**Wise parents and wise children**

Text: Proverbs 4

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures**: Proverbs 4, Hebrews 12:3-15

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL]211, 25, 119:33-40, 470, 527

**Series:** **Proverbs.** Sermon 5

**Theme:** A wise father instructs his sons to acquire wisdom, giving the benefits of gaining wisdom, the dangers of not doing so and the vital importance of having wisdom safely stored in the heart.

**Proposition:** Acquire wisdom, acquire Christ!

**Introduction**

We are all involved in relationships as parents, children, husbands, wives, friends. They bring us the greatest pleasure and joy but can also result in the most painful sadness and grief.

Some of us here today are Fathers, some mothers. **All** of us are children of our human parents, sons and daughters.

For all whose faith and trust is in the Lord Jesus Christ, to all who have received him, who believe in his name, God has given the right to become children of God (John 1.12).

Beloved of Christ, as we consider the wisdom of Proverbs 4, the Word of our Heavenly Father speaks to us all to instruct us both for His glory and for our good.

We have three points this morning:

1. Wise parents instruct their children

2. Wise children acquire wisdom from their parents

3. Wise people acquire Christ

1. **Wise parents instruct their children**

If you love someone, you want the very best for them. Just as our Heavenly Father only gives good gifts to his children (Luke 11:13), **So likewise**, good parents - those who love their children - desire to give them the very best preparation for life as they grow up…

As we’ve seen in chapter 3 of Proverbs, the gift of wisdom results in **more gain** than that which is obtained through material profit (Prov 3:13-15, 16:16). As we’ve also seen, the foundation of true wisdom is found **not** in the mere gathering and analysing of information, but through a **living relationship with God**, who alone is the ultimate source of all true wisdom (Rom 16:27).

Notice again in our text, the way in which wisdom is conveyed, transmitted, passed down, from generation to generation. It is conveyed from fathers to their sons (v1,10,20). We could equally well say from ‘parents to their children’.

Here then is a basic principle of life for loving parents: **Wise parents follow a pattern of wisely instructing their children.**

The wise father in chapter 4, quite possibly Solomon himself, recalls the instruction in wisdom which he received as a young boy from his own father. If this is Solomon writing here in chapter 4, then this teaching came from David. Here is the lesson he remembers his father teaching him: "*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. Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. The beginning of wisdom is this:* ***Get wisdom****, and whatever you get, get insight. Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honour you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a graceful garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown*." (Prov 4:4b-9)

The dad who wrote our text has applied the pattern of being instructed by his own father to his role as teacher for his own children. Notice that this instruction is both by word and by example (v11): “*I have* ***taught*** *you the way of wisdom; I have* ***led*** *you in the paths of uprightness*”

# Benjamin Franklin wisely said, “*Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn*.” Think about the wisdom of Christ’s pattern of making disciples by both teaching and showing his followers the way. For example, his lesson for his disciples when he washed their feet… “*If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you*” (John 13:14-15).

The best lessons are learned by following an example informed by explanation/description. Many people, young and old, today are using the internet resource ‘Father YouTube’ to learn practical skills. Hearing instructions and then seeing an expert following them. YouTube is good, but a living relationship with a real person is so much better for instructing in wisdom.

Why is that? Because the best learning takes place in the context of a living relationship. A tutor who interacts with his/her pupils can correct thinking and behaviour which he/or she observes to be unwise, unhelpful, or in the case of Biblical instruction, ungodly or sinful…

It’s not surprising then that we find many proverbs dealing with the importance of correction in teaching and training: e.g. **Proverbs 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.”* **Proverbs 22:6** *Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”* The word ‘discipline’ here means to correct/chasten.

Brothers and sisters in the Lord - God, our Heavenly Father is a wise ‘parent’ who instructs us his children. He teaches us through His Word. He trains us ‘*that we might share in his holiness*’ (Heb 12:10). The teaching/training of our Heavenly Father in life can seem ‘painful rather than pleasant’ (Heb 12:11) but brings valuable results… ‘*the peaceful fruit of righteousness*’ (Heb 12:11).

The good result of painful affliction, experienced through trusting in the instructing providence of the Lord, is righteousness. A wise heart and mind which seeks to live according to God’s wise word. Those who have learned to how to live a holy life by persevering through pain, suffering, distress, despair, loss and grief do not resent the providential process, but rather are at peace with the wise instruction of their Heavenly Father. The psalmist writes: “*Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word. You are good and do good; teach me your statutes*” (Ps 119:67-68).

For those of us who are no longer in the younger years of life…How well did your parent(s) instruct you in true wisdom, the foundation of which is hearing them talk to you about and seeing them display in their lives a living relationship with God?

Individually, our answers to this question will vary. Some have been blessed with wiser parents than others. Some have been blessed with believing parent or parents, others have not. Some of us have had parents whose words and actions were often less than wise.

