

“The Importance of a Dad”
Proverbs 4 (selected verses)
June 16th, 2019

Three young fathers were in the delivery waiting room. The first was told that his wife gave birth to twins. He was amazed and said, “I play baseball for the Minnesota Twins.”

Later, a nurse came out and told the second man, “Congratulations, you are the father of triplets.” He said, “That is amazing! I work for 3M.”

The man next to him fainted. When he woke up they asked, “What’s wrong?” He said, “I work for 7-Up.”

Not everyone here *is* a father, but everyone here *has/have* a father. This day when we honor fatherhood can arouse difficult emotions/memories for those who may have had/have a difficult relationship with their fathers. And, for many, our fathers are no longer with us this side of eternity. Despite such factors and others, it’s good for the Church to be taught about and reminded of the importance of Dads.

In 1909, **Sonora Smart-Dodd** of Spokane, Washington, one of six children raised by a single father, wanted to honor him. She suggested to her pastor that June 5th, her father’s birthday, be a day in which the church honored fatherhood. The pastor liked the idea, so the first Father’s Day observance took place 110 years ago in June 1909.

In 1966, President **Lyndon B. Johnson** signed an official proclamation of recognition of Father’s Day and made a request that flags be flown on all government buildings that day in honor of fatherhood. Father’s Day wasn’t made a national holiday until 1972 by President **Richard Nixon**.

After a week away with Jan and Zach to Washington, DC, I’m back to resume our study of the Old Testament book of Proverbs. I’ve called that study *Proverbs: Wisdom for Life*. For the last three months or so, we’ve taken a topical tour of Proverbs to see what it has to say about various subjects. To date, we’ve explored such concepts as friends and neighbors, pride, words, work, wealth, mothers, leadership, and self-control when it comes to food and drink. Today, Father’s Day, we explore what Proverbs teaches on the importance of fathers.

Proverbs 4 (selected verses):

Verses 1-5: “Hear, *my* children, the instruction of a father, and give attention to know understanding;
² For I give you good doctrine: do not forsake my law. ³ When I was my father’s son, tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, ⁴ he also taught me, and said to me: “Let your heart retain my words; keep my commands, and live. ⁵ Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.”

The refrain of verse 1 is mentioned in two more verses of this **4th Proverb**. Drop down to verse 10 where we read, “Listen, my son, accept what I say, and the years of your life will be many.” Now

verse 20 - “My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings.” These three verses begin different sections of this chapter featuring the address of a father to his son.

Notice something interesting in verse 2. The father speaking to his son here in **Proverbs Chapter 4** recalls that when he was young, his father taught him what he knew about the Lord. This crossing of three generations – grandfather to father to grandson – pictures the ideal. It is one primary way God grows His Church generation to generation – parents faithfully reading, teaching, and modeling God’s Word to their children. Passing the faith along to our kids!

It’s helpful to be reminded what the Bible says about **who** is a father before we look at what a godly father does. Before one can be a father, he must first be a husband! This is the clear and early teaching of sacred Scripture. It jumps out at us from the Bible’s second chapter! **Genesis 2:24** points that out as our first parents, Adam and Eve, came together in marriage. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” No children are yet mentioned here – they don’t begin to appear until **Genesis Chapter 4**.

How many of you remember the K-I-S-S-I-N-G nursery rhyme? We sang it often in my childhood, a time when any public display of affection brought embarrassment and tittering laughter. “Adam and Eve, sitting in the tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G. First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes Cain in a baby carriage.” It is unforgettable; I haven’t thought or sung that for many moons! But, it teaches what the Bible teaches – a man and a woman who first fall in love, then get married, then they have any children with which God may bless them.

I’m not sure if any of our young people are familiar with that little ditty, but we live in a very different time than when I first began to sing that nursery rhyme. Many people believe that changing times mean changing standards; but, that is not the way of the Word of God. Changing times are met with the unchanging Word of God faithfully preached, taught, and testified. The prophet Malachi wrote, “For I *am* the LORD, I do not change...” (**Malachi 3:6a**) “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever!” according to the author of Hebrews (**Hebrews 13:8**). This theological concept is called “immutability.” God does not change because God cannot change. He is a firm foundation; He “does not change like shifting shadows.” (**James 1:17c**)

Because God is immutable, we can rely upon Him and His Word! God’s Word doesn’t change with the times because **He** doesn’t change with the times. And, we must remember that we are **not** free to change God’s Word simply because we don’t like it or we’ve grown tired of it.

So, the seeming archaic standard that a man and a woman must not engage in premarital sex (or even to put themselves into the position where they may engage in it – shacking up) is not actually archaic. **It’s timeless!** Our children know that Jan and I long for grandkids. But, they also know we hope and expect they come about in God’s time, according to His Word. Get married first; then have the children!

