

Family

Proverbs 3:11-12, 4:1-7, 13:24, 22:6, 23:15-16

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Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here, and it is great to be with you. It's good to be back with you as I was away last week, and I will be away one more week this summer before we do the final push at the end of the summer towards the fall, but it was good to have a week away and to be able to worship with other saints in another place, in another church. I'm thankful that the kingdom of God is bigger than CTK, bigger than the PCA, that when we're away, when we're on vacation, there are places that we can worship and to rejoice and sing praise with other saints, but even though I'm thankful for that. I'm also thankful to be back with y'all because every time I go away, it makes me realize what the Lord is doing in this place and the goodness that he has shown to us and how much I love being with y'all. So, it's good to be back, good to see your faces, and good to enter back into God's Word, and we'll be looking at Proverbs this morning again. So, we're in the book of Proverbs for the summer, so if you have a Bible, you can turn to Proverbs 3 or Proverbs 4. Just like other weeks, we're going to be hopping around a little bit because as we've been doing, as we've been saying each and every week.

Proverbs is a little bit different than the other books of the Bible. As we approach other books, you know, we go verse by verse, chapter by chapter, we work our way through the book as a whole, but Proverbs, because of the way it's structured, it's kind of scattershot, right? Like you talk about one theme, one verse, and then another theme, the next, and there doesn't seem to be a lot of cohesiveness, and so because of that, we've jumped around and we've been looking at topics and themes this summer, topics like what is the wise life to look like, right? That is the overarching theme of Proverbs, what is a wise person to be, and what does wisdom look like with regard to our wealth and regard to envy and anger? These are the different topics we've talked about, and this morning, we're going to turn our attention to the topic of family. Proverbs has lots to say about it. Now, you might be here this morning and maybe, maybe you're single, or maybe you're not married, right? Maybe you're a teenager. Maybe you're sitting there going, "I'm not sure if family has much to say to me," but the truth is, is that whether you're married, whether you're single, whether you have children or are childless, the truth is, is that you are part of a family. Every one of us, right? We are all sons and daughters of someone, regardless if we are fathers and mothers of anyone else, right? We, most of us, many of us have siblings, we have extended family, and so every one of us is a part of a family.

So, what does the Bible - what does Proverbs - have to say to us with regard to our family dynamics? Well, as I was thinking about family, I was reminded this week of the short story that Hemingway wrote called *The Capital of the World*, and at the very beginning of this short story, he introduces the story with another story. He tells the story of this man, this father, who comes to a city looking for his son. Now, we're not told why the father and son are estranged, we're not sure why the son has run off to be on his own, but the father comes looking for his son, searching for him, and as he comes to the city, he realizes that he has no idea where his son Paco might be, and so he puts an ad in the newspaper that simply said, "Paco, meet me at Hotel Montana, noon Tuesday, all is forgiven, Papa." Well, the story goes on that Tuesday morning came and the father, he starts to move towards the hotel, and as he approaches the hotel, he's actually confronted by something that is completely unexpected.

You see, there is a squad of police in front of the hotel, dispersing the 800 young men named Paco, who showed up hoping that that message of forgiveness was for them. 800 boys named Paco, 800 men longing to hear all is forgiven. Now, I share that story because I think it illustrates what many of us experience in our families, right? Many of us have broken relationships, many of us long for forgiveness, we have desire for restoration, because we know that within our families, families can bring hurt and comfort, they can do damage and build up, they can push us away and draw us close. We know this, we've seen it, we've experienced it, maybe sometimes from a distance, maybe sometimes firsthand, but we know that our families are complicated. So, what does the Bible tell us about families? Like, what are we to think about them? What is the ideal that is presented in Proverbs? Well, with that in mind, let's go ahead and read Proverbs:

3:11-12: "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, or be wary of his reproof. For the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights."

4:1-7: "Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive that you may gain insight, for I give you good precepts. Do not forsake my teaching. When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother, he taught me and said to me, let your heart hold fast my words. Keep my commandments and live. Get wisdom, get insight. Do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will keep you. Love her, and she will guard you. The beginning of wisdom is this, get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight."

13:24: "Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him."

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

23:15-16: "My son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad. My inmost being will exalt when your lips speak what is right."

Friends, this is the Word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, as we come to your Word, we ask that you would help us, help us to see the goodness that you reveal to us. Teach us what it means to follow after you. Help us, Father, to walk and step with your Spirit. And so I pray that you would guide us, that you would allow my words to give you glory, that you would help us to be attentive to your Word. We pray all this in Christ's name. Amen.

