

Father's Day: What Every Good Father Remembers (Proverbs 3:11-12)

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4 years: "My Daddy knows everything."

8 years: "My Dad is really smart."

12 years: "My Dad probably doesn't know that."

16 years: "My Dad is absolutely clueless!"

21 years: "Dad is pretty much out of touch."

30 years: "I'd like to find out what Dad thinks."

40 years: "Let's get Dad's opinion before we make a decision."

50 years: "I wish I could ask my Dad about that. He's pretty smart."

60 years: "My Dad knew absolutely everything."

70 years: "I'd give anything if Dad were here. I really miss him."

This was found written on the back cover of a menu sheet.

"A WORD IN FAVOR OF FATHER"

Your father!

Maybe he gets crabby sometimes. Maybe he could tell you things a little more gently. Perhaps he even blames and scolds you unfairly once in a while. But think of all the times when you did something wrong and got away with it. You're still far ahead of the game.

And don't think your father is angry or grouchy every time he looks or talks in a serious way; maybe he's really worrying about you -- and with good reason. The next time he gives you a good going-over, take it like a good soldier who has made a mistake. Don't ever go away with a grudge in your heart against your father -- a grudge that doesn't wear off for three or four days.

You don't have to put a halo on your father's head or wings upon his shoulders to get the right picture of him. But remember that he is not just the man who provides the home in which you live, the food you eat, the clothes you wear and the money you spend.

He is your father!

Father gets little enough in return for all he does and gives. Love from his children? Certainly! But love packed in little packages and so tightly wrapped that poor father wears himself out looking for the speck of love and gratitude that is tossed to him. And it's a rare day when he has to get out an umbrella

to protect himself against the showers of thanks that are rained upon him. But he keeps on working and providing and giving. He is satisfied with the happiness he provides for his family. *After all is said, he is still your father!*

Maybe we did not all have the kind of father described above, but we all most certainly have had some kind of relationship with our earthly father that can be described in many of those ways.

A grade school teacher asked a little girl to tell the class what Father's Day was. The child thought for a moment and then said, "It's just like Mother's Day only you don't spend as much for the present."

Fathers get a lot of guff and too little credit. So it is good to have a day when we pause to honor our fathers. However, we would waste our worship time if we allow it to evolve into mushy, sentimentalism about fatherhood. Instead, I would like to share a biblical word having to do with fatherhood.

The Bible has a lot to say about fathers. There is no way in which we can deal with all of it. So today we'll focus on two verses: **Proverbs 3:11-12:**

11 My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, 12 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

The implications in these verses can help us understand our father's better, as we know them today or as we remember them from years gone by. If these verses could be reduced to a thesis statement, it would be something like this: The good father is the one who is self-disciplined and disciplining. Let us remember some of the implications which undergird this statement.

I. Every father is also a child.

The author addresses his words of counsel by saying, "My son....." Let us never forget that we are children no matter how old we get. Think about that. We are always a child. We have an earthly father. We have a heavenly Father. We did not just appear full-grown. We are the products of the human reproductive process. Without an earthly father we would not exist. And without a heavenly Father, who started the whole creative process, we would not be alive today.

This is so basic that it almost goes without saying. However, it is one of the most easily forgotten facts. There is something within our nature, inherited

from the first Adam that just rebels against authority. We want autonomy. We would just as soon not have to keep tipping our hats to our earthly parents or kneel before our heavenly Parent. Why not? Because it is humbling...

Deep within each of us is a desire to consider ourselves self-made. We are determined to prove ourselves. In all of our efforts, as good as they may be, we cannot forget that we are products of earthly fathers and mothers, and we have a heavenly Father to whom we are responsible. The Scriptures teach that every good and every perfect gift we have comes from Him. It is a humbling thought.

At the same time, it is a liberating concept. We are in relationship, whether we want to be or not, with the divine personality who generously gives us every breath we breathe. He is the One who has complete rule and authority over the cosmos. It is an awesome thought. We try to repress it. Nonetheless, it is true. We are children, dependent upon His grace and mercy, dependent upon His love, and dependent upon His daily provision. We need to remember that.

II. As fathers who are children, we need continuing wisdom.

Today's text is set in the larger context of the entire third chapter of Proverbs. This chapter has, as its central theme, our need for wisdom. We are exhorted and urged to seek wisdom. (**Proverbs 3:1-2, 5-7, 13-18**).