Whatever our own human fathers, and mothers, were like, we all have a wise Father in Heaven who instructs his children for their good. Why does He do this?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, because He loves us and wants to give us the very best preparation for our future lives…

Which brings us to our 2nd point…

1. **Wise children acquire wisdom from their parents**

The older parents here this morning may remember the 1960s music group The Beetles – John, Paul, George and Ringo. Many Christian parents wisely warned their children of some of the dangers of the ideas promoted in their music e.g. ‘Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds’ a song about drug use with the song titles initials standing for the hallucinogen LSD.

As Proverbs 4:14 warns “*Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil*”. Music can certainly be a powerful influence for good or for evil.

In 1969 Paul McCartney wrote and produced a song with the opening line: “*If you want it, here it is come and get it”.* These words, written in a different context, do sum up the **invitation** to us all from Proverbs 4 about wisdom…

Look at the start of verses 1,10 and 20: “*Hear, O sons, a father’s instruction and be attentive*”; “*Hear, my son, and accept my words*”; “*My son, be attentive to my words*”. Here the parent is saying in effect to his children. “If you want wisdom, here it is come and get it!”

Children, the best period of your life for you to gain wisdom from your parents is whilst you are living at home. In the words of Deut 6.7 ‘*when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, when you rise*’. There are certainly opportunities for us to learn from parents (&grandparents) later in life, but generally these are less frequent than when we are young and living at home.

To acquire wisdom, a person (young or old) must **listen carefully** and concentrate on what is said by their teacher. To acquire wisdom, it is necessary to **accept** what is taught by a teacher who is known to be truly wise. The call to acquire wisdom is at the heart of what the writer here, likely Solomon, heard from his father, likely David. We hear this call twice (v5,7) ‘*Get wisdom*’. The word ‘get’ here can be translated ‘acquire’ – to buy or obtain for yourself.

Wisdom offered by parents to their children is free.

Here then is a basic principle of life: **Wise children acquire wisdom from their parents.**

Remember what Solomon asked from God, after his own father David had died? “*Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil*” (1 Kings 3:9).

Wise children, however old they are, whether or not their own parents are still alive, are willing to be instructed: **Proverbs 13:1** “*A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke”;* **Proverbs 15:5** “*A fool despises his father's instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is prudent”;* **Proverbs 13:10b** “*with those who take advice is wisdom*”.

Are you someone who readily takes advice? **Proverbs 18:2** “*A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion*”. Would you describe yourself as ‘teachable’? Willing to be taught by elders, church leaders, mature brothers and sisters in the Lord here in this congregation? Willing to carefully listen and consider the Biblical instruction of others to help you form and reform your own opinions?

For this church to continue to grow, to rebuild, we need men and women who are qualified to lead. One of the key qualities of a good leader is having a ‘teachable spirit’. Christian author, Dave Kraft has written: *“If a leader isn’t teachable, he will be resistant to hearing instruction both from God and from others and will likely make little progress when it comes to personal growth and spiritual maturity”.* **Proverbs 26:12** “*Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him*”.

Let us all then hear, be attentive and accept the wise words, not only directly from our Heavenly Father, but also from others who have been well taught from his Word. Why?

Because accepting His Fatherly wisdom brings great benefits: Being able to make steady progress in life, not hampered, not stumbling – v12; Avoiding the paths of the wicked v14; following the ways of light not darkness -v18.

Think of Jesus who is a Great Teacher, both in His Words and His example (ref. 4:11), yet also As the Son of God, in His humanity, on this earth we read that “*Although he was a son, he* ***learned*** *obedience through what he suffered*” (Hebrews 5:8). Jesus was ‘teachable’.

Christ’s life on this earth was not easy. He faced many challenges growing to human maturity in a fallen world under the tutelage of his fallible parents Joseph and Mary. **Yet He was a wise child who acquired wisdom. Jesus was a learner on this earth…** “*And Jesus* ***increased in wisdom*** *and in stature and in favour with God and man*” (Luke 2.52).

If increasing in wisdom was important for the perfect man Jesus, how much more so for you and for me? Do you desire to be **more teachable** in the future than you have been in the past?

Yes? Then hear and be attentive to our 3rd point:

1. **Wise people acquire Christ**

Solomon’s father David taught him, yet his example was less than exemplary. David had many wives, as did his son Solomon. When Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart so that he was not wholly true to the Lord his God (1 Kings 11:4). Solomon did not keep the Lord’s wisdom within his heart – the very instruction of Proverbs 4:21b.

We saw from Proverbs 3 the importance of having a healthy heart. **not** the cardiovascular, four-chambered blood pumping organ, but rather **the centre** of our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual life as human beings made in the image of God. To ‘get wisdom’ is to take the wisdom of God ‘to heart’.

