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## **“Proverbs-Driven Parenting” Varied Proverbs**

### **Introduction**

According to George Barna, there have been 75,000 books published on parenting—in the last ten years or so. That's an incredible amount of information. When I heard that statistic, I had two immediate thoughts. First, is parenting really that hard? Does it really require 75,000 books on the subject? Secondly, what could I contribute to this discussion? The answer seems to me to be, “Not much!” And that is pretty much the truth. I won't even pretend to be something I am not on this one—for two reasons. First, I am not an expert on parenting. And two, most of the thoughts that I will share with you today come via the writing, conversations and teachings of other men whom I highly recommend to you. I have been influenced by men like Paul David Tripp, Tedd Tripp, Jay Adams, Jim Newheiser, Ken Wingate, Warren Wiersbe, my own dad, Lou Priolo, Anthony Selvaggio and William Farley.

Now, I used to be an expert on parenting. Not too many years ago I saw things pretty much in black and white. There was a day when I really possessed some deep, biblical insights into the biblical child-rearing. I saw clearly how God's Word spoke to every problem in the home. I mean the word of God is perspicuous—I believe it speaks with clarity and it always provides the ideal solution to every problem those 75,000 books deal with. I was an expert on parenting!

Then something happened that moved me from expert to egghead! Our first son was born. And I was amazed to learn quickly that he didn't appreciate all my wonderful, time-untested theories on parenting—even when I sought to live by the solid truth of the Word of God. He didn't share that perspective. And then I found out it wasn't just him. All three of my children didn't immediately buy into my worldview of parenting. In fact, they often offered competing ideas of the best way that they should be parented. And I didn't handle that very well.

I hope I have grown in the last 21 years as a parent. I have learned that while the Bible offers clear guidance and timeless principles on parenting, it's not nearly as easy to apply those principles in real life. I'm not saying the Bible isn't sufficient. What I am saying is that I've learned that in every parenting context—which is virtually 24/7—that there are always two sinners in the room—not just one—two. And I am the worst and the most needy of those sinners.

So here's the perspective I am coming from in this talk: Children are born foolish, ignorant and helpless, but it is really we parents who are the most needy ones. We are in need of God's amazing grace as we shepherd and parent His gifts, the gift of children to us.

In addition to the 75K books out there, there have been tens of thousands of seminars, lectures, sermons, and talks given on parenting. So how will this one be any different. It won't be different from every other one you have heard, but one way I promise you it will be different from most is this: it will be centered on the Word and propelled by the Word. I may not say much that you haven't heard already, but even if you take one or two thoughts away, chew on them, and begin applying them this seminar will be worth it. And even better, if this seminar drives you back again to the Word of God to give you an eternal and divine perspective on parenting, it will be more than worth the time you and I will have invested in this day.

So I want to challenge us today to do something that you may have never done thought of before. I want to urge you to parent your children, to shepherd your family, to educate your family—for eternity. I am going to speak on this theme today, on Mother's Day and on Father's Day. Parenting for Eternity! That takes a conscientious, a deliberate, mindset because the truth is our default setting is to parent for today, this week, this season of our child's development. We are prone to figure out how we are going to juggle this week's crazy schedule, or how we are going to help our children get that paper handed in on time, or what activities we want our children to participate in this summer, or where they are going to go to college one day—if they go. We parent too often for the here and now.

Now all of those things have their place, but they are temporal issues, not eternal. So I want us to consider what parenting for eternity looks like because there are only two things in this world that are eternal: the Word of God and the souls of people! So what we want to be doing as parents is applying the eternal Word of God to the eternal souls of our children! As parents, we certainly desire to teach more than just the Word of God obviously, but the Word is the foundation of everything we teach.

So as we learn about wise parenting this morning—about parenting for eternity, let me begin by just listing five major assumptions which William Farley develops in his great resource *Gospel-Powered Parenting*. "Every Christian parent. . .

- assumes that parenting will not be easy but that the rewards will ultimately make it worthwhile
- is willing to hold God's sovereignty and their responsibility in tension
- embraces an offensive mindset: pursue their hearts, do everything possible to make the gospel attractive.
- is wise about the new birth: don't assume it, understand it well and look for indicators
- Labors to focus their eyes on God, not on their children God-centered, rather than child-centered, in their parenting.

