

Made for Fatherhood

During our last lesson, called “Made for Marriage,” we discussed how the institution of marriage first came to be, and we identified several important qualities of a godly marriage, all with the intent to solidify a foundation regarding this important topic. In doing so, we placed a special emphasis on the relationship that you will one day have with your bride-to-be. But your marriage will not affect just the relationship you have with your bride. In fact, the union of your spirits will possibly be the *very cause* of additional relationships, for together you will quite likely bring forth into this world children of your own!

We can already imagine some of the different reactions that you might have upon initially reading this lesson. Perhaps you have instantly broken into a cold sweat, for you fear you are not even ready to do tomorrow’s chores, let alone raise a family. Or maybe you consider the matter unimportant, for you figure that fatherhood is something that probably won’t happen until you’re really old. Or perhaps you are properly sober about the whole matter, knowing that in due time the privilege of being a father will present itself, but in the meantime you still have your go-cart to fix.

Whether you have never given the matter any thought, or if you have been wanting children all your life, your reactions

are probably within the realm of normalcy. But as with any important topic of life, we want you to be *complete in Christ*, and that involves having a godly understanding of what God thinks about things. And most assuredly, God is not silent about the topic of fatherhood.

God Ordained

Like the institution of marriage, parenthood is ordained by God. Make no mistake about it—God created the earth with the intention that it be filled with people. The Genesis narrative makes this clear:

And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over...every living thing that moves on the earth.” Genesis 1:27-28

“Be fruitful and multiply,” God has said. And His word is still the same today. There is nothing to indicate that God’s views on this matter have changed. He has a vested interest in people. He loves and places tremendous value on them, so much so that He has made provision for their every need.

You should know that there are plenty of people who are clueless about the ordination of parenthood. And there are others, who, knowing better, simply disregard God’s say on the matter. As you might suspect, such people have embraced a faulty worldview, and thus are blind to the truth. One false view in this regard is not at all uncommon, and you should know something about it:

The Earth as Mother

It is likely you have heard the phrase “Mother Nature” many

times. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this phrase, you should know that many people take the wording quite literally. They believe that the earth originally brought forth all of the life on it, and hence the phrase and others like it. This worldview is not a new one, and has likely been around for thousands of years. But it is a ridiculous and ungodly worldview.

Science itself recognizes that life must come from life, but many scientists make an exception to this law when it comes to the origin of living things. In doing so, they conveniently disregard common sense, and ultimately, God. They believe that long ago, lifeless molecules, coupled with energy and lots of time, spontaneously gave birth to crude, microscopic forms of life that eventually evolved into everything else that is living. They believe that the earth is their parent, rather than acknowledging God as their creator.

At the heart of this worldview is the notion that mankind is here because of the earth, rather than the earth being here for the benefit of mankind. However, God commissioned mankind to “be fruitful and multiply” and to “fill the earth and subdue it.” But this false worldview does not see things this way, and in fact often makes mankind out to be the enemy of the earth. Proponents of this worldview often argue that mankind has filled the earth and subdued it so much so that he has now overpopulated and begun to destroy it.

Plenty of Room

The notion that mankind has overpopulated the earth is a myth, and it has neither a scientific nor sensible basis. The people who believe this false view have probably never travelled more than three city blocks, or they are just plain blind to the vastness of the earth. Indeed, the earth is vast, and you can be sure that if God made it to be the home of His children, He would also make provision in regard to room.

Here's an interesting fact to help clarify this point: Did you know that you could line up all the people in the entire world side-by-side, chest-to-back, and fit them *all* within the city limits of Jacksonville, Florida? In fact, there would be plenty of wiggle room, and much of the city would still be vacant! Feel free to do a little fact-finding and make the calculations yourself if you should need convincing.

Of course, it would not be any fun to live in such a small space all the time. After an hour or so, everybody would want to go home and take a good shower. However, a point can be made, and that is there is *lots* of room on this wonderful planet of ours. And you can be sure that God designed the earth to be able to sustain us with plenty of food and other resources. In fact, the state of Iowa alone can produce enough food to feed our entire country (although you may tire of corn and soybeans every day). When you hear that certain areas of the world do not have enough resources, poor economic conditions due to inefficient governments are often to blame.

