

A Faith Worth Imitating

Proverbs 1:8-9

According to a 26-year study where researchers followed the lives of those in the study, the strongest factor indicating whether children practiced high levels of empathic concern for others in their adult years was whether they had an involved father in their lives. In fact, according to their findings father care was a stronger indicator than the top three other strongest maternal factors combined. (*Pastor's Weekly Briefing* 8/5/11)

The millennial generation (those born between 1980 and 2000) is the least Christian U.S. population group. Thom Rainer, president and CEO of LifeWay Resources, estimates only 15% are Christian. With a total U.S. Millennial population of 80 million, that means 70 million are not Christians. (*Facts & Trends*, Summer 2011)

Twenty-five million copies of the Bible are sold in the U.S. annually. Yet, the U.S. is now the fourth largest lost nation in the world. According to George Barna in his book *Futurecast*, the fastest growing faith group in America is the Skeptics, comprised of both atheists and agnostics. This group has doubled in the last 25 years.

From his book *The Father Connection*, Josh McDowell provides some additional sobering statistics when he writes: "We are faced with the daunting task of raising children amid a culture in crisis. Research tells a statistical horror story of what is happening *every day* in America." The following statistics were taken from the Children's Defense Fund and the book *13th Generation* as well as a *Fortune* magazine special report, "Children in Crisis: The Struggle to Save American's Kids."

- 1,000 unwed teenage girls become mothers
- 1,106 teenage girls get abortions
- 4,219 teenagers contract a sexually transmitted disease
- 500 adolescents begin using drugs

- 1,000 adolescents begin drinking alcohol
- 135,000 kids bring a gun or other weapon to school
- 3,610 teens are assaulted; 80 are raped
- 2,200 teens drop out of high school
- 7 kids (ages 10-19) are murdered
- 7 juveniles (17 and under) are arrested for murder
- 6 teens commit suicide

That's every day in these United States.

McDowell goes on to say in his book that "the task of being a father is of critical importance, and it has never been more so than in this day and age. A child's relationship with Dad is a decisive factor in that young man or woman's health, development, and happiness." We can't emphasize enough the importance of an ongoing and growing relationship with kids into and including adulthood.

Listen carefully to the following:

- Dr. Loren Moshen of the National Institute of Mental Health analyzed U.S. census figures and found the absence of a father to be a stronger factor than poverty in contributing to juvenile delinquency.
- A group of Yale behavioral scientists studied delinquency in forty-eight cultures around the world and found that crime rates were highest among adults who as children had been raised solely by women.
- Dr. Martin Deutsch found that the father's presence and conversation, especially at dinner time, stimulates a child to perform better at school.
- A study of 1,337 medical doctors who graduated from Johns Hopkins University between 1948 and 1964 found that lack of closeness with parents was the common factor in hypertension, coronary heart disease, malignant tumors, mental illness, and suicide.
- A study of 39 teenage girls who were suffering from anorexia showed that 36 of them had one

common denominator: the lack of a close relationship with their fathers.

- Johns Hopkins University researchers found that “young, white teenage girls living in fatherless families...were 60% more likely to have premarital intercourse than those living in two-parent homes.
- Research by Dr. Armand Nicholi found that an emotionally or physically absent father contributes to a child’s (1) low motivation for achievement; (2) inability to defer immediate gratification for later rewards; (3) low self-esteem; and (4) susceptibility to group influence and to juvenile delinquency.
- A 2001 report conducted by the Southern Baptist convention revealed that over 70% of teenagers involved in church youth groups stop attending church within two years of their high school graduation. A similar report indicated that 88% leave church at age 18.

Years ago before the nightly news came on at 10:00 the question was asked “do you know where your children are?” The idea was that parents ought to make sure their children were in the house at a decent time. It has been suggested that the question should be restated today to ask “do you know where your children are spiritually?”

The statistics I have share suggest we are in a crisis, a crisis of faith. We live in a day and age where families are fractured more than ever. Kids are growing up wondering what the big deal is about Christianity. They don’t see its relevance as they observe parents or other people in their church not living the standards they say they believe. **So what hope is there for our children and grandchildren and our great grand-children to keep the faith?**

You may be thinking that these statistics or the passage we will consider today doesn’t apply because my kids are all grown and gone or I don’t have any kids, but I assure you that there is relevance for each of us from this passage. With

that in mind take your Bibles and turn to **Proverbs 1:8-9**.

To honor God’s Word please stand while I read this passage aloud.

