

# Father Knows Best

Proverbs 3:1-4

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Most of us have had the experience of hearing advice from someone older and wiser than we are, and all of us have certainly been tempted to ignore that advice. Or maybe we encounter a law or a rule that we just don't think really applies to us, and so we are tempted to ignore it. A year or two ago, our family went hiking to see some waterfalls up near Lake Superior, and on our way back to the car, we came to a bridge over a gorge, and they had a few signs posted. We had a good time with that. We all looked at each other and said, "Do you think they mean that? Do those signs really apply to us? Or are those signs only for other people?" It was hot, we were worn out, we were surrounded by mosquitoes, we had to take a huge detour to get back to the car, but ultimately in this case we trusted the advice we were given, that we should probably not try to cross over this bridge.

The same idea, of course, applies in other areas of life. Someone older with some experience might give some words of wisdom, they might direct us on the straight and narrow path, but for whatever reason we are tempted to turn aside and to ignore those wise words. Maybe we think that God just wants us to be happy. Maybe we want to take a route that seems to be easier. Maybe we want to go along with what the people around us are doing.

A year or so ago, I mentioned that I wanted us to very slowly work our way through the book of Proverbs in sermon form, since then we have studied several lessons from this book, so this morning I want us to get back to Proverbs for a few weeks, with several lessons from Proverbs 3. Proverbs, of course, was primarily written by King Solomon, and the book is a collection of wise sayings that are being passed along from Solomon to his children. A proverb is a short and wise statement, a piece of good advice, often passed down from one generation to the next.

This morning, then, we return to some wise sayings in the book of Proverbs, some wisdom passed along from a father to his son, which makes this especially appropriate for today. And as with many of the proverbs, we see a familiar pattern in this morning's passage - a command, followed by a promise, which is then followed by a warning or a reminder as to the reason for the original instruction.

If you will, please look with me at Proverbs 3:1-4,

- <sup>1</sup> ***My son, do not forget my teaching,  
But let your heart keep my commandments;***
- <sup>2</sup> ***For length of days and years of life  
And peace they will add to you.***
- <sup>3</sup> ***Do not let kindness and truth leave you;  
Bind them around your neck,  
Write them on the tablet of your heart.***
- <sup>4</sup> ***So you will find favor and good repute  
In the sight of God and man.***

As we look at these four verses this morning, I want us to go through this passage by looking at the COMMAND, then the PROMISE that is made, and then the WARNING or the REMINDER at the end.

- I. **But here at the beginning, we start with the INSTRUCTION in verse 1, “MY SON, DO NOT FORGET MY TEACHING, BUT LET YOUR HEART KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS.”**

The proverb starts with the idea that we are not to forget our father’s teaching. Obviously, in this case, we are dealing literally with a father teaching his son (Solomon teach his son Rehoboam). But in another sense, this is Scripture. This is inspired. So we are also dealing with this command or instruction that we are not to forget the word of God. Or, to put it positively, we are to REMEMBER what we have been taught. Perhaps you have done something stupid as a teenager, and maybe you’ve heard your parents say something like this, “You weren’t raised like that!” or maybe, “We taught you better than that!” Have we ever heard something like that? That is what Solomon is saying here: Remember how you were raised! ***“My son, do not forget my teaching.”***

So, we need to remember the word of God - we need to hear it, we need to read it, we need to study it, and then we need to keep on hearing, and reading, and studying - over a lifetime - not just to learn new information (which is important), but also so that we remember to obey, so that we remember what we already know. As Solomon says, we are not to forget, ***“but let your heart keep my commandments.”*** This is something we do personally. Nobody else can study for us. Nobody else can remember for us. The word needs to be in our hearts.

