

# Wisdom For Life And Ministry

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.  
(Proverbs 1:7 ESV)*

*Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof leads others astray.  
(Proverbs 10:17 ESV)*

*‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.’  
(Job 28:28 ESV)*

*The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.  
(Matthew 12:42 ESV)*

## **How And Why To Discipline Your Children**

**July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019**

**The Book Of Proverbs**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning church. I'd love for you to open your Bibles now to the Book of Proverbs, that's found on page 527 in your pew Bibles. I mentioned when we began this series that the Book of Proverbs is presented as the inspired counsel of a mom and a dad to their royal son about to make his way in the world. There is a 9 chapter long cover letter followed by various collections of wise sayings from well-known sources. Thus if you want to study a particular THEME in Proverbs you have to work systematically to get at all the available material and that is what we are going to attempt to do this morning.

This morning we are going to talk about how and why to discipline our children.

We'll begin this morning by talking about the "why".

## **Why Should We Discipline Our Kids?**

I suppose if we were preaching this sermon two generations ago we might have started with the how question and we might have skipped the why question altogether. No one in your grandparent's generation questioned the need or the rationale for discipline. It was expected. It was assumed. Kids needed to be disciplined – everybody knew that.

But, as we all know, things have changed.

There is far less urgency around raising kids than there used to be. We forget that a very high percentage of children died before reaching maturity in previous generations. Martin Luther and his wife Katie had 6 children but only 4 of them grew to adulthood. John Owen, usually thought of as the greatest theologian in the English language had 11 children 10 of whom died in infancy. He had a daughter who survived to adulthood and got married and shortly thereafter died of consumption. This was BEFORE vaccination and before penicillin and so raising kids had an urgency about it. You needed your kids to forsake evil and to find Christ early in life because you didn't know if they would HAVE a LATER IN LIFE and so discipline was A THING in our great grandparent's day.

And life was harder back then as well. And failure at life was punished harshly in those days. If you raised a lazy kid back in the 1800's he DIED of starvation – there was no safety net, no welfare system and so YOU NEEDED TO DISCIPLINE your kid for his or her own safety.

But then after WW2 and as we entered the greatest and most enduring stretch of peace and prosperity in human history we kind of took our foot off the gas – collectively – as parents. And we are just now feeling the effects of that as a culture and so we are ready again, it seems, for a conversation about the REASONS WHY WE REALLY OUGHT TO BE DISCIPLINING OUR CHILDREN. So let's take a look at what the Bible has to say.

The Bible says that we discipline our children, first and foremost BECAUSE THEY NEED IT.

### **1. Because they need it**

Flip forward in your Bibles to Proverbs 22:15. The text says:

“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.” (Proverbs 22:15 ESV)

The Bible commends discipline because the Bible assumes original sin.

Original sin is the belief that all people – all children – are born already twisted and distorted because of the sin of our first parents. That’s what the doctrine of original sin refers to. Sometimes we think that “original sin” refers to “THE original sin” – as in the sin of Adam and Eve – but actually it refers to the EFFECT of that sin in each of us at the point of conception.

That’s what David meant when he said:

“I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”  
(Psalm 51:5 ESV)

He’s not saying that it was a SIN for his mom and dad to have sex, he is saying that HE BECAME A SINNER in the womb – at the moment of conception.

The Bible says that an inclination toward sin is BAKED INTO the human cake. The Bible says that we are SINNERS WHO SIN. It doesn’t say that we are sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners – we do WHAT WE ARE.

That is PART OF THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW and it has a MASSIVE EFFECT on how we parent as Bible believing people.

The world thinks that babies come out of the womb as total innocents - as blank slates and that they only become deviant if and when exposed to deleterious societal or familial influences. Meaning – babies come out good and WE MAKE THEM BAD. The Bible says the opposite. The Bible says babies come out BAD and it is up to us to point them in the direction of good.

That’s a completely OPPOSITE PERSPECTIVE to the current cultural consensus, but that’s what we see in the text. Read it again. Proverbs 22:15 says:

“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.” (Proverbs 22:15 ESV)

Are you hearing that?

That’s what the Bible says about human nature.

That’s what the Bible says about your baby as it is exiting momma’s womb.

The Bible says: “Your baby is coming into this world as a little sinner. She’s cute as the day is long but she comes pre-loaded with greed, dishonesty and selfishness inside. You won’t have to teach her how to steal cookies or tell lies; that information comes preloaded. And your job is to show her a better way. Your job is to teach her to be honest and generous and kind. There is FOLLY in your baby girl, the Bible says, but discipline drives it far away.

