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Building 3-D Families
Proverbs 22:6

I have talked with people for whom life is not working very well. It not because they lack intelligence. Its not because they are lazy, but part of their struggle with life can be traced back to parents who were foolish in raising them. their parents didn't know how to lovingly guide them from dependence to independence; From irresponsibility to responsibility. From immaturity to maturity. To not knowing how to love and obey God to desiring to do what God knows is best. Their parents never gave them the model and what was the price? Plenty of heartache. Plenty of pain. Plenty of "I never knew that" Plenty of "I wished I had learned that at a younger age...it would have made life a whole lot more doable. I'm not here to blame your parents, I'm here to challenge and encourage them in their pursuit of effective parenting skills in order to build strong families.

There are also people I've talked with for whom life is working well. That's not because their life has no problems and is devoid of any disappointments and challenges. But they seem to have the inner strength and direction, emotional, relational and spiritual tools to pull through whatever happens. Most of those folks will attribute their character resources and inner strength to God's empowerment and often to a parent who has raised them well.

The value of a parent that raises a child well is priceless. Basketball phenom Michael Jordan was interviewed in the summer before his father was murdered. He told the columnist Bob Greene. "My heroes are and were my parents...It wasn't that the rest of the world would necessarily think that they were al that heroic. But they were the adults I constantly saw and I admired what I saw. If you're lucky, you grow up in a house where you can learn what kind of person you should be from your parents. And on that count, I was very lucky. It may have been the luckiest thing that ever happened to me." To Michael Jordan,

good parents meant more to him than his amazing skill with a basketball.

More and more it seems our families are under heavy attack. Some predict the traditional family unit as we know it will soon fade away as even abusive or at best irrelevant. Our families are getting shot at and shredded and we need to do everything possible to strengthen our families. Last week we talked about strengthening our marriages, the foundation of our families. This week we are going to talk about how we can be more effective in our parenting. That wisdom comes to us straight from God's manual for living well. That is the Bible. Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 15:20 says, "A wise son makes his father glad." Proverbs 23:25 "Let your father and your mother be glad, and let her rejoice who gave birth to you." There is incredibly great joy for the father, for the mother to watch a child grow up and walk in the way of wisdom, to walk in pursuit of the best God has for them. To walk in obedience with a heart for God. There is nothing better than that for a father. For when my sons grow up, I don't care how big a paycheck they bring home, I don't care whether they are famous. I don't care whether or not they live in a large home with a job of great power. But what I care about deeply, what I long for, what would bring me the greatest joy...if only they would grow up to walk in Godly wisdom and pursue God's heart. There would be nothing better than that. Because if that Godly pursuit is in place, all the rest of life seems to work out just right; from relationships, to vocation. Wise living chases after a Godly pursuit. It is a wise son that makes his father glad. Our kids should hear how much we love them and how much we delight in them. Our unconditional love should be just the place for kids to grow up strong and healthy and godly, sometimes in a tough love and sometimes in a grace filled love, but always in an unconditional and sacrificial love. That is some very fertile soil for the heart of a kid to grow up in.

Yet, the reality is that wise and godly children don't just happen by accident. When we bring that little bundle of joy home and look down in that innocent little face, we can't imagine that child could ever have a streak of rebel or anger or selfishness or stubbornness. But if you have had one of those little cherubic bundles of joy grow up, without

exceptions you realize that parenting isn't for cowards. The age old debate of whether children are born good and the kid is only damaged by picking up bad habits from his parents and environment or our kids are born with an innate tendency toward mischief, a gravitational attraction to sin. Proverbs 22:15 leaves little doubt as to where the Bible comes down in this debate. "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of the child." Most parents look down at that snugly little child and even though they may be desperately optimistic, they too find out that it is experientially true; there is rebellion lurking inside this sleepy newborn just waiting to get out. If it's not dealt with it will produce great conflict in the early years and a horrible nightmare in the teen years..after that it gets only worse.