Years ago, the preacher down in Goodlettsville, Tennessee, made the point that we need to study on our own instead of just relying on what the preacher says, and he compared it to going to a buffet and finding on the buffet a container of pre-chewed food! He painted the picture of somebody chewing the food for us and putting it back on the buffet. It might save us some time and effort, but that’s disgusting! In the same way, we don’t want our spiritual food to be pre-chewed, either! We need to be studying on our own. There is a value to studying together. This past Wednesday, Patsy and Abe (and several others) brought out some ideas from our text that I never would have even thought about in a thousand years. I read commentaries on those chapters all day Wednesday, but the people in this class made points that all of those commentators missed. So, there is a value to studying together; it is foolish and arrogant to think that we can study on our own without any input from others and to learn everything we need to learn to be wise and spiritually mature. Not only that, but it’s also important to be the one who helps contribute to the discussion. It’s easy for us to focus on what WE get out of it. There is more to it than that. We need to be thinking of others. We might be the

ones who help somebody else figure something out. So, it is important that we study together; however, an hour on Wednesday and two hours on Sunday is not enough to keep us out of trouble. We need to be in the word on our own, not relying only on pre-chewed spiritual food.

So, we need to remember God's instruction, and we also need to obey it. We are to **"keep his commandments."** One of the most basic building blocks of a family (and of civilization itself) is that in a family, children are to obey their parents. If children don't learn obedience from a very early age, the family is headed for chaos. This week, I read an article from a fellow preacher, and the title of the article was, "Jesus Learned to Obey. Have Your Children?" Have your children learned to obey? Hebrews 5:8 teaches that Jesus **"learned obedience."** We usually don't think about God "learning" anything. But Jesus learned obedience. He came to this earth as a baby, and he learned to obey his parents. Jesus has always existed from eternity, but only when he came in human form did he ever have to "obey" anybody! He **"learned obedience."** When Mary and Joseph told him to do something, he did it. He learned obedience. Our children must also learn obedience, or they are heading for a lifetime of chaos, a lifetime of heartache. Solomon, then, gives the reminder: We must learn, and we must obey. We must obey from the heart. So, this is the command: We are to remember and obey.

## II. **What about the PROMISE? The promise (in verse 2), is that we will gain LENGTH OF DAYS, YEARS OF LIFE, AND PEACE.**

**"Length of days"** - apparently, God will in some way make our days longer! Of course, in a literal sense, God did this for Joshua in a battle described in Joshua 10. Apparently, the battle was going well, but they were running out of daylight, so Joshua told God to make the sun stand still, and it did! For about a day, the sun did not move, allowing Joshua and his army to finish what they started. So, they had some miraculous help from God. Figuratively or symbolically, though, I think we know what Solomon is talking about here. He's talking about being productive. Sometimes we might wish that we had more time in the day, and we know that other times it seems as if we accomplish more than usual in a day. To me, it seems that this is what Solomon is talking about here. When we follow God, generally speaking, we are given **"length of days,"** we use our time efficiently.

But secondly, if we remember and keep God's words, we are also promised **"years of life"** - more time to spend with those we love, more years to accomplish God's will in our lives, more time to reach out and help others. But is it true that those who obey God live longer? Some of you might have noticed a study released just a few days ago, a study out of Ohio University that was published in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, where researchers analyzed more than 1500 obituaries from across the US, and took note of whether each obituary mentioned whether each person was religiously active in some way. They found that those who were religious lived, on average, an extra 5.64 years. They then adjusted for other factors, like marriage status, since those who are married tend to live longer (spouses apparently nag each other into going to the doctor), but even when they took them out (since religious people are also more likely to get married and stay married), once marriage was taken out of the equation, those with some kind of religious affiliation still lived 3.82 years longer. Of course, we remember that what Solomon says here is a PROVERB - this is true generally, but not always. Sometimes, good people die young. But in general, following God is good for us. Generally, we avoid certain risky behaviors. There are diseases we do not get. We do not drink, and smoke, and so on. Following God is good for us.

The average lifespan in the US right now is 78.7 years, but what I found surprising is that this figure has now gone down for two years in a row (the statistics are from early 2017, so this refers to 2015 and 2016). But the statistics show why lifespans have gone down. By far the most significant factor is the opioid epidemic -

overdoses. If you don't get the daily briefing notes from our police chief every morning, I would highly recommend it, but all the time they are responding to calls of people unconscious or dead due to overdoses. In yesterday's briefing, the chief described saving a guy passed out in the Home Depot restroom at about 3 o'clock Friday afternoon. I was in Home Depot Friday afternoon. Other overdoses or drug related calls came in from Moorland Road, from Muirfield Drive, and from a coffee shop restroom on State Street, among others. Not that religious people would never get caught up in this, but obviously, what we believe, and what we choose to do, and who we associate with, will often have an impact on how long we live.