Secondly, the Bible says, you discipline your kids:

## **2. Because you love them**

Look at Proverbs 13:24. It says:

Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him. (Proverbs 13:24 ESV)

Discipline is ultimately an act of love. Nobody enjoys it and in fact, if you do, then you shouldn’t be a parent.

Discipline is hard.

And it’s scary because you worry as you are doing it that it will cost you the love of your child.

And it does – in the moment. I remember going up to my room as a kid and hating my dad in my heart. I remember that – but I also know that it did not last. Eventually you realize that your dad or

your mom disciplined you because they loved you and because they knew that you needed to stop doing whatever it was that they disciplined you for doing. They did you a favour and eventually you realized that and you loved them for having the courage to follow through on that.

The Bible that's how God loves us. In Hebrews 12:6-11 the Apostle says:

“For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives... For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ... we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ... all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” (Hebrews 12:6–11 ESV)

Discipline is hard – for parents – because both the FRUIT and the GRATITUDE come later. But if you love your kids you will discipline yourself to do it.

Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him. (Proverbs 13:24 ESV)

Thirdly, we discipline our kids:

### **3. Because an undisciplined child brings shame**

Flip forward to Proverbs 29:15. The text says:

“The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.” (Proverbs 29:15 ESV)

The positive version of that Proverb comes two verses later:

“Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.” (Proverbs 29:17 ESV)

So again, the principle being espoused here is that discipline is HARD for parents initially but if you do it diligently then it does yield very pleasant fruit OVER TIME. And conversely, if you don't do it, you bring great pain and shame upon your entire family in the long run.<sup>1</sup>

If you don't discipline your child NOW then you will be bailing him out of jail 40 years from now. If you don't discipline your child now you will be raising her abandoned or neglected kids 30 years from now.

That's what the Bible is saying.

The failure to discipline your kids when they are young generally results in tremendous pain and heartache when you are old.

Now of course, we need to remember here that NOT ALL SHAME IS WELL EARNED.

Not all bad kids are the result of bad parenting. Sometimes children CHOOSE to be BAD despite having received a great deal of very GOOD PARENTING - Proverbs talks about that again and again too and we're going to see that in just a minute – so we need to acknowledge here that there is such a thing as undeserved shame and I know for a fact that a lot of parents in this church wrestle with undeserved shame. They are embarrassed by how their kids turned out DESPITE that they did an awful lot right as moms and dads.

That does happen.

But it is also true, and therefore it needs to be said, that bad parenting now does generally result in well-earned shame later. We have to say that because the Bible says that. And so we need to feel that warning – we need to know that a failure to discipline NOW CAN and USUALLY DOES come back to bite us and shame us down the road.

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<sup>1</sup> The mention of “the mother” is likely an example of stylistic variation as for example Allen Ross who says: “The focus on the mother in the last part is probably rhetorical variation for the parent and not meant to assume that she will do the training.” Allen P. Ross, *Proverbs* in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary Volume 5* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 1115.

So grit your teeth, bite the bullet and do the work. It will be better for your kids and better for you in the long run.

And then fourthly, we discipline our kids ultimately:

#### **4. Because it will spare their souls from hell**

Turn now to Proverbs 23:13-14. It says there:

“Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.” (Proverbs 23:13–14 ESV)

The Hebrew word Sheol means “hell”, “the underworld” or “whither men descend at death.”<sup>2</sup> Sometimes it just means “death” or “the grave” but sometimes it means HELL – it means spiritual and total death and you have to consult the context to know which is in view in any given passage.

It is probably both here.

The Bible is saying that discipline now makes salvation more likely for your child later – and may also preserve them from an early death. If you don’t teach little Johnny not to stick his finger in the light socket little Johnny may never grow up to be Big Johnny and if you don’t teach little Johnny to manage his desires and to respect authority then he may never find and love the path that leads to everlasting life.

That’s what the Bible seems to be saying.

Now to be clear, you can’t “spank your kids into heaven” – Proverbs 23 goes right on to encourage a good response to discipline in the child. Look at verses 15-17:

<sup>15</sup> My son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad.

<sup>16</sup> My inmost being will exult when your lips speak what is right.

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<sup>2</sup> Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, page 982.

Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day.  
(Proverbs 23:15–17 ESV)

So if you respond WISELY child to the discipline of your parents; if you learn to love the right things and if you learn to respect and worship the Lord then you will find yourself on the path that leads to everlasting life.

