Series: Foolproof
Title: #8 Wisdom & Parenting

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SELECTED PROVERBS

[SCRIPTURE READING]

9:10: *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.*
3:11–12: *My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.*
4:1–2: *Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight, for I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching.*
4:11: *I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness.*
6:20–22: *My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching. Bind them on your heart always… When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you.*
13:24: *Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.*
19:18: *Discipline your son, for there is hope.*
20:7: *The righteous who walks in his integrity—blessed are his children after him!*
22:6: *Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.*
23:26: *My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.*
29:15: *The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.*

[PRELIMINARY REMARKS]

- We're in a series called *Foolproof: God's Wisdom for Your Life*.
- This week we're going to talk about **Wisdom & Parenting**.
    - We are all someone's child.
    - Many here are parents or grandparents.
    - Many more are spiritual mums and dads—aunts and uncles, coaches and mentors, Sunday school and small group leaders.
    - And at every baptism, we all promise to help raise the children of this church.
- It truly does take a village—so I hope this sermon will be helpful for us all.

[Transition]: The Proverbs have been read for us, so let me pray—and then we'll dive in.

[INTRODUCTION]

- I'd like to start by giving you 30 seconds to sit with this quote from **Wendell Berry**:[1]

  "Children, no matter how nurtured at home, must be risked to the world. And parenthood is not an exact science, but a vexed privilege and a blessed trial, absolutely necessary and not altogether possible."

- Let's see how Proverbs prepares us for this inexact science, this vexed privilege, this blessed trial, this absolutely necessary but not altogether possible task—starting with:

THE POWER OF PARENTING

1. First, Proverbs wants us to know that parents have real INFLUENCE.

[State]

- **22:6:** Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.
- What happens at home lasts.

[Illustrate]

- Reflecting on this verse, **Ray Ortlund** said: *"Your few years with your kids are a life-shaping opportunity."*[2]
- It strikes me that he says, *"Your few years…"*
  - Author and blogger **Tim Urban** estimated that by the time we graduate high school we've already used up about 93% of the in-person time we'll ever spend with our parents.[3]
  - It's just an estimate, but it's enough to instill a wild sense of urgency or make us feel super sad—depending on where we are in the parenting journey.
- But the point is that these few years *"are a life-shaping opportunity."*
  - How a wee soul thinks about God, others, and themselves.
  - What they value and what they enjoy.
  - How they stand up for their beliefs and make a difference in the world.
  - How they handle conflict or failure when it comes.
  - Through a thousand ordinary moments, and some epic ones as well, parents have an incalculable impact on who their children become.

[Apply]

- If your children are **young**, this is the moment of opportunity.
- If they're **grown**, remember that we're not done yet. (And there's a lot we can still do with the remaining 7%.)

[Transition]: Parents have real INFLUENCE, but at the same time…

2. Proverbs also wants us to know that parents have real LIMITS.

[State]

- Remember that **22:6** is a proverb, not a promise.
    - In other words, it tells us how life typically works.
    - But it's not some sort of guarantee.
- Proverbs is honest about this: A good home can produce a son who's too **stubborn** to learn (13:1). Or one who's **lazy** (10:5). Or one who **wastes** his parents' money (29:3). Or one who **rebels** and despises his own mum (15:20).

[Illustrate]

- **Derek Kidner** puts it this way: *"Even the best training cannot instill wisdom, but only encourage the choice to seek it… it is ultimately the man himself who must bear his own blame, for it is his attitude to wisdom… which sets his course."*[4]
- **Kathy Keller** describes the limits of parenting this way: *"Parenting, if it is anything at all, is a humbling endeavor. I once told a friend that it is better to be high on grace than on techniques when it comes to raising your kids. I still believe that. Grace does not mean giving up. It does mean giving up on the idea that the right formula will produce the right results."*[5]
    - Parenting is influential—but not as influential as we might like to think.
    - Parenting matters—but it has limits.

[Apply]

- This can feel scary as a parent, but these limits can also be quite freeing.
    - They free us from **pride:** *My kids turned out well, so I must have done it right.*
    - They free us from **despair:** *My child wandered, so I must have failed.*
    - And they free us from **fatalism:** *My parents failed me, so I'm bound to make the same mistakes as them.*
- None of those things are necessarily true.
    - Parenting marks us, but it doesn't make us.
    - That's the point: Parents have real LIMITS.

[Transition]

- In light of all that—real influence and real limits, *"absolutely necessary and not altogether possible"*—what does wise parenting look like?
- That takes us to our second point: 1) The **Power** of Parenting; and now…

THE BEST PARENTING

- Unfortunately, Proverbs isn't going to give us a secret formula.
- In fact, its advice is so earthy it almost seems obvious.
- But if we take it to heart and live it out—it will make a profound difference.
- Here are three things our kids need according to Proverbs.

