

Today you can find all sorts of books about parenting and leadership –
but how many books are there on how to be a good child? Or a good follower?

In many ways, I think that we have it backwards.

We think that the key is good parenting.

If you parent well, then your kids will turn out well.

Or the key is good leadership –

if you have good leaders, then your business – your church – your government –
will do well.

Proverbs challenges that paradigm.

Proverbs starts from the assumption that where you need to start
is to learn how to follow well.

If you learn obedience –

if you learn how to listen and put into practice what you are taught –
that is the key to the good path.

The book of Proverbs has a few verses about parenting (such as verses 13-14 here),

but *most* of Proverbs is about how to be a good child –

after all, Proverbs is not really talking to parents about how to parent,
but to children about how to be a wise and faithful child.

How do you learn leadership?

By being a good follower.

If you learn how to follow well – then you will see what works (and what doesn't!).

And so then, when you are in a position to lead others,
you will remember what it feels like to be a follower.

We are in the middle of the Thirty Sayings of the Wise (22:17-24:22).

We saw last time that the Thirty Sayings have many similarities to Egyptian wisdom –
but the portion that we are looking at now has very few connections to Egypt.

The Father is teaching his Son that there is useful wisdom in every tradition on earth –
but that wisdom needs to be re-oriented back to the fear of the LORD.

After all, the LORD is the creation of heaven and earth.

He made all the peoples of the earth –

and so we should not be surprised when people made in God's image
figure out things that are true and right about the world!

But all the wisdom in the world cannot save you from the grave.

For that you need the Wisdom that comes from above –
the Wisdom of God who came in the flesh
in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction: Saying 12: Call to Wisdom (v12)

Verse 12 opens our passage with a familiar call to learn wisdom.

*Apply your heart to instruction
and your ear to words of knowledge.*

Everyone within the sound of my voice will *hear* this sermon.
But it will only take root in those who apply their *hearts* to instruction.

I worked in a meat department in a supermarket when I was in high school.
I heard my boss – Tito – as he challenged me to *work hard*.
Until then I had only worked in the deli –
and in the deli, I was a hard worker!

But the meat department was a union shop –
and these butchers took pride in their work!
They worked hard – and they put out a really good product.

I may have been the hardest worker in the deli –
but that same level of effort was barely more than a sluggard to the meat dept!

Those butchers taught me what it meant to work hard and take pride in your work.
The follower – the disciple – the child –
should have an attitude of obedience.
My father – my boss – my teacher –
wants what is good for me –
and so I will be devoted to putting that teaching into practice.

Apply your *heart* to instruction and your *ear* to words of knowledge.

The word *heart* ties together our passage tonight.
It appears 9 times in these verses –
in a descending scale of warning –
because if you don't start with verse 12,
then you will wind up with 24:2

Listen:

Apply your *heart* to instruction (v12)
My son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad (v15)
Let not your heart envy sinners (v17)
Hear, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way (v19)
My son, give me your heart (v26)

[or] Your heart will utter perverse things (v33)
Like one who lies down in the heart of the sea (v34)
Their hearts devise violence... (24:2)

You will be a follower.
You will be a disciple.
The only question is: who will be your master?
Who will be your mentor? Your father?
You gotta serve somebody!

So verse 12 starts off by setting out the basic principle of discipleship.
You must have an internal disposition that orients you toward instruction.
That instruction then trains you in the path of life.
Your ears then hear these words of knowledge,
and you put them into practice.

Now – you might say, “Uh, Pastor, I don’t have that! What do I do?!”
Start at the beginning.
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.
What is the lie that you are believing?

Because you are listening to *someone* – to *something*!

Do you doubt God?
Do you doubt his goodness? His power? His love?

When you start to doubt God – when you start to stray from his truth –
you need to confront the lie for what it is!

If the lie is – “God doesn’t really love me” –
then you need to reject the lie – and confess the truth!

No, God loves me.
He sent his only-begotten Son to die for me.
God loves me.

Say it out loud!
God loves me.
He sent his only-begotten Son to die for me.

When you are believing a lie, you need to reject that lie –
and you need to confess the truth – you need to reaffirm the truth –
every day!

1. Parenting and Salvation (v13-16)

a. Saying 13: The Necessity of Discipline (v13-14)

¹³ *Do not withhold discipline from a child;
if you strike him with a rod, he will not die.*

¹⁴ *If you strike him with the rod,
you will save his soul from Sheol.*

Verses 13-14 then turn to parenting.

If you have are the sort of person who has learned wisdom –
if you have been a faithful disciple of those who have mentored you –
then you will be prepared to be a mentor –
you will be prepared to disciple others!

Saying 13 focuses on the importance and necessity of discipline.

Discipline is broader than just spanking.

(The word translated “discipline” in verse 13
is the same as the word translated “instruction” in verse 12).

If you have applied your heart to discipline –
then you will be prepared to discipline others.

Discipline should always be oriented toward the goal of salvation.