Now there is a lot, as you can see, that God's Word has to say about parenting, but today we are going to focus on this truth as we seek to parent in view of eternity. (And remember more messages are planned, Lord willing). For today I want us to focus on this truth: Proverbs-driven parents disciplines their children with eternity in view.

Ephesians 6:4 says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Also the book of Proverbs demonstrates the importance of parental discipline simply by the sheer amount of attention it devotes to this issue. Proverbs is the most extensive and explicit resource on childrearing anywhere in the Bible and thus I would strongly encourage parents to master this book and it places major emphasis on this topic. Let’s start doing that today by considering four questions regarding disciplining our children.

- **What is it?**

We need to be clear on what the Bible means by discipline. This word in the Hebrew includes “instruction, teaching, training and correction.” Of this word Anthony Selvaggio writes, “Stated briefly instruction and teaching involve imparting knowledge; training involves all sorts of coaching and preparation; and correction involves identifying errors and urging their removal. In other words, biblical discipline is fundamentally about passing along and reinforcing wisdom and truth in a variety of ways; its about education.”

OT professor Paul Wegner comments, “The Hebrew word *musar*, commonly translated as 'discipline' in the OT, has a wide range of meanings that suggest various levels of discipline, including on one end of the spectrum 'teaching and instruction' (Proverbs 1:2, 3, 7, 4:14), then progressing to 'exhortation or warning' (Ezekiel 5:15; Job 20:3), and climaxing with 'discipline or chastening' (Proverbs 13:24; 22:15; 23:13).

So what I want us to see at this point is that the word “discipline” has a broad range of usages in Proverbs. Having said that, this morning we are going to just focus in on the narrow sense “identifying errors and urging their removal” or correction. My plan currently is that on Mother's Day and Father's Day to again address the area of parenting and consider the remaining usages of this word as well as other parental duties in the Scripture. But for today, we will focus on “correction”, realizing discipline is broader than just this.

- **Why do it?**

Most of us don't like the idea of discipline, much less disciplining our children, and one of the major reasons is we don't understand why it is so important. We lack motivation. And motivation matters—to us and to God. So let me give you three major motivations for disciplining your children.

- **For our children's sake**

The Bible describes children in this way: “The intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” (Genesis 8:21). “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child.” (Proverbs 22:15).

**What do fools do?**

- Fools reject wisdom and instruction (15:5; 1:7, 22, 32; 10:8; 18:2; 30:11, 17).
- Fools don’t respect their parents (19:26; 30:17).
- Fools choose foolish and wicked companions (13:20; 14:7; 22:24).
- Fools talk too much (12:23; 13:16; 15:2; 18:7; 29:11, 20).
- Fools are boastful (27:1–2).

- Fools are proud (14:16; 28:26).
- Fools justify their sin (12:15; 28:26).
- Fools are self-centered (18:2).
- Fools are quick-tempered (12:16, 18; 14:17, 29).
- Fools are argumentative and quarrelsome (18:6; 20:3; 26:4–5; 29:9).
- Fools gossip and tattle (11:13; 20:19).
- Fools get into mischief (10:23).
- Fools mock at sin (14:9).
- Fools are stubborn (17:10).
- Fools are unreliable (26:6).
- Fools flatter and manipulate (29:5).
- Fools are lazy (10:5).
- Fools lie (12:22; 26:18–29).
- Fools steal (28:24).
- Fools are unwise with money (14:24; 28:24).<sup>1</sup>

You see our children are not inherently good or innocent, even though that is certainly the predominant worldview in our culture and even in many confessing Christians. But I never had to teach my children to hit one another, be jealous, speak unkindly, brag about how their bike was better than someone else's. How about you? Which words did your children learn first: "no" or "Daddy, Mommy, how may I serve you today?"

But seriously, Foolishness is deadly—like a cancerous tumor: must be removed—won't happen by mere words, weak methods like bribery or whining.

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child. Which means that the heart of this problem is the problem of the heart—namely indwelling sin. The problem is spiritual and moral. And so is the solution. Children act badly because they are bad—just like us.

The primary motivation for disciplining our children is because we love them. "Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him." (Proverbs 13:24). "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol." (Proverbs 23:13-14). If we love our children, we will teach our children positive truth, warn them of sinful behavior and its consequences and administer punishment when necessary. Why? Because we know the rod of the parent now may be God's instrument to deliver our children from the rod of God's wrath later on. This gives to our discipline a sense of urgency!

Discipline really is a test of our love for our children first. So I hope you don't listen to the world which teaches that corporeal punishment is child abuse. They have it wrong. God says, "A failure to discipline is child abuse."

A biblical example of this would be Hophni and Phineas, the sons of Eli who were "Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the Lord." (1 Samuel 2:12, ESV). Serving as priests they treated the offerings brought before the Lord with

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<sup>1</sup> Newheiser, J. (2008). *Opening up Proverbs* (149–150). Leominster: Day One Publications.

contempt and they committed immorality with women who came to the Tabernacle. God declared severe punishment on Eli's house, "I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them." (1 Samuel 3:13, ESV).

- **For our neighbor's sake**

A foolish, undisciplined child will grow into a foolish, undisciplined adult! And whereas the former might make life difficult for you, the latter widens the circle of destruction. Raising an undisciplined child does more than just harm the child. It harms a church or a community. "Let a man meet a she-bear robbed of her cubs rather than a fool in his folly." (Proverbs 17:12).

Consider what happens if you don't teach your son to control his anger and he grows up with a hot temper. It could have a great impact on his wife, children, employment, society, church. Or what happens if you don't teach your daughter modesty and importance of chastity and she grows up to be adulterous and ruins her life and the lives of other men and other homes.

### **So If you love your neighbor, discipline your children.**

- **For our own sake**

"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother." (Proverbs 29:15).

"Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart." (Proverbs 29:17).

"The book of Proverbs consistently repeats a warning to parents (Proverbs 13:24; 17:21; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-16). Something will be broken in your home; either your child's will or your heart. The stripes from the rod of correction will land on your child's rear end, or on your own. If it is the latter, then both you and your child will feel the pain" (Bob Beasley)

Sometimes disciplining your children isn't any more fun than taking them to the doctor or administering a shot when they have a serious allergic reaction to something (like peanuts) but the result is wisdom and peace.

- **For God's sake**

Neglect in this area is a sure sign that we don't trust God enough (Proverbs 3:5-6). When you aren't trusting God's ways, you aren't glorifying Him—which is the chief end of man and the chief end of your parenting. You want to release children in this world who will let their lights shine before men who will in turn see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16)  
And if we do it correctly and we do it with the right motivation, God will bless. He will give grace. God's ways are always best. "For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life," (Proverbs 6:23, ESV).

- **How do we do it?**

- **Verbal and corporal discipline**

These are the two God-ordained methods of discipline: verbal reproof and corporate discipline. These are gospel means. Following worldly counsel that suggests various other means are not God's way. They essentially flow from a non-Christian worldview. Neither does God want us to replace therapy with gospel-driven discipline. Religion isn't a valid substitute either. And even a lot of the techniques mentioned in Christian books on parenting shouldn't be our focus. No wise parenting is about having a right relationship with God and following his means: verbal and corporal training.

- **Verbal discipline**

- **Involves encouraging good behavior**

"Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight. . . .When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother, he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live. . . .The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight. Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a graceful garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown.'" (Proverbs 4:7-9, ESV).

- This is simply explaining to our children the benefits of doing what is right
- Nothing wrong with encouraging them with the rewards! God does this all the time—all the way through the Bible (Matthew 5:1-12)

- **Involves discouraging sinful behavior: warning, explaining, and exposing.**

"My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason; like Sheol let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder; throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse"— my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths," (Proverbs 1:10-15, ESV).

- **Show them the consequences of disobedience:**

"for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood. For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird, but these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives. Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors." (Proverbs 1:16-19, ESV).

- **Do it with purpose and conviction: "Better is open rebuke than hidden love."** (Proverbs 27:5, ESV).

