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Eastminster Worship Services

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Never the Same: When the Word Changes You

Like Father, Like Son

Proverbs 1:1-9

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Bruce Feiler writes in *The Council of Dads*,

As you know, I have learned that I have a seven-inch cancerous tumor in my left femur. The afternoon I heard the diagnosis, I went home, lay down on my bed imagining all the ways my life would change. Then Eden and Tybee came in, running and giggling and looking in the mirror. They began to dance, a dance they made up when they turned three a few months ago. As I watched them, I kept imagining all the walks I might not take with them, the ballet recitals I might not see, the boyfriends I might not scowl at, the aisles I might not walk down. I quickly determined that I was looking at one of three options: the lost year, the lost limb, or the lost life. Whatever happens, I have lived a full life. I thought Linda would be fine. She would find a way to live a life of passion and joy. But I kept coming back to Eden and Tybee. Would they wonder who I was? Would they yearn for my approval, my love, my voice? A few days later, I woke up suddenly before dawn and thought of a way I might help re-create my voice for them. I started making a list of six men—from all parts of my life, beginning with when I was a child and stretching through today. These are the men who know me best. The men who share my values. The men who helped shape and guide me. The men who traveled with me, studied with me, have been through pain and happiness with me. Men who knew my voice. I wrote to them. Will you help be Eden and Tybee's dad?¹

The book of Proverbs begins, “The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel.” What is the significance of this book of the Bible for followers of Jesus? It contains the voice of God our Father. The book of Proverbs is referred to as wisdom literature along with several others: the book of Job, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. A proverb is a riddle that points to a deeper meaning, often by way of moral instruction and exhortation for living. These proverbs depict the One who knows us best. There is wisdom here for a better way to live.

Wisdom (hokma) is a feminine noun denoting knowledge, imagination, discipline, piety, order and moral instruction. Sages instructed students in wisdom. Parents, scribes and teachers were viewed as sages. The purpose of teaching wisdom is that the learner projects a reality of order and beauty in the world, the establishment of justice and order in society and the formation of human character by virtues and faith in the God who created and sustains the world in and by righteousness. God is both the source and goal of wisdom.

The wisdom contained in Proverbs is God's voice to us. The Father is not with us in physical form. But the Bible is his voice. The Proverbs, along with the entire Bible, is God's voice to us. The Bible is the Council of God;

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Throughout Proverbs, wisdom (or the wise person) is compared and contrasted with foolishness (or the fool). ‘Fool’ in Proverbs indicates one who is lacking in morality and uninterested in correction, not one who is merely silly or playful. Wisdom is held up as something worth effort to attain and the reader is told that it starts with God. Fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom whereby man’s pride is broken down and weakened.

Proverbs is attributed to Solomon. He was a great king and the son of a great king. The point of the book of Proverbs is to bring everything into relation to God so that he becomes the center of it all. Today is Father’s Day. And today’s message speaks directly to Dad’s. It also speaks to mothers. Moreover, it speaks to every follower of Jesus Christ.

There are seven things to learn; seven pieces of wisdom to grasp from Proverbs 1:1–9. They all relate to God. They are not the kind of wisdom you might pick up in reading Ann Landers’ column. The world’s wisdom is absent of God. This absence of God in the world’s family-advice is ultimately a fatal flaw.

The first lesson is the book of Proverbs, the teachings of Solomon, is for our benefit. The teachings help us attain wisdom, discipline and understanding in order to acquire a prudent life. The teachings instruct us and we instruct the generation coming up behind us. The book of Proverbs is for the benefit of the family to obtain wisdom, discipline and understanding in order to acquire a prudent life and to instruct the generation coming up behind us.

The second lesson is that the family is God’s idea. Mothers, fathers and children are related in a relationship of unique accountability. Note verse 8: “Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.” The family is God’s idea. The family is not an arbitrary evolutionary development based on instincts. The family is ordained by God in creation. In the very first chapter of the Bible, Genesis 1:27-28 reads, “So God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.”

How are they to do this fruitful earth-filling? By indiscriminate mating and pregnancies? The second chapter of the Bible (Genesis 2:24) gives the answer: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” A profound covenant relationship between one man and one woman; a cleaving to each other alone, in a one-flesh union is God’s idea of the heart of the family. When this is broken by death or divorce, there may have to be single parent families. And God has been faithful to millions of

¹Bruce Feiler, *Council of Dad’s* (New York: William and Morrow, 2010), 1-3.

mothers and fathers who have had to raise children alone. But God's original purpose for the family was one man and one woman cleaving to each other as husband and wife and becoming one flesh in fruitful sexual union. In that way he meant to fill the earth with humans who image God's glory and with couples whose covenant-relationship shows the world the way that God relates to his covenant people in love and faithfulness. The family is God's idea.