This is true of church discipline –
but it must also be true of discipline in the home as well.

The point of discipline is *not* to get your kid to do what you want.
The point of discipline is to train your child in the way of life.

This is why all the best books on parenting
start with an emphasis on training the heart of the parent!

You will invariably discipline your child toward what matters most to you.

If you try to discipline your child without paying attention to your own heart –
then your wayward heart will direct your steps.

And since the wages of sin is death,
the result of walking down the wrong path –
is the destruction of everything we thought we loved.

That’s why discipline oriented toward the way of life
will result in saving his soul from Sheol –
saving his life from the grave.

Discipline never exists in a vacuum.

It always points a child toward something else.
At its heart, discipline should say to your child –
“please don’t die!”
If you keep walking down that path, it will kill you!

We didn’t spank our kids all that much –
but one place where we did was when they were little –
if they went out into the street.

Going out in the street could kill you.
And that’s the principle of all discipline!
Crossing that boundary could kill you.
That path is the path to hell.
Stay away from it!!

Because when children learn from their parents –
when disciples learn from their masters –
the result is saying 14:

b. Saying 14: The Heart of Wisdom (v15-16)

¹⁵ *My son, if your heart is wise,
my heart too will be glad.*

¹⁶ *My inmost being^[d] will exult
when your lips speak what is right.*

Notice the role of the heart in verse 15:
If your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad.

I’ve often commented that in Hebrew, the *heart* is the center of thinking and deciding.
In English, we think of the *mind* as the center of thinking and deciding,
and the heart as the center of our emotions and affections.
But in Hebrew, it is the heart that is the center of thinking and deciding –
and the *kidneys* are the center of our emotions and affections.

I’ve heard some people say that Hebrew has no word for mind.
But that would be like saying that English has no word for kidneys!

The Hebrew word for “mind” is “heart” –
and the Hebrew word for “heart” is “kidneys”!

We could say it this way:
“My son, if your mind is wise, my mind too will be glad.
My heart will exult when your lips speak what is right.”

But the point of all this is that when you see your son walking down the path of life – making wise decisions, you rejoice!

When you hear your daughter speaking things that are right and good, you are glad!

This is the purpose of discipleship – so that the next generation would continue to walk in the fear of the LORD.

2. Two Admonitions to Fear the LORD (v17-21)

a. Saying 15: Don't Envy Sinners (v17-18)

Saying 15 (verses 17-18) then provides a warning against the other path:

¹⁷ *Let not your heart envy sinners,
but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day.*

¹⁸ *Surely there is a future,
and your hope will not be cut off.*

If your heart envies sinners –
if you look around and start getting jealous of all the stuff that sinners are doing –
“they have all the fun!” –
“what’s the point of following Jesus when I don’t get what I want?!”

If you do not continue in the fear the LORD, then hope dwindles.

That is why your heavenly Father says to you:

¹⁷ *Let not your heart envy sinners,
but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day.*

¹⁸ *Surely there is a future,
and your hope will not be cut off.*

There is a future – there is an *end* –
and there is a glorious hope that awaits those who trust in Jesus!

b. Saying 16: Be Not Among Drunkards or Gluttons (v19-21)

Saying 16 then makes the warning more particular:

¹⁹ *Hear, my son, and be wise,
and direct your heart in the way.*

²⁰ *Be not among drunkards^[e]
or among gluttonous eaters of meat,*

²¹ *for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty,*

and slumber will clothe them with rags.

Drunkards are those who overindulge in alcohol.

Gluttons are those who overindulge in food.

Meat is a good gift of God –

but the glutton overindulges because he loves the gift more than the Giver.

Wine is also a good gift of God –

but the drunkard also overindulges for the same reason.

The wise man will eat and drink enough for the well-being of his body –

and then he will abstain from overindulgence because he understands that all good gifts are to be used in the service of God.

And – not surprisingly –

when we overindulge, we are using our resources wastefully –

with the result that the glutton and the drunkard come to poverty.

We'll come back to this in just a minute –

but notice particularly that the Father's warning is *be not among them!*

It's not just "don't *be* a drunkard or a glutton" –

but first and foremost – don't be among them!

Don't hang out at parties where the focus is always on eating and drinking!

We need to be careful about this!

Because we like food and drink!

We need to make sure that our focus is truly on Christ!

3. Saying 17: Let Your Parents Be Glad Because You Are Wise (v22-25)

Saying 17 then returns to the central theme of being a faithful child –

being a good disciple – a good follower:

²² *Listen to your father who gave you life,
and do not despise your mother when she is old.*

²³ *Buy truth, and do not sell it;*

[the image here is that if you sell truth, you don't have it anymore!]

buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.

[use your resources to acquire wisdom – and then *keep* wisdom!!]

²⁴ *The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice;
he who fathers a wise son will be glad in him.*

²⁵ *Let your father and mother be glad;*

let her who bore you rejoice.

One of my great joys was having my father pray the ordination prayer at my ordination
(He was a Reformed Baptist elder,
and so my Presbytery invited him to pray the ordination prayer).