Beyond length of days and years of life, those of us who hear and obey God will be blessed with **"peace"** - the word has been translated **"completeness," "soundness,"** or **"welfare"** - **"peace"** - peace with God, peace with ourselves, peace with each other. By listening to and obeying God, we have a sense of peace in our lives.

III. **So we have a command (remember and obey), we have the promise (length of days, long life, and peace), and at the end of this little passage, we have a WARNING, and the WARNING is (as I have summarized it on the wall up here), HANG ON, FOR GOOD REASON.**

***"Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart."*** ***"Kindness"*** is the word we discussed in our Wednesday class a few weeks ago when we studied Lamentations 3:22-23, ***"The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."*** It is the idea of steadfast or loyal love - love even when we do not feel very loving toward another person; doing what needs to be done, even if this other person has not been very loving toward us. Like you, I've heard a number of people make the argument recently that we just need to get rid of all of the difficult people in our lives. If this person doesn't bring me happiness, if this person brings drama into my life, I just need to ditch this person and move on. We need to be thankful, though, that God did not have that attitude toward us! Not only that, but as His people, God has called us to love some very difficult people. And sometimes, the most difficult people in our lives are those who are closest to us - children, parents, brothers, sisters, and even our own spouses. If somebody does something to us that we don't like, if they hurt us or offend us, we might be tempted to just get out of that relationship. However, let's be open to the possibility that this is the very situation where God is calling us to be like Him. Solomon, then, gives the reminder: Do not let kindness and truth leave you.

Instead, to keep kindness and truth from leaving, we are to bind them around our neck and we are to write them on the tablet of our heart. We are to bind kindness around our necks just like we might put a yoke or harness on an animal. We are to be controlled, not by our feelings, but by love or lovingkindness - faithful love. Love that only loves when it feels like it is not faithful at all. Instead, kindness is to be written on the tablet of our hearts. When the first readers of this book thought about writing on a tablet, they would obviously think about the Ten Commandments. And that seems to be what Solomon is alluding to here. Write the word of God, not on tablets of stone, but write it on your heart! Again, this is a proverb - we don't take this literally. You might remember the story from earlier this year of a transplant surgeon in England who was convicted of burning his initials into the livers of several patients. Just Google "liver, surgeon, and initials," and you will find it. But we are not talking about literally writing on our hearts; instead, we are talking about making lovingkindness and truth permanent qualities. We will be truthful, and we will be kind, with no regard as to whether others are being kind and truthful to us.

And when we do this, Solomon says that we will ***"find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man."*** And in that order - favor with God, and then favor with man - similar to Jesus at the age of 12, as he ***"...kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."*** When we are kind and truthful, when we

overcome our feelings about somebody to the point where we can do what is right and good instead of what we might want to do, Solomon says that we will find favor in the sight of God and man.

**Conclusion:**

As we close our thoughts on this passage, we think back to this sign and others like it, and we ask ourselves: Do we listen? Do we appreciate the warning? Or do we ignore it and press on? The word of God is like a guardrail, like a barrier protecting us from danger, like a warning sign. Is it worth it to listen to the warning? Is it worth it to be kind and truthful, even when we might not feel like it? Solomon says that it is. There is a command, a promise, and a warning.

By turning to God to save us, by obeying his word, we gain the favor of God and man. We gain the forgiveness of sins. We gain eternal life. We gain the hope of heaven. We gain ***“peace,”*** as Solomon says. Today, we turn to God in faith. We turn away from sin. We allow ourselves to be buried with Jesus in baptism, for the forgiveness of sins, a reenactment of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. If you would like to talk about this further, we hope you will get in touch - either on your way out this morning or during the week. But, if you are ready to turn from sin, if you are ready to confess Jesus as the Son of God, if you are ready to make an appeal to him for a good conscience in the act of baptism, and if you are ready to do these things right now, we are ready to help in any way we can, and we would invite you to let us know right now, as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

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