Proverbs 3:1-2:

1 *My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart,* **2** *for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity.*

Proverbs 3:5-7

5 *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.*

Proverbs 3:13-18

13 *Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding,* **14** *for she is more profitable than silver and*

*yields better returns than gold. **15** She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. **16** Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. **17** Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. **18** She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed.*

Is there any quality which gives more dignity to a father than wisdom? Those of us who acknowledge the fact that we are children of both earthly parents and a heavenly Father are much more readily able to find wisdom than those of us who are boldly proclaiming our autonomy. Wisdom comes only to the person who is humble, who acknowledges his or her need, who is willing to bow before a higher sovereign.

Remember Solomon? His father, David, had just died. Humble before God, Solomon went to the altar. He took his offerings. In the night God appeared to him and said, "Ask what I shall give you." Solomon acknowledged God's love toward his own father, David, and acknowledged the fact that God had made him king in his father's place.

And then Solomon made this request in **2 Chronicles 1:10**: *Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?*

God answered in **2 Chronicles 1:11-12**:

***11** Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, **12** therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, riches and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have.*

God rewarded Solomon for wanting the right things. Granted, we have a problem understanding Solomon's later life. How could a person of such wisdom do so many wrong things? Perhaps instead of presenting a problem, it illustrates the fact that we can willfully go against what we know is right and, in spite of God's gift of wisdom, mess up our lives. This underlines a very important fact. You and I must live in the daily appropriation of God's

wisdom. It is a gift that you and I need to steward on a daily basis. A foolish man can, with God's help, become a man of wisdom.

III. Wisdom comes through the *discipline* of our heavenly Father.

God is the source of wisdom. All wisdom ultimately comes from Him and is enabled by Him. One of His key methods to give us wisdom is to do it ***through discipline***. A careful study of the Bible will reveal that ***discipline*** is closely associated with two parental practices.

1. The first of these is "*instruction*"

This involves training and knowledge. If we were to look at this in athletic terms, we could compare it to what will begin this summer for the various professional football teams. They will check into training camps. There will be several major emphases to the ***instruction*** which the coaches will give at the beginning of this season. Each player will have his playbook. It is a valuable commodity. Usually a fine is levied against any player who loses it. There will be classroom sessions. We've seen football diagrams on television. There is a cerebral aspect. The coaches ***instruct*** players as to what they are to do in certain situations. They are to memorize the plays.

You just don't go out there and do what you feel like doing. You are ***instructed***. You are told that if you do what you should do, there will be a desirable result. This is called a "skull session." You are ***instructed*** as to how to use your head. Then you move from the classroom to the practice field. It is there where you are drilled to implement what, up to this point, is head knowledge. You practice blocking and tackling. The whole team runs through the play patterns. The receivers work with the quarterbacks to perfect their timing on the various routines.

Interspersed into the football camp scheduling are conditioning exercises. Muscles are stretched, preparing the body for contact. "Gassers" are run to build up the endurance. ***Instruction*** involves **knowledge**. ***Instruction*** involves **training**. ***Instruction*** involves **practice**. ***Instruction is one part of discipline.***

God has given us His Word. **He instructs** us as to what it is to be His person. He describes His game plan. He tells of our rebellion against His will for us. He alerts us to His provision as He became a man in Jesus Christ to die for our sins. He alerts us to His Holy Spirit's presence in our life. He challenges us to a Spirit-controlled life. And we are called to daily practice. It is here that the athletic analogy breaks down. We don't have the luxury of a

month at training camp and a six or seven game pre-season schedule. **We learn our lessons daily, right in the middle of life, and for all our life.**

2. The second of these is "reproof and correction"

What makes this **second dimension of discipline** all the more difficult is that a biblical understanding of **discipline** will show that combined with **instruction is reproof and correction**. All through the Bible we see God's "rod of discipline" in dealing with His people. He takes **corrective measures** not to crush His children, but to **train them** in the ways in which they should develop.

We have seen films of what training it takes to become an Olympic gymnastic star. We've all seen on TV pictures of youngsters when they are competing and they would miss the bar and hit the floor. What pain! Pain is part of **discipline and correction**. **Reproof is part of discipline**. God cares enough to guide our efforts!

What would you think of a math teacher who was so pleasant that he never told a student that two and two are not five? He didn't want to be negative. He didn't want to hurt the child's feelings. He wanted to be liked **so he never corrected**. Is he doing that child a favor?

Students are graded for their own good. There is no place for an easygoing relativism in math, nor is there in life. And we would never know this if God never corrected us.

IV. God warns against two natural responses to His discipline.

On the **one hand**, we are warned, "... **do not despise the Lord's discipline....**" We have seen this in children. There is that occasional child who despises parental authority. He hardens his heart against the parent's discipline. He refuses to accept the instruction.

God urges us not to despise **His discipline**. Expect it. Realize that a **disciplined life** will have **pain**. There will be **those corrections**. Don't refuse to be guided or counseled. Open your life to **His discipline**. Don't despise it.