1. Our kids need our… DELIGHT

[State]

- Take, for example, **3:12:** The LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he **delights.**
- More on reproof in a moment. For now, notice the term **delight**.
    - It means to **take pleasure in** someone—to enjoy them.
    - That's how God holds his children.

[Illustrate]

- Of course that makes sense to us: We love our kids deeply.
- But the point here is that they need to know it: that we enjoy them, celebrate them, delight in them.
- And they need to know this irrespective of how they perform.
    - Not when they make the team.
    - Not when the report card comes home.
    - Before any of that.
- Kids can tell the difference between a parent who's proud of their **accomplishments** and a parent who delights in ***them.***

[Apply]

- So, the question isn't whether we delight in our kids—it's whether they know we do.
- For some of us, this is **hard to hear.**
    - Maybe because you **long for children**—you wish for a child to delight in.
        - A sermon like this touches deep grief.
        - I see that.
    - Or maybe this is hard because **we've messed this up**: We have kids and love them more than we can say—but somehow, along the way, we've left them with the impression that we're disappointed in them.
- Rather than getting mired in guilt, let's make today a fresh start.
    - **If they're grown:** Call them this afternoon, not to check in or give advice, just to tell them you love them and you're proud to be their mum or dad.
    - **If they're at home:** Do something fun and tell them something you think is awesome about them today.
    - **When they mess up:** Let them hear both: "I love you," and "Let's talk about what happened."
- As you do this, remember that something deeper is going on.
    - One of my primary goals as a parent is to make it easy for my kids to believe in the Father's love.
    - So when they hear about a Father who loves them wildly and only wants their best, I want them to think, "Yeah, that makes sense."
- Through the ups and downs of normal family life—make sure your kids feel secure in your **delight**.

2. Our kids need our… EXAMPLE

[State]

- Consider **23:26:** My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes **observe my ways**.
- When it comes to parenting, more is caught than taught: Whatever we say, our children will learn the most from watching how we live.

[Illustrate]

- I remember being struck by my own dad.
- When I was young, he was in the middle of that career grind—where many of us find ourselves as we raise our kids.
- But on mornings when I got up early, while it was still dark, I'd find him up before me—sitting in a particular chair spending time with God.
    - Loads of people told me I should have a quiet time.
    - But none of them impacted me as much as watching my dad.
- **Ortlund** says: *"Children sense hypocrisy immediately, but they also know sincerity."*[6]

[Apply]

- All this makes me wonder what my kids are learning from my ways…
    - What kind of man do I want my sons to be? Am I a man like that?
    - How do I want my kids to approach marriage, generosity, and witness? Am I modeling that?
    - And what do I want them to do when they've done wrong? Am I leading in confession—being the first to own when I mess up?
- Again, let's push back against the quagmire of parental guilt—today is a great day to make a fresh start.
    - Our kids need an example.
    - And they need your example:
        - God has given them to you because you are the parent they need.
        - Simply ask: What do I want them to learn? And how can I model it for them?
- **Delight** in your kids and set them a godly **example**.

3. Our kids need our… DIRECTION

[State]

- In Proverbs there are two sides to this.
    - On one hand, our kids need **instruction**.
    - And on the other hand, they need **discipline**.
- **Instruction** shows them the path of life, and **discipline** brings them back to it when they've wandered.

1) Let's start with **instruction**…
    - **6:20:** My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching.
    - None of us are born knowing how to live or follow Christ—all of us need to be taught how to walk the path of life.
    - So what do you want your kids to know?
        - About God, the gospel, and grace.
        - About his word, prayer, and the life of faith.
        - About friendship, money, marriage, and sex.
    - Study God's word and teach them.
        - Of course there are resources to help—books, school, the church.
        - But don't delegate this responsibility to anyone else.
        - You are the primary discipler of your children—so teach them.
            - In everyday moments: Carpool, the dinner table, bedtime.
            - And in other intentional conversations as well.
    - Make sure they know what the path of life looks like.

2) And then **discipline**…
    - Once they know the path of life, our kids sometimes need loving correction to keep them on it: **13:24:** Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.
    - The "rod" language raises the somewhat controversial topic of spanking.
        - Faithful Christians disagree.
        - Personally: We used spanking with some of our kids. With others we took a different approach.
    - Wherever you land, the key point is not to neglect the hard work of loving correction: **19:18:** Discipline your son, for there is hope.
        - Our kids need to learn that their choices have consequences.
        - And they need to learn to make things right.
        - Help them become healthy adults—and keep them on the path of life.
    - Because discipline has been used as an excuse to be cruel to children—and if you've experienced that, I'm sorry—let me suggest three **guardrails**:
        - *Discipline must come from love.* **3:12:** For the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.
        - *Discipline must seek your child's good.* Never discipline to vent your anger—take time to cool off first.
        - *Discipline must bring hope.* Don't crush your child's spirit—make sure they know how to come back.
    - We all need to figure out what this should look like in our homes:
        - Time out, grounding, screentime, and all the rest.
        - Personally, we always tried to find productive discipline: One time one of my new drivers drove over a neighbor's flowerbed. They were sent to apologize. And then to Home Depot to make amends. That's healthier for a teenager than being sent to stew in their room.
    - The point is to make sure we do it—and that we do it in love.

[Apply]

- **Eph 6:4** pulls these two words together: Bring them up in the **discipline** and **instruction** of the Lord.
    - Do our kids know the way?
    - Do we lovingly bring them back to it?
- **Delight** in your kids, set a godly **example**, and give them your **direction**.

[Transition]: And do it all as beloved children ourselves, which takes us to our final point: 1) The **Power** of Parenting; 2) The **Best** Parenting; and finally…

THE GREATEST PARENT

[State]

- Whatever parents we had, and whatever parents we've been—we have a perfect Father.
    - A Father who **delights** in us.
    - A Father who **exemplifies** true love.
    - A Father who **directs** us and keeps us on the path of life.
- A sermon like this can cause us to think about how much we've fallen short—there's nothing quite like parenting to make you feel shame and guilt.
    - Things we shouldn't have said. Things we should never have done.
    - Or ways we've been absent from our children.
- What do we do with that?
    - The good news is that God has done more than show us how to parent: He has made us his children by giving us his Son.
        - Because he died on the cross, we don't have to hide our failures.
        - We can receive forgiveness from him.
    - Our parents may have failed us, and we may have failed our kids—but there is a Father who loves us still: **1 Jn 3:1:** See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

[Apply]: And parents, this good news frees us to do at least two things.

1. **First, entrust our children to him.**
    - Remember **Berry**? Children *"must be risked to the world."*
        - That's true, as far as it goes—the time comes when we must let them go.
        - But the deeper calling, even before that day, is to **entrust them to God**.
    - When you reach the limits of what you can do—keep bringing them to the Father.
        - In your home, in our church, or simply through prayer.
        - We're not in control, but we know whose hands we're placing them in: The Father who loves them—more than we ever can.
    - No matter where you are on the parenting journey, don't give up.
        - There's more to their stories than we can see.
        - And God isn't done with them yet.

2. **Second, as this gospel frees us to entrust our kids to God—it also empowers us to be better parents to them.**
    - Why?
        - Because it stops us from getting caught up in the things our world says are the most important—as if our children's greatest need is the right school, experience, or job.
        - And we start focusing instead on the things that matter most.
    - Do you see how practical that is?
        - We stop pressuring them to perform and enjoy them as they are.
        - We stop treating every failure as a crisis and see it as an opportunity to learn.
        - We stop trying to control everything and help them walk the path of life themselves.
    - That's what wise parenting looks like when it's rooted in grace: less fear, less control, more trust.

[THE CLOSE]

- And parents, especially if you're struggling, you're probably doing a better job than you think—and remember: You're not alone.
- The Father who adopts us gives us a **church family.**
    - Find parents who've **gone before you**—they'll give you perspective: *I remember when this happened to us—this phase will pass.*
    - Find parents **in the thick of it** now—they'll give you company: *You're not the only one.*
    - And find **other adults** to pour into your children—they'll give you backup.
        - If you're one of these spiritual parents—pouring delight, example, and direction into kids who aren't your own—thank you.
        - Sometimes kids can only receive things from people who aren't their parents—we need you.

[CONCLUSION]

- Of course, no parent is perfect—except God.
- So trust in him with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.
- In all your parenting acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.

We can be wise parents because we are children of God.

RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*.
- Tim Keller, *Proverbs: True Wisdom for Living*.
- Ray Ortlund, *Proverbs: Wisdom That Works*.
- Logos Bible Software.

Endnotes

[1] A friend texted me this quote during a hard parenting moment. I understand it comes from Wendell Berry, "Family Work," in *The Gift of Good Land*.
[2] See Ray Ortlund, *Proverbs: Wisdom That Works*, 154.
[3] Tim Urban, "The Tail End," accessed here 10/29/26.
[4] See Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, 47.
[5] See Kathy Keller, foreword to Rebekah Hannah and Michael Keller, *Talking to Kids About Hard Things: Honest Conversations When Life Gets Complicated*, xii.
[6] Ortlund, 154.