Proverbs paints many a horror story to haunt us who are parents. The second half of "A wise son makes a father glad, say, But a foolish man despises his mother." Literally the foolish son laughs at and saddens his mother. Nothing breaks the heart of a mother or father then to have a son you must admit is acting like a fool. Look at 15:27 "He who profits illicitly or greedily troubles his own family. Nothing more sickening than a son or daughter who uses his family relationships to get for self thinking nothing of others selling off his character, raffling his integrity for more stuff. Proverbs 28:24 the nightmare family continues; "He who robs his father and mother and then says, "it wasn't wrong!" Is the companion of a man who destroys." It's pretty easy to see the damage this child wreaks on his family. stealing, taking for his own, never giving back....and thinking it was no big deal. Never even seeing how his actions destroy the family. What...what did I do? I didn't' do anything wrong. I didn't hurt anybody? They didn't need that? I deserve it. It's rightfully mine. So they steal money, steal time. Steal respect. steal honor, steal joy, steal peace, steal health. Look at Proverbs 20:20 "He who curses his father or his mother, his lamp will go out in the time of darkness." It's pulling directly off the 5th of the 10 commandments to honor your father and mother and you will live long on this earth. Literally his life will become as pitch black as night. Why? Because he is not walking in the light, he is stumbling in the darkness. And you hit a lot of things in the way, when you can't see where you are going.

In a time when it seems disrespect between the generations is at an all time high, building strong families seems like quite a challenge.

Many would say their parents gave them no good reason to look up to them. Sometimes those words are just a shallow excuse for blatant disrespect...but other times its true. Parents have failed to have the guts to stand up and rise to the great challenge of parenting that is outlined for us in the book of Proverbs. We are called to model wise living, to consistently disciplining, to affirm life giving values.

What is it going to take to pass these kinds of values on in our parenting? What is it going to take to build 3-D families? Maybe it will mean a few less hours sitting in front of the TV, a few less hours staring at the computer, a few less hours out in the shop, a few more hours sitting actually eating dinner together, a few more hours devoted to reading together, a few more walks, a few more talks. A simpler, less rushed, less busy lifestyle. A life that models and focuses on doing the stuff that makes a difference and has lasting impact and influence.

It sad that far too often parents and kids seem to be adversaries fighting against each other, then allies working side by side proud to be on the same team. Do you want to work to avoid nightmare children and nightmare families like Proverbs describes? It's almost like Proverbs is trying to scare us into being proactive and intentional and Godly about our parenting. And those who have been there know the scare is real, the family nightmares do come. But they don't have to. You can enjoy your kids as they grow up. They can actually enjoy you as you respect each other and grow up wise together. Do you want to experience the incredible joy of a watching your child grow up wise and well? Then you will want to work on effective parenting by building a 3-D family. Those three D's are Dedication, Discipline and Discovery.

Lets look at Proverbs 22:6 as a springboard to building 3-D families. "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." That first phrase "train up" is the Hebrew word Hanak. It means literally to dedicate. That is the first D in building 3-D families. Hanak is used in Deut 20:5 to dedicate a home. In I kings to dedicate a temple. The idea is for a parent to dedicate their children for special use for the Lord. To dedicate a child to God. We dedicate infants and young children here at the church. We do that to encourage and challenge the parents to dedicate themselves to training, instructing, motivating this child in raising them for the Lord. Remember children are

a gift from the Lord. We parents don't own them. We are God's stewards to take care of them, to train them. Our child belongs to God. So if you are wanting to build strong 3-D families the first D to start with is Dedication.

Have you dedicated your kids to God? Are you committed to praying for them? Are you committed to putting your life into them so they know and understand the life giving truths of God? Are you dedicated to modeling them so they can see practical godly wisdom in action? lived out in your home? Do we help our child know there is a God in heaven and a Savior who paid a price for their sin and wants to lead us toward the wise way of life? Do we pray for our children? Do we pray for our grandchildren?

