

The Ultimate Father-Son Chat

The Quest for Hidden Treasure – Part VII

Selected Proverbs

Introduction

Several years ago, I came across an unusual story about a man named Larry Walters. In fact, the story was so unusual that before I repeated it, I checked to see if it was an urban legend. It was not – I even saw his picture and the pictures of his famous lawn chair.

It seems that Larry had a life-long dream to fly. When he graduated from high school, he joined the Air Force in hopes of becoming a pilot. Unfortunately, his poor eyesight ended that particular dream.

When he left the service, he enjoyed sitting outside in his lawn chair to watch the fighter jets that crisscrossed the skies over his backyard.

One day, Larry got an idea. With the help of his girlfriend, he bought some helium tanks and weather balloons from the local Army Navy Surplus Store. He told the store owner that they were going to be used in a commercial shoot by his company.

Larry and his girlfriend filled the balloons, which were tied to his lawn chair, with helium. Larry then climbed into the lawn chair with some sandwiches and drinks and his trusty BB gun. The lawn chair was anchored by a rope to the bumper of his jeep. His plan was to hover at about 200 to 300 feet in the air and then pop a few of the balloons when it was time to settle back down to earth.

Lawn-chair Larry, as he was about to become known around the world, cut the rope on July 2, 1982. But he did not float lazily up; he shot upward as if fired from a cannon. And he did not climb to a couple hundred feet; he finally leveled off at 16,000 feet – or, if you can imagine, 3 miles up.

Larry did not know what to do. He was certainly too afraid to shoot any of the balloons, which might cause an imbalance and toss him out of his lawn chair, so he just hung on.

He finally drifted from San Pedro, California, into the approach corridor for the Los Angeles International Airport. A pilot radioed the tower about “passing a guy in a lawn chair.” A rescue helicopter was dispatched, but every time it got near him, the current of wind pushed him dangerously away.

Can you just see this? Whoa!

Finally, Larry got up the nerve and shot one balloon, and then another, and another. He slowly descended until the balloons got caught in a power line, causing a neighborhood in Long Beach to experience a blackout! He was, however, able to climb down, whereupon he was immediately arrested.

Imagine this final indignity – Larry was put under arrest. However, can you just see the law enforcement officers scratching their heads as they try to figure out what to charge him with? They ended up charging him with, and I quote, “operating an aircraft without an airworthiness certificate,” and, get this, “not maintaining contact with air traffic control.”

As he was being led away by the LAPD, a reporter asked, “Hey, why’d you do it?”

Larry responded, “Well, a man can’t just sit around.”¹

Obviously, Larry should have sat around a little longer – and thought it through more clearly. He could have experimented first, perhaps with two balloons and the neighbor’s cat – no harm done.

Larry went for everything on the first try. When I read this story again, I wondered if he thought through some things.

- What about low flying aircraft?
- What if the balloons burst or leaked?
- Were the ropes strong enough and tied well enough to connect the balloons and the chair?
- How do you steer a lawn chair?

And these are just for starters.

I could not help but think that parenting is a lot like Larry’s flight into space. There is no time to experiment. Parents arrive at the hospital in time and before they are ready or hardly prepared, they are being moved out – “Hey, insurance only covers 48 hours . . . we need this room back.”

Just to show how things have changed, Marsha delivered our twins twenty-two year ago this month at Baylor Hospital in Dallas, Texas. Marsha was in

the hospital for four days, not because she was ill or the boys were under special care, but because that was just the standard length of time. Before we checked out, we were served a full course dinner in their special parlor for new parents. It was standard operating procedure for all new parents at Baylor Hospital to be served steak and baked potatoes cooked to order.

Hospitals do not do this anymore. Parents barely have time to recover from the shock of it all before they are sent home, and then they are charged for everything – they are charged for using the mirror. All the people who walked through the delivery room did so just so they could bill them later.

The parents finally bring their baby home and they have everything ready, right? They have the baby bed and dresser on loan from friends or family. The dresser is filled with little outfits and pajamas with “footies”. They have cases of baby lotion and baby powder, and a plastic tub for bath time, and on and on and on. Most of this is on loan or borrowed from friends, except for the car seat – that was a special purchase. It morphs from a car seat into a stroller into a changing table and then into a high chair – it is amazing. They were able to purchase the newest model by taking out a second mortgage.

However, before they know it, they are airborne – going higher and faster and further away from everything they know or ever planned. Up there, they cannot catch their breath. Some moments are exhilarating, but most of the time it is exhausting.

I am saying this, but I got to leave the house eight hours a day, “Have a great day, honey, I’m praying for you!”

Well-meaning friends drop in to help or give advice; to give the latest book on the personality development of eight-week-olds – and how the parents can really mess it up. The wind these friends create makes the parents’ ride all that more difficult.

Parents soon discover – and it only takes a few days – that there may be a formula to feed them, but there is no formula to raise them. Each child is unique and different. By the time they figure out the basics of parenting, the ride is over and they are under arrest – I mean, they are an “empty nester”.

For young parents and old; in fact, for grandparents who are flying in *that* new territory for the first time, God actually has a lot to say about what really matters.

I want to spend a couple of sessions exploring with you, what Proverbs has to say to parents. It will

not be about what kind of diaper increases the child’s I.Q. or where they are supposed to be on the percentage scale at three weeks old or why they must be able to crawl by the age of six months and walk by ten months if they are to be superior human beings.

By the way, one of our sons never learned how to crawl properly. He just pulled himself along with one arm, like some wounded soldier crawling under a fence. I even got down on the floor and tried to show him how. I was convinced at the time that this son, who would later be named to the all-state soccer team, just was not able to do the stuff babies are supposed to do.

We are not going to talk about this. God does not seem to be worried about percentage points and diaper selection.

We want to talk about things that matter over the long haul. We want to talk about things that truly matter.

Ask the average father today if he has had “the talk” with his middle schooler or high schooler, and he will respond, “You mean the talk?”

“Oh yeah, have you had the talk?”

Ask the average father what “the talk” is about, and he will say it has something to do with the “birds and bees,” right?

Not that it is wrong to have this talk. In fact, Solomon spends quite a bit of time talking about the dangers of being sexually involved with someone to whom we are not married. We will probably look at this topic in a future session.

I find it fascinating that while most fathers who would argue that they must have a talk with their sons or daughters about sexual matters, will never talk to them about scripture, the character of God, eternal life, election, eternal security, grace, giving, and on and on.

What the church needs and what families need is for parents to communicate to their children issues of character and values and priorities and submission to God and honesty and on and on and on.

Frankly, God knew we would need direction concerning what to talk about with our children, so He gave us plenty of guidance on the subject matter. Turn to Proverbs chapter 4, to what I will call, “The Ultimate Father-Son Chat”.

Two Principles of Wise Parental Counsel

Let me divide our study into two principles that make up a wise session of parental counsel.

1. The principle of spiritual edification.

The objective of this principle is telling children the truth.

Notice the words that Solomