

Happy Father Day

Proverbs

June 16, 2019
Steve DeWitt

Speaking for all the fathers today, we want to thank all of you in advance for the foot-rubs, favorite foods, quiet during Sunday naps, lawnmowing by wives, car washing by kids, and kind notes with gift cards to steakhouses, sporting events, and local golf courses. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you. And yes, we will be accepting Father's Day gifts through the end of the summer.

What makes that humorous is that the actual experience of being a dad is quite the opposite and is so by God's design. Any dad with any measure of fatherliness knows that being a father is much more about giving than receiving. Not that being a dad isn't deeply meaningful because it is. Being a dad is learning to enjoy giving of ourselves for the joy of our children, especially their eternal joy. I mentioned to my wife Jennifer recently how much I enjoy seeing our girls excited about something. There is a happiness connection between the hearts of children and the hearts of their parents. When they are sad, we are sad. When they are glad, we are glad. The parental spiritual umbilical cord is never cut.

I read something that said that the typical greeting "Happy Father's Day" may miss the point.¹ OK. However, our families and our children and our marriages would be much better off if our sincere desire was not for a happy Father's Day but for "Happy Father Day." We don't want the day to be happy we want the fathers to be happy. But herein lies the problem for so many dads and kids. Yes, the foot rubs and Home Depot gift cards are appreciated, but ask any dad which he would prefer, steak or ongoing happiness as a dad and I think you know the answer. Happy day or happy dad? Happy day or happy family? Happy day or happy children?

We are taking a summer break from our teaching series in Romans and doing a series of messages in the Old Testament book of Proverbs. Some of our topics will include the wise and the fool, lust, money, and others. Proverbs is easily the most practical book of the Bible. It is a collection of pithy, memorable nuggets of wisdom for life. Like the rest of the Bible, Proverbs tells us about God first, and like all Scripture, is implicitly about Jesus. It was largely written by a dad (Solomon) to his sons urging them to live their lives by God's wisdom. Dads, if your children collected all the dad sayings you have passed on to them, how big would that book be?

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching" (Proverbs 1:7-8 ESV).

What follows is 31 chapters of wisdom for life and godliness; success in all categories of life, and ultimately living my life *Coram Deo*, before the face of God. Proverbs runs contrary to the Sunday-only Christian, the Christmas and Easter church attender, and the secularist—all of whom try desperately to keep faith sequestered in the walls of the church. Proverbs shows what a faithful, godly life looks like in every dimension of life, including parenting and fatherhood, to which we turn our attention today.

¹ Berith Road blog, "The Key to a Father's Happiness According to the Book of Proverbs," September 1, 2011.

The Bible is at its best when it speaks bold truth to the most difficult and broken aspects of our lives. Relationships with dads and relationships with kids are incredibly complicated and often represent the most wonderful and painful relationships of our lives. I became a dad six years ago. Being a dad is one of the greatest experiences of my life. It is also one of the most challenging.

"Parenting is sacred, smelly, exciting, crushing, frustrating and expensive. It's the most important thing that people ever do and to be completely honest with you, it scares the life out of me" (Paul Carter).²

I remember when Jennifer was about to give birth to our oldest daughter thinking to myself, *whatever comes out is going to change my life*. I was excited and terrified. Kids don't get that until they become parents. Kids, just wait, if you become a parent someday you will wish you were a little more gracious and a little more patient with your parents. Why not start now?

Not Happy Father's Day but Happy Father day. What Proverbs says is that for dads to be truly happy they must lead and love their children toward a life according to God's wisdom and will. What Proverbs says to children is that the choices you make and the directions you live will have a direct impact on the happiness of your parents. So, this is a message urging dads to father in a way that produces eternal happiness for their kids and children to live by God's wisdom for dad's joy. Dad's "dadding" for children's joy and children "childrening" for dad's joy.

How to be a Happy Father

I'm going to assume that every dad greatly desires to be a happy father. We all want to be happy and that certainly includes the most important relationships in our lives—our family—and if we are married, our spouse and children. How do we do so?