When George McCluskey married and started a family, he decided to dedicate one hour a day in prayer, because he wanted his kids to follow Christ. After a time, he expanded his prayers to include his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Every day between 11 a.m. and noon, he prayed for the next three generations. As the years went by, his two daughters committed their lives to Christ and married men who went into full-time ministry. The two couples produced four girls and one boy. Each of the girls married a minister, and the boy became a pastor. The first two children born to this generation were both boys. Upon graduation from high school, the two cousins chose the same college and became roommates. During their sophomore year, one boy decided to go into the ministry. The other didn't. He undoubtedly felt some pressure to continue the family legacy, but he chose instead to pursue his interest in psychology. He earned his doctorate and eventually wrote books for parents that became bestsellers. He started a radio program heard on more than a thousand stations each day. Of course now you know the rest of the story. The man's name was James Dobson. "Through his prayers. Through his dedication of setting his family for the Lord. George McCluskey affected far more than one family. Dedicate your child to the God.

The second "D" in building strong families is Discipline. This would encompass the training aspect of the word Hanak. Train up your child, discipline your child. This involves teaching them all the essential of living a life pleasing to God. Train them in the way they should go. That

way is the way of wisdom that leads to God. Discipline is an act of love that equal love to your child. Look at Proverbs 13:24 here is probably the most famous Proverb. "He who spares the rod HATES his son. BUT, He who disciplines him diligently LOVES him." Modern parenting experts revolt at the idea of discipline...but the Bible is not talking about brutality. This is about love, not violence. Its not easy for a loving parent to discipline his child, but its necessary. Proverbs speaks against those who would hold back discipline and even puts their love in question because it shows such a lack of concern for the child's long term character development. The one who is too lazy to discipline consistently causes great confusion and frustration in the child. They never know what is the standard and when the rules apply and when they don't. This instability causes great frustration. The one who fails to discipline is one who is simply living for whatever seems the easiest at the moment. This parent is a short term thinking that cannot see beyond the hour to the disasters they might avoid long term. The parent who fails to discipline is more interested in their own personal comfort..in somehow maintaining the child's affection for the moment instead of forging a love and character that last for a lifetime. A whimpy spineless, pushover of a parent that lets the kids get away with stuff does not engender love...the kids know. They dislike discipline and will do whatever they can to get out of it. But they know that letting them get away with it does not shows love, it shows laziness and self-comfort.

Kids if you have a parent that has the strength and guts to lovingly, consistently discipline you, not caring for the ease and comfort of the moment but is more concerned for developing your character. You would be wise to give them a huge hug and a thank you this afternoon, for they are giving you possibly the greatest gift a parent can give a child. And if they have disciplined you well, you probably don't think this suggestion is all that strange, because you can already see the incredible benefits, the difference your life is to others around you. You can see the difference it make in the peace and rest in the home. You probably even look up to your parents as heroes.

Its tough to be consistent isn't it parents? When your worn down, too tired to follow through. Its easy to throw your hands up and say. "I give up". Its too easy to slide into that threatening and repeating parent

instead of following though and training our children with first time obedience. You all know what I'm talking about. "Now Johnny I don't want you to hit your brother with the bat." Bamm. Johnny, sweet little thing you put that bat back in the play room. Bamm, bamm. Johnny, I'm going to take that bat away if you keep hitting your brother. Bamm, bamm. Johnny I'm getting really angry, my voice is getting louder. I'm really serious. Johnny. Bamm. Bamm. Who won that fight. The kid.

We have too many kids that are running our homes and parents that are lazy enough to let them. A telemarketker called the home asking to speak to the person who makes all the final purchasing decision in the home. The woman replies, "I'm sorry that person won't be home for another hour, she is still at kindergarten."

