

How to Bring up Children – Successful Parenting! – Proverbs 4: 1-9

INTRODUCTION

Our children do not belong to us but to God. They are precious gifts given to us by our heavenly Father to care for and look after. One day we are to return to Him the children whom He has given to us from infancy. Children in infancy are like very soft pliable clay. We can shape and mould them into any form or shape we desire. They are literally soft clay in the master's hand. The master in this instance is the father and the mother. The child is sent to pre-nursery classes and takes whatever courses they dictate. The child remains in the child care centre or any place and is surrounded by people he has never seen before because his parents put him/her there. These young children are at the mercy of their parents. They could even be placed in harm's way and they would be defenceless. They could be sold or given away or fostered off or sent to Timbuktu. This is how much power parents have over their children!

The influence in the development of the child's character is greatest from infancy to the child's age of accountability. The reason is obvious. Before the age of accountability, the child depends on his parents to protect, feed, nurture, etc, one hundred percent. The more time the child spends with a person, the more that person's influences will have the greatest impact. For example, if the child spends the greatest amount of time with the maid in the house, then the maid's influence over the child will be visibly great. Her philosophies of life, morality and ethics will have the greatest impact on the child as opposed to the child's working parents who hardly spend time with their child. By the time they get home, the child is already asleep. By the time they leave home for work, the child is probably still asleep. Food and clothing are abundantly provided for. Thrown into this mix of the best food and best clothing would be the best holidays money could buy at the end of the year. Very often, this goes on from year to year until the child becomes an adult. If the parents are unhappy with how the child turns out in terms of character and behaviour, it is too late to do anything about it. The child has become an adult and any influence of the parents over their child's character building is long gone.

As the child grows older, the influence of the parents declines. By the time the child becomes an adult, the window of influence is almost closed. The norm is generally seen as 100% influence (at birth) to near 0% (adulthood). Knowing that their influence in the moulding and shaping of their children's lives will decrease as they grow, Christian parents need to take a step back and ask themselves three very pertinent questions in light of eternity.

I. WHAT IS MY LEGACY? – 4:1-4

Every parent leaves behind a legacy for his children. This is the inevitable result of parenting. It is not whether he wants to or not, it is just the way bringing up children entails. It is not a matter of choice because of close proximity and the influence the lives of the parents have over their children from the moment they are born. Some might even say from the moment of conception! What will we as parents leave behind for our children that will avail them the very best? The world believes that it is fame and fortune sprinkled them with a mixture of happiness and an ethical life of doing some philanthropic goodness toward the poor and downtrodden. This is the way of salvation by good works. For the Christian parent, it is the pearl of great price that he has found, i.e. Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour, which is what he must give to his children. To give anything less than Christ is to short change our own children and we might as well condemn them to Hell. Some naive and ignorant parents who call themselves Christians think that they should let their children choose for themselves when they grow up. This is utterly false logic, for it is like a man who found the cure for cancer and cured himself and then buried that knowledge.

Then when his son has cancer, he tells him to find the cure himself! This is cruelty to one's own children! For a Christian parent to think this way means he is either completely ignorant of God's teaching or he might not even be born again! As truly born again parents, the first person we should share the gospel with must be our own children! If we do not care for the salvation of our own children and that they be reconciled to God, how can we ever be concerned for the souls outside of our own family?

a. 4:1 – the duty of the father is to teach

What children need most today from their fathers is right teaching. Proverbs 4:1 begins with an emphatic cry from the father to his children to hear (imperative) the instruction of their father! The word for instruction has the idea of "correction, warning, chastisement, and reproof." The world out there is a dangerous place. Our children must not be gullible and easily deceived into sin and fall into bad company and become victims to evil men. The father wants them to attend, i.e. pay close attention, to understanding, i.e. discernment. The use of synonymous parallelism in 4:1 is to emphasize the importance of properly hearing the father's instruction. Spend time with your children and make sure that the teaching is more than just memorizing some portions of Scriptures; teach by your life. Children learn well when they see father living the life of a godly believer or "walking the talk". They will observe and hide the precious lessons in their hearts. They will remember them for life even after the father is gone.