As Christians, we must never forget that God loves people. And because He loves mankind, you can be sure that He made the earth with ample room and other provisions to take care of all our needs.

A Blessing from the Lord

We lament that there are certain people who do not place a high value on humanity. "There are already enough people in the world; we do not need any more," they say. Others, recognizing this view to be extreme, temper their attitudes somewhat by saying, "It's hard to provide for so many children, so it's best not to have very many."

But what does God's Word say? Without exception, every biblical passage involving children refers to them as intended blessings! Consider this verse: "Then the Lord your God

will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body. He will also bless the fruit of your womb” (Deut. 30:9). Or how about this one?: “Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them!” (Psalm 127:4-5).

Here’s yet another verse (one of our favorites), which comes right from the mouth of Jesus: “Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14).

Children are indeed an intended blessing! And yet, there are those that do not recognize this wonderful truth. Some, while recognizing part of the truth, attempt to keep God’s blessings at bay by suggesting that less is better than more. One wise man offered a thought provoking question in this regard. He asked, “If children are a blessing from the Lord, why do some couples tell the Lord that they want a limit on their blessing?”

One day, you may have children of your own. And when you do, we hope you keep them coming! Embrace the idea of having as many children as the Lord will provide, so that “your quiver will be full.”

What About Provision?

We have already assured you that there is plenty of room and food in the world. But make no mistake about it, a house will not be made for you, nor will food magically appear on your plate without you having to work for it. It is likely that you are already keenly aware of this fact, both from your own experiences as well as the lessons you have previously learned in this book.

Some couples are reluctant to want children because they are fearful of either their own abilities to provide or of God’s ability

to do His part. So we will offer here a word of encouragement on this matter. But we will not be flowery or long-winded in doing so.

Simply stated, you have nothing to worry about in regard to providing for your family some day. In fact, you won't even need an extra edge; all you will need to see your family through is a solid work ethic and an ability to see needs and fulfill them. Can you do this? Of course you can! We have no doubt about it, and neither should you.

But what about God's ability to do His part? In short, God can be trusted to take care of you and your future family, every time, all the time. We have never met one individual who could honestly tell us otherwise after placing his trust in God. God would not indicate that children are a blessing from Him, and then not provide appropriate shelter, clothing, and food for them. The idea is just silly. If God blesses you with one child, He will provide accordingly. And if He blesses you with two, three, ten or even thirty children, He will still provide accordingly!

Even a young girl will feed and care for her Shirley Temple doll. Why, we have even seen some boys feed their GI Joes pretend K-rations. If it is human nature to provide for those under our care, how much more will our perfect, heavenly Father take care of us!

You will do well to always remember that part of the Sermon on the Mount which we studied earlier. Jesus told us not to worry about what we will eat or what we will wear, for if we seek first after the kingdom, then "...all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).

You are quite likely going to be a dad someday. We encourage you to not let the concern of provision be a stumbling block to you. It is a non-issue. God is looking forward to working alongside you, helping to lead your family. Remember too, that

your children are His children; He will not let them go without provision any more than He would let you go without.

When Should You Have Children?

There are some married couples who try hard to plan when they will have children and how many they will finally settle on. While we are not going to dissuade you from one day giving these matters thought, neither will we emphasize their importance.

If you keep on the forefront of your mind that children are an intended blessing from the Lord and that God is a wonderful provider, then ninety percent or more of your concerns about family planning will be instantly taken care of.

So, should you have children soon after you are married, or should you wait? Our counsel to you is to let God be truly in control in all matters related to this issue. Neither attempt to accelerate nor slow the matter, and let the wonder of it all unfold naturally.

How to Keep a Blessing a Blessing

We have unabashedly declared what the Bible says about children—that they are an intended blessing from the Lord. That being said, we know that some people doubt that children are a blessing because they have seen so much selfishness and other bad manners coming from various children. So is the Bible true? How can we honestly state that children are a blessing when so many of them demonstrate otherwise?

