

A Father's Delight

Scripture Text: Proverbs 3:1-12

Introduction

Today is a special day in the life of the church in which we honor those godly men who God has placed in our lives – our dads, our earthly fathers. Scripture acknowledges that God's design for our lives is to have mothers and fathers who nurture us, who take care of us, who teach us to fear God and to obey Him, who occasionally have to discipline us, and who eventually let us go to become mothers and fathers to our own children. While unfortunate circumstances sometimes happen, the natural order and indeed the most ideal structure for children is to be raised in a loving home by two God fearing parents – a mother and a father. Our mothers give birth to us, nurture us, and kiss our boo-boos. But we should not neglect the importance of our earthly fathers. God has given these men a high calling to teach us, to protect us, to provide for us, and to lead the family. In fact, for many of us, our concept of God is shaped by our earthly fathers.

Unfortunately, most children probably do not appreciate the God-given men in their lives. When I was much younger, I thought my father did not know anything. But the older I got, the smarter he became. I believe most fathers naturally want to help their children by teaching them good things – things that will help them grow into productive members of society. We find this kind of teaching in the book of Proverbs. Much of Proverbs is advice from a parent to a child and except for Proverbs thirty-one, most of them were written from a father to his son. The passage from Proverbs three is one such proverb. It begins with a father's appeal to his son to remember his teaching and it ends with the father's appeal for his son to not reject the Heavenly Father's instruction. Throughout this passage we see a connection between obeying the instruction of our earthly fathers and being blessed by the Heavenly Father. There are the commands and there are the promises for obeying the commands. Basically, one ought to do what God's Word says and he will be blessed.

The Love of Our Earthly Fathers

The first verse of this passage states the following:

Proverbs 3:1-2 *My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.*

I presume that most parents, fathers included, want their children to listen and obey what they tell their children. Parents naturally want to impart their wisdom to their children so that they will not repeat the same mistakes as they did or that their children will have a better life. My father, for instance, was known to impart his wisdom to me with some rather interesting statements. We call these "Ed-isms." For instance, my father was very concerned about my education and wanted me to learn as much as I could, even if I was less than eager to do so. One of his sayings about it was the following:

"I buy you books and buy you books and you just gnaw the covers off of them."

Now, I have always had an affinity for books, but I did not know that I used to eat them. About having good behavior, my father would tell me this:

“Do as I say, not as I do.”

Maybe some of you have heard that statement. Maybe some of you have said it to your children. Apparently, a child imitating a parent is not as desirable as a child obeying the parent. Since most children learn by example, we might need to reconsider this statement. Regarding my debating skills, my father would say:

“You would argue with a fence post.”

Now, honestly, I still hear that one and it’s not from my father or my mother. Apparently, Ed-isms are popular with other members of my family.

The passage from Proverbs chapter three opens with a father’s appeal to his son to remember what he has taught him. He tells his son, “Do not forget all that I have taught you.” These fatherly instructions are not about mere outward obedience, such as just obeying the rules. Certainly, our fathers want their children to obey them, but that is not the intent here. The father is concerned about his children’s character – who they will become and how they will relate to both God and man. In verse three, the command to maintain love and faithfulness shows us that the child’s internal character is what is most important. A father giving godly instruction will desire to mold his children and to influence their character. He is not interested in blind obedience but character development. He wants his children to write these instructions on the tablet of the heart – something not easily erased.

The motivation for a father’s godly instruction is his love for his children. He loves them so much that he works to build their character. A father’s instruction to his children is also for their benefit. Fathers want to raise their children right, and mold these little people into productive members of society. To have a godly father who trains his children rightly is good for them. This passage declares that the children who follow good fatherly advice would have *shalom*, a word that essentially means “peace” but here it means to have well-being, to be fulfilled, and at peace with God. The point is that obeying godly parents who instruct their children in the right ways will be a blessing to one’s life.

The Proper Response to a Father’s Love

The proper response to a father’s godly instruction to his children is to trust and rely upon God. Every father should desire to point his children to the Heavenly Father.

