

“Father Knows Best”**Proverbs 4:1-27**

Well, to all of you who wear the fatherhood badge both by title and by your untold expertise in everything from putting together bicycles until 2a.m. to fishing to auto-mechanic to kite flier to ball catcher to you name it - Happy Father's day.

Did you ever engage in that age old battle of debating with another child which Dad was better?

The signs of our changing times were evident in a recent argument between two boys over the superiority of their respective fathers. After several heated exchanges about the greater strength and ability of their Dads, one boy shouted, “Well, my Dad's phone is smarter than your Dad's phone!”

A father was rushing to get his young daughter off to school one day and inadvertently turned right on a red where it was prohibited. After completing the turn he realized his mistake and told his daughter that he had just made an illegal turn. His little girl tried to encourage him by declaring, “It's all right. The police car behind us did the same thing.”

One evening after dinner a mother overheard the following exchange between her husband and their preschool-aged daughter. “Daddy, you're the boss of the house, right?” The father responded that indeed he was the boss of the house. To which she replied, “Cause Mommy put you in charge.”

It is tragic that for years sitcoms have put fathers in a position of being an old dimwitted imbecilic duffer who is incompetent to make decisions and always screws something up. How unfortunate that fatherhood is put in such a poor light when in a 2009 national survey conducted by the Rasmussen Report revealed that 75% of American adults think that being a father is the most important role for a man in today's world.

I have been reading this book, *The Father*

Connection – How you can make the difference in your child's self-esteem and sense of purpose, by Josh McDowell. While it is primarily about important lessons that we can learn to help us be a great father while our children are still in the home, I would recommend it to you regardless of how old your children are. If you know someone who is having a baby it would make a great gift to the soon to be Dad. As a matter of fact I would recommend to everyone to read, grandparents, aunts, uncles, even if you don't have children. It is a way to pray for those who have kids and boy, we sure need prayer. The basic principle of the book is that in order for us to be good fathers, really in order for us to have good relationships with anyone – spouse, child, relative, neighbor, co-worker – we must have a connection with The Father – we must have a good connection with our Heavenly Father. It's a great book with some questions at the end of each chapter that make you think.

Josh McDowell writes, “As I strengthen my connection to God, I strengthen my connection to my children and enhance the effectiveness of my relationships and interaction with them.”

The key to this two-sided Father Connection is the realization that God the Father is not only the incomparable model of effective fatherhood, He is the indispensable resource for becoming the father you long to be. The Father Connection is not mere imitation, not simple emulation; it is association. It isn't about knowing how; it's about knowing Who!”

As I have told couples I counsel for marriage, it's the same advice for each of us, the kind of relationship we have with God will determine the kind of relationship we have with others.

I don't know of any father out there who honestly felt totally prepared for this thing called fatherhood. We can manage huge firms, have a handicap of 4 on the golf course, diagnose an engine problem or an illness, and a myriad of other tasks that require

finesse, but give us a 7 pound bundle of flesh wiggles wrapped in some soft little foofoo blanket and we're like deer in head lights. Now what do I do? It is a frighteningly huge responsibility. More than we realize. Statistics are alarming in our culture of the impact on children when the father is absent either emotionally or physically. Your direct involvement in their lives will to a large degree determine their health, development and happiness. Fathering comes with struggles. There are days of frustration, days when I blow it big time, but I'm grateful for God's grace and forgiveness and the forgiveness of children who accept my apology when I need to ask their forgiveness. It is at the same time both frightening and rewarding.

And Moms of all ages you play a significant role in how your children see their father. You more than anyone else have the power to demonstrate your support or undermine them before your children. We stumble along in this thing called fathering no matter what age we are and we need you to encourage us in front of the kids of all ages.

Monday, Robyn was out putting some cages on the tomato plants. David was running around the yard trying to catch some bugs in his cool bug catcher wrist band he got last Sunday in Church. I was on the porch enjoying the breeze coming through the screen reading this book. He came in and asked if I was reading my sermon and if I would please come and help him catch a spider. I said that it was about my sermon but then told him he was my best sermon. What is more important? I put the book down and we went spider hunting.

After school was over for the year he brought home all the things from his desk, I was going through some of his papers and was leafing through his notebook. Let me read some of the things he wrote.

