

GOD WITH US
Part 4: The Life and Writings of Solomon
Direction and Drift – Proverbs

Message 10 – Wisdom and Folly: Family
Proverbs 10-31

Introduction

“By wisdom a house is built, through understanding it is established . . .” (24:3).

Building a great family does not come easily. It takes wisdom, work and commitment, especially today when traditional ideas about the family are being rejected. As with other topics, Lady wisdom continues to show forth her impersonal *principles* of cause and effect with regard to the functioning of a family.

There are NO *guaranteed formulas* with people. Not even for God as He began a relationship with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and the beginning of ‘family’. God said: “If you obey Me and do not eat from this one tree, you will live.” Humanity from the beginning has challenged God’s love and wisdom and has chosen to test God and His Word, even though the warnings of Lady Wisdom (His wisdom and consequences) have been clearly laid out. Yet, GOD continues to give hope and purpose for parents and children who choose to trust Him with their lives and family.

Proverbs discusses the different people/roles in the home: husband, wife, father, mother and child. Each person must fulfill his/her role in order for the home to function effectively. If anyone fails to play the part assigned by Lady Wisdom, then life in the home will take a troubled and tumultuous turn. At the same time, being in a family is more than a role we play at any given time. It is a story, a journey of a lifetime as we all move through various stages. We are born into a family. We grow up in a family as children. We marry and start a new family as husband or wife. We then become fathers and mothers, eventually launching out adults who form new family units. Finally, it is family that gathers to our side as we complete our journey and depart this earth. *Family* is the primary context in which we live out our lives. As Michael J. Fox (Back to the Future actor) put it: “*Family is not an important thing, it’s everything.*”

THE FAMILY ATMOSPHERE

Every home has an atmosphere - a set of values that determine what it will be like to be in that family unit. The atmosphere is effective in a positive way only when each person in the family cherishes and embodies these attitudes. Further, the home is the environment in which the child first learns these ideals that will, hopefully be carried on into the rest of his or her life.

FAITH:

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (9:10).

God is to be the center of one’s heart and home. Proverbs is strong on this theme. Each individual must *allow God to be the center of his/her life and to shape his/her interactions*. It is in the home (not the church or the school) that a child is first taught about a relationship with God (ie., the ‘fear of the Lord’) and the young person is encouraged to develop a daily relationship with God.

What can you do to increase the level of love for God in your home? Small things can have a big effect over time: Reading the Bible, praying together, discussing life issues in light of God’s Word, being active in the local church, doing mission work together, blessing those in need. Can you think of one little step you can take right now to increase the ‘spiritual temperature’ of your home by just 1 degree?

LOVE:

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity” (17:17).

“Many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find” (20:6)?

In the home, we should find the truest expressions of unconditional *human* love and acceptance that we will ever find on this earth. Here, our core beliefs should be firmly formed: that we are loved (just because we belong), accepted, valued and secure. When we experience this kind of love early on in the home, it is more natural for us to carry these same ideas over into our relationship with our heavenly Father as we grow up and into our later years.

Have you ever considered how your experience in your family of origin has impacted your experience in God's family and, more specifically, your experience with God Himself as your heavenly Father? Do you struggle to trust God as your Father? Is it difficult for you to believe that He loves you? Are you constantly trying to perform well in order to make Him happy? Do you often feel that He is disappointed with you? Many of our ideas about God have been misshaped by our experience in our family of origin. It is important to invite the Holy Spirit (and wise counselors) to point out these skewed ideas about God, and to replace them with His truth. This is one of the amazing things about Inner Healing Prayer (also called Transformational Prayer) . . . the Spirit reaches into the innermost recesses of our damaged hearts and reveals lies that have been planted there. In turn, He replaces lies with God's truth, allowing you to live in the freedom of your relationship with your GOOD heavenly Father.

GRACE:

“Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs” (10:12).

In the home, a child learns to take his/her first steps. Of course, there is always more falling down than standing up at first. But gracious parents and siblings encourage the toddler to get back up and try, try again . . . until the skill of walking is finally mastered. In a similar way, the family should be a place of grace, where we find forgiveness for our mistakes and encouragement to get back up and move forward after a fall. The family is where we learn that it is OK to fail (in the context of folly), and it is a wonderful thing to turn failure into wisdom and maturity.

PEACE:

“Better a little with the fear of the Lord than great wealth with turmoil. Better a small serving of vegetables with love than a fattened calf with hatred” (15:16,17).

“Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife” (17:1).

Striving and working hard is a good thing in Proverbs, unless it turns into excessive striving at the expense of peaceful, loving relationships in the home. Lady Wisdom would argue that it is better to live at a moderate level and pace with love, peace and quiet in the home than to be wealthy, successful and busy . . . with anger and strife tearing into the relational fabric of the home.

KINDNESS:

“Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones” (16:24).

“The tongue has the power of life and death . . .” (18:21).

As we have seen, Proverbs says much about how our words have a tremendous impact on others. The home is the place where we should learn to give and receive kind words. Our tone in society will largely be determined by the tone of words in the home.

PRIDE:

“Children’s children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children” (17:6).

Self-centered pride is a bad thing in Proverbs. Yet, it is a good thing to have great pride in the other family members that make up your home. Grandparents see their grandchildren as the pride and joy of their lives. In a mutually respectful way, the children and grandchildren esteem their parents and grandparents with pride.

DIVERSITY:

“The first to present his case seems right, until another comes forth and questions him” (18:17).

