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A Father's Wise Instruction: Proverbs 1:1-10

By Tal Davis

Almost forty years ago, my father died in Tallahassee, Florida. It seems like only yesterday. The memories I have of him, my late mother, and my late sister, will never leave me. Since his death, I now have two grown sons of my own and two granddaughters. With Father's Day coming up soon. I thought it would be helpful to take an opportunity to address the issue of fatherhood from a biblical worldview perspective. First, I looked up what some famous people in history had to say about it.

- "When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years." - Mark Twain
- "A father carries pictures where his money used to be." - Anonymous
- "By the time a man realizes that maybe his father was right, he usually has a son who thinks he's wrong." - Charles Wadsworth
- "Life was a lot simpler when what we honored was father and mother rather than all major credit cards." - Robert Orben
- How to Diaper a Baby (a now lost art): "Spread the diaper in the position of the diamond with you at bat. Then, fold second base down to home and set the baby on the pitcher's mound. Put first base and third together, bring up home plate and pin the three together. Of course, in case of rain, you gotta call the game and start all over again." - Jimmy Piersal (late Major League baseball player and sportscaster)
- "My father used to play with my brother and me in the yard. Mother would come out and say,

- 'You're tearing up the grass.' 'We're not raising grass,' Dad would reply. 'We're raising boys.'" - Harmon Killebrew (late Hall of Fame baseball player)
- "There should be a children's song: 'If you're happy and you know it, keep it to yourself and let your dad sleep.'" - Jim Gaffigan (comedian)
- "There are 3 stages in a man's life: 1. 'My Daddy can whip your Daddy.' 2. 'Aw, Dad, you don't know anything.' 3. 'My father used to say'" - Dwight McSmith
- "The father of a daughter is nothing but a high-class hostage. A father turns a stony face to his sons, but when his daughter puts her arm over his shoulder and says, 'Daddy, I need to ask you something,' he is a pat of butter in a hot frying pan." - Garrison Keillor (radio personality and author of The Prairie Home Companion)
- "A man's children and his garden both reflect the amount of weeding done during the growing season". - Anonymous
- "It is admirable for a man to take his son fishing, but there is a special place in heaven for the father who takes his daughter shopping." - John Sinor (late columnist for the San Diego Tribune)
- "He opened the jar of pickles when no one else could. He was the only one in the house who wasn't afraid to go into the basement by himself. He cut himself shaving, but no one kissed it or got excited about it. It was understood when it rained, he got the car and brought it around to the door. When anyone was sick, he went out to get the prescription filled. He took lots of pictures ... but he was never in them." - Erma Bombeck (late writer and humorist)

Those are all interesting and true observations about fatherhood. I am sure there are dozens of other quota-

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tions and numerous books written about the subject. As Christians, we look to the Bible as our textbook for life, that includes on parenthood. So we ask, "What do the Bible say about being a father?" We could analyze a number of passages addressing fatherhood. One specific passage that speaks directly to the father's responsibility is found in the very first verses of the book of Proverbs. In this article we will examine that important portion of Scripture. If you are a father, or intend to be a father in the future, listen carefully to what the writer advises:

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel. (Proverbs 1:1 NASB)

Chapter One serves as something of a prologue to the whole book of Proverbs. It provides the purpose for all that is going to follow. It serves as a basis for what a father should teach his children.

The wise king begins with four essential purposes for Proverbs, and with principles all fathers should use as they instruct their children.

The first purpose for a father is to teach his children correct behavior.

*To know wisdom and instruction,
To discern the sayings of understanding,
To receive instruction in wise behavior,
Righteousness, justice and equity (Proverbs 1:2-3)*

The word "Wisdom" in Hebrew is *Chokmah*. It comes from a word that literally means to behave or act in the correct way, or do something well. It has both a practical skill element and a moral element. Someone can do a skill very well, but do it for evil or wrong reasons. For instance, an athlete may be great at a specific sport such as

baseball or basketball. However, if his only motivation is to gain fame and fortune, and he has no concern about doing right or wrong off the field or court, then he is acting unwisely.

