

Lessons For Young Parents

by Dee Bowman

The application of truth's principles to different situations is an attestation to the wisdom of God. For instance, we all know the command to "love thy neighbor as thyself." Now that applies in a variety of circumstances. It applies to your neighbor next door and it applies to your neighbor across the sea or over the border. It applies to neighbors who like you and those who don't. It applies to those who don't even deserve your attention.

The proverbs of Solomon are general principles like that and may apply to a number of different situations with equal import. I want to take a few proverbs from chapter 4:23-27 and apply them to young parents. They are certainly applicable to rearing children.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Ironically, the rearing of children begins with having your own heart right. Acquainting your heart with the high principles of righteousness and holiness is not just a good beginning place, it's the only beginning place. What issues out of life—what happens in your family—is much more likely to have a good result if it is based on the truths revealed in God's word. That means that young parents have to be diligent in pursuing after rules of righteousness. After all, you can't teach what you don't know yourself.

"Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee." It is astounding how much influence we wield over our families with our speech. Actually, it is the basic instrument of communication. The tongue is the teacher. If parents learn good speech habits we not only teach good information, we illustrate it as well. Many a child's life has been adversely affected by a father's lack of control over his tongue. And many a good child has come out of a family where good speech was practiced. The NRSV translates this verse nicely: "Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talks far from you." Be sure, parents, your children's speech will be very much like yours. Is that how you want it?

"Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee." Satchel Paige, the great Negro League and later Hall of Fame baseball player said it well. "Don't ever look back," he said, "something may be gaining on you." Many a family plan has failed because parents were looking back. A family without vision is like a nation without vision—it's likely to perish. A forward gaze is likely to produce good results. Eyes that look ahead are focused, they will see where the family is going, be aware of what's ahead—potholes, detours, crooked roads. They are concentrated on getting there, too. Good spiritual leadership comes from good spiritually-minded fathers who have their eyes fixed on the better things.

"Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established." To "ponder" is to

meditate. It means that the good parent will think about where he is taking his family. The wise parent will take time to think about his family: the things they see, the things they hear, the things in which they are allowed to participate, even who their friends are. And wise parents talk to one another. A lot. They take the time to discuss potential dangers, investigate certain trends in their childrens' conduct, plan corrections and lend encouragement as each is needed. Meditation takes time, but the wise parent will take the time to do it.

“Turn not to the right hand nor the left: remove thy foot from evil.” This proverb speaks to the business of conviction, commitment, and constancy. It says that truth must be kept going forward, that the energy for righteousness and the enthusiasm for holiness be not diminished. Don't turn off on some inferior road when you know what is the right one—that's the message here. One rendition says “don't swerve to the right or to the left.” That means a straight course is the right course and once you're on it you should stay there. You must teach your family to run away from evil, to abhor it, to see it as a potential danger. You must teach your children not to flirt with evil, not play with fire, not fraternize with the world. And you must not only teach them, you must be the illustrator of it, keeping yourself out of harm's way.

I once said that had I known how difficult it was to raise children I might not have had any. I didn't really mean that, but it is hard. I know. But do it well and it becomes the singular most satisfying effort life has to offer. Do it well and it brings rewards far beyond what you could ever have imagined. Do it well and someday soon some little grandchild, with eyes full of love and respect, will hold out arms and say, “I love you, Papa!”