My Sunday

We go to church every Sunday. When the Pastor, who is my Dad, is done preaching we go home. But

before we go home Mom or Dad locks up the church. Then my Dad is done. Then he puts it in his pocket and Mom puts it in her purse.

Dad (18!)

Dad is a Pastor. Sometimes he takes me to school. Dad helps me sometimes. My Dad is good at Legos. Dad is the best!!!!!!(6) The teacher gave him a smiley face for that one.

Talk about pressure. The pressure of sinking a game winning three pointer to clinch the title or closing some big business deal doesn't compare to the pressure of being a Dad, of measuring up to their expectations. The passage I have selected today to challenge Fathers of all ages is a passage that really speaks to everyone. Of course, being that we are winding our way through Proverbs in a study that looks at ancient wisdom for modern times, I have selected as our text **Proverbs 4:1-27**. Turn there with me.

I. A FATHER IS A MAN OF COUNSEL – v. 1-9

Counsel is offering advice. It's based on any number of factors. It could come from experience, lessons learned through the school of hard knocks. It is there you find truths that are important to pass on. They may be simple things like the best shaving cream to use or how to handle a difficult boss. Through the years you have learned some important lessons that you want to pass on to your children.

We counsel from education. We counsel through exhortation or edification. In life counsel given may be good or bad. Rehoboam had just taken over office as king from his Dad, Solomon, who was the wisest man to ever live. He sought counsel from his father's advisers and from his own peers. He chose to accept foolish counsel and the kingdom was split. The wise father counsels from his wisdom.

If you want to be a good father, give good counsel. Notice from these verses the kind of counsel he gave.

A. His Counsel is Solid – v. 1-2

He begins by inviting his children to listen or hear. It's more than just giving time to hear what someone has to say. The word means to make a conscious effort to pay close attention, and then to do what is said, to comprehend it or understand it and then obey it.

I'm sure you have had times where you felt like the advice you have given went in one ear and out the other. You think to yourself that it's like talking to a 20 foot brick wall or that your words of wisdom were just a waste of your time and breath because they just won't listen or you're speaking a foreign language. Solomon is not offering some suggestion. He's not telling his sons to take it or leave it. In the tense of the words used this is a command. "Pay attention, listen up. What I'm telling you is important stuff to know, so don't throw it out with the trash or dump it along the side of the road. It's not like road kill."

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."

Our responsibility as fathers is to counsel them with godly principles. Don't just talk to them about changing the oil or making good career choices or selecting a good spouse or how to throw a curve ball. Teach them Biblical principles to live by. We

are to impress the commands of God on their heart. To impress is to leave a mark or an imprint, something that is lasting. Teach them to love God all the time.

Proverbs 22:6 "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

"Point your kids in the right direction-- when they're old they won't be lost." (The Message)

Most kids are going to mess up somewhere along the way, so don't be surprised. They're going to make bad decisions. We did. **What makes us think that this generation or the next generation is somehow going to be different?** They aren't. Abraham did. Isaac did. Jacob did. But in the end they followed God. We need to teach them what right choices to make, point them in the right direction and then guide them with our own example. And when they mess up, continue to give them solid counsel and genuine love rather than telling them they better straighten up or else or that they're losers. Demonstrate grace and love even when they mess up, not just when they do good. That doesn't mean kids have the freedom to go out and mess up or take advantage of Dad. This is a command. Listen and obey.

If they are given solid counsel from Biblical standards, they may veer off course sometime but this verse says that eventually because they have received the right counsel, they will return to the truth. Make sure your counsel is solid.

B. His Counsel is Seasoned – v. 3-4

This is counsel that has stood the test of time. Solomon is speaking now about his own childhood and how he was counseled by his own father, referring to David. Every generation has the responsibility to pass on solid counsel to the next generation. **How are we doing?** Don't abdicate that responsibility and leave it to the schools or to the

government. You can bet your bottom dollar that their counsel won't always be right or righteous. They're teaching kids that truth isn't absolute, it's whatever you make it. What's right or wrong for you isn't necessarily right or wrong for someone else

Dads, take responsibility for helping your kids know truth from error. Yes, it will take time. Yes, it will be inconvenient. Yes, it can be frustrating if they don't get it, but keep at it. You need to pass on truth to them so that they pass on truth to their kids.

C. His Counsel is Secure – v. 5-6

The results of obeying or not speak for themselves. Solomon instructs his sons here that if they will but listen and obey, if they will pursue wisdom, then the result is that wisdom will protect them. We learned earlier that wisdom brings health and long life. It will keep them from making really dumb choices in life, choices that will have serious consequences.