So I want us to begin with a question. It's a simple one. What is the purpose of family? How would you answer that question? What is the purpose of family? Maybe if you're theologically oriented, theologically minded, you might turn to the catechism, right? Catechism, question number 1. The shorter catechism says, "what is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." And so if that is the purpose of man individually, then surely that must be the purpose of families corporately, right? That would make a lot of sense. It's a really good answer, actually, right? To glorify God. That's the purpose of family. That's a good answer. But maybe you didn't go to the catechism. Maybe that's not where you went in your mind. Maybe instead you were much more pragmatic when you were thinking about the purpose of family. And so you thought, well, the

purpose of family is to reproduce, right? To bring children into the world and to grow them up so that they would become good and faithful citizens and that they would reproduce and have children and so on and so forth, right? And that'd be a good answer too, right? Maybe not as good as glorify God, but still pretty good, right? Or maybe, maybe you thought about, well, the purpose of family is to bring safety, to be a place of comfort, to be a place where there's freedom. And we actually see this playing out in the various parenting models that are often popular, right? That are popular right now. Like, think about the helicopter parent, right? Who hovers over their children, right? Protecting them, keeping them safe, watching everything that they do, right? Or the snowplow parent, right? Maybe you've heard of this type of parenting where the parent goes ahead of the child and clears a path, right? Removes all difficulties so there's a smooth and easy, comfortable way of life. Or maybe, maybe you've rejected those and you're a free-range parent, right? Maybe you've heard of this one. A free-range parent, right? Who allows their children to explore and experience the world, free of consequence, free of rules and constraints, right? Just let them out like chickens running around, right? There are many ways to answer that question, what is the purpose of family? There's many ways we could answer them.

Wisdom

Some better than others, but the one that Proverbs gives us is found in chapter 4 verses 1-7. There we're told that the father is instructing his son and he's passing along to his son what he had heard from his father. So the father tells his son and the son grows to be a father and the father now is telling his son and what is he passing along? Verses 4-7: "Let your heart hold fast my words, keep my commandments and live. Get wisdom, get insight, do not forget and do not turn away from the word of my mouth. Do not forsake her and she will keep you. Love her and she will guard you. The beginning of wisdom is this, get wisdom and whatever you get, get insight." So do you hear what the father is saying to the son? What he is passing along to him is wisdom. That at the very root of family, right, that one of the purposes of being in a family is that this is the place where the wisdom of God is passed along. That this is at the root of the purpose of family, right? He said that, "get wisdom, do not forsake her." Her in Proverbs is often referred to, wisdom is often referred to as lady wisdom, right? It's a female, it's personifying wisdom. "Do not forsake her, keep her, hold her fast, love her, she will guard you, get wisdom." Now if you remember from weeks ago when we started this series and we looked at wisdom generally, we talked about how wisdom isn't simply information. It's not simply data, it's not just knowledge. But wisdom, as the theologian Jack Collins put it is "the art of godly living." And the place in which we first learn what godly living is to look like is to be the family. That's where it begins. We learn wisdom in the context of family. So one of the purposes of family is simply to impart wisdom. To impart wisdom.

Training

And this wisdom is often dispensed through training. That's the second thing we hear in Proverbs. Chapter 4:1: "hear oh sons, a father's instruction." 22:6, "train up a child in the way he should go." So the family is the place where we learn what it looks like to follow the Lord. Where we learn what it looks like to pursue him. It is the place where we see and hear instruction and direction to be lived out on a regular basis. Do you know that studies are being done and have been done recently trying to determine the greatest predictor of a child retaining their faith into adulthood? That's actually a really important study, right, for those of us who are parents. Because if you're a parent, right, and you're a Christian, which, you

know, I'm going to assume many of you are these things, then that is our greatest desire, isn't it? I mean, of course we want our children to grow strong, to be healthy, to have careers that they love, to maybe meet a spouse, to have a family of their own, to maybe work a job that will afford them time and, you know, to go on vacations and travel and do these fun things. And we want those things. And those are good things for us to desire of our children. But more than any of those things, isn't it our greatest desire that they would walk with the Lord? And so what is the greatest predictor of a child continuing to walk in the faith? Well, these studies have found that it's not where they go to school. It's not Christian school. It's not home school. It's not public school. It's not parochial. It has nothing to do with schooling. And it's not youth group. And youth group, y'all, like, youth group's good. You know, youth, go to youth group, okay? It's really good. That's why Caleb's here, right? Go to youth group. It's really good. And it's not Sunday school. Sunday school's good, not just for kids, for adults, too. They start back next week, by the way, remember, so y'all can come, right? So Sunday, it's not Sunday school. It's not programs.