Solomon lists four specific elements a father should teach in this regard. First, as we said, is wise behavior. Second is righteousness, that is to teach them what is right and wrong according to God's word. He next says they need to learn about justice. This is how we are to treat one another. Finally, he says to teach them equity. "Equity" can also be translated as "integrity" (CSB) or "fairness" (NIV).

The point is, a good father has the responsibility to teach his children what to do and why to do it. This principle was laid down clearly in the Old Testament law. Notice how and where (underlined below) Israelite parents are to instruct their sons and daughters about the reality of the one and only Lord God.

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4- 9 NASB)

Teaching children good behavior is a challenging job. It requires giving them both love and discipline. Sometimes that is a difficult balance. But love without discipline or discipline without love will suffice for neither. Especially when dealing with a child who is strong-willed.

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The late Howard Hendricks, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and regular speaker at Promise Keepers rallies, told the story of one very strong-willed little boy. He had done some bit of mischief, so his Dad brought him into the living room and told him to "Sit down!" The boy just stood there defiantly. So, the father repeated his order, "I told you to sit down!" Again his son stayed standing. So the father reached out and literally forced the boy to sit down in a chair. The boy looked up and said, "I may be sitting on the outside, but I'm standing on inside!"

Christian psychologist James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, many years ago, wrote a classic book on parenting called *The Strong Willed Child*. In the book and the video series that went with it, Dr. Dobson asserted that some kids are just wired to resist authority. He said, however, that it was both a good and bad quality. It is good because such a child will not be easily swayed to do things he or she does not want to do. Therefore, he or she will not easily fall prey to peer pressure. It is bad when the child resists doing what his or her parents expect. In that case, Dobson says, it requires a breaking of the child's will, but not of his or her spirit.

But just teaching good behavior is not all that is needed. A good father also gives his children wise counsel (vs. 4-6)

*To give prudence to the naïve (simple),
To the youth knowledge and discretion,
A wise man will hear and increase in learning,
And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,
To understand a proverb and a figure,
The words of the wise and their riddles.* (Proverbs 1:4-6)

This passage contains an interesting word: "wise counsel" (*tachbulah*)

(CSB; NIV: "guidance"). It derives from a word that literally means to steer a boat. That is to turn the wheel so the boat will go in the right direction. Now if you have ever steered a boat with an outboard motor, you know you have to turn the motor or rudder in the direction opposite of how you want to go. The same is true when trying to back up a trailer. Its not easy and can be confusing. Good Dads must steer their children in the right direction in life. Sometimes that's not easy either and can be very confusing.

That's what it means to give them sound advice or wise counsel. Children will often come to you for help in making decisions. This duty may extend well into their adulthood.

The most important job for a father is to direct his children to the knowledge of God. Listen to what Solomon says is the key to smart living.

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
Fools despise wisdom and instruction.
Hear, my son, your father's instruction
And do not forsake your mother's teaching;
Indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head
And ornaments about your neck.
My son, if sinners entice you,
Do not consent.* (Proverbs 1:7-10)

Verse seven, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge," is sometimes called the "Motto of the Proverbs." The same principle is found in other passages of Scripture.

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.* (Proverbs 9:10)

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
A good understanding have all those who do His commandments;*

His praise endures forever. (Psalm 111:10)

*And to man He said, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;
And to depart from evil is understanding." (Job 28:28)*

"Fear," in these contexts, means to show respect, awe, reverence, love, and, yes, FEAR of God (like a father). My wife and I recently visited Warm Springs, Georgia. In that small town, famous for its treatment of polio, is President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Little White House." It is actually where he died. One of Roosevelt's best known quotes, made at the height of the Great Depression, was, "All we have to fear is fear itself!" That may have been true in that economic crisis, but all we ever ultimately have to fear is God Himself.

That "fear of the Lord" must be taught. Dads must demonstrate that fear or respect to the Lord in how they conduct their lives. If children see no respect for God in their parents actions and attitudes, they are not likely to have any for Him either. Of course, a father's greatest goal should be to lead his sons and daughters to Christ. If you are a father, make this Father's Day a time of rededication to training up your children in the way of the Lord. And, if you are fortunate enough to still have your father with you, take time to tell him you love and honor him.

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