If we hope to avoid our children becoming one of the statistics I just mentioned, this passage gives some clues and some hope. We’ll find that it is the responsibility of the parents to teach and live what is right as well as the responsibility of the child to hear and obey what is taught. The greatest challenge we face is to stay strong in our own Christian faith and model Biblical principles in daily living. It is our responsibility, our duty if we want our kids to grow up with strong faith to approach our teaching with unconditional love and grace, holding on to our convictions with confidence in the wisdom God gives us to live and teach godly principles. It should be our desire, our endeavor to raise up what George Barna calls “spiritual champions.” In these days we need to seek God’s wisdom as we raise the next generation to walk with and live for Christ whether parent, teacher, or church member.

Today I would like us to consider two points:

The wisdom of godly parents – v. 8-9

The walk of godly people

I. THE WISDOM OF GODLY PARENTS – v. 8-9

Watch the news on television or catch snippets through the internet we see that there is an ever increasing organized attack on the institution of family by those who want everyone to be politically correct. Through television sitcoms, talk shows, and the liberal news bias they are working to normalize lifestyles that Scripture says is wrong. The crux of it is their attempt to undermine and redefine the role of the father and the place of traditional marriage in society including the role parents play in the raising of children. There is an obvious bias in our culture against these institutions.

Articles in the *American Psychologist* show a very clear absence of discussion about father's in their research. Organizations are out to remove any and all barriers that stand in their way to change the view of the family and eliminate the role of fathers altogether.

In an article titled "*The Non-Essential Father*", the author concluded that we don't need fathers because fathers were an invention of man in order to provide for the needs of the family. The author states that fathers have a two-fold responsibility: provide monetarily for the family for essentials like food and shelter and for procreation. Now with things like child support, welfare and sperm banks the author claims that the father figure is no longer necessary. Our culture is attempting to normalize single and gay/lesbian parenting as acceptable in an effort to eliminate the traditional family. A recent new article indicated that the traditional family is obsolete.

But other unbiased research reveals something entirely different about the well-being of children within the context of traditional families. It bears witness to the importance a father has in the family, more than just putting bread and butter on the table or for procreation. There is sufficient enough research to substantiate the critical role fathers have in society and especially in the home with children.

Notice again our passage as it indicates the mutual and active role both the mother and father have in training their children. First of all we need to notice that it implies what we discovered last week that any instruction begins with fearing the Lord. It is critical for anyone giving instruction that they be in a growing relationship with the Lord, to reverence Him and His Word. If we want to raise godly sons and daughters, we need to be godly ourselves. If we want our kids to follow God's ways, we too must be following God's ways. The premise of our instruction must begin with God.

We find then in **verse 8** first of all that godly parents teach because it is right.

A. They Teach Because it is Right – v.8

From our text we see that it is the duty of both parents to be involved in the upbringing of children. It is not to be delegated primarily to the mother, with the father only having incidental contact.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

NLT – “Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Parents must take the primary role of instructing children about the things of God. We cannot abdicate the responsibility of teaching our children to the church. The command to teach our children begins at home.

One of the first Sunday schools was started by Robert Raikes in 18th century England. He offered a school on Sundays to children living in the slums as an attempt to prevent them from descending into crime. In that era, wealthy children were tutored. Middle class boys attended a grammar school while girls were left to learn from their mothers or their father's library. Raikes started his school to teach children from the slums using the Bible as his text. Sunday school grew to become religious education. Consequently parents turned over their God given responsibility to the church.

If anything, the church should be supplementing what is being taught in the home. We don't hear much these days about having a family altar or what we call these days as family devotions. **When was the last time you sat down as a family and read from the Bible and talked about it? When was the last time you drove home after a morning service and discussed the message or Sunday school class?**

Often the conversation is focused on what you are having for dinner when you got home, what the plans were for the afternoon, and if you do have kids at home, what homework they still had to get done before Monday. Kids with phones probably texted some friends to see what they were doing and if they wanted to get together later in the day.

Take the necessary time to engage in discussion around the Bible. If you're reading through a chapter of Proverbs each day why not read it together and spend a few minutes talking about it. Work on the Sunday school questions together. Schedule it in your day or the week. I had a professor in college who would say that the family who prayed together stayed together.

All of us and not just those who are parents or those who have children still at home need to engage with God's Word. We all have a responsibility in this. God's command is very clear that we are to meditate on His Word and then from our time of pondering it pass it on to the next generation. When we meditate on and correctly apply the principles of God's Word we are then in a position to impress those truths on our children and grandchildren. Ethical and Biblical teaching is done best in the context of the home, not in formal education. How much instruction can you really get in a half hour Sunday school class or a 45 minute message? There is greater opportunity in the home to teach by example if we take the time to teach using daily life encounters.