b. 4:2 – the father must give good doctrines

The father is not just to teach anything he wants. He is not to teach his own philosophies or the philosophies of men. The father is a believer in Christ and therefore he must teach his children the perfect Word of God. There is no teaching wiser than the Word of God. To know the Word of God is to have the mind of God. To have the mind of God is to think like God. To think like God is to evaluate all things in life with the mind of God. Not even Satan's deceptions can deceive the child of God who has the mind of God. The father gives to his children good doctrines. The father learns them from the Word of God and passes them to his own children as gifts. This is his legacy! He does not sell them to his children. The doctrines are characterised by goodness. Only the perfect Word of God can be considered good doctrines. It will be good for the person who obeys the Word of God. The child who obeys God's Word will receive goodness. When the child becomes a Christian himself, he also becomes the child of the heavenly Father. The heavenly Father will also care for the child the same way He cares for the father. The father's warning to his children is "forsake ye not my law". The use of the first personal pronoun is a reference to God's law and not the law of man. The use of synthetic parallelism is to supplement the teaching in the first line. The children are reminded not to forsake because as they grow older they may forget. The attractions and manifold temptations of the world have seduced many young persons. But the father's children are to hold on to father's good doctrines all their lives regardless of their age and the circumstances of life. They must never forsake, i.e. relinquish, the good doctrines that father has given them since their birth.

c. 4:3 – the father is continuing the same legacy

The father shares that he learned the good doctrines from his father and now he is passing on to them the same good doctrines! Basically he is telling his children: "I have tasted and experienced what these good doctrines have done in my life since I was born and now I am passing them to you." This is the best legacy a father could give to his children - the knowledge of the way to eternal life! For the first time, he mentions the impact of his mother in his life. His mother watched over him with tenderness and love. What he gained from his

father and mother, he wants the same for his beloved children. It is the duty of both father and mother to bring up their children. Do not turn your family into a single parent family by your absence.

d. 4:4 – experiential knowledge is the best knowledge

Teaching good doctrines accurately is very good, but there is nothing better than teaching good experiential knowledge. Good doctrines that father himself practises in his own life which are witnessed by his own children is the best way to teach. The influence of a godly father to his godly son is passed down to the grandchildren. The father shares that his father instructed him to retain, i.e. take hold and never let go, his words, i.e. God's Word. Just as his father told him, now he tells his son to keep, i.e. guard, his commandments. One does not guard something unless it is precious to him. Regard the commandments, i.e. non-negotiable instructions that must be obeyed, as very precious and do not let anything or anyone take these commandments from you! The end result is that you will surely live! This is eternal life as well as the abundant life that Christ promises every believer on earth. This legacy is eternal.

II. WHAT IS MY OBJECTIVE? – 4:5-7

The objective in bringing up children lies with every parent. There are only two categories: eternal and temporal objectives. Good education and well paid jobs leading to a luxurious lifestyle are temporal objectives that the world would regard as successful living. Individuals who can make millions before they turn 30 years of age are placed on pedestals for others to emulate. Awards are heaped upon them to recognise their great success in so short a time. Some are even knighted by kings and queens simply because they have done so well in the world. Billionaires are touted as richest men or women in the world so that the world might take notice of their wealth. Their luxurious lifestyle is published in elite magazines for the envying world to long for and admire but will probably never obtain! All these belong to the temporary category. Is this the objective parents want for their children? Is this the objective Christian parents should want for their children?