The greatest predictor of whether a child will continue to walk in the faith that they learned as they move into adulthood is their home, is seeing the faith of their parents lived out. That's the greatest predictor. It's hearing the prayers of their parents, the conversations around the Bible and theology of family church attendance together, of faith lived out in the home. It's as though the surveys are just finding what Proverbs already told us, that training begins with the family. So what does it look like to train up a child, right? I mean, that's got to be a question that we have in our minds. In fact, I know every single parent has wondered that, right? Because y'all have asked me this before. So what should our training look like in our homes? And there are many things we could point to, right? Bible reading, prayer, applying God's word, theology, all of those things are great things. They're very good. But let me give you just one very, very practical thing to consider, that training in wisdom is training in worship.

Training in wisdom is training in worship. So what do I mean by this? We have lots of kids in our church, right? A little bit less today, holiday weekend, so not as much squirming, not as much squeaking, right? But often we have many children, and this is a beautiful thing, right? It is wonderful that the Lord has given us a church that spans the generations. And so we, there's some squawking, right? That's a good sound. It's a good sound, right? It is a good thing to hear that. And we know that having our children in our midst means that they're going to squirm and they're going to shift, and that's totally fine. We want them in the service. And while they're here, we're to train them in what worship looks like. So let me just encourage us that when we stand to sing, if we're able to stand, that we have our kids stand with us, even if they can't read the words yet. Even if they don't know what's being said up on those screens, right? We have them stand, and they hear God's people singing around them. It's a good thing that when we pray, we encourage them, you know, put down your crayon for a second, bow your head, close your eyes. That during the sermon, we invite them knowing that they're not going to understand everything, right? Like little ears, sometimes the sermon goes over their heads. I know this because sometimes the sermons I know aren't the most clear, and sometimes they're convoluted, and they go over the adults' heads too, right? Yeah, you laughed instead of nodded. I get it. I know that. So sometimes we're going to miss it. So are our kids, but we invite our kids. Just listen for one thing. Listen for one thing that Pastor Penny or Pastor Tobias said this morning, and draw it, color it, right? Put it down, right? And I know some of you all do this because your kids bring me these pictures. They're beautiful. They're wonderful. And sometimes all it's going to be, it might just be a cross every week for like the next three years.

And you know what? That's great because that's the gospel. But in doing these things, we're training our families to know what a worshipping people and a worshipping community is to look like. And that's not just for our children, but that's for all of us. Now, before moving on, let me just say one more thing about chapter 22:6, because I didn't read the second half of that verse. And some of you know I didn't read the second half of that verse. It says, "train up a child in the way he should go. Even when he is old, he will not depart from it." Now, that second clause is incredibly hopeful, isn't it? It's incredibly hopeful. Instruct and train, and they will walk in these ways. It's so hopeful. And for some, it's actually quite painful. It's quite painful because I know many of your stories. And I know that in your families, some of your families, children have departed and abandoned the faith. That you have these families where maybe you have multiple children and they grew up in the same home. They grew up with the same parents, the same family, the same instruction, the same church. And yet as they grow, one continues in the faith and another one rejects it. And so this verse can be quite guilt-ridden. And we start to wonder and think, maybe I should have done more. Maybe we should have prayed more. Maybe there should have been more Bible reading, more church attendance, more repentance, more forgiveness, more grace.

And listen, y'all, the truth is, is that whether you have what you perceive to be an ideal Christian family or you have a mess of one, the truth is, is that we all need grace. That we all could do more. And yet there is grace. Because every one of us has not been the parent that we wish we would have been. And every one of us have been children that we wish we hadn't been. We have all said and done things that have brought pain and hurt to our families. I have. You have. In fact, Kat and I sometimes will joke after a really hard conversation with our kids, after times when we've had to go repent afterwards, right? And once everything is calmed and it's now appropriate to joke, we've joked that that's the conversation they're going to tell their therapist, right? Not that it's the conversation that will send them to therapy. We just assume that's already a given, right? It's like, why save for weddings, you know, just save for therapy? But, you know, this is what we, we know this. Families are places of hurt. And we have all contributed to it. And so the right response is to repent, and to ask for forgiveness, and to extend it when it's been offered.