Proverbs 3:5-6 *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.*

The earthly father’s instruction to his son in this passage is how the child should relate to his Heavenly Father. The son is told to rely on, to depend on, to have complete confidence in God. We are to trust that God is the source of all wisdom and

power and is therefore worthy of our complete confidence. It would be like saying you are placing your life in the hands of God – which in fact, you are. To trust anything or anyone other than the God, especially ourselves, results in disaster. A godly father will instruct his children to not rely on their own way of thinking, but to rely upon God and His Word. The father also tells his child to acknowledge God, meaning to know him, to have an intimate acquaintance with Him. We must accept God's presence to guide and direct our lives.

Part of a father's godly instruction is to encourage his children to faithfully support God's work. This is the reminder to "honor God with your wealth." We are to show how much we respect and love God with our time, talents and treasures. The promise of God is that blessings come from sacrificial giving. The earthly father also reminds his son of the necessity of repentance. Parents know that their children sometimes do things that are not right. Well, let's be honest, sometimes children do things that are just down right mean. Father's ought to want their children to "fear God" and "turn away from evil." This is the essence of repentance – turn from evil and turn to God. The earthly father in this passage tells his son that doing so will be good for him. Repentance and turning to God is like medicine that will keep you in good health.

The Love of Our Heavenly Father

So, this proverb began with a father's instruction to his son. It ends with a reminder of both the father's love for his son and the Heavenly Father's love for His children.

Proverbs 3:11-12 *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.*

It might seem strange to point out God's discipline when this Proverb basically encourages us to trust God, to acknowledge Him, and to honor Him. Presumably, if we did those things, we would not be concerned with discipline. However, all parents know that even the most well behaved children will stumble from time to time and will need correction. I think that is the sense of this passage. The earthly father is reminding his son to not reject God when He corrects him. It is out of love that God disciplines us. We should trust God even in the midst of trouble, even in the midst of the consequence of sin. As a parent disciplines his child, so does the Heavenly Father discipline us. This is exactly what the writer of the book of Hebrews said.

Hebrews 12:4-7 *In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood...It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?*

I suspect that most children do not appreciate discipline. When I was much younger, I sure did not. I tried to avoid it whenever I could. Unfortunately, the best way to avoid it is to not get yourself into situations that require discipline. But as my father often said, "I was hard-headed." This passage of Scripture should be an encouragement to us – God disciplines those He loves. To ask God to refrain from giving us discipline would be to ask Him to love us less. When we are disciplined by God for turning away from Him, we can trust that God loves us just as our earthly

fathers love us when they correct us. We might not appreciate it at the time, but the father who loves his children will correct them. An earthly father who desires to raise children to fear and love God will model his own parenting according to the pattern set by the Lord's parenting.

Conclusion

In closing, fathers are a gift to us and a father's love is a special treasure. There is nothing like it. It is out of love that our fathers protect us, care for us, teach us, and at times, discipline us. Maybe you have had that kind of father in your life – a nurturing, caring, and at times over-protective father. You were blessed! Perhaps you did not have that kind of father in your life. Maybe your father did not meet your expectations, he let you down, or he was not the kind of father you should have had. Take comfort that we all have a Heavenly Father who does care for us and demonstrated His love for us by providing a way for us to be enjoy life forever with Him – through His Son Jesus Christ. All earthly fathers, no matter how good they are, pale in comparison to our Heavenly Father.

For those fathers who are with us today, we thank you for your hard work in raising your children. We also encourage you in the call God has placed upon your life, to not give up, to not be discouraged, but to rely upon the same source of wisdom and strength all fathers and children have – your Heavenly Father. God wants for you to succeed in fatherhood. He has made you courageous, to be warriors on the front line, not watchers on the sidelines. He has called you to be men of God, who will train future men and women of God. The same words that were written to the son in this Proverb three apply to you as well:

Proverbs 3:5–6 *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.*

This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!