The Bible says that children are *meant* to be blessings; but it does not imply that all children are, in fact, blessings as far as their behaviors are concerned. Cain was most assuredly not a blessing when he killed his brother Abel. The great judge Samuel could not keep his sons in line. And King David's son Absalom certainly gave him grief.

Why do some children turn out to be the opposite of a blessing? As we have stated in a previous lesson, God has gifted each person with a free will, which means that all of us are ultimately responsible for the decisions that we make in life. The power and responsibility associated with a free will cannot be overstated. Nobody forced Cain to kill Abel, and likewise nobody is forced to choose evil over good. But it is clear that many children grow up and choose to live dishonorable lives. The Bible is rich in content about this very topic, and it offers valuable insight in regard to raising children so that they will not choose to live the wrong way. Let's review some of what the Bible has to say:

A Wonderful Proverb—To Train Up a Child

One of the most oft quoted verses pertaining to raising children is Proverbs 22:16, which states, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

Notice that the first word in this passage says “train.” It does not say “provide for,” “teach,” or even “raise.” It says, pointedly enough, that your children will need to be *trained*. Too many parents miss this foundational point. Indeed, the world is full of parents who think that clothing their children and sending them off to bed is enough. It is not enough!

If you want your dog to come, sit, roll over, or do any kind of trick or obey any kind of command, you must train it. Rover is simply not going to fetch or do anything other than eat, sleep, or scratch himself unless he is trained by someone to do otherwise. If this is true for a lowly dog, how much more so is it for humans who are infinitely more complex!

You should know that there is a popular worldview that competes with the biblical one we are presenting here. This false worldview says that because humans are complex and have a

free will, they should not be trained. Rather, they should be free to do whatever they want, even throughout childhood. If Little Johnny wants scrambled eggs for breakfast after he requested Cheerios and was granted them, then Mommy or Daddy should instantly comply. If Sister Susie wants her eyebrow pierced for her first day of kindergarten, then her wish should be granted. In some places, this false worldview has been embraced so much that it has become the cultural norm. As you might suspect, this approach to childrearing tends to raise children who have respect neither for God, themselves, nor for others.

In The Way He Should Go

The proverb tells us to train a child “in the way he should go.” Some parents find this part of the passage mysterious and even intimidating, for they aren’t sure what the phrase means. But really this part of the verse is not mysterious at all.

“In the way he should go” does not refer to a north or south type of direction. Neither does it refer to guiding a child toward a particular vocation in life. While it may involve some of these aspects, the verse primarily intends to admonish its readers to lead their children in the *path of righteousness*.

Jesus told us that the road to heaven is a narrow one, and that few find its path (Matt. 7:14). One day, when you are a father, you will need to identify this path for your children, and after identifying it, you will need to use wisdom to train them how to walk accordingly.

When He Is Old....

If you train your sons and daughters to walk in the way of righteousness, they will have a huge advantage all throughout their lives, and this includes their old age. So then, we will offer, in the way of tips and commentary, some insight from the Bible and from experiences gathered from those who have walked

successfully before us.

Some Tips for Success:

Before we begin offering you a few tips in the way of parenting, you should know that space and time do not permit us to present all you will need to know. So we will not be discussing the finer points of changing diapers or the drawbacks of bottled formula in this lesson. You and your wife will figure these things out and more in due time. Actually, most parenting skills aren't all that hard to master, and we are confident that you and your wife will both be experts sooner than you think.

However, there are certain things we deem important enough to pass on. Most of what you are about to read is wisdom passed on from ages past; we have invented nothing. Some of it is universally accepted, and other parts are downright resisted due to conflicting worldviews. But all of it is presented so that you can keep the hearts of your children in the path of righteousness.

Dad and Mom in Agreement

Before you and your bride-to-be have children, you must both understand and mutually embrace the importance of being in agreement as to how you will raise them. Indeed, the more you can agree on this matter, the better. In fact, total agreement is best. The power of unity in this regard cannot be overemphasized. Parental harmony fosters emotional security, safeguards against domestic divisiveness, and validates all things taught.