Third, the family is God's school for instructing children how to live in the world. Note verse 8 again, "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching." The father is an instructor and the mother is a teacher. Therefore the family is a school. God ordained the family not just to be fruitful and fill the earth with people, but to fill the earth with instructed people and taught people. Life does not come naturally for human beings. The sucking reflex comes naturally. The falling reflex comes naturally. The iris of the eye closes naturally in bright light. Those skills will not get us very far in this world. Humans have to learn just about everything from the most basic skills of walking, talking and eating, to the moral actions of courtesy, gratitude, respect and faith in Christ.

If a mother and a father seek help from others through relatives, nannies, day-care, Sunday schools, primary schools or secondary schools, the responsibility is still the parents'. We parents will give an account to God for how the minds and hearts of our children were shaped and molded by the educators and care-givers to whom we entrusted them. The family is God's school for instructing children how to live in the world.

Fourth, the foundation of family instruction is the fear of the LORD. Note verse 7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." What is the basis, beginning and integrating theme of the father's instruction and the mother's teaching that runs through all their daily modeling, counseling, explaining, correcting and disciplining that give unity and meaning to it all? The answer is "the fear of the LORD."

The family isn't just a place where children learn to hold spoons, walk on two feet, say "please", tie shoes, read, look both ways, cut grass, put on makeup and drive a car. The family is the context in which we are to learn to fear God; that is to revere God; to stand in awe of God; and to trust God. The foundation of family instruction is the fear of the LORD.

Fifth, under God both fathers and mothers share in the responsibility of this family instruction. Hear verse 8 again, "Listen my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching." It does not say, "Fathers instruct, and mothers change diapers." It does not say, "Fathers work at the office and so have no responsibility to teach their children." Nor does it say, "Mothers work at the office and can turn the responsibility of

teaching over to a care-giver.” It says fathers instruct and mothers teach. They share this responsibility. Since it is Father’s Day, I challenge fathers to take fresh initiatives at home. To instruct our children, Dads, is a great privilege and it never ends. Fathers must take a stronger initiative in the family. Fathers and mothers share in the responsibility of instruction.

Sixth, God calls sons and daughters to be submissive to their mothers and fathers. Listen to verse 8 again, “Listen my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.” These two commands warn against the two common temptations of rebellion. One is when a child is home; and the other is when he is away from home. If he is home, the temptation of rebellion is not to listen when his parent speaks. So Solomon says, “Listen to your father’s instruction.” If he is away from home, the temptation is to forsake what he was taught. So Solomon says, “Do not forsake your mother’s teaching.” Young people listen to your parents. Do not write off what they say. Exodus 20:12 reads, “Honor your father and mother.” Honor your mother and father by listening respectfully when they speak. Children, remember what your parents have taught you about right and wrong; about the fear of the LORD. The family is the place where children learn what is right and wrong and to fear the LORD.

Finally, God ordains a reward for sons and daughters who do not forsake the teaching of their mother and father. Verse 9 states: “They (the father’s instruction and the mother’s teaching) will be garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.” What this verse makes plain is that the instruction of fathers and the teaching of mothers, rooted in the fear of the LORD, is good news. Children, hearing a father’s instruction and not forsaking a mother’s teaching will be a garland of grace and a chain of adornment both representing God’s claim on your life and your salvation in him. Parents, teach the fear of the LORD for there will be great reward for your children.

Believing the good news without obeying it is not the abundant life. The good news of the gospel is sufficient for salvation. But, teaching the good news of the gospel and learning it is most necessary to follow in the steps of Jesus. Proverbs has much to do with moral existence and provides the church with instruction for moral transformation and the shaping of character.

The book of Proverbs is for our benefit to obtain wisdom, discipline and understanding in order to acquire a prudent life and instruct the generation coming up behind us. The family is God’s idea. The family is God’s school for instructing children how to live in the world. The foundation of the family is the fear of the LORD. Under God, both fathers and mothers share in the responsibility of instruction. The family is the place where children learn what is right and wrong and to fear the LORD. And God ordains a reward for sons and daughters who do not forsake the

teaching of their mother and father.

As James writes, the person who is wise shows it in his good life and deeds. His wisdom is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, impartial and sincere.² When Jesus asked Peter, “Who do you say I am?” may we respond as he, “You are the Christ.”³ The follower of Jesus who fears the LORD departs from error and directs his ways to the path of virtue. Except a follower of Jesus fear the LORD, he is unable to renounce sin.

The wisdom contained in Proverbs is God’s voice to us. The Father is not with us in physical form. But the Bible is his voice. The Proverbs, along with the entire Bible, is God’s voice to us. Even more powerful than Bruce Feiler’s *The Council of Dads* is God’s book *The Bible*. It could have easily been named *The Council of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit*. Let us pray!

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²James 3:13,17

³Mark 8:29