

Sunday 14th August Wisdom about parenting.

Scripture readings - various Proverbs

Proverbs 1:8

⁸ Listen, my son, to your father's instruction
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.

Proverbs 10:1

10 The proverbs of Solomon:

A wise son brings joy to his father,
but a foolish son brings grief to his mother.

Proverbs 17:6

⁶ Children's children are a crown to the aged,
and parents are the pride of their children.

Proverbs 22:6

⁶ Start children off on the way they should go,
and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

Proverbs 23:26

²⁶ My son, give me your heart
and let your eyes delight in my ways,

Proverbs 29:17

¹⁷ Discipline your children, and they will give you peace;
they will bring you the delights you desire.

Message: (Rev Louise)

Today we're continuing our sermon series on Proverbs after the break we had last week. Today we're thinking about parenting. I think parenting has to be the hardest job in the world.

I remember when I was pregnant with Rebekah - Paul and I read every baby magazine there was. We bought pretty much the whole of Waterstones parenting and child rearing section - we had so many books by experts on feeding, sleeping, playing, parenting styles.... Got this sussed I thought! How hard can it be? Just do what the book says.... What a shock to the system being a parent is. We brought her home from hospital, she was asleep in the car seat and we sat her in the middle of the front room. And we looked at each other and said, what the blooming heck do we do now?

It's hard work being a parent. And it doesn't come with a handbook - but perhaps we've just got to do what the book says.... Not the Gina Ford book on what makes a contented baby... I read that several times, but perhaps this book has more than we think on what right minded parenting looks like.

Let me remind you of what I said when we talked about marriage - I'm not a perfect wife, far from it. And I'm certainly not a perfect mother. You've met me. You've met Rebekah. So as always, this is a sermon to me first - as well as it's a sermon to us all. And if you've got little children, this is for you. If you've got teenage children, this is for you. If you've got grown up children, this is for you. And if you've not had children - well this is also for you. Because although the role of parenting is the subject of our sermon - I honestly feel, that is also takes a village to raise a child. It takes a family. It takes all of us. It takes all of us to love our church children, to model something of Christ to them.

I'm going to embarrass Lesley now. She'll hate me. Rebekah plays the flute. And I have single handedly failed in my parenting duties to encourage her to practice it regularly. I don't play nay musical instrument. I am probably the least musical person in this building at the moment. So Rebekah was on the verge of giving up her flute. Her school flute teacher wasn't helping encourage her. Which I mentioned in passing to Lesley. And before you knew if, Lesley and Rebekah struck up a flute practising friendship that has been delightful to watch.

Where outside the family, or in our case the church family - an idea that I know some of you may mind problematic, would that work? Lesley has encouraged my daughter no end. I think she enjoys it too. And others of you have also invested in my beautiful daughter in grace filled ways, for which I am profoundly grateful.

It takes a village to raise a child. So each of you who are praying for a Breakouter.... Remember those prayer cards we all had? It takes a village. We all have a role to play. Whether we are biological parents or not. So there is advice for all of us, in the gathered wisdom of Solomon and others this morning.

Being a Minister is sometimes like being Secretary General of the United Nations... being a Mum is like working for the Red Cross, the United Nations, Vogue Magazine, YouTube, Encyclopaedia Britannica and the Lancet rolled into one.

Geof read to us some wisdom on parenting from Proverbs. Remember that Proverbs in general is the wisdom that a Father gives his son as he starts out in life to find a wife and set out on his own. He's clearly reminding the younger generation of what has already been taught and imploring him that he brings that to mind in his life choices in the future.

**⁸ Listen, my son, to your father's instruction
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.**

**A wise son brings joy to his father,
but a foolish son brings grief to his mother.**

**⁶ Start children off on the way they should go,
and even when they are old they will not turn from it.**

Our children may test our patience, keep us awake at night and batter our ear drums during the day. But I hope we realise that they are a gift from God. A blessing.

Parenting may be the hardest job in the world, but it is also a privilege and a earth shatteringly awesome - in the real sense of the word - responsibility.

The book of Proverbs is full of snippets of wisdom. Proverbs 23:24 says this “ The father of a righteous man has great joy; he who has a wise son delights in him.” We can make that inclusive of mothers, sons and daughters can't we? And Proverbs 17:6 adds that “*grandchildren are a crown to the aged*”.