So DISCIPLINE IS NOT DETERMINATIVE but it does make a good outcome far more likely.

We discipline our kids, in part to prepare them to fear and follow the Lord.

Now how do we do that? I want to talk about that next.

### **How Should We Discipline Our Kids?**

Turn back one chapter to Proverbs 22:6. There we are told:

“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6 ESV)

The word that is used there in Proverbs 22:6 is an interesting word. It literally means “up”. Up a child in the way he should go – that’s what it says. The “train” part is assumed and added in the English so that the sentence makes sense, but it literally just says “UP a child” in the way he should go.

And the idea here is that discipline, first and foremost is CONSTRUCTIVE – it’s about building UP. We discipline our children first and foremost CONSTRUCTIVELY.

#### **1. Constructively**

We teach/train/build them UP and we try to establish them on a FIRM FOUNDATION – that is first and foremost HOW we discipline our kids.

The word “discipline” means to teach and instruct. In the New Testament the Greek word translated as “disciple” is *mathetes* – which literally means “a learner”. So a disciple is someone who learns. To discipline is to facilitate learning – it is to TEACH or instruct.

It is an essentially constructive activity.

The destructive – the negative part of discipline is only required when the lesson is rejected.

But the process itself is fundamentally positive – the first job of a parent is to CONSTRUCT. Brick by brick you need to build UP a biblical worldview in your child.

You need to tell them the most fundamental things. You need to tell them who God is – and who they are. Your children need to know that they are both FEARFULLY and WONDERFULLY MADE and also FUNDAMENTALLY and DAMNABLY FLAWED.

They are RULING CREATURES but cannot live and lead by their every whim and desire because:

“The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9 NKJV)

Your kids need to know that! They need to be told that their desires and instincts are ultimately unreliable. Their compass does not point true north and therefore they must learn to RELY ON the unchanging, inerrant Word of God.

And of course, they need to know about Jesus.

They need to know that he lived the life that they will never be able to live. That he obeyed God perfectly and died on the cross sacrificially – they need to know that he did all of that for them. And thanks be to God he rose from the dead and he lives right now in the presence of the God Almighty to make intercession for them.

Your kids to know that – you need to teach them that.

The Gospel does not come pre-loaded. It has to be UPLOADED into your kids.

We need to discipline our children CONSTRUCTIVELY.

And we also need to discipline our kids:

## **2. Inclusively**

By that I mean that we should share with them MORE THAN just our OWN wisdom and understanding. Look at Proverbs 4. In verses 3-4 he says:

“When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother, he taught me and said to me, “Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live.” (Proverbs 4:1–4 ESV)

So kids, listen up to what daddy has to say because I learned all this from my daddy. This is FAMILY WISDOM – this isn’t just from me.

I think this is helpful; I do this all the time. I tell my kids – “I’m not making this up and I’m not inventing this, this is exactly what my dad said to me and this is exactly what you will be saying to your kids in 20 years.” I think that is helpful. It says to a kid: “This is how WE DO IT in our family.”

I may do this more than the average dad because sometimes my kids think I’m just saying stuff because I’m the pastor. “Dad, you are just making me go to church because you are the pastor” – to which I reply: “Listen here, kiddo, I’m not saying this to you because I’m the pastor – I’m saying this to you because this is what my dad said to me. In the house I grew up in you went to church on Sunday unless you were bloody or covered in your own vomit. That was the standard in my father’s house and that is the standard in this house because I am my father’s son and because this is how CARTERS DO.”

I think that is helpful.

If you can say that, I think you should.

And even beyond that – I think you should encourage your kids to look wider even than your own family. Look at verse 7. He says:

“The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.”  
(Proverbs 4:7 ESV)

He tells his son, you’ve got to take responsibility for identifying and connecting with sources of WISDOM and INSTRUCTION. Find a mentor! Grab on to some leaders. Whatever you get – get wisdom! Get insight!

This is one of the things you can say to your kid as you drop them off at youth group. I’m taking you here because this is a good place to find mentors. This is a good place to SEEK OUT SOURCES of wisdom and insight.

Your kids will learn from somebody, and part of your job as a parent is to point them towards good sources; in your family and in your wider family of faith. We NEED TO bring other voices in; we need to parent our kids INCLUSIVELY.

And, according to Proverbs, we need to parent and discipline our kids FIRMLY.