We look to God, asking him to keep our families walking with him, knowing that it's only by his grace and not by our great parenting that anyone would ever walk with him, right? Because Proverbs, y'all, isn't a formula. That's how we think about it sometimes, right? That Proverbs is a formula. That A plus B will equal C. Train your kids, instruct them, pray, and poof, we have faith. But that's actually not how Proverbs works. Proverbs isn't offering promises like that. You see, every single commentator worth their salt will tell you that this is not a promise that is for all times, all people, in every situation, in every circumstance. No, what Proverbs is doing is it's saying that when all things are equal, this is what will happen. But we know that all things aren't equal, right? We live in a world with sin and brokenness, with rebellion and pain. And so even as we seek to make our families places of training, we recognize that what we need even more than right instruction is the grace of God. That's what we need. And the good news is that's what God gives. He knows you. He knows that I'm not the best dad ever, and neither are you. And he knows that we have failed as being children and siblings. That's why he's gracious. That's why he gives grace. That's why Jesus gave his life for those sins as well, not just those big ones that we think about, but for those ones as well. That's what we need is grace.

Correction

Now, there's one last thing I want us to see with regard to the purpose of family. We've said that it's the place of wisdom, it's the place of training, but also family is the place of correction. We see it in chapter 3:11: "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be wary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves as a father, the son in whom he delights." 13:24: "whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him." So what we're seeing is that correction is part of the life of the family. And this goes hand in hand with training, doesn't it? Because Proverbs has made it clear that there is a right path that we are to walk on. That is the path of wisdom. But there's also a wrong path, and that is the path of foolishness. And when we get off the path of wisdom, we need to be brought back. And that happens through correction, it happens through discipline. Now listen, the word rod there, don't spare the rod, it does not mean corporal punishment is required. Rod is a broad term used for discipline, broadly speaking. And so there are many forms of discipline, many forms of correction, right? Like we've all seen the person who would just affirm word is brought to repentance. But then others who need a little more prodding, right? Now what Proverbs is instructing us with is that godly discipline, godly correction is part of what it means to be part of a family, but it is also a reflection of love.

That's what we heard in 3:11: "the Lord reproves him whom he loves as a father, the son in whom he delights." You see, love, biblically speaking, is not unconditional affirmation. That is how our culture appropriates love. That if you love someone, you must affirm everything about them, whatever they say, whatever they do, whatever they want, you have to affirm them because you challenge or correct them means you don't love them. Y'all, that is not true. That is not true. The Lord reproves, he rebukes him whom he loves. You see, love looks like when a family member is going down a wrong path and we redirect and we rebuke and we correct. And listen, this isn't simply limited to a parent correcting a child. Sometimes children correct parents, right? I mean, my kids have corrected me. It doesn't feel good, but it's love. It's love. Now, of course, correction can be done in unloving and self-righteous and controlling, condemning sorts of ways, but that's not what we're talking about. No, we're talking about the humble, compassionate, gentle, seeking-to-restore sort of love. That is the correction we're talking about. And families are to be the place where people would love one another enough that we would correct wayward ways. And y'all, that is beautiful.

I mean, this picture of family that Proverbs is presenting us with, one that corrects, one that trains, one that pursues wisdom, it is beautiful. It's beautiful because it's actually modeled after the family we've been brought into, right? Because some of us, the truth is, didn't experience our families of origin like this. No, for some of us, our families of origin weren't marked by great beauty, but great pain and hurt and sadness. But the good news is that if you're in Christ, the family that Proverbs is presenting is the family you've been adopted into. You heard it in our assurance of pardon this morning, right? That all who trust in Christ, all who put our faith in Him, all who have been given the Spirit of God, the Spirit bears witness with us that we are the children of God, so now we cry out, Abba, Father. That's what we say to God, because He has brought us into His family. We are His children. You see, we learn what family is to look like by experiencing our spiritual family, the one we now belong to, a family where the Father loves us enough to correct our sinful ways, a family where the Spirit leads us and trains us in the ways of Jesus, a family where the wisdom of the kingdom of heaven is set up against the foolishness of the world, a family where those who have failed as parents and have been difficult children and have wounded and been wounded by our siblings

and have grieved our Father, we are part of a family that because of Christ, though all those things may be true of us, because of Christ and what He has done, we actually now hear the loving words of our Heavenly Father who says, because of my son, because you are part of my family, all is forgiven. That is the family of God, and that family of God is the model for what our families are to be.

Heavenly Father, we thank you. Thank you that you have given us families, brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, grandparents and cousins, aunts and uncles. We thank you, Father, for our families. We thank you, Father, that you have not left us alone, but you have also given us a spiritual family, a place where, Father, we can experience healing and grace, mercy and forgiveness, and so I pray. I pray that we would rest in your fatherly care. I pray that we would put our trust in our brother Jesus who has given his life for us. I pray that we would depend on your Spirit who leads us in your truth, so that we would not just look like the spiritual family of Proverbs, but our families, our physical families, would look this way as well. Families of grace and forgiveness, trust and dependence, of wisdom and correction and of training, and so we pray, Father, that you would work in and through our families, and we pray this in Christ's name, and God's people said together, Amen.