The command of God was to give Biblical instruction throughout the day so that kids could see

how to relate what the Bible teaches with everyday life experiences.

There is a command given in verse 8. The command is for the son to "hear" or "listen." The word means to have knowledge or to listen intently to gain knowledge, to learn from what we hear. The word also implies the idea of obeying what is heard. Instruction is given in such a way that a decision is required by the one who is listening. James says we should be doers of the Word and not hearers only. Listening equals understanding plus action.

Instruction then is to be given so that it is clear to the listener what he or she is to do, what action is required. This comes not just in what is said but how it is lived out. If we are telling our children to do something, we should already set the example in our actions. Effective hearing involves understanding and obedience. We should strike from our vocabulary the notion that our kids should do as I say not as I do. Teaching comes both by our instruction and by our example.

This verse also implies that parents have godly wisdom to pass on, that they are practicing what they are preaching. **So what is to be taught?** The word teaching in the Hebrew is torah. Parents were specifically to teach God's law. That was the command in Deuteronomy 6. This teaching would be with them all their days. It implies that they listen and retain what is taught. **"Listen to your father's instruction...and don't forsake your mother's teaching."**

Proverbs 10:1, 17

Proverbs 15:5, 20

To forsake something is to leave or abandon it, to reject it. The word initially meant to thrust off, to push away. It conveys the idea of finality or completely. To forsake a parent's teaching is to forsake God Himself, because He is the one who has put the responsibility of teaching on the shoulders of the parents. The wise son or daughter

will not reject such instruction, but cherish it, hold to it and obey it. That's why it's so important for us to set the example of doing what we are teaching.

They teach because it's right.

They teach because it's rewarded.

B. They Teach Because it is Rewarded – v. 9

Those who follow the wisdom of their parent's teaching are adorned with grace and honor. Notice the metaphor used here. The beauty of what adorns them through their obedience is like getting the wreath of a victor placed on their head or like the beauty of a well-crafted necklace.

A necklace was worn by leaders of a nation depicting their rank or status. Obedience to parent's teaching is like an attractive wreath or necklace.

They are both grace and honor. Charm and beauty are yours for obedience to the parent's teaching God's ways and God's Word.

Your parents know you better than anyone else. They fed you, clothed you, and changed you. They saw you grow, and how you responded to life's lessons. They know your personality and realize that every child is different in they should be raised. Parents have the potential to give you greater advice than anyone else. Teachers only have you for a few hours a week. Friends tell you only what you want to hear.

Parents have the best opportunity to know what you need.

Their knowledge of you provides them with the best vantage point to give sound, Biblical instruction.

Another reason you should listen to parents is their experience.

They have been where you are. They were once children too.

They are now where you are headed. Someday you too will be an adult so they know what you are

going through and what it takes to get to that stage in life.

They may have experienced some things in life that they hope to keep you from experiencing. Learn from their experience.

Then, learn from their wisdom. Believe it or not, parents are pretty smart. You would be wise to listen to them. They have an accumulation of wisdom that has been passed on from others including their parents.

You will be amazed when you become an adult and have your own kids what advice you will call and ask your parents for. Be wise and listen.

Proverbs 4:1-4

George Washington once admitted that the greatest teacher he ever had was his mother.

“Nothing is so strong as a mother's influence” and nothing is as important as the role of the father. Hopefully, their wisdom is wisdom that comes from God's Word.

When we listen to the sound wisdom and instruction of our parents it is like beautiful jewelry that is worn to make us more attractive or handsome.

Adam Clarke wrote that “respect and obedience will be as ornamental to you as crowns, diadems, and golden chains and pearls are to others.”

John Gill said “the instructions and laws of parents being attended to and obeyed by children, render them more lovely and amiable than any beautiful ornament that can be put on their heads.”

Compare that to the outcome of those who reject or forsake their parent's teaching.

Proverbs 20:20

Proverbs 30:17

According to the OT law, the penalty for cursing one's parents or rebellion against parents was death.

Leviticus 20:9 “If anyone curses his father or mother, he must be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother, and his blood will be on his own head.”

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 “If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elder at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elder, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.”

That was the law in the Old Testament and was serious punishment. We now live under God’s grace, but that does not mean we can do as we please.

There is wisdom from godly parents. Now consider the walk of godly people.