Proverbs sees two primary tasks for loving parents. Two key duties that every wise parent should perform if they want their children to grow up well.

The first is teaching. Parents are to take primary responsibility for teaching our children what is right and wrong, showing them what is true and false. Above all, we are to teach our children about the Lord. We are to introduce them to the God who made them, who loves them, and who sent his Son to save them.

Listen to these verses from Proverbs on the value of teaching and training our children:

- At the very start of the book, in chapter 1, children are told to “*Listen to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching*”.
- Proverbs 22:6 advises parents with the words: “*Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it*”.
- And Proverbs 14:26 says to parents: “*Whoever fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for their children he will be a refuge*”.

We are so fortunate that in this church family we are helped in this task by Dan, by the Breakout leaders, by all those who take our children and young people out every Sunday morning, or mid-week. And let's take this opportunity to recognise what a great responsibility we hand them when the children go out of those doors every Sunday morning. And what a fantastic job they do. When was the last time you thanked them? When you prayed for a Breakout leader? Or for Dan himself?

Some weeks I manage to prise out of Rebekah what they've been up to when they leave us. Some weeks I don't get to know! But that's okay, I trust them. But as much as I think Dan is one of the best youth workers I know, and I can say that because he's not here this morning he's on his holiday, so he can't get big headed.... Dan or any of the other Breakout leaders are not responsible for the raising of faith in my child. That is my job. Not as the Minister. But as the mother. I cannot delegate or abdicate my responsibility as a parent for my child's spiritual upbringing. I can't decide that for her. But my job is to model that.

My greatest parenting ambition so far was that Rebekah would one day know Jesus as her Lord and Saviour. That she'd come to faith. Her own owned faith. A faith that

was individual and known to her. Not acquired as being a child of the Manse - but someone who has fallen in love with Jesus herself. And you will all remember that her and Emma took that step of faith through the waters of baptism last year.

So Christian parents. Is that your number one ambition? Over anything else? Over what you want your child to do and to be? What you want your child to achieve and accomplish? Is it your number one ambition that they grow up to know and love the Lord Jesus for themselves? And they say that faith is taught and it's caught. It's modelled by us.

Children notice what happens at home. Now, before you all think I'm getting holier than thou - I find this bit the scariest bit. That who I am at my most real and honest. Who I am before my second cup of coffee in the morning. Who I am at my grumpy Mum/wife not nice Minister on a Sunday face - that's noticed.

And so spiritually so if you never pray. If you never read your bible. What do your children see of faith? If you get out of bed in the morning moaning that oh no, you've got to go to church again.... What do they learn about that Church is the priority place for the people of God to meet together and learn and grow together.

Faith is taught and it is caught. It starts at home. With Mum's and Dad's - or however your family is made up.... Showing that a personal faith in Jesus is of the greatest ever value.

The best thing that we can do for our children is for each one of us to personally get right with God and to walk in the way of the Lord the way that he showed us - with his prayers and his worship, the way he showed us - with his acceptance and his forgiveness, the way he showed us - with his reaching out to people to show them love - to bring them healing - and to teach them the truth. We teach our children by example. If we lead godly lives - then the odds are that they will lead godly lives. And of course it's not perfect science - and we have prodigal children - I'm very much aware of that.... But it's important.

As well as teaching our children, Proverbs tells parents that they must discipline their offspring. You see, Proverbs does not have a naïve or idealistic view of children. It knows that they sometimes need correction as well as instruction. They sometimes need reasonable chastisement as well as encouragement. Proverbs recognises that our kids are fallen and struggle with sin – just like the rest of us. This truth is summed up in Proverbs 22:15, which says “**Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but...discipline will drive it far away.**”

Without some form of discipline, Proverbs warns parents that our children will become wayward. Their bad habits will become character traits, their occasional bad behaviour will become the norm. As Proverbs 19:18 says: “**Discipline your children, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to their destruction.**” That sounds serious - but actually that's common sense. And Proverbs 13 states clearly that the parent

“who loves their children is careful to discipline them.” So that says to me something about boundary setting, about loving rules within sensible loving limits. Sounds a bit like how God deals with us His wayward children, doesn't it?