I think that every child wants to hear their parents say,
“I’m proud of you.”
It’s a good thing!

You *should* want that!!

But you can’t control your parents –
you can’t make them do what they should!
What you can do is seek to *be* the person that your heavenly Father calls you to be!
If you are pursuing wisdom – acquiring instruction (discipline!) – buying understanding –
then you will become the sort of person that who brings joy to your parents.

You can’t force your parents to become wise parents.
But *you* can become a wise person –
and in so doing, you will bring joy to those who mentor and disciple you!

The church of Jesus Christ is his new family –
we are to be a place where those who need parents find parents –
those who need siblings find siblings –
those who need homes find homes.

Why do we do this?
Because that’s what God did for us!
God has become “our Father.”
Jesus died for our sins, in order that he might reconcile us to God –
and thus he became our big brother!
And through the gift of the Holy Spirit,
we now have a home.
We now belong to the Triune God!

But before we close tonight, we need to beware of three dangers that seek to ensnare us!

4. Three Admonitions to Avoid Trouble (23:26-24:2)
a. Saying 18: Do Not Turn to Prostitutes or Adulteresses (v26-28)

Saying 18 warns against the prostitute and the adulteress:

²⁶ *My son, give me your heart,
and let your eyes observe^[1] my ways.*

²⁷ *For a prostitute is a deep pit;
an adulteress^[g] is a narrow well.*

²⁸ *She lies in wait like a robber
and increases the traitors among mankind.*

Sexual sin is a dangerous snare –
a deep pit – a narrow well!
If you fall into it – you may never be able to get back out again!

So stay away!

And the one who turns aside is a traitor.
Adultery is betrayal.
When you commit adultery, you are betraying your wife – your husband –
and above all – you are betraying your God!

So the father son, “My son, give me your heart...”
Don’t hide in a corner!
Don’t pretend that you are impervious to attack!

Give me your heart.
After all, what you take pleasure in depends on what you really *want!*
Where your heart is – there your treasure will be also – Jesus said.
The eye will find pleasure in what the heart longs for!

“Let your eyes observe my ways.”

b. Saying 19: Do Not Tarry Long Over Wine (v29-35)

Saying 19 then expounds on the drunkard:

²⁹ *Who has woe? Who has sorrow?
Who has strife? Who has complaining?
Who has wounds without cause?
Who has redness of eyes?*

Verse 29 starts with the results of drunkenness –
the drunkard who wakes up with a hangover,
and cannot even remember how he got hurt!

Verses 30-31 then caution against the temptation:

³⁰ *Those who tarry long over wine;
those who go to try mixed wine.*

³¹ *Do not look at wine when it is red,
when it sparkles in the cup
and goes down smoothly.*

The one who says “oh, just one more glass...” is asking for trouble!
Back in chapter 9, Lady Wisdom said,
“Come, drink the wine I have mixed...”

So mixed wine is not inherently bad!
But the drunkard is obsessed with his drink –
whereas the wise man is focused on his God!

And if you about it – when you focus on the creation rather than on the Creator,
then you are following the path of the serpent –
and so...

³² *In the end it bites like a serpent
and stings like an adder.*

³³ *Your eyes will see strange things,
and your heart utter perverse things.*

At first you feel great – “wine to gladden the hearts of men” (Psalm 104).

But then your head swims – and your lips are loosed –
you have a hard time controlling your impulses –
and so you say things that you didn’t really mean...right?

Or was it just that your inhibitions were relaxed –
and so you said what you really thought?!

³⁴ *You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea,
like one who lies on the top of a mast.^[h]*

³⁵ *“They struck me,” you will say,^[i] “but I was not hurt;
they beat me, but I did not feel it.*

When shall I awake?

I must have another drink.”

The father shows how ridiculous drunkenness is!
How ridiculous – and yet how tragic...

I have watched the drunkards stagger down the street to the local liquor store.
One man was passed out drunk in the street in front of our house.
He was on his way to get another drink –
even though he had an unopened bottle in his pocket!

(you gotta keep one always on hand in case the missus starts yelling again...)

The drunkard reaches a point of craving the very thing that is destroying him.

It is why addiction is so deadly!

It's killing you – but you can't stop!

c. Saying 20: Be Not Envious of Evil Men (24:1-2)

We conclude this evening with Saying 20:

*24 Be not envious of evil men,
nor desire to be with them,
2 for their hearts devise violence,
and their lips talk of trouble.*

This connects back to verse 17:

“Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day.”

Saying 20 summarizes the warnings of this section.

Be not envious of evil men – nor desire to be with them!

What do they have that you could possibly desire?

They have misery and violence – trouble and death.

Why are we so attracted to misery and violence – trouble and death?

Because we have lost sight of what joy and peace – goodness and life – really are!

We think that we have to make a temporary alliance with evil in order to do good.

Do not envy those who do wrong –

for they will soon perish – and all their evil will be destroyed with them.