

Pearls from Proverbs

Proverbs for Parents

Sam Jones

Parenting is one of the most challenging roles facing individuals and couples. To take upon the responsibilities of parenthood is to undertake a serious, long-term task and also to enter into a sometimes perilous, sometimes exhilarating adventure. Some of the responsibilities of parenting can be intimidating: to protect and support the children until they launch into the world; to provide for their safety, comfort, education and health; to help them develop skills and values to function in society; but most of all to provide them with spiritual values and beliefs that will empower them to live in compliance with the rules and expectations of our Lord and society.

A great joy of life is listening to parents talk over and over about the pure excitement and pleasure that their children produce in their lives over the years. When they talk about their children, the “gleam” in their eyes is present. You are able to see the radiance of excitement and happiness beam from their faces. But more and more in recent years, I am hearing too many conversations from parents of the pain, anguish and misery which their children have contributed to their lives.

My oldest son is an assistant principal for one of the high schools in Jackson, Tennessee. He shares with me, on a weekly basis, some of his many observations. He has said to me too many times, “Dad, our children are in a state of crisis.” One of his duties is to address students

who will not comply with the rules and policies of the school. He further states two additional observations: "Many of the students have an 'I don't care attitude' about school and life in general," and "The parents of these students don't seem to care."

Often as I watch the six o'clock news, I find myself reminiscing and wishing for yesteryears. I find myself dreaming and reflecting on how things used to be and wondering what can be done to bring back the times which appeared to be so much better from a parenting perspective. It just seems that most parents once accepted parenthood and its responsibilities. Again, my son has stated to me that parents are saying to him, "Mr. Jones from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., he/she is your problem."

With this type of attitude affecting increasingly more parents, it is no wonder, then, that we are experiencing problems with our children. According to the **National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse** (2003), our children are at a "high risk" for substance abuse. The absence of effective parenting, in my opinion, has contributed to the following condition of our children: 25% smoke, 94% have tried alcohol, 43% drink alcohol in a typical week, 42% get drunk at least once a month, 79% have friends who use marijuana, and 71% have tried marijuana. Also, in 2003, **the Children's Defense Fund** gave the following report on the state of American children: every 9 seconds a high school student drops out, every 20 seconds a child is arrested, every 21 seconds a child becomes sexually active for the first time, every 60 seconds a child is born to a teen mother, every 4 minutes a child is arrested for drug use, every 8 minutes a child is arrested for a violent crime, every 3 hours a child is killed by a gun, and so on.

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Hopefully, now you can understand why I wish and dream for the days of yesteryears. Moses, in Deuteronomy 6:6-12, proclaims the importance of effective parenting and pleads with the parents to instill certain beliefs and values in their children before entering into the Promised Land. Why? Because the land was still inhabited by people who didn't know God or believe in Him. Because of the real possibility of their children being negatively influenced by these ungodly people, the parents were charged to teach and equip their children to remain faithful to God.

For years the parents gave heed to this charge – this exhortation. The children of the Israelites feared the Lord and served Him, and then the writer of Judges records one of the saddest verses in all of the Old Testament. Judges 2:10 says, "... And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers; and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel." [All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.]

The million-dollar question for this presentation is, what can we do as parents and grandparents to equip our children and grandchildren to face this ever-changing world? Solomon, the wise man, in his thought-provoking and insightful book known as Proverbs, offers advice, principles and truths for equipping parents to be better parents.

Let us now consider several proverbs or words of truth from the book of Proverbs to equip our children to remain faithful to God.

TEACH OUR CHILDREN TO BE CAREFUL IN THE SELECTION OF FRIENDS

One of the early truths given to young hearts by Solomon on how to handle temptation is, "...walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path" (Prov. 1:15). Our children will be invited by those in the world to "come with us." We must teach them to reject their invitations. God's warning is, "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away" (Prov. 4:14-15). Don't even discuss things with them. Paul told the Corinthians, don't deceive or fool yourself, if you continue to remain around bad influences, your life can become corrupted (1 Cor. 15:33).

TEACH OUR CHILDREN TO DEVELOP AN UNENDING TRUST IN THE LORD

This is the capstone principle or truth of a child of God—faith in God's care, promises and grace. Our children need to know assuredly that they can trust in God at all times. They should be taught not to put confidence in self or others, but their trust must be "in the Lord" (Psa. 40:4; 62:8; Prov. 28:26).

A very comforting text in the Bible is in 2 Chronicles 20. In the text, King Jehoshaphat was in a critical situation in life. Several nations, the Moabites, Ammonites and others on the side of Syria, planned to fight against God's people. Jehoshaphat was overcome with fear (2 Chron. 20:3). King Jehoshaphat did something that our children need to know to do when they are consumed with fears and insecurities. He revealed his dependence on God and not himself. He gathered Judah together and led them in a prayer of trust in God. Listen to

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a portion of his prayer, "O our God, wilt thou not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon thee" (2 Chron. 20:12). Children must be taught to trust in God (Eph. 3:20; 2 Cor. 9:8; Rom. 8:28).