I'd like to imagine that David and Solomon are sitting down under some shade tree out in the palace courtyard enjoying some lemonade while David recites **Psalm 1. "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."**

Son, you have a choice, obey God's Word and be protected or disobey and perish. God's Word will keep you from sin. If you live by God's standards you won't throw your money away, you won't get STD's, you won't end up in jail for some crime.

Let them know that when they mess up, you'll still love them, you'll still be around for them.

Teach them that wisdom brings sound judgment and they won't forsake God's commands. Wisdom will guard their decisions.

D. His Counsel is Supreme – v. 7

Supreme carries the idea of being highest in rank, authority, quality, achievement and excellence. There isn't anything of greater value than wisdom. We want our kids to do well and to set the bar of excellence high in all they do, but don't dispense with wisdom for the sake of pursuits. Wisdom is the greatest thing you can pursue after.

Among the many stories that Jesus told, you may recall the one in which He about our pursuit of heaven. Pursuing heaven is like the man who one day found a pearl that was exquisite. It was of the rarest quality ever seen. Its beauty and elegance were far superior to anything he had ever seen so in order to obtain it, he sold everything he had. Pursue giving counsel that is supreme.

E. His Counsel is of Splendor – v. 8-9

Wreaths were worn at festive occasions like a wedding or some celebration at the harvest. They were ornaments that adorned and enhanced the beauty of the wearer. They were also symbols of victory. An athlete competing in the games was rewarded with a wreath to signify that he had beaten all other contestants. The winner of the Boston Marathon is still crowned with a wreath.

Wise counsel is like that wreath. Wisdom adorns you with beauty because you have obeyed its teachings. At the end of your life when you look back in reflection on the path you have chosen to follow, the path of wisdom directed by your father, there is glory in having chosen wisely, there is satisfaction and a happy sigh of relief that you have

been spared the agony and consequences of poor decisions that otherwise would have plagued you.

Wise father's, seek to give godly counsel to their children so that they too can make wise choices.
And children, obey your father in the Lord.
A father is a man of counsel.
A father is a man of courage.

II. A FATHER IS A MAN OF COURAGE – v. 10-13

Most fathers want the best for their kids. We want them to do better than we did in school. We want them to do better than we did in sports. We want them to do better than we did in music. We want them to do better than we did in business. So it takes courage to tell our kids that we made mistakes along the way. We want them to avoid the pain we may have experienced in life getting to where we are. We've been where they are now. Kids, believe it or not, we were once your age.

So Dad's it takes courage to admit when we are wrong.

It takes courage to make choices that go against what the rest are doing.

Dad's it takes courage to say no to that dream weekend golfing trip with your buddies, to say no to that promotion that will keep you on the road for weeks at a time, to say no to those courtside seats to the big game when you made a promise to your son to build a bird feeder or to your daughter to take her to get her nails done. It takes courage to spend time with your family.

Patrick Morely, founder of Man in the Mirror Ministries once said, "if you don't have enough time for your families, you can be 100% certain that you are not following God's will for your life."

My Christian Ed teacher in college used to say that the family that plays together and prays together, stays together.

It takes courage to spend time with your kids – no matter what age they are. Last year there was a commercial on TV that hits a home run with me. This elderly woman hears a noise and looks out her second story apartment window to the sidewalk below where she sees this man doing a cheer. He's really getting into it. The woman had this concerned look on her face like maybe she should call the guys with the white coats and really long sleeves. What she couldn't see because the edge of the building was blocking her view was the guy's grade school daughter next to him. He was practicing her cheers with her.

Notice in these verses that the man of courage guides, the man of courage guards, and the man of courage grips.

A. He Guides – v. 10-11

B. He Guards – v. 12

C. He Grips – v. 13

I enjoy the Olympics and am looking forward to watching this summer. In the 1992 Olympics held in Barcelona, Derek Redman of Great Britain had qualified to race in the semi-final heat of the 400m run. As the gun sounded he was out of the starting blocks running the race of his life when suddenly he felt a stab of pain in his right leg only 150 meters into the race. He fell face first to the track with a pulled hamstring. He struggled to his feet before the medical team could reach him. He began to hop forward, tears of pain and disappointment streaking down his face, determined to finish the race. A man plowed through the security guards on the sidelines and ran onto the track. He raced to Derek and hugged him and said "you don't have to do this, son." His son said, "Yes, I do."

