

PARENTING & PROVERBS

It's More Than What You Say

Introduction

Proverbs. This is a book of wisdom. As a Biblical text the Book of Proverbs is to give us skill for living life from God's perspective. Solomon is generally thought to have authored the entire Book of Proverbs except for three sections: Proverbs 30, Proverbs 31, and The Sayings of the Wise in Proverbs 22:17-24:34 where our text comes from today.

This section gets its name from the opening verses in Proverbs 22:17–21

Today, as we think about parenting, the text I want you to consider with me is Proverbs 23:15–18 (ESV),

¹⁵ My son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad. ¹⁶ My inmost being will exult when your lips speak what is right. ¹⁷ Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day. ¹⁸ Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.

Along with WHAT should we communicate to our children, I also want to emphasize the HOW. I have often been corrected when someone says to me, “Jim, it’s not what you said that’s the problem, it’s how you said it.” So careful consider the “how” of the inspired author.

Exposition

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

73 times in the ESV the author commences a comment from a parent to a child with the words, “My son . . .” One of the key themes in the book of Proverbs is the instruction of young men. Look again at verses 15-16. It looks this way:

- ✓ My heart is glad, when your heart is wise.
- ✓ My lips praise, when your lips speak what is right.

Ask any parent what brings them happiness and it will have something to do with the success of their children. From the little leaguer that hits a homerun, to the gigantic fish on the line, to first place in the skating competition – parents love to see their children achieve. Parents that have a godly priority will receive the most joy, the most exhilaration when their children act in godliness. Or stated in the words of the Apostle John: “*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*” (3 John 4, ESV).

When children have a heart of wisdom and speak what is true, it brings great joy to the parent. Or on the contrary as Solomon had noted earlier: “*... A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a*

sorrow to his mother." (Proverbs 10:1, ESV). Elsewhere we read, *"A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him."* (Proverbs 17:25, ESV). And note: *"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother."* (Proverbs 29:15, ESV).

WORDS OF EXHORTATION

Now in verses 17-18 we move from the encouragement to the admonition. If a child is going to have a wise heart and right speech, where does that come from. Here's the warning: *"Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day."* (Proverbs 23:17, ESV). Instead of emulating, modelling their lives on people who disregard God's way, they should continue daily in the fear of the Lord. You see what this parent is doing? You don't get your clues from the culture around you, you seek to follow the Lord's instruction. And here he uses the key idea in Proverbs: *living in the fear of the Lord*. In other words, regarding God as so honorable, so worthy, so deserving of our love and devotion, that it causes you to tremble just to think of defaming Him. Live life that way!

And then in verse 18 we have

WORDS OF PROMISE

He says, *"Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off."* (Proverbs 23:18, ESV).

Grammatically, the second line of verse 17 and the first line of verse 18 begin with the same phrase in Hebrew. This teaches us that there is a direct correlation between "the fear of the Lord" and a "future hope."¹

To teach your children not to emulate the lives of a sinful culture but to focus their attention on living for the glory of God, is the true path to a future and a hope.

Application

At the beginning I said that this passage not only teaches us the "WHAT", but the "HOW". How should we as parents communicate to our children. The inspired wiseman show us how. Note:

1. He communicated an encouraging expectation. "When you do such and such, you give me great joy!"
2. He communicated with clarity a clear exhortation or advice. "Son, you will have a heart of wisdom. You will speak with truth, when you 'do not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, but your delight is in the law of the Lord.' Do you see the connection?"
3. Thirdly, he communicates the eternal value of his son listening and following his advice. "To live that way, son, is your only true hope for this life and the future."

¹ Koptak, P. E. (2003). [Proverbs](#) (p. 548). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Just like I might say the right things to you but fail to do it with the right tone or attitude, I suspect many of us parents have been guilty of the same error. I heard Josh McDowell say once, “Rules without relationship equals rebellion.” Likewise, parental instruction without encouragement and hope may fail to accomplish what you really want. As we teach our children: win their hearts with genuine encouragement; be clear in your counsel; and give hope.

Conclusion

In conclusion someone might be skeptical and say I’m not sure this will work; I’m not sure if this will be effective. It is at this point we have to recall the reason God inspired the author to write these sayings. Turn back with me to Proverbs 22:17–19 (ESV),

¹⁷ Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge, ¹⁸ for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, if all of them are ready on your lips. ¹⁹ That your trust may be in the LORD, I have made them known to you today, even to you.

These wise sayings are given to us that we might trust in the Lord, not ourselves. Parenting by faith enables one to apply this wisdom to our homes. So as we “bring up our children”; as we “train our children”, along with all the other wisdom we receive from this Book, let us communicate to them with encouragement, winning the affection and loyalty of their hearts. Let us teach them through words and by example what it means to live in the fear of the Lord. Let us give them hope, that as they follow Christ, they will have hope – hope for eternity.