This is vitally important because from the heart flow the springs of life…everything about us originates from here: What we **say**, hence the wisdom to “*Put away from you crooked speech and put devious talk far from you”* (v24); What we **look at** (v25) “*Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you.”;* The **directions we take in life**: “*Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure”* (v26).

If you have been attentive to this sermon so far, you will have considered for yourself: How wisely your own parents have instructed you in wisdom by word and example, how teachable you have been to the instruction of your parents, church leaders and others, and whether you have been willing to learn through the wise discipline of the Lord. Questions like these touch our very heart, the core of our being. Which is why, often we try to avoid them.

We saw from Proverbs chapter 3 the danger of taking a verse from this book and understanding it to be like a mathematical formula: **“***Honour the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine*” (Prov 3:9-10). Now 2+2=4 is always true, without fail. However, giving willingly, sacrificially and generously for the work of the Lord is not a **guarantee** of material wealth in all circumstances.

Likewise **Proverbs 22:6** “*Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” d*oes not **guarantee** that the result of diligent parental training in bringing children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord will **always** be strong men and women of God who love Christ and willingly serve Him in their lives.

Even the best training cannot instil wisdom, but only encourage the choice to seek it. A son or daughter may be too opinionated/unteachable to learn wisdom from their parents (13:1 cf. 17:21). A ‘good home’ may produce an idle child (10:5) or an offspring who squanders the family wealth (29:3). A son or daughter may rebel enough to despise (15:20), mock (30:17), and/or curse his/her parents (30:11; 20:20). He or she may be heartless enough to steal from dad or mum (28:24) or even turn their widowed mother outdoors (19:26).

While there are parents who have only themselves to thank for their shame because the refuse to discipline their children (29:15), Ultimately each individual must bear his/her own blame and shame for their attitude towards wisdom - whether they be parent or child (29:3a, 2:2ff).

The blessing of wise children in **contrast** to the pain of unwise offspring is a comparison frequently made in the book of Proverbs: e.g. **15:20** “*A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish man despises his mother.”;* **17:25** “*A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him”;* **19:13a** “*A foolish son is ruin to his father”;* **23:24** “*The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice; he who fathers a wise son will be glad in him.”.* In contrast to the family shame and grief which a foolish child bestows, is the joy resulting from a wise one.

Brothers and sisters, please be attentive…there are some dangers for our hearts in this area for us all. For example, parents who have children not walking with the Lord may feel that they have failed in their primary duty. There is much pain for both parents and grandparents in this area. Alternatively, parents whose children faithfully attend church and serve in various ministries may feel somewhat proud of their achievements and evident faithfulness and may look down on others whose children or grandchildren have gone astray.

How can we approach this area which is so close to the heart of so many of us in the covenant community of the church? Ultimately, to acquire wisdom is to acquire the person of Christ who is “*the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (1 Cor 1:24b). We all need to **acquire Christ**, because of our failings as parents and children and also because of our perceived ‘successes’.

For parents with wayward children who suffer under daily despair and sorrow. Who are ‘heavy laden’ with a great weight of concern, Christ says “*come to me and I will give you rest*” (Matt 11:28). Bring your sadness, your guilt, your shame, your losses to me. Accept responsibility where you as a parent have failed to teach wisdom to your children by word and example, but remember that although wisdom may be offered, it must be personally acquired to be of any value.

For parents with ‘successful’ children who live with the temptation to pride, arrogance, and a haughty attitude of looking down on others. Christ says, “*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me*” (Matt 11:29).

These words would be true on the lips of Jesus: “Even though I am perfect, yet I am humble of heart”. All of us need to “get wisdom”, to “get Christ”. To ‘acquire’ the Son of God who is offered to all to who will turn to Him in repentance and faith. To acquire Christ is free – there is no cost in ‘getting’ Him. Which is good news, because we have nothing with which to purchase anything He has to offer.

The gospel call to come to Jesus could be expressed this way: “*If you want Him, here He is come and get Him”.* Jesus Christ is the perfect son of the perfect father… He never entered the path of the wicked or walked in the way of evil. His was always the path of the righteous which shone forth light. He kept his heart with all vigilance. His speech was always straight and true. His focus was always upon the direction His Father would have him go.

All the way to the cross at Calvary. In willingly going there to lay down his life for others he did not ’swerve to the right or to the left’. As he suffered the penalty for all the disobedience, the sin of people like us, as parents and children. The perfect relationship between the perfect son and the perfect Father which had always existed was broken.

Why? So that we might acquire Christ and thereby receive the wisdom of God. So, will you then, in light of the wise work of Christ. Whether you be a parent, a child or anyone else? Acquire wisdom?

AMEN