The Dad as Leader

How do you promote an environment of unity between you and your wife with respect to childrearing? The best way is to choose a wife who embraces all the Bible has to say about this subject, and one who will let you lead in this regard. We already

discussed the importance of this in our last lesson, “Made for Marriage,” but it is worth repeating here.

How your children will be schooled, how they will be disciplined, and who they will hang out with are just a few of the many questions you and your wife will need to answer. But make no mistake about it; you will need to be in charge. Ephesians 5:23 says, “For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.”

You may have seen some families whereby neither the father nor the mother was in charge. Rather, it was the children who were directing the course of daily living. May this never be in your home! Children should never be allowed to tell Dad or Mom what is right for the moment. You must make sure your children are not raised to do so.

We are not saying that it is wrong to ask your toddler if he wants ice cream along with his birthday cake; you may in fact want to ask him questions like this from time to time. But he should never *tell* you what he wants. Before long, he will be telling you he wants the car keys, and he may even chide you for not filling the gas tank.

Teach Them Your Way

Asking children questions in the way of preferences should not be the norm, especially if the children are very young. Parents who routinely ask their toddlers what they would like to wear or what they prefer for lunch are only asking for problems down the road. If you adopt this type of parenting style, you will likely raise a child to be self-centered. You shouldn’t be surprised if you are routinely challenged by such a child.

Perhaps a short example can be useful here. We know of one family who went on a vacation in a beautiful, mountainous

region of our country. There were a few historical sites along the way that both the father and mother really wanted to see, but in the end they never ended up visiting them. The reason? The parents made the mistake of asking their young children if they wanted to visit the sites. Both the young son and his slightly older sister instantly voiced objections to their parents. “We don’t want to do what you guys want. We would rather have extra time for swimming and watching television at a hotel.”

The father complied with his children’s wishes rather than his own or his wife’s, and both parents felt like they were being sacrificial servants to their children. But the truth of the matter is these children were already in a routine of being moody and steering their parents accordingly, and both Mom and Dad were blind to it.

These children and their parents missed out on some really terrific experiences that they may never be able to recapture. Could these parents have directed their family in a better way? We think so, and that is by not letting their children dictate family policy.

Truth be told, children do not have a clue what they really want, let alone what is best for them. It is usually not until they are in their early teens that they are able to reasonably analyze what they want based on prior experiences. Even then, they are often governed by the extremes of what-is-familiar and what-is-new. While this is normal for most people, children are not usually equipped to make wise decisions in this regard, especially when consideration is made for the good of the entire family.

When your children get older, it will be natural for them to voice their requests and offer insight into family affairs, and it should be just as natural for you to want to hear and consider them. A request from your twelve year old son to visit a sporting goods store so he can check out a new fishing lure that he has saved up for is a reasonable request that you may want to consider.

However, a request from a six year old to stop at McDonald's for his fifth Happy Meal in the same week is probably more noise than anything else. In many successful families, such requests are not even allowed.

There is a philosophy on the loose that suggests that parents are somehow being mean if they direct their children confidently and with consistent certainty. This philosophy is wishy-washy, and you will do well to reject it before you even have children. If you and your wife want to see Custer's Last Stand during a family vacation and you think your children would benefit from it, then your way should be the sole voice of direction. Your word should not be the last word; it should be the first and only word. This should hold true for all matters regarding childrearing.

Godly Expression

Do you want to be the kind of father someday that is a really good leader, the kind where his words are like golden music whether they be in the form of a directive or an announcement of things to come? If so, then you will do well to incorporate a healthy and bountiful dose of godly expression in both your *demeanor* and *candor*.

Your demeanor is the way in which you behave and conduct yourself. Essentially, it is the expression of your personality. Your candor is part of your demeanor because it demonstrates the sincerity of your expression. In other words, a person's candor indicates whether or not he is genuine. In regard to both of these expressions, your desire should be that your children may see God through you. As God is certain, so should you be. As God is love, so should you be. And as God is gracious, so should you be.