a. 4:5 – give wisdom to our children

The commandment from father to his children is to get wisdom. The word for "get" is in the imperative which implies a command. The meaning of "get" is "to procure or buy." The child is to regard wisdom as precious and therefore no matter what it takes he is to buy wisdom. This means to sacrifice to get this wisdom if necessary. Wisdom is the application of godly knowledge in solving life's circumstances. It is similar as having discernment but not the same. Discernment is the ability to evaluate or gauge the circumstances or even the cross roads of life and wisdom is to know which direction to choose that is not only the best but also right. Therefore the father commands the children using the same verb twice and both in the imperatives to buy both wisdom and understanding. The wisdom and understanding that father speaks of is found only in God's perfect Word and nowhere else. The children must never forget at all costs if they want to live. Using antithetical parallelism to contrast the loss of wisdom and understanding which is to decline from the words of the father's mouth. To decline is to turn away from following God's Word. There are many ways this can happen. Marrying an unbeliever, love of money, persecution, seduction, enticement of a luxurious life and sinful habits are some of the ways the children can turn away from the wisdom and understanding of the father.

b. 4:6 – wisdom will guard our children

Do not forsake wisdom and wisdom will preserve the children. The word for “preserve” is the same word for “keep” in verse 4. If the children were to keep God’s Word then God’s Word will keep the children. They will not fall into sin. They would have the fear of God in their hearts to keep them on the path of righteousness. If they fall into sin they will repent of their sin and turn back to God and the path of righteousness. They will have the wisdom to go to the right kind of places and know what kind of places to avoid. They will have the wisdom to choose the right kinds of friends and find the right life partner. They will lean on God and His wisdom and abiding presence will be their main stay. The evils of the world have no sway over them as they are led by the Holy Spirit constantly. To ensure that this is not a passing phase but will last a lifetime they must love wisdom and she will keep the children in safety. The word for “keep” here is different from the previous word. This word has the idea of concealment or to keep by hiding. Wisdom will cover the children and hide them from the evil one. This synonymous parallelism is to emphasize the importance of holding onto wisdom and never let her leave.

c. 4:7 – give wisdom at all cost

The father must deliberately focus on passing on wisdom to his children. Wisdom is the principal thing to give to his children. He can give them food and clothing and these are important but not as important as wisdom. He can also give them a very good education but this is not as important as wisdom i.e. God’s Word. The word for “principal” means “first or chief.” The father must realize that the education of the world is only good for this world and they are all temporal. However, the wisdom of God is eternal and gives eternal life to your children. That is why the emphasis is repeated here as it was first mentioned in verse 5. No matter what, the parents must understand that if their children get wisdom they have gotten all that they need in life. If the father is able to give this wisdom to their children and their children obtained it and hid it in their hearts, he has become a successful father. With all their getting i.e. in life as they accumulate much of the worldly goods and accolades they must always remember to get wisdom. To get wisdom is to keep on studying God’s Word. They must never stop studying God’s Word.

III. WHAT ARE MY VALUES? – 4:8-9

The values of the father and mother become the value of the children. The focus on their children’s lives is determined by the values of the parents. When the parents focus on materialism the children grow up and become very materialistic. If the parents are godly and encourage godliness above all else in their own lives and the lives of their children, inevitably this will also become the children’s values too. The values of every parent are already determined for them by God. They are found in God’s perfect Word. Therefore parents beginning from the father as the head of the house, pass on to your children biblical values for they are never wrong. These biblical values are timeless are good for all occasions. They will guide your children throughout their lives on earth but also unto eternity. Their lives when lived in accordance with God’s revealed Word are guaranteed to please God and bring blessings to others especially God’s people.