- **Corporal discipline: biblically administered and coupled with verbal discipline is an act of true love**

- "Spare the rod, spoil the child?" The proverb, "Spare the rod and spoil the child" goes back to the days of Rome (*Qui parcat virge, odit filium* = "Who spares the rod, hates [his] son") and has been in English literature since the year 1000. Those exact words aren't found in Scripture, but Proverbs 13:24 comes closest: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes [early]." The Roman proverb no doubt comes from the Hebrew proverb, which is much older."--Warren Wiersbe

- Bruce Waltke writes “Loving parents seek to correct the faults of their children because. . . their children's lives, favor, protection, healing, dignity, and prosperity are at stake. Unloving parents turn their backs on them and hand them over to death, social ruin, public exposure, calamity and shameful poverty.”

- “. . . A rod is for the back of him who lacks sense.” (Proverbs 10:13).

- **“Both/and” never “either/or”**

"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother." (Proverbs 29:15, ESV).

"A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool." (Proverbs 17:10, ESV).

- **Instruction and reproof first, then rod then more instruction.**
  - Corporeal discipline is the exception, not the rule.
  - More reproof, less rod as the children grow older if you do it right. Some respond much quicker than others to verbal reproof so corporeal punishment is not needed as much. But it is also true that “boys have ears on their backsides.”
  - Verbal teaching and reproof is the daily food, corporeal discipline is more like medicine. Don't try to make medicine your daily diet!

"On the lips of him who has understanding, wisdom is found, but a rod is for the back of him who lacks sense." (Proverbs 10:13, ESV).

"Blows that wound cleanse away evil; strokes make clean the innermost parts." (Proverbs 20:30, ESV).

- Discipline with the rod for only for specific sin or foolishness (Difference between a child (age 4) spilling a cup of milk and throwing a cup of milk)

- **Start early:** "Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death." (Proverbs 19:18). If you want to enjoy your children in their teenage years, discipline in their preschool years!

- Charles Bridges, a wise pastor, in his commentary on Proverbs wrote, “Our character largely takes the form of that mould into which our early years were cast. . . .If the crooked shoots of self-will and disobedience are not cut off, their rapid growth and rapidly growing strength will greatly increase the future difficulty of bending them.”

- **Do it lovingly and tenderly**, not in anger or frustration. "When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother, he taught me and said to me, “Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth." (Proverbs 4:3-5).

- **Don't discipline your child in anger:** Before you can control your child, you must control yourself (16:32), purpose of discipline is training child not avenging yourself (Romans 12:19)

- Don't over discipline: don't use “sledge hammers to drive thumb tacks.”--Jay Adams (Ephesians 6:4)

- Let your discipline be **gospel-driven:**

- Let the gospel **motivate** your discipline

- Let the gospel be the **goal** of your discipline
- Use discipline as a **teaching tool** of the gospel: this is why we stress first time obedience and bathe it love! The gospel doesn't teach us to "obey on three" and when Christ bore our punishment he did it out of love.
  - **Aim for the heart:** If you reach the heart, the desired outward obedience will follow. If you just aim for the external conformity, you will have to deal with the heart repeatedly. (See *The Heart of Anger* by Lou Priolo and *Shepherding Your Child's Heart* and *Instructing Your Child's Heart* by Tedd Tripp, *Age of Opportunity* by Paul Tripp and *Get Outta My Face: How to Reach Angry Teens* by Rick Horne)
  - **Other practical counsel**
    - Discipline is often **inconvenient and time-consuming**, but it is worth it in eternity
    - **Don't get worn down or discouraged** because of lack of results.
    - This often requires **great perseverance and resolve**—on the part of parents. We need grace! Believe Proverbs 6:23!
    - **Make sure you and your spouse are committed** to the same standards, methods and goals of discipline (Matthew 12:25)
    - **Don't quarrel or argue with your child; act**
      - Discipline with **eternity in view**
  - **Who should we imitate in our discipline?**
    - **God disciplines us verbally:** "Hear, O my people, while I admonish you! O Israel, if you would but listen to me!" (Psalm 81:8); Jesus in Revelation 2-3.
    - **God disciplines us corporally:** "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." (Proverbs 3:11-12).
    - "Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:9-11). **Are you disciplining your children with eternity in view?**

### **Conclusion**

In the last few moments of this message, let me just encourage you in the trenches of active child-rearing right now with a few simple truths and then just a word to parents whose children are already grown.