In an upcoming lesson, we will be discussing the various fruit of the Holy Spirit, which is comprised of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and

self-control (Gal. 5:22). You will be a godly father indeed if your demeanor and candor reflect these wonderful things.

Being Joyful

We view joy as one of the most effective expressions in raising godly children. We have already indicated that as a father, you must be in charge, and that your word should be the first and only. If we had said only that, one might likely conclude that childrearing was a lifeless contest of the wills. But as we have stated, children are an intended blessing, and you will certainly find joy upon joy while raising your children.

If you want to stack the deck in your favor in regard to gaining honor and respect from your children, then you will do well to let your children *know* that they bring you joy. You can do this in many ways, not the least of which is to simply smile at them. And let your smiles turn to laughter from time to time, even often.

Do you know how to tickle your son or daughter's funny bone? Then do so, both literally and figuratively. Tell them jokes, be at ease with them, and allow yourself to be the brunt of humor from time to time.

Have you seen your son make a fantastic tackle or your daughter make a graceful expression? Then tell them so in a way that clearly demonstrates the joy within you.

Can a parent do all of this too much? Actually, we think so. You do not want to be the type of father that is clowning around so much so that he is difficult to take seriously. In fact, your children should not ever have to search for the serious side of you, so don't mask it by giving them the idea that fun and laughter is your number one aim. That being said, be lavish with your praise and admiration of your children's accomplishments.

Spending Time

We will not offer advice in the way of exactly how much time you should spend with your children. Suffice it to say that the gray-haired veterans who have parented before us are right; time goes by very quickly, and before one realizes it, his children are grown. So you will want to keep this in mind, and make the most of your time with your children while you have it.

That being said, we should let you know that some parents get into a trap whereby the entire routine of the family revolves around keeping the schedule of their children's various commitments. We encourage you to guard against having everything centered around your children such that you are always taking them to or from some sort of practice or event. To be sure, there will be times when this is best for them, but do not think this needs to be a lifelong habit.

While we are on this topic, we want to encourage you to spend plenty of time alone with your wife after you have children. And don't be afraid of going overboard on this matter. Your children will need to see that their mother comes before them, and it will do them good if they are told this directly and for them to see this in practice.

How we wish that we did not have to warn you against the sin of becoming obsessed with work, but alas! Many men have fallen prey to the slave-master of labor. While we encourage you to be a hard and steady worker, we will also warn you against doing so to the detriment of your family. We would rather see you serve bread without butter and have time for your family than to see you serve steak and shrimp without having time for them.

Start Them Young

When should you formally start childrearing? We say right

away! A practice that we have seen employed successfully many times is to give a newborn immediate and consistent attention for each and every need during the first several months of his life. Coddle him, pamper him, and feed him until he is satisfied once again. By doing so, you will be well on your way to raising a child who knows for certain that his world is a safe one.

When They Start to Test You

Up to about seven months of age, give or take, the only noises a baby knows how to make are soft cooing sounds along with intermittent crying. One thing you must know is that babies do not whine at this age, for all they know how to do is cry. Crying is completely natural, for it is a baby's God-given way of letting his parent know that something is wrong. However, whining is another matter.

Whining begins when a baby starts to be more cognizant of his world. This usually happens at about seven months of age, and during this time an observant parent will notice that his or her baby will sometimes "cry" for no legitimate reason. It is at this time that a baby will experiment with whining.

An unobservant parent will mistake whining for crying and will inadvertently encourage the baby to whine even more by giving him attention. We implore you to heed this advice: do not ever pamper a whining baby! This is a pivotal time in the development of your child and much is at stake, not the least of which is your future ability to see your child as a consistent blessing. Simply stated, you must have the courage and insight to discern the difference between a cry and a whine, and then to respond appropriately.

Why do we say it takes "courage" to discern a cry from a whine? We say "courage" because too many parents are fearful of facing the truth that left to their own devices and without godly direction, babies will eventually grow into self-centered

toddlers who will eventually grow into misdirected children who will eventually grow into egocentric teenagers who will...you get the picture.