Secondly, God warns us to "... **not resent His rebuke....**" The RSV translates this better, urging us to "... **not grow weary of His rebuke.**" Even as there are those who harden themselves against the Lord, there are those who faint. They collapse under life's pressure. They are like the

gymnast who dislocates a shoulder or breaks an ankle. He gives up, never experiencing the satisfaction which comes from a well-executed routine. Perhaps you are growing weary. You are discouraged. You are beaten down. You can't handle much more. **God's discipline** is not designed to knock us out. This leads us to another implication.

V. Only a father who delights in a child takes time to give adequate discipline.

Let's look at our text in **Proverbs 3:11-12** once again. It reads:

***11** My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, **12** because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.*

Look again to the Scriptures and you will **see constant comparisons** between God's relationship with us as His children and us in our relationship with our children. Discipline dare not be viewed as a yelling, screaming, beating affair.

God doesn't practice child abuse. We have all seen a parent grab a child by the arm, picking this helpless little one up, hitting him or slapping him in the face. **That is not discipline. That is lack of discipline.** That is not authority. This is lack of authority. That is not an adult. That is a child. That is not control. That is lack of control.

In contrast, God is talking about leading in a loving direction. It is **instruction** and **reproof** that emerges from a **sensitive and deep love.** Delighting in a child doesn't mean spoiling the child.

Perhaps the analogy of a garden best pictures this discipline. In our Senior Citizen Mobile court every lot has some sort of garden, flowers, shrubs, trees. It's interesting to watch these various people and the way they take care of their gardens. There are those who are half-hearted gardeners. They are lackadaisical about keeping their flowers and shrubs trimmed. Every so often they pay a little bit of attention to it. They really don't get down to good, hard work. And they really don't get a whole lot out of their gardens.

Then there are others who really love their gardens. They carefully provide the right soil. They add the right fertilizers. At certain times of the year they work extra hard. They are careful in the way they pull weeds. They spray for insects. They carefully water. They carefully prune back any unhealthy

growth. They take delight in this growth process. They face many a challenge. They keep at it. Drought demands extra watering with its cost in time, effort, and money. They know that gardening takes work. **Trained, disciplined growth doesn't come easily.**

So it is with a father who delights in a child. **It takes time to give adequate discipline.** A father who knows best loves his children enough to go through the pain of executing his **God-given authority and discipline.**

VI. The only person able to adequately discipline is one who lives responsibly under adequate discipline.

A responsible person must be **accountable** to someone. The father who knows best is subject to a Father who knows best. Fathering is never easy. There is no human father who can properly **wield authority** who is unwilling to live **under authority.**

A father who knows best is willing to be **disciplined by a heavenly Father.** He is willing to live **under this authority.** He is willing to **model this** before his children. The father who knows best is **disciplined and disciplining.**

Charlie Shedd, author of many family books, in his syndicated newspaper column, "Strictly for Dads," once told about listening to a famous child psychiatrist read a paper on *"Theological Implications in the Father-Child Relationship."* It began by saying that he himself was a believer. And then he made this announcement: "No little child will **think more of God than he thinks of his own father!!**"

Startled by this, Shedd began to check it out in his work with parents, teenagers and the college set. In his hours with alcoholics, drug users and unhappy marriages, people of every kind out of sync with life at its best, it became clear that the child psychologist was right. **A little child can't contrast. He can only compare.**

We teach him to pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven." We tell him that God is our heavenly Father. In his mind he muses, "God is like my father? I'm not so sure my father really cares about me. He's always playing golf, watching television, reading the newspaper. Besides, he isn't very nice to my mother. He's not even fair. I don't think I like God."

What did Shedd suggest? It is a little speech to kids -- a speech given both by words and by actions. It goes like this:

"Listen to me, children. Where I'm the kind of father I should be, that is what God is like! Where I am not so hot, I hope you'll forgive me and not compare but contrast me to God. Wherever the Bible says that God is like a father, you can understand it means that God is like a perfect father. You know I'm not perfect, but I'm going to keep on trying. I want you to know that I know I've got a long way to go."

This is pretty good advice for both fathers and mothers, isn't it? Although today we have spoken in relationship to God as Father, we need to remember that He is more than that. He is also One who comforts as a mother. Jesus referred to God as Spirit. He has both the feminine and masculine characteristics of the finest parents, while being so much more than Parent. Today's words are also for mothers as well as fathers, as we are called to acknowledge that we live accountable to God and to others, and we can ask forgiveness where we have failed.

Perhaps today you may need to talk to your heavenly Parent, receiving anew His grace, love and forgiveness.