So Proverbs tells us that parents should take seriously their responsibility to train their children in goodness and godliness. It tells parents that if we love our children, we shouldn't be afraid to discipline them when necessary. Tough love, we'd call it today! Discipline is not a dirty word - in Solomon's day it may have involved corporal punishment... Proverbs 23: 13 says Do not withhold discipline from a child, if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.

Now in this room, there will be all sorts of opinions of the value of that. I'm not in the camp that thinks that is a helpful parenting practice- -but I know some of you will no doubt disagree with me.

Two weeks ago we thought about wisdom in marriage. From Solomon with his 300 wives and several hundred concubines. And today we're thinking about how to parent wisely. But there's also heaps of wisdom on both those issues outside of the gathered wisdom in the book of Proverbs.

Because the rest of Bible tells us that God himself is an eternal relationship of love. It tells us God's being is the ultimate family unit – a loving relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Three persons in relationship who can each help us to strengthen our own most precious relationships.

For example, God the Father is a great model for a husband and wife trying to show commitment and faithfulness to one another. As we follow the storyline of the Bible, as we read about the history of Israel and the life of the church, we see that God has shown total commitment to his people through thick and thin. He has kept every promises, his love has never waivered, and he has remained faithful even when his people have proved unfaithful.

God the Father is also a model for parents, both fathers and mothers. His love for his children is unwavering, and he gives us careful instruction and guidance in his Word. But he also disciplines those he loves. Listen to this verse from Hebrews chapter 12: *“Do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his child.”*

If we had time this morning we could delve into another Old Testament book that of Hosea. That's the story of a love song between God and his wayward children told between the story of Hosea and his wife, Gomer the sex worker.

I love that story. It's powerful and provocative. And it speaks of how God loves his children - his wayward children - how despite all the evil that they did - he continued to lead them with cords of human kindness and ties of love - how he continued to lift the yoke from their necks and bend down to feed them.

That's what God does for you and me. For each of us. Even when we are dead in our sin. Even before we knew Him - he reached out to us!

It is powerful stuff - the love that God has for us - and that is the love, that is the way, that we are called to raise our children in.

Crumbs. No pressure then people!

But we can't do it - we can't be successful parents in the way that God is a successful God - unless we walk in the way that God wants us to walk.

In Ephesians - and again in Colossians - Paul shares the word that he received from the Lord concerning children and their parents. In Ephesians 6 he writes ***"Children, obey your parents in the Lord - for this is right. Honour your mother and father - which is the first commandment with a promise - that if may go right with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."***

He continues (Ephesians 6:4) ***"Fathers, do not provoke your children - do not exasperate your children - instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord"***

Whatever you may think of Paul - these last words are surely inspired.

Do not provoke, do not exasperate your children
- do not break your promises to them - do not neglect them
- or mindlessly indulge their every whim so that they lose all respect for you
instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.....

When I reading around the subject of godly parenting this week preparing what I was going to say, I've read all sorts of things from Christian authors - a bit like those self help books I started talking about at the beginning of the sermon...

But I read one thing that had 6 things that successful biblical parenting requires us to...
I wonder what you think of these...

Successful biblical parenting requires us to-

- 1) Diligently teach our children biblical truth**
- 2) Model biblical truth before them**
- 3) Integrate biblical truth into their daily lives**
- 4) Help our children become personally involved in serving Christ**
- 5) Continuously offer fervent and often heartbreaking pray for our child's spiritual well-being**
- 6) Shield them from negative outside influences**

Parenting is never easy being a father - or a mother - has incredible challenges - incredible pains - as well as incredible joys.

We can do no better thing for our children than personally walking in the way we should go so that we can bring them up in that way and have the assurance that then, when they are old - they themselves will not soon depart from it.

All of us. Those with children of our own. Those who have children in their wider families and all of us in this church family.

Number 5 in our list is praying for our children's spiritual well being. End our time thinking about parenting by doing something very simple. On communion table are candles around a central candle. If there is a child or young person on your mind. For whatever reason. Be it your child. Or someone else's. Maybe you have a prodigal son or daughter and so this talk of training a child in the way he or she is to go has hurt like mad.... Maybe your child is going through hard times, be they little or grown up, Come say a prayer and light a tea light, a candle - such a small symbol of light in the darkness... Let God meet you here. Let God walk beside you. God loves us and parents us in order that we parent the children in our lives. Lesley going to play something.....