us twice to listen, to him. To heed this warning so that you might have joy. This warning builds off what we just talked about because it doesn't make sense if we are only driven by what life is like in the short term.

To partner with the glutton and the drunkard is to get what you want now! The drunkard has his fill of wine and the glutton of meat. They are not controlled by the Holy Spirit but by what they consume (we will talk more about the danger of this next week).

And this sense of immediacy is contrasted with the mother and father who are calling you to buy truth and not to sell it, to buy wisdom and insight. What's the contrast here? The contrast is that wisdom and truth, unlike gluttony, comes at a cost.

You buy it, you don't sell it. In the moment to believe the truth of what the father has been teaching is costly and seeming provides no immediate gain. Let's remember here that what the father is calling us to is a fear of the Lord, that is a reliance upon the God who saves us and redeems us. In the context of Proverbs, those who feared the Lord turned to the Law of God and found peace there, but for us on this side of the cross, to fear the Lord is to see how Jesus has fulfilled the Law for us and brought us peace with God through faith.

In the face of what is immediate and tangible, Solomon calls the son to desire the truth of the gospel which is often invisible and immaterial.

Do you guys remember the court system where everyone used to judge their parents? It was the lunchroom table at school. Everyone would open their lunches and you would judge how great a parent is based off what was in the lunch of their kid.

The experience Solomon is trying to get ahead of here is you looking in the lunch sack of the gospel and seeing an apple and a sandwich, and then looking in the lunch pack of the world and seeing Cool Ranch Doritos and Pudding Cups.

Many of us view not only our parents, but God this way. We see the bag he gives us and we think, “Does he even love us? Does he actually want us to have any joy?!”

For many of us we think that God is after our holiness and could care less about our happiness, but in this text Solomon wants us to see that God cares about joy more than the world. In fact his parenting of us, and our parenting of our kids is an invitation into the world’s greatest joy.

Solomon’s plea to the son is that instead of looking at what is offered by the drunkard and the glutton that we would consider the parents who gave us life.

To follow the consumption and immediate joy of the world is to ultimately find yourself in poverty, those who live like that don’t even have enough rags to cover themselves let alone share with you.

But your parents have given you life itself! The end of fellowship with the world is rags but the end of fellowship in the wisdom of the Lord is joy and celebration. Look again: **Proverbs 23:24-25**.

Why do we want to parent our kids into the wisdom of the gospel? Because we want them to share in our joy. We want them to be clothed not in the rags of the world but in the riches of the grace of Jesus Christ.

If you are a follower of Jesus, do you realize that in all God calls you to believe, in all the wisdom and instruction which at times is costly to keep, that he is after your eternal and abiding joy. That he wants to bring you into the eternal joy of the Trinity.

In John 17, Jesus is talking to the Father about this joy. But in verse 13 he begins to pray that his followers will trust in the promise of God’s joy even when it seems the world is mocking them for what is in their lunch sack: **John 17:13-17**.

Jesus is calling you to trust him because he has something better than rags for you. He has an eternity with the Father and a relational intimacy which comforts us when we feel the pull of the world.

Therefore we parent our children for their joy, by showing them the joy there is to have in Jesus Christ. This text applies even to those who aren’t parents in here. Not only should you see God’s love for you in this way, but you ought to consider which path your life models to the children in our church? Does it model the immediacy of the glutton’s rags? Or the certainty of joy found in the gospel?

And this idea of parenting with the end in mind, parenting for the joy shared in the family leads Solomon to his final plea to us as children. It’s here where we see our last point today: **Parenting for the Heart**.

Read with me, **Proverbs 23:26-28**.

In this text we have seen Solomon pleading with his son who is leaving the house that he would understand the heart behind all the wisdom and parenting he received. And it ends with this plea that in light of all of what has been said the son would trust the father with his heart.

It's here we see the battle lines that have been drawn. On one side is the prostitute and the adulteress, the ones who play with the heart but only end up robbing and deceiving those who are foolish enough to give in. And on the other side is the hand of the father, asking for the heart of the son.

Solomon as the father in this text knows that the world wants the heart of his son. It is going to lobby for it at every corner asking to receive the unreserved affection of the young man. But Solomon says, "Son, trust me with your heart. Resist the temptations of the world and hold fast to all I have taught you. Trust that I love you more than the world loves you!"

Our parenting should be aimed at the heart of our children. It is an invitation for them to trust us with their affections, their joy, and their future. Part of the way we are called to show them the safety of this is by calling them to observe our ways.

This is a bit of a parallel to the theme of the prostitute here. The first thing the prostitute wants young men to see is her beauty, she wants to allure them with the promise of joy in what they see. And here is a father who says, look at my life son, see the joy I have had in pursuing Jesus, see my delight in the gospel!

When you parent your children what is ultimately on display is your own relationship with your heavenly father. Do they see that this is the life of joy? Do they see that you are willing to trust your father with your own heart?

And here is the bittersweet reality of this, our children might trust us with their heart, and we might hurt it. We are not perfect parents. Our lives don't always look attractive. But that's where we have the ability to point our children to our heavenly Father. The one who never fails us, the one who on the basis of his Son, forgives us, draws near to us, redeems us, loves us, and satisfies us.

Last week we saw the selfish host who refused to give us his heart, but here we see the Heavenly Father who asks all of us to trust him with our own hearts. To submit ourselves to his care for us, to trust his discipline in our lives and to experience his joy.

It is here where if any of us want to apply this to our lives as parents or as church members, we must first apply this text as children. To whom have you entrusted your heart? Here we see that even when God disciplines us, he does so for our future hope. Here we see that when the world offers nothing but rags it is the heavenly Father who has given life and salvation through the work of his Son.

In light of this, will you give him your heart? Will you pursue the fear of the Lord and find that in the crucible of parenting, in the marketplace of desire, and the in brokenness of our world that there is a future and because of Jesus, you will never be cut off from the love of the Father?