These opening verses of **Proverbs 4** reveal that the godly father was imparting wisdom to his son even as his father imparted God’s Word to him. The substance of this father’s teaching was

doctrine! We have here a godly father who is taking the time and effort to pass on something of eternal value – “sound doctrine” (God’s Word). Dad, future dad, please take note – the most important thing you can pass on to your children is a belief in Jesus Christ based on the teaching of His Word. Your most important responsibility is to show your kids Jesus! Don’t expect that they’re godly, or growing in godliness, simply because they go to Sunday School, *Tnt*, or Polka Dot Girls each week. Those ministries are very good supplements; they’re ways the Church answers the Great Commission given us by Jesus, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;” (**Matthew 28:19-20a**) But, such ministries alone cannot replace the daily influence a godly father teaching his children to see the world through God’s eyes. Yes, make sure your kids are good young churchmen and women, participating in the various church ministries, but don’t stop there. If this isn’t happening in your home, then start today. Expect resistance, but don’t succumb. You are the parent; God will bless you.

Let’s look at one more passage from this 4th Proverb – Verses 20-27: “My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. ²¹ Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; ²² for they *are* life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh. ²³ Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it *spring* the issues of life. ²⁴ Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you. ²⁵ Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you. ²⁶ Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. ²⁷ Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil.”

The opening three verses impress upon us that listening to, and acting upon, God’s Word are matters of life and death. They can result in eternal life in glory if faithfully employed, or they can result in eternal condemnation if they are ignored. Or they are left up to the children to decide. That decision is a parental decision, not a child’s!

Verse 23, then, continues that important theme, but it’s not as apparent in the *New King James Version* as it is in others. “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it *spring* the issues of life.” I find the *New International Version* to be clearer when it reads, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”

Verses 24-27 – As your Savior, Jesus, Who died for you, claims *all* of you – from the top of your head to the soles of your feet – and everything in between! Notice the body parts mentioned in this passage – **ear** (v. 20); **eyes** and **heart** (v. 21); **heart** again in verse 23; **mouth** and **lips** in verse 24; **eyes** (v. 25); **feet** in verses 26 & 27. This, in turn, means that we are to deploy our very bodies for the gospel! The Apostle Paul urges Christians in his New Testament letter to the church at Rome – “in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” (**Romans 12:1**)

At the beginning of this message, I made reference to a couple of different US Presidents. *Do you remember who they are?* Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon. I’d like to close by sharing with you an appeal by another US President to his father-in-law (kind of a reversal of the order given us here in Proverbs 4, where the father is testifying to the son).

It was August 1982, and the man had just written a letter to his father-in-law, a pioneering neurosurgeon who lay dying. This is the last half of that letter:

“I know of your feeling — your doubt but could I just impose on you a little longer? Some 700 years before the birth of Christ the ancient Jewish prophets predicted the coming of a Messiah. They said He would be born in a lowly place, would proclaim himself the Son of God, and would be put to death for saying that.

All in all there were a total of 123 specific prophesies about His life all of which came true. Crucifixion was unknown in those times, yet it was foretold that He would be nailed to a cross of wood. And one of the predictions was that He would be born of a Virgin.

Now I know that is probably the hardest for you as a doctor to accept. The only answer that can be given is — a miracle. But Loyal (the father-in-law’s name) I don’t find that as great a miracle as the actual history of His life. Either He was who He said He was or He was the greatest faker & charlatan who ever lived. But would a liar & faker suffer the death He did when all He had to do to save Himself was admit He’d been lying?

The miracle is that a young man of 30 years without credentials as a scholar or priest began preaching on street corners. He owned nothing but the clothes on His back & He didn’t travel beyond a circle less than 100 miles across. He did this for only 3 years and then was executed as a common criminal.

But for 2,000 years He has ... had more impact on the world than all the teachers, scientists, emperors, generals and admirals who ever lived, all put together. The apostle John said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that who so ever believed in him would not perish but have everlasting life.”

We have been promised that all we have to do is ask God in Jesus’ name to help when we have done all we can — when we’ve come to the end of our strength and abilities and we’ll have that help. We only have to trust and have faith in His infinite goodness and mercy.

Loyal, you and Edith have known a great love — more than many have been permitted to know. That love will not end with the end of this life. We’ve been promised this is only a part of life and that a greater life, a greater glory awaits us. It awaits you together one day and all that is required is that you believe...

Love, Ronnie

Ronnie as in Ronnie Reagan, Ronald Reagan. He wrote this letter in 1982 while he was serving as our President. As his father-in-law, Loyal Davis was dying, President Reagan was faithful, as a man of God, to testify to the love, grace, and mercy of Jesus Christ in the letter he sent to him.

At the end of Loyal’s life, it is reported that he did turn to God. His daughter, Nancy (Reagan), was with him at the hospital, where he requested a chaplain to pray with him before he passed.

If you’re a believer in Jesus, be encouraged by this testimony, and go and do likewise. If you’re not a believer in Jesus, it’s not too late. Repent and believe, and you will be saved.