We take our cues from the happiest Father in the whole universe, God. God the Father who is the prototype father for all fathering. He is the happiest of all fathers as Jesus is the Son in whom he delights. *"And behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'"* (Matthew 3:17)

God loves being a father so much that he built into the fabric of human relationships a similar role. Like he takes leadership in the Trinity, earthly fathers are in the leadership role in the family. God the Father is the head of the Trinity and fathers are the leaders of their household. As such, we are responsible for the culture of our homes. We bear the primary responsibility for all that happens. This is not a king-of-my-castle type call but a Jesus-of-the-castle calling. Jesus, who came *"not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Matthew 20:28).

The first step toward happiness as a dad is one of orientation. Am I a dad-king or dad-servant leader? Am I here to be served or to serve? Dad joy comes in giving of ourselves. This boomerangs back to us in dad joy. Dads who love well and lead well will experience God's design for joy. Those who "rule" from the throne of their mancave or are emotionally absent from the home will not.

² Paul Carter, "10 Parenting Imperatives from the Book of Proverbs," www.ca.thegospelcoalition.org, September 18, 2017.

Here is my summary of what Proverbs urges dads:

Model, Discipline, and Teach Your Children to Live According to God's Wisdom (Word/Jesus)

We are going to take these in reverse order.

Teach your children God's wisdom

The emphasis in Proverbs is on spiritual instruction and character development of children. Knowing how to change the oil or the tire is great, but the aim of Christian parenting is what matters in a trillion years. In a trillion years your child will be either experiencing eternal bliss through faith in Jesus or eternal punishment as God's justice for their sins. Wise fathering aims for their eternal joy.

Proverbs is pre-Jesus and pre-cross, so we don't have explicit gospel language here. What we do have everywhere is the language of wisdom. Wisdom is living according to God's Word and will. Godly fathers diligently teach their children God's Word so that they can live according to his will.

The clearest example is Proverbs itself. This is a collection of wisdom teachings from a dad writing to his sons to instruct them in God's Word and will. Most dads have some dad proverbs they repeat over and over to their kids. One of my dad's favorites was, "Work first; then play." Guess what I say to our girls all the time. "Work first, then play." These dad sayings stick with you and Proverbs is divinely inspired dad sayings for all of us.

- *"My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you"* (Proverbs 2:1).
- *"Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight"* (Proverbs 4:1).
- *"My son, do not lose sight of these—keep sound wisdom and discretion"* (Proverbs 3:21).

Many others. Solomon models for all dads the importance of teaching your children.

Now I'm going to assume most Christian dads know they should do this but there is a lot of guilt out there about failure to do so. I could heap on the guilt and you would go home and read *Systematic Theology* to your kids for three days and burn out. How are we to teach our children?

"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

This is the art of spiritual conversation. I'm not in homes and cars and so I have no way of knowing this confidently. My pastoral sense is that nurturing spiritual conversations is lacking because too often the parents aren't having spiritual conversations. And why is that? Because we aren't having spiritual thoughts that lead to spiritual conversations.

It's also very hard to have spiritual conversations when you are looking at your smartphone. There are no smartphones in heaven, but perhaps the other place will allow them.

We talk about the weather, but the weather won't matter in a trillion years. We talk about the ball game, but the ball game won't matter in a trillion years. We talk about politics, but they won't matter. We talk about hobbies and amusements, but they won't matter. What will matter for dad's happiness is the gospel in the heart of the child and it's the one thing that too often is missing from the home.

Proverbs urges that dads should teach character. "*A wise son makes a glad father but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother*" (Proverbs 10:1).

What is a wise son or daughter? They live according to God's Word and will. They are appropriating the gospel into their lives. What does it look like? It looks like moral and spiritual character. Andreas Köstenberger lists the following character qualities from Proverbs that dads should nurture³:

<i>Diligence</i>	<i>Justice</i>	<i>Kindness</i>	<i>Generosity</i>	<i>Self-control</i>
<i>Honesty</i>	<i>Prudence</i>	<i>Gentleness</i>	<i>Contentment</i>	<i>Integrity</i>
<i>Graciousness</i>	<i>Restraint</i>	<i>Faithfulness</i>	<i>Purity</i>	<i>Skillfulness</i>
<i>Patience</i>	<i>Righteousness</i>	<i>Humility</i>	<i>Discretion in choosing friends</i>	

We dads look at that list and think, *wow. How?* These are all character qualities that come as the byproduct of a life given over to God. That is the key. From the perspective of the New Testament, these are the spiritual byproducts of a person who is following Jesus.

I find that our girls have a natural spiritual curiosity and ask the most interesting spiritual questions. Take their questions and run with them. Ask them questions. Create regular spiritual contexts like family devotions where it seems natural to talk about God.