### **3. Firmly**

We’ve quoted a few Proverbs now that have the word “rod” in them. We think for example of Proverbs 13:24:

“Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.” (Proverbs 13:24 ESV)

The “rod” in the Bible is a common symbol for correction and chastisement. Job for example says:

“Let him take his rod away from me, and let not dread of him terrify me.” (Job 9:34 ESV)

Then later in Job 21:9 he said about other people:

“Their houses are safe from fear, and no rod of God is upon them.” (Job 21:9 ESV)

So Job’s complaint was that it seemed to him that God was being harder on him than he was being on other people and Job didn’t think that was fair – God’s ROD was heavy on him - figuratively speaking.

God wasn’t actually hitting Job with a stick – that was Job’s way of speaking symbolically about the discipline of the Lord.

Now, of course, in those days, tools and implements were often used. In living memory in this country tools and implements were used. Many of us are old enough to remember the strap in Public School and the wooden spoon at home. The laws in this country have changed now. The current law says that you can spank with your hand but NOT with a tool or implement of any kind and you can’t leave a mark and you can’t do it in anger – those are the current laws in Canada – and they in NO WAY keep you from following what the Bible says here.

You can be firm – and if the occasion calls for it – you can be physical. You don’t need a spoon or a strap to communicate to a child that they have crossed a significant line and they need to retreat rapidly. You can be firm without breaking the law.

And you should be firm.

When you are firm with your kids you communicate that crossing lines – at home – and out in the world – comes at a cost.

That’s the goal of firm discipline.

You want your kids to understand that if they cross a line that has been drawn – whether by mom and dad or by the government or by God – if they cross the line, they will pay a cost.

We want our kids to understand that.

We want them to know that lines are there for a reason. Rules are meant to keep us safe and to point us in the direction of health, love, kindness and respect for God, ourselves and others.

So with the means at your legal disposal – be FIRM and CONSISTENT in your discipline. Clearly communicate where the lines are and consistently enforce the consequences that have been agreed upon.

That's good parenting and that's good preparation for life in every age and culture.

And then lastly and most importantly, we need to discipline our kids faith-fully.

#### **4. Faith-fully**

I said at the beginning of this series that it is very important for us to understand the difference between a Proverb and a promise. A PROVERB IS NOT A PROMISE. A Proverb tells us how things GENERALLY GO. It communicates a LIKELY OUTCOME within a LOGICAL SYSTEM – but it is not a promise and that's why I said that if you really want to understand WISDOM in the Bible you have to read Proverbs, Job and Jesus.

Proverbs gives us the general design. Job reminds us that in a fallen world that has not yet been redeemed sometimes things happen that cannot be understood or predicted and that will not make sense ultimately until we see Jesus.

That's wisdom in the Bible.

And so we have to understand that sometimes we can do everything right as parents and not receive the outcome that we hope for and expect.

Sometimes – because of sin and injustice – we don’t reap what we sow.

Sometimes we raise up a child in the way he should go and he does depart from it when he is older.

Proverbs are not promises!

And you don’t have to wait for Job or Ecclesiastes to figure that out - that heart breaking truth can be found in the Book of Proverbs itself. Proverbs 13:1 talks about the son who is too foolish to take instruction. It says:

“A wise son hears his father’s instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.”  
(Proverbs 13:1 ESV)

There are kids in this fallen world who simply cannot be taught by anyone.

Proverbs understands that.

In Proverbs 19: 26 it actually talks about kids who reject the discipline of their parents and even turn violent against them. It says:

“He who does violence to his father and chases away his mother is a son who brings shame and reproach.” (Proverbs 19:26 ESV)

There are kids in this world who can’t be taught and will even turn violently against those who are trying to help them – Proverbs understands that. Solomon knows very well that we live in a broken and fallen world.

So you can do all the right things and still feel POWERLESS as a parent.

That’s what I mean when I say that we need to discipline our kids FAITH-FULLY.

Parenting eventually is entirely an act of faith.

Whether you have rebellious kids or not – eventually they’re out of your hands. Eventually you find yourself with nothing left to do but PRAY.

But thankfully prayer is not nothing.

There are an awful lot of people who have been prayed out of the ditch and onto the road that leads to life.

So pray.

Pray against those mountains of unbelief and rebellion that currently lie between the heart of your child and the cross of Jesus Christ.

Pray.

Jesus said:

“For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matthew 17:20 ESV)

That’s a promise. And when it comes to kids – particular our grown kids – promises and prayer are better than Proverbs every day of the week.

So pray! Pray in faith – pray in the Name of Christ - and nothing will be impossible for you.

Thanks be to God – let’s pray together.