All humans, at one point or another in their lives, will try to test their boundaries to see what is acceptable and safe and what is not. It should not surprise anyone, then, that this testing begins at a very early age, earlier than most parents are willing to realize.

This testing begins by whining. For example, a baby will sometimes whine, rather than cry, because it wants to be picked up after being put to bed. Pick the baby up after whining, and what have you done? You have just taught him that it is all right to whine to get picked up. After a few more times of this, it becomes clear who trained whom. The baby will have successfully trained the parent to succumb to his manipulative whining.

So what is a parent to do? We encourage parents of newborns to calmly and confidently declare war on all forms of whining in their household. And to be sure—whining takes many forms. Sometimes it will be more of a squawk than a whine; other times it may be more like a screech. The older a baby gets, the more varied the forms. Perhaps you have heard some of the various forms of whining coming from a teenager. If so, you know how utterly awful it can sound by this advanced stage. But chances are good that a whining teenager was once a whining baby who was never successfully restrained.

Parents do not need to get upset when whining happens; rather, they simply need to respond consistently in love. A baby who whines should be completely ignored if at all possible. If eye contact must be made, the parent should convey a look of disapproval. A firm yet confident “no” should somehow also be conveyed. Babies that are still whining after being placed in bed should be gently but firmly held in the prone position and

not allowed to move. A gentle lullaby might be sung by the parent, not as a reward for whining but rather as a supplement to being firmly held. In a very short time the baby will be having heavenly dreams of your lullabies.

A very young baby who is whining during waking hours should be held gently yet firmly against his parent's chest, and not allowed to squirm, not even a little. A gentle but confident "no" should be whispered into the baby's ear. If the squirming or whining increases, the firm hold upon baby should actually increase. At all costs, you must win. Do not give into the baby's demand.

In short order, any baby, even strong-willed ones, will tire and comply. After all, they want to know their boundaries, and once they are convinced that you are in complete control, they will not want to waste energy on a battle that they know that they will only lose.

Why are we spending so much time discussing something as seemingly trivial as whining? Isn't a lesson on how to stop thumb sucking more important? No, it is not. Whining is the precursor to murmuring and complaining, two of the most destructive attitudes that a person could demonstrate. You will do well to eliminate it in your children at a very young age. Once you do, the rest becomes easier, and you will see them as constant blessings.

Arguing

Can you imagine somebody attempting to argue with God? The idea is as much grotesque as it is silly. It is dishonoring, to say the least, and a complete exercise in futility. It is also grotesque and silly to see a child attempt an argument with his or her parents, and you will do well to not let your children even attempt such folly.

Arguing is actually an evil cousin to whining. There are all kinds of ways to prevent it from taking root, but space does not permit us to discuss them here. Suffice it to say that wisdom and discretion will see you through. There are also some decent books on the matter for the looking, and there are plenty of parents who will gladly share with you their tricks for success. At any rate, we thought we should mention this topic in case you think that arguing with parents is normal. It's not. But we will at least leave you with a word of encouragement: if you can manage to take care of whining during the infant years, you more than likely will not ever have to deal with its evil cousin.

Discipline

Discipline is any training that corrects, molds, or perfects one's moral character. The Bible has much to say regarding discipline, including the fact that God disciplines his own children:

It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Heb. 12:7-11

Discipline is indeed a good thing. Proverbs 12:1 tells us, "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid." So how are children best disciplined? There are several ways to do so, and you will need to study this matter

out as part of good fathering.

In our culture, “time outs” and “responsible thinking times” have taken the place of customary corporal chastisement (spankings), which were at one time embraced by most of our culture. Most kinds of discipline techniques can find some sort of biblical justification, but we will caution you to refrain from the cultural tendency to refrain from spanking. The Bible has much to say about this.

Consider these biblical verses on the subject of chastisement: “He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently” (Prov. 13:24); “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him” (Prov. 22:15); and “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother” (Prov. 29:15).