Then his father said "Well then, we're going to finish together." Derek's father gripped his son around the shoulders and they faced the finish line, resolutely waving off the security men who were near them. They limped and hopped together, his

head sometimes buried in his father's shoulder, but they stayed in Derek's lane all the way to the end.

Being a father takes courage to push aside all the security guards in life to get to a son or daughter who needs our help, who needs to know that we're right there with them when the pain of life sweeps over them, when disappointment overwhelms them or when we've made a promise to them. It means that we endure the stares of the crowd and ignore the cries of critics and Dad's, it takes courage to do what is right even to admit when we are wrong.

Best-selling author on time management, Ken Blanchard shared a story that occurred years ago when his son was a senior in High school. Parking was limited in the driveway and his son was supposed to park on the street because his truck took up too much space. The problem exploded one day when Blanchard arrived home from work and vented his fury. He left no doubt about what his son had done and how he felt about it. He walked into the house with his son racing after him. He said, Dad, you forgot the last part – you know, the part about 'you're a good kid, I love you, and this is so unlike you.' Blanchard couldn't contain his laughter and quickly embraced his son who never left his truck in the driveway again.

The courageous father guides, guards, and grips his children. With courage take hold of your kids or someone else will.

III. A FATHER IS A MAN OF CHARACTER – v. 14-19

A. He Avoids Evil – v. 14-17

Through his example, a father shows his children the dangers of following the path of evil. He explains its natural course and the consequences of pursuing wickedness. Again, remember that the Psalmist says we'll be happy if we don't go down that road or sit in their company. The reason, as

Solomon explains, is that they are bent on doing evil. They are the ones who cause trouble. They're out looking for some kind of mischief they can get into. Mischief is not school yard pranks like putting tacks on chairs or greasing all the door knobs of the school. The intent of the word is just as the NIV suggests, its evil through and through. They're looking for some way to cause harm or injury or to be destructive. It is not a harmless prank.

Notice too, that our verse calls to mind that they have to do some evil before they even hit the sack. Their day isn't complete until they end it with some kind of evil activity.

Genesis 6:5 “The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that very inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.”

That characterizes the heart of the wicked being described by Solomon and he is telling his sons to avoid such a person because all they want to do is get you in trouble too. They thrive on a lifestyle of being wicked. Their heart is only evil all the time. **How many of us have had that happen where we got in trouble because we were following someone else who started it? Isn't that our kids #1 excuse?** “He started it!” The wise father sets the example of avoiding evil.

Solomon is plastering a big stop sign here. Don't go that way. It's only trouble. The road is full of potholes and it's a one-way, dead end street. If you want to be a man of character, you need to avoid evil. That's the advice of Paul to the Thessalonians when he wrote **“Abstain from the appearance of evil.” (I Thessalonians 5:22)**

Paul told the Romans not to **“conform to the world” (Romans 12:2)** and to Timothy to **“flee youthful lusts” (II Timothy 2:22)**. Peter advised us to **“abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul” (I Peter 2:11)**.

A father is a man who sets an example by avoiding evil. He doesn't cheat on income taxes or short change the gas attendant. He avoids wickedness. On the other hand if you want to be a father of character, then aspire godliness.

B. He Aspires Godliness – v. 18-19

A young minister, leader has been sent into a difficult region to lead several congregations into continuing the journey of becoming beacons of God's grace through faith in Christ. These churches were started by Paul, but he didn't have the time nor was he called to a ministry of pastoring only one church. He was a missionary. His protégé, Timothy, was sent to lead the churches and develop men to take the responsibilities of shepherding them.

I Timothy 3:1-7

Clearly what Paul is stressing is that in every way possible, we become men of integrity and honesty. We do what is right. We aspire to godly living. Our children learn from watching us whether or not God can be trusted, they learn from watching us whether our faith is real or phony, they learn from us whether following God is worth it. We need to show them that following godly wisdom is always the right path to take. It is a path that is uncompromising. The father who takes this path has his jaw set with rugged determination to persevere no matter what the odds or what criticism they. He sticks to it.