Go to church each Sunday! If only dads would lead in this. Talk about a built-in opportunity. Not only do the children receive spiritual instruction, but you have the drive home and the rest of the day to talk about it. Dads, when was the last time you shared with your family something you've learned, confessed, memorized, or are spiritually working on?

If there is one verse that summarizes a dad and a home according to God's wisdom, "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*" (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Don't encourage children to follow their heart (sorry Disney). Why? Wise parenting is urging children to follow God's heart. David was famously a young man after God's own heart. Don't follow your heart, it is desperately wicked. Selfish. Destructive. Heart is what Romans called, the flesh. It is anti-God, anti-law, anti-gospel. By this I don't mean children shouldn't be encouraged to nurture natural gifts and pursue excellence in every sphere of their life. But by all means, DON'T let them follow their heart. Urge them to follow after God's heart. To trust what his Word says more than what their heart, feelings, friends, and carnal desires want. "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge*" (Proverbs 1:7).

³ Andreas Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, page unknown.

Discipline your children

- *"Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him."* (Proverbs 13:24)
- *"Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him."* (Proverbs 22:15)

Children don't arrive wise. They arrive foolish and naïve and morally empty. Discipline is one key way we implant a moral compass in them. I don't have a lot of time here, but the absence of fatherly discipline is surely one of the great causes of our society's ills. I never like to discipline my daughters. Hate it. But I know if I don't, I will pay the price later.

Proverbs also urges corporal punishment. We live in a day that thinks that's inappropriate, but I'll go with the Bible's wisdom on how to raise God-fearing kids. My old pastor used to say, punish children here (buttocks) and God gives them wisdom here (head). God-fearing starts with holy dad-fearing. You aren't their friend. You aren't their buddy. You are their dad and we desperately need dads who lovingly discipline their children.

"My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights." (Proverbs 3:11–12)

Model for your children a life according to God's wisdom

Words are powerful but not as powerful as the example of our lives. I don't think we follow Jesus in order to save our kids. We do that for God as an expression of worship. Further, there is no example powerful enough that alone it will save our kids. The prodigal children of eminent saints prove the point. Salvation is a work of God, not dads. But God works through means and I will tell you from my own life that a powerful example of an imperfect dad living out his sincere faith before me is one reason I'm standing here before you. *Really? Tell me one thing he said that made the difference.* I don't have one thing. It is the cumulative effect of years of observing the life of my dad that God used to nurture faith in my life. Do you have to have that? No. My dad didn't have that in his own life. His dad died when he was 4. God doesn't need a dad to make a strong Christian, but he often uses one to do so.

"In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge." (Proverbs 14:26) Dads—model, discipline, and teach your children.

How to Make your Dad Happy

Not Happy Father's DAY, but happy Father day.

- *"The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice; he who fathers a wise son will be glad in him."* (Proverbs 23:24)
- *"Be wise, my son, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him who reproaches me."* (Proverbs 27:11)

Kids, you have great ability to bring joy to your dad. If your dad is a Christian, this means you listen to your earthly father but serve and worship your heavenly father. If you are a Christian, you have two dads. You are called to honor your earthly father. Hold him highly in

your heart. But don't worship him. Worship your heavenly father. You are called to obey both of them. Can you do that? You need Jesus to do that.

Here is one of my favorite Proverbs and I want each of you to promise you will memorize it: *"The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures."* (Proverbs 30:17) How's that for a visual? Mock your dad and ravens will pluck your eye out and leave it on the road. Then vultures will come and eat your eye. Ever see those vultures picking a dead carcass on the road? That's your eye.

What's the point? Who suffers from rebellious children? Yes, mom and dad grieve. But you suffer far worse things than losing your eye. Don't mock. Honor. Don't scorn. Obey. Do that consistently while following Jesus with your life and your dad will be a very happy man forever.

Model, discipline, and teach your children to live according to God's wisdom (Word/Jesus) We need God's grace and help us do this. Kids become adults who choose their own paths, but our prayer must be that God would use our testimony to draw them to faith and a life lived to God's glory. Then the eternal day will be for us forever a happy father day.

Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Permanent Text Edition® (2016).* Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

© 2019 by Steve DeWitt. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include Bethel's website address (www.bethelweb.org) on the copied resource.