TEACH OUR CHILDREN WHO GOD IS AND WHAT HE HAS DONE FOR THEM

In the text of Proverbs 4:3-8, Solomon states the godly teaching received from his father (1 Chron. 22:5; 29:1). Solomon allows us to see into the family of "the man after God's own heart" (cf. 1 Sam. 13:14), as he instructs his child in the fear of the Lord (1 Kgs. 2:2-4).

Lois and Eunice taught Timothy from a child about God (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14-15). Timothy developed a desire to serve God, because he was taught who God is and what He had done for him. Children need to know of God's deep and abiding love for them (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). If this knowledge remains in their repertoire, it could be a factor in keeping them faithful to God (Ecc. 12:1, 13-14).

TEACH OUR CHILDREN TO PROTECT THEIR HEARTS

Satan knows this Biblical truth, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he..." (Prov. 23:7). A person's words and actions tell a lot about him or her. Satan is going to do everything that he can do to corrupt the hearts of our children (Luke 22:31-34). Listen to the exhortation of Solomon to parents, teach them to "keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

The heart is the center of a person's treasure. Teach our children to know their hearts, if they are going to be able to keep them from evil. Nothing is more difficult, and

yet nothing is more necessary. Satan knows what so easily entangles our children (Heb. 12:1). Thus, they must know their hearts, then they will know their weak points.

The importance of guarding the heart is seen in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Later, Jesus again tells His disciples of the importance of the heart, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). Plead with your children to guard their hearts!

TEACH OUR CHILDREN TO BE PEOPLE OF INTEGRITY

The truth of Proverbs 19:1 is that a life in poverty is better than a life in a mansion without God. Better is the poor man, than he whose riches lift him up in his own eyes, and he is given up to his wickedness and foolishness (Prov. 28:6). Paul warned Timothy of the danger of being controlled by the riches of this world, then striving to have a relationship with the Lord (1 Tim. 6:17-19). It is better to be homeless, than live in a castle without God! Was not Job on the dunghill, walking in his integrity, better than ungodly Ahab on the throne (Job 2:7, 8)? Wasn't Lazarus in his rags better than the rich man in all his fine linen (Luke 16:19-23)?

How priceless is a good reputation! This is the point of Proverbs 22:1. A good name or reputation is something that our children need to be encouraged to strive for more than great riches. A good name will be an everlasting remembrance (cf. Acts 9:36-39).

**TEACH OUR CHILDREN TO RETAIN
BIBLICAL TRUTHS GIVEN TO THEM
BY THEIR PARENTS**

Solomon challenges parents to teach children the boundary lines set by God (Prov. 22:28). God has given all spiritual authority to His Son (Matt. 28:18; John 17:1-2; Heb. 1:1-2). Jesus has set the boundary of what must be obeyed to please Him (Heb. 5:9). The boundary of what must be obeyed shouldn't be removed—it is forbidden (2 John 9).

For everyone who wants to please Jesus and our Father, Jesus has set boundary lines of what all must believe. These lines include these doctrines: baptism is essential for salvation (Mark 16:15-16; 1 Pet. 3:21; Rev. 20:6); it matters how we worship God (John 4:24; Col. 3:16; Matt. 15:9); and love not and remain not conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 6:17-18; 1 John 2:15-17). These boundary lines and others must be known by our children and not moved or altered.

**TEACH OUR CHILDREN TO BE WILLING TO
MAKE NECESSARY CHANGES**

The final truth to be presented is found in Proverbs 27:1. Listen to this wise man's truth for our children, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." This is very similar to James' exhortation, "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor..." (Jas. 4:14). Tomorrow is not ours to boast about, because there is no promise that we will be alive.

The Hebrews' writer tells us today, if you hear God's word, don't harden your hearts (Heb. 3:8). Don't reject the Lord's will; obey it because tomorrow is not

promised. Each day a part of me wants to go back to August of 1974. My oldest brother, Billy, said to me on a Wednesday night, "On Sunday, Sammy, I want you to baptize me." I was filled with joy and excitement. My first convert into Christ was going to be my brother. My brother died Saturday morning from a blood clot to the brain. I didn't get to baptize my brother into Christ. The time to obey the gospel is today. Please emphasize to our children the need to obey the gospel today. Also, they need to realize the urgency of removing sin from their lives. Solomon wrote in Proverbs 28:13 that a child of God will not prosper until he/she decides to turn from sin. Our children need to know that today is the day to turn and serve a true and loving God.

These are just some of the many wonderful truths about parenting in this thought-provoking book. Just imagine what schools, communities and cities would be like if we could get parents to embrace these truths and instill them into their children.

Years ago, a young man looked at the condition of God's people and wondered what could be done to change the lives of people (cf. Jer. 8:22). As we ponder what can be done to save our children, the answer is given by Solomon, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). My prayer, my wish, my hope is for those of us who are parents and grandparents to rise up and make a difference. Be sure that these truths and others are safely embedded in the hearts of our children.

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Sam Jones is Vice President for Academics and Professor of Sociology, Family Studies and Bible at Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tennessee. He also preaches for the Oak Grove church of Christ in Henderson, Tennessee.