In a healthy home, individuals will learn that they are not *always* right. There are other opinions, views and versions of this or that event. (Mothers become master arbitrators of disputes between children!) It is in the home that we first learn how to live interdependently, rather than independently. Yes, we *are* individuals; but we are part of a community and we must learn to respect the views of others.

HUSBANDS & WIVES

In Proverbs, the home is pictured as one where there is both a husband and a wife, and this relationship is the most important one in the home. Everything hinges upon this relationship being healthy. Certain aspects of the husband-wife relationship are highlighted:

GRATITUDE:

“He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord” (18:22).

“Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord” (19:14).

“A wife of noble character is her husband’s crown” (12:4a).

“A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life” (31:10-12).

Recall that Proverbs is a discussion between a father and a son. This is why the emphasis here falls upon finding a good *wife*. If this were a discussion between a father and a daughter, surely the emphasis would have been on finding a good husband. In either case, the idea is that *finding a husband or wife of noble character does not come automatically*. We should search for this kind of spouse wisely and, once we have found him/her, we should be grateful to God for the rare gift of a spouse of good character.

FAITHFULNESS:

“Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth” (5:15-18).

Proverbs makes it very clear that there should be mutual and exclusive commitment between husband and wife. No extra-marital relationships should ever be allowed to encroach upon the sanctity of the marriage covenant. Boundaries should be created to protect the marriage. And of course . . . the best defense is a good offense. Develop a healthy, satisfying, intimate relationship (emotionally and physically) between husband and wife so that you won’t be tempted to look elsewhere for your desires to be met.

COMMUNICATION:

“Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome (nagging) wife” (21:9).

“The proud and arrogant man – ‘ mocker’ is his name – he behaves with overweening pride” (21:24).

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (15:1).

For the husband or the wife, loving restraint in the choice of words, body language and kindness sets the table for an atmosphere of love and acceptance in the home. It models for the children (who are watching and learning) how to treat other people.

The principle that Proverbs is getting at is this: An environment of fighting and bickering is no way to live. The answer is not to run away and hide, rather, face the issues with gentle, understanding words that seek to bring about resolution and unity.

Proverbs just scratches the surface when it comes to marriage. If you wish to go deeper and learn wisdom on strengthening your marriage (or preparing for a healthy marriage), consider taking Oak Pointe's Loving Well marriage course. Results over several years has shown that this course helps couples get to the deeper issues that are hindering growth and intimacy in marriage.

PARENTS

In Proverbs, parents are portrayed as ‘teachers’ and ‘trainers’ while children are ‘learners’ and ‘disciples’ under their parents. Through their words and example parents instruct children in the way of wisdom. Through discipline they encourage their children to learn that there are consequences for their choices.

The foundational understanding for what it means to discipline (train) children comes from the way that God disciplines us as His children. God disciplines *those whom He loves*.

“My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in” (3:11,12 see also Hebrews 12:5,6).

Similarly, loving parents discipline their children so that their *character* can become fully formed. Proverbs speaks *often* about the importance of *training*.

“Discipline your children, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to their death” (19:18).

“Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire” (29:17).

“Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them” (13:2).

Teamwork is critical in parenting. Father and mother are most often mentioned *together* working as a team in the instruction of

children. Parents should first agree together as to their plans for raising children. Then, they should cooperate in the outworking and adjustment of the plan over time.

“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck” (1:8,9).

The parent’s sincere hope is that the children will take their learning into their adult lives and continue to reap the benefits of the ways of wisdom.

“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it” (22:6).

FATHERS

“Listen, my sons, to a father’s instruction; pay attention and gain understanding” (4:1).

“My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity” (3:1,2).

Proverbs 1-9 is a father-son discussion in which the father is teaching, warning and guiding his son in the paths of life. The primary responsibility of a father is to be the voice and example of wisdom in the home, giving instruction both by his words and example. The father must realize the weight he carries in giving guidance to the family unit.

MOTHERS

“The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down” (14:1).

“She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: ‘Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all’” (31:26-29).

Mothers play an especially important role in building a strong family. The home is her special platform for building up her children and influencing her relational world through her children and her peers. The mother must realize the *power* she has to build a

strong home and family. If married, she has an essential and integral role as co-discipler of her children with her husband.

CHILDREN

The entire book of Proverbs *is* a book for a maturing child. This in itself points to the priority of children *learning* from their parents. A son or daughter can bring great joy or grief to parents, depending on whether they live wisely or foolishly.

“A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son brings grief to his mother” (10:1).

“A wise son heeds his father’s instruction, but a mocker does not respond to rebukes” (13:1).

“A fool spurns a parent’s discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence” (15:5).

“May your father and mother rejoice; may she who gave you birth be joyful” (23:25).

A final thought on Proverbs:

Proverbs is a book of principles, not promises. Lady Wisdom is telling us how life works; but there are no guarantees. There will be exceptions to every rule. This is so true when it comes to trying to raise a great family. Some families will try to do all the right things, and the results will not be exactly as they had hoped. Life will be dotted with disappointments. On the other hand, some families will do all the wrong things, and great individuals will emerge from those chaotic homes. Life will be sprinkled with surprises. Lady Wisdom gives us *principles* of life that are true. Nevertheless, there are some truly unpredictable factors in life, namely: 1) human nature, and 2) the amazing grace of God. So, we do our best to live by the Wisdom of Proverbs, while always leaning into the grace of God to turn our failures into victories. And whatever issue Lady Wisdom addresses (wealth, work, words, purity, family) we always remember this: *there is no sin that is a match for the amazing grace of God.*