Following a godly character leads to a path that gets brighter and brighter with each passing day. The way becomes clearer and though there are obstacles along the way, the person on this path is better able to navigate those difficulties because of the light. On the other hand, the person who is following the path of wickedness, that path becomes darker and more difficult to navigate. It's like walking into woods where the deeper you go the darker it gets.

If you are truly a father of character you will avoid evil and aspire godliness.

IV. A FATHER IS A MAN OF CAUTION –

v. 20-27

A. He Cautions the Heart – v. 20-23

The heart is a symbol of the hidden inner life, not this thing that keeps blood pumping to all the parts of our body, but the source of our behavior, our conduct.

The urging of Solomon is to indelibly write these commands of wisdom on the heart, so that they won't be erased. **“How shall a young keep his way pure? By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word...Thy Word have I hidden in my heart that I might not sin against You.”**

(Psalm 119:9-11)

Sir Walter Raleigh was one of Britain's greatest sea captains. He was also highly favored by Queen Elizabeth I. However her successor, James I, disliked him and sentenced him to death. The executioner, whose sympathy was with the prisoner, had no joy in his task. Hoping to ease the sailor's last moments, the executioner told Sir Walter how to place his head on the block to ensure swift decapitation. The prisoner thanked him and said “It matters little whether or not the head is right so long as the heart is right.”

Jesus said that what is in the heart will come out in our actions. Keep your heart.

B. He Cautions the Head – v. 24-25

Father's, do you realize how powerful your words are?

Someone has suggested that parents average 10 negative comments to our children for every 1 positive comment and that it takes 4 positive comments to overcome 1 negative comment.

Ephesians 4:29 “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

Ephesians 4:15 cautions us that we should **“speak the truth in love.”**

Colossians 3:8-10 “But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

James speaks about the effect of the tongue being like the small rudder that is capable of steering a huge ship. The tongue can get us into all kinds of trouble. Our words either build up or tear down.

Watch what you say and how you say it. Watch where you look. The writer of Hebrews encourages us to keep our eyes fixed on Christ (**Hebrews 12:3**). Sometimes with all the difficult demands of work and home we can lose our focus and we can get irritable and cranky. It's easy to take out weariness and frustration out on those that are closest to us. We're encouraged to keep our gaze straight ahead, fixed on Christ, so that we don't lose our temper or won't be critical or condescending or condemning.

Your kids will learn from your example to keep the heart and keep the head.

C. He Cautions the Hands – v. 26-27

Psalms 24:3-4 shows the direct link between the heart and the hands, hands being a symbol of activity. **“Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.”**

We must watch what we do.

Truth be told, I still go back and seek the counsel of my Dad. I have to admit that it will be difficult when he is gone, so valued is the counsel I get from him. I love my Dad. I loved it when he engaged in bean bag fights when we were in grade school or when he would get out his old army mittens so we could box or when we built our pine wood derby cars. Though probably not particularly safe we had a blast when snow covered the roads and the plows hadn't come through our little subdivision in Lake Orion. Dad would hook the

toboggan up to the back of the truck and pull us through the neighborhood. What a riot. I'm just sure kids were envious watching us. He taught us to fish and hunt, though I'm not very good at either. He taught us to play ball and encouraged us in sports. He pushed us to do better. I learned about changing the oil and gapping a spark plug. He showed us unconditional love by caring for our Mom. And every morning He showed us commitment to the Lord by opening His Bible and reading. I'm forever grateful for the wisdom of my Dad. He emulates the principles of this passage.

He is a man of counsel.

He is a man of courage.

He is a man of character.

He is a man of caution.

Being a father is a daunting and oftentimes overwhelming job. The hours are long, the pay is small, but the long term rewards are fabulous. We'll never know how even just spending time is of great value to them.

Charles Adams, son of President John Quincy Adams had spent the day fishing with his son. After he died they were going through his journals and found the entry of that day. It read: “Went fishing with my son today. Caught nothing. Wasted day.”

They read the journal entry of his son for that same day: “Went fishing with my Dad today. Best day of my life.”

We may not ever measure up to the father we want to be, but with God's help and God's Word we can be the father our children need us to be.

Men have been asked this question: What is the most courageous thing you have ever done? I would suggest that before you answer, think about your task of being a father.

Numerous times in the opening pages of Joshua, God challenged him to take courage, you're not alone. What great advice for us.

Be a father who is a man of counsel.

Be a father who is a man of courage.

Be a father who is a man of character.

Be a father who is a man of caution.

Happy Father's Day!