While these proverbs demonstrate the importance and usefulness of corporal punishment, they also indicate several principles that go against cultural acceptance. We see that from God’s perspective, spanking is an act of love, but refraining from spanking is not (13:24). We see that it is normal for a child to sometimes act foolishly and that it is a good thing to remove foolishness from him (22:15). And we see that a selfish child is an embarrassment to his parent, but correction can produce wisdom (29:15). When you are a father some day, hold these principles dear to you, and you will have a solid foundation on which to build.

Wisdom and Discretion

You will not be able to be an effective father if you do not employ wisdom. What exactly is wisdom? Wisdom has many facets, not the least of which are common sense and sound judgment. How does one obtain wisdom? Thank the Lord that obtaining wisdom is relatively easy! Proverbs 20:21-22 says,

“Wisdom shouts in the street, she lifts her voice in the square; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings....” And James 1:5 says, “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

So we can see that wisdom is not something that is hard to find, nor something revealed to us in mysterious whispers. Wisdom wants to be heard and in fact will “shout loudly” to anyone who has ears to hear.

But common sense and sound judgment are not enough. These will provide the insight that you need for a given matter, but you will need *prudence* and *discretion* as well. Prudence is the ability to anticipate the probable results of one’s actions. And you will need to top this off with *discretion*, which is the ability to properly respond to your judgment of a matter. This might sound complicated, but really it isn’t. Much of it involves studying human behavior, and so you will need to be a student of your own children. In a short time, you will be able to discern the motivation of almost anything that they do, and you will be able to predict with fair certainty the best way to respond to them. Thank God for wisdom!

Being a Role Model

This section of our lesson should stand apart as being the most important. As a man, you are to be God’s light to the world. As a husband, you are to demonstrate the sacrificial love of Jesus. And as a father, you are to be all these things and more, for you are to demonstrate the very nature of God. In doing so, you will point to Jesus, for He is the perfect way. But make no mistake about it; your children’s ability to understand God as their Father is largely dependent on your ability to make Him known to them.

As a father to your children, you must be willing and able to say to them, as Paul said to the church at Corinth, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). We trust that you will be willing and able to do so, for your children will need to hear this challenge and for you to show them the way.

In the meantime, identify for yourself the positive role models in your own life. Consider your own father, your friends’ fathers, or other men whom you may know. Do you see leadership skills within certain men that make you proud and hopeful that you can be like them someday? If so, good! Not one of these men would fault you for copying him. On the contrary, they would be honored.

Teach Them Diligently

Here is an oft-quoted passage in regard to childrearing. No study on this subject would be complete without it:

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:5-9

We view this passage as one of the most informative and liberating ones in all of Scripture regarding childrearing. It tells us, simply, to have God’s words “on our heart” and to teach His words to our children at all times. Does this mean that you are supposed to lead your family in a round-the-clock family devotion? Heavens, no! It means that you are to teach

your children the precepts of God as a natural expression of who you are.

From time to time, even often, take opportunities to make important points come alive to your children. Do so at all kinds of various times, whether you are working, playing, dining, or traveling together. While study guides and Sunday morning sermons are useful tools for teaching children, there really is no substitute for hearing their father's unique take on a matter.

At the heart of this matter is your children's education. We implore you to seek and obtain the very best education that you possibly can for them. If homeschooling is the best option, then by all means do so! If certain people are better able to teach specific subject matters, then solicit and obtain their expertise. But in doing so, never compromise on what you know to be best for your children. This is true for many facets of their upbringing, but especially so in regard to education.

You—A Future Dad!

So, what do you think of all this? Can you see yourself as a father some day? If you are a committed follower of Jesus Christ, then we can see you as one, and a great one at that.

Someday, you will likely be the proud father of someone who looks and maybe even acts quite a bit like you. He or she will be made in your image, and it is just fine for you to allow yourself to imagine what this time will be like. We hope you look forward to it, for the world needs more people like you.

We realize that this lesson is a bit different than most of the others. For one, you are not called or even ready to implement the knowledge you have learned at this time. Nevertheless, you are getting old enough and wise enough to know that time passes quickly by. In due time, fatherhood will be upon you. In the meantime, we realize you may have more pressing needs, like

fixing your go-cart. But you will do us proud if every once in a while between now and then, that you think of these things with wonderful anticipation!