#### • **God gives you children**

First, let me just remind you that children are a gift from the Lord. God has given you the children you have. Remember that! On the good days, on the hard days, in the good seasons of parenting and the more challenging ones. And he hasn't just given you children—any children—he has given you your children! They are an heritage from the Lord—specially wrapped and delivered to you—seedlings that God wants to raise, God willing, to be oaks of righteousness!

#### • **God gives you grace**

And with God's gifts of children comes God's grace.

"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (2 Corinthians 12:9).

" But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." (2 Corinthians 4:7).

"Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more," (Romans 5:20).

As parents we need God's grace. As parents, we need to preach the gospel to ourselves every day. Sure we will have failures but never condemnation or discouragement. Remember we are all sinners, we never do all our "should's" and we constantly do the "should not's." We fall short of God's best continually. What's the answer: grace! Apply it to your conscience multiple times daily! The gospel of God's grace is salve on the wounds of our imperfection and encourages us to persevere through failures. Remember you are not your child's gift! God's grace is His gift to you and to your children. Children don't need perfect parents, they need humble parents, grace-seeking and grace-giving parents.

- **Why do some children go wayward?** (Proverbs 22:6)

Let me close by answering one question that is certainly swirling in some minds right now. What about Proverbs 22:6? "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6, ESV). If that is true, why do some children from gospel-driven homes, still go wayward?

Well, we need to understand several things. First, Proverbs 22:6 is not an ironclad guarantee that says "You just do all the right things and I guarantee your children will never go astray or if they do that they will come back to the gospel." In other words, it is not some sort of Christian rabbit foot. Proverbs are maxims—that is generally true observations on life in general. They are not absolute guarantees. We read in Proverbs that a righteous man will be blessed with long life. And that lazy person will not be rich (Proverbs 10:14). But that is not always true. It is generally true. You see there three factors that influence how your children turn out.

- **The role of parents**

First, you have the role of parents. And the most important factor in determining from a parental perspective whether or not a child will grow up to be an adult who fears the Lord is the spiritual depth and sincerity of love and consistent lifestyle of a godly father. The father's influence is more pervasive than the mother's life even. There are other factors, but the role of the father is crucial. That's the first one. Certainly, if our children don't turn out godly, it should be in spite of our training, not because of it. "Parents who neglect their responsibility contribute to the ruin of their offspring," Jim Newheiser writes. Go back to Proverbs 13:24 again for hope as you obey!

- **The hearts of children**

"Even a child makes himself known by his acts, by whether his conduct is pure and upright." (Proverbs 20:11, ESV). Not all rebellion is the fault of parents. I mean, look at

Cain and Abel, raised by the same parents but one worshipped God correctly and the other one didn't. Then they had a third son (and probably many more) named Seth who was a righteous one. So we know of two good ones and one bad one. And that story has been repeated over and over again.

Furthermore, if it were just a matter of right parenting, what is the use of the whole book of Proverbs which is after all an appeal to children by a father to do what is right? If all it took was wise parenting then why address a whole book of the Bible to children. Parents must present truth; children must believe it and obey it! You can't make your child believe!

Consider also that the Lord has "wayward children."

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me." (Isaiah 1:2, ESV).

"In vain have I struck your children; they took no correction." (Jeremiah 2:30, ESV).

"O Lord, do not your eyes look for truth? You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish; you have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent." (Jeremiah 5:3, ESV).

◦ **The sovereignty of God's grace**

Only he can soften a hard heart and give sight to the blind. If your children are walking with the Lord, give him glory. (For more information on the subject of dealing with wayward children, see *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices* by Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jim Newheiser, Harvest House, 2005.)

Parents today, make sure that you are parenting wisely—imparting truth, verbally rebuking and administering biblical discipline for the glory of God and for the good of your children. Then trust Him to bring the increase—a harvest of righteousness! Discipline your children with a view of eternity!