We must learn to lovingly discipline our children because discipline equals love. When a child steps out of the line we must get off our duffs and deal with it. We must love them way too much to let them get away with that. We must choose to love them instead of loving our own comfort.

Proverbs 23:1-14 "Don't withhold discipline from a child." Again no form of discipline should ever do violence to a child. It should never be administered when you the parent are out of control. But to withhold discipline is just like sitting back and watching them head over the cliff to destruction. Don't let them get away with it...it will spell nightmares for you when they get older and destruction for them when they leave the home.

Parents may be reluctant to discipline maybe for fear they would break relationship, fear their child would resent them, fear they may stifled the child's development and send them to years of counseling. But the opposite is true. Wise, loving discipline is not going to kill them. God has designed a specially place for certain types of discipline. most of us have more padding then we'd like to admit there. Sometimes the lessons are learned the hard way because foolishness in bound up in the heart of the child and sometimes it take more than a time out to drive it out.

Look at Proverbs 29:15-17 " The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother." Sometimes it seems all we do every day is nag and scold and punish and say "NO" Mom's, Dad's especially single parents. When you are tempted to give in

and let the child get his own way. Remember verse 17 "correct your son and he will give you comfort (peace) . He will also delight your soul. Remember that loving, firm, consistent discipline will help make them wise and teach them to discipline themselves.

There are various forms of discipline from spanking to time-outs to removal of rewards to isolation, natural consequences. Wisdom finds out the most effective rod of discipline for your child and family in that situation. One kid may have a high tolerance to pain and laugh at a spank, but does not want to be isolated in their room for 5 minutes. Another might be motivated by removing the reward of going to a friends house, or computer time. We can't afford to allow our children to grow up without limits, boundaries, consequence, to learn responsibility and accountability. If we fail to discipline we are sending them down a lifetime of heartache and disaster. That sin streak that is left unchecked in their life will grow and become a driving force of meism and self-absorption that will drive people away from her and lead to personal, vocational, and spiritual ruin.

The wise parent steps up to the challenge of discovering the balance in discipline while at the same time showering then with sacrificial and committed love. When do we let things slide because they are just overtired and when do we jump all over an attitude that needs to be dealt with. When do we step in to protect our child from a hurtful or even destructive decision, and when do we stand back and allow the natural course of consequences to teach our child the hard lessons of life? When do we come and comfort tenderly and when do we confront forcefully? When do we encourage and when do we admonish? When do we speak in counsel and when do we listen? There are right and wrong times for all and I confess, I am not perfect. I've gotten it wrong. I've punished in anger at times. I've talked too much when I should have listened. I've confronted loudly when I realize later that listening would have been a better tact. These are the questions of balance that drive parents to their knees in asking God for wisdom. But...that really isn't a bad place to be.

Shaping a child's character is a bit like stone carving. The Smithsonian magazine did an article on a master stone carver from England named Simon Verity. He had learned to carve stone by restoring

13th century cathedrals in Great Britain using the four basic tools of the trade; the hammer, a punch, a chisel and rasp. As the authors watched Verity work they noticed something interesting. Verity would listen closely to hear the song of the stone under his careful blows. A solid strike and all is well. A higher pitched ping, and it could mean trouble, a chunk of rock could break off and ruin the entire work. He was constantly adjusting the angle of the chisel and force of the mallet to the pitch and running his hand over the freshly carved surface. In much the same way, when a parent disciplines a child, we must listen with great sensitivity to how the child responds, with a loving hand, constantly guide and train and move.

Are you ready to build a 3-D family? It begins with dedication. Committing your child to the Lord and for the Lord. It involves the guts and hard work of discipline that shows we truly do love our kids and forges character that lasts a lifetime. That same discipline also drives us back to our knees. But for the parent...that's not a bad place to be.

One more D we will explore next Sunday. It the exciting aspect of Discovery. The rewarding joy of parents helping children discover the path of life that has been uniquely designed for them.