a. 4:8 – honour God and He will honour you

The children must learn to honour God from their fathers. To exalt God’s Word is to honour God. To diminish God’s Word is to diminish God. This is also true in real life. When we cast aspersions on the person’s word and say that his words cannot be trusted, it is as good as

saying that the person cannot be trusted. One cannot divorce the person from his word and vice versa. Therefore when the father exalts wisdom and tells his children to do the same the impact is tremendous. The word “exalt” means “to esteem highly.” Command our children to regard the Word of God as more important than life itself and wisdom will promote our children. The word “promote” means “to be raised up.” Everyone honours something in life. This is reality. The question is what do we esteem as the most important? Some esteem education as most important and therefore if their children do not go to university, they regard their children as well as themselves as a failure in life. Others may regard money and reputation as the most important and they would do anything to get them and hold on to them. When they fail, they see themselves as failures in life. For the Christian father he teaches his children that exalting wisdom is the best. Wisdom will cause the children to be noticed because they are different from the rest of the world. They have integrity and high moral standards that the world cannot understand. They have wisdom in making wise decisions for themselves and the company they work with. They stick out like a godly thumb! Using synonymous parallelism the Bible asserts that when wisdom is embraced that is held onto dearly as something that you love dearly, wisdom will bring the children to honour. This is a promise! Do not equate honour with material rewards for this is not guaranteed gambling! The moment the person thinks this way he is unwise. He has lost it. The sincerity and heartfelt love for God’s Word will exalt the child of God to the highest honour from God’s perspective. Look at the lives of Joseph in Genesis and Daniel and the great apostle Paul. The nature of this honour is elaborated in the next verse.

b. 4:9 – eternal honours money cannot buy

Wisdom will give the children of the father who obeys God’s Word “an ornament of grace”. This will be placed on the head which is a figure to mean something easily recognisable rather than the literal head. Grace refers to the undeserving blessings given by God. It might include material things that are good for this life but more so to spiritual and eternal things. The children who highly esteem wisdom and embrace her are full of grace. They are very conscious of the presence of God in their lives in all that they do. They are very grateful for they know that all that they have come from God. They know how to own and use things for God’s glory and not be owned by things and become slaves to their own possessions like so many today. They are humble and not fill themselves with pride and arrogance. They know who they are because of their relationship with God through Christ and not measure themselves by their earthly possession like diplomas and degrees from institutions of higher learning or their bank accounts or lack of it or their houses and social status. Spiritual reality guide their heart and thinking. The children know that they have a home in heaven and there awaits for them a crown of glory that God alone can give and will give. Their life on earth is a life of service unto God. They do not live for the things of this earth. They live for eternity for the glory of God their heavenly Father.

APPLICATION

All parents are bestowed gifts from God. They are our children. Our children are never ours to own but to nurture and one day we are to return them to God who gave them to us to look after and to bring up. Our children are born in sin like all of us. This sin was imputed to all human beings from the first Adam. This means that if our children die in their sin they will end up in Hell. There is nothing on this earth that can save them from Hell except God. Do you think that you are considered a successful parent if you do not give to your children to answer that will help get them out of Hell? All the religions and educations of this world are helpless to get our children out of Hell except Jesus Christ.

The main determining factor in evaluating successful parenting is eternity not what we possess on this earth but what we possess in heaven. Your answers to these three questions will help you determine whether you are a successful parent. What is your legacy for your children? What is your objective in bringing up your children? And what are your values in life that are most precious to you? The biblical answers to these questions are stated above. Are they your answers? If not, why not? Please do not resign to the fact that it is too late. It is never too late with God and Jesus Christ. Repent of your sins and slothfulness and come back to Christ. Pray for yourselves and take concrete steps to be good students of God's Word and godly examples at home to your children. Pray for your children without ceasing that the LORD will be merciful to bring them back unto Himself. Amen

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the world define successful parenting? Do you agree with this definition of the world? How do you define successful parenting? Where or what do you base it on? Do you think that it is biblical?
2. What do you wish to leave behind as a legacy for your children? What do you as children want as your legacy from your parents? When your parents are no longer on this earth, how or what would you like to remember them of?
3. What is your goal for your child? How do you want your child to end up when they grow up? Are you doing the right thing to ensure that your objective will be met in the future?
4. What is most important to you as parents in bringing up your children or child? What is most important to you in life growing up as a son or daughter? What is the basis for your decision?
5. Do you think you are a successful parent? Do you think that your parents are successful in bringing you up?