II. THE WALK OF GODLY PEOPLE

For Christmas David got the pocket version of the game Simon. It beeps out a pattern that you are to follow in some random order. As the game progresses the pattern becomes more difficult to follow. If you miss the pattern, a buzzer sounds letting you know that you lost. The object is to follow the pattern.

What kind of pattern are we setting for the next generation? We need to equip them to lead the church right.

That should be our ambition as adult Jesus followers to the generations coming up behind us. We should be a pattern for them to follow. I have 10 things that I think are important in teaching those coming up behind us about a faith that seeks to

follow God, a faith we want to pass on to the next generation.

1. Display faith that is real. Kids are desperate to see a faith that is genuine and authentic. They can smell a pretender from a long way off. If we want our kids to follow Christ we cannot have a faith that is casual. To them, that’s phony. Kids need to see that we don’t just live out faith for a few hours on Sunday. They need to see that faith fits into a worldview that includes Biblical teaching for daily living.

2. Display faith that is relevant. By that I mean that faith has a direct bearing on what is happening in their world right now. They need to see how the principles of the Bible fit into the context of life as it’s happening to them in the moment. **Does Scripture speak to me about tests and temptations and break ups and self-esteem and pimples and flipping burgers? Why does the Bible matter to me right now?** They need to see that Proverbs is sound advice for every situation in everyday life.

3. Display faith that is relational. They have heard a hundred times that Christianity is not a religion it’s a relationship. They need to see that Christ is relational and wants a personal relationship with them. They need to see how they fit in to the body of Christ. They need to know there is value in who they are right now and that they don’t have to grow up first before they can serve. They need to see that the Bible gives sound advice and can be trusted to help them navigate through the maze of relationships. They need to see how to establish solid friendships that help them grow.

4. Display faith that is resilient. When they are stressed and stretched from all that life throws at them they need to see from your example that faith will help them stand on firm ground. They need to see the resiliency of a faith that will help them

bounce back from times of hurt or disappointment or trials that seem unbearable.

5. Display faith that is resolute. Kids need to see that we are determined to keep our focus on Christ when things are tough. They need to see a faith that stands firm in the Lord when the storms of life come crashing down. They want to see whether you're built on the solid rock or the sandy shore. They need to see that your **"eyes are fixed on Jesus" (I Corinthians 12:2-3)** so that when opposition comes you don't grow weary or lose heart. They need to see faith that doesn't waver, that doesn't give up or give in.

Like David you proclaim this one thing I desire...

Like Paul you press on to the goal...

They want to see if your faith is unwavering.

6. Display faith that is responsive. By that I mean are you ready to give an answer for the hope that is in you. I don't mean that you obnoxiously ooze Scripture in response to everything that happens or that is said. What I mean is that when asked you have a good grasp of Scripture to help in time of need, something that will encourage, comfort and strengthen. They want to see your answers from the wisdom of God not the philosophies of man. You can make Scripture simple to understand and apply to what they are going through.

7. Display faith that is radiant. Kids want to see Christ in you. **Do you exemplify Christ? Do you let your light shine? Are you joyful even in tough times?**

8. Display faith that is reliable. Kids want to see that you keep your word, that you're trustworthy and dependable. They are living in a world that is unreliable. Heroes let them down and they feel like no one can be counted on, that the only person they can really trust is themselves. They need you to be reliable. They need to see that God is reliable and trustworthy, that He always

keeps His promises and they see that in you whether you believe it or not.

9. Display faith that is reproducible. **If our faith is all we say it is, are others curious about it and are we seeing people come to Christ? Are we setting an example that is easy to follow or are we inconsistent? Does it leave them confused about what we really believe?**

10. Display faith that is restorative. Kids want to know that when they blow it in some way, that we will forgive them. **We talk about being forgiving, but are we really?**

Parents/People have a lot of responsibility to set a good example of godly living, to be a model worthy to follow. Kids have the responsibility to listen and obey. We have a tremendous responsibility to teach our children to follow God. Proverbs provides guidance for us to instruct them in godly living, but it begins with getting our own house in order first. If we aren't following God as we should, then it will be no wonder if they choose to reject what you teach. We may be the closest thing to God that they may see. **Are we giving them a good pattern to follow?**

It's a question each of us should ask whether a parent or not.

Voddie Baucham in his book *Family Driven Faith* states that "sending young people out into the world without a biblical worldview is like sending an athlete onto the field without a playbook." We cannot pass on to them a Biblical worldview if we ourselves don't have one. Proverbs provides a good foundation on which to provide Biblical principles for our sons and daughters to live by. But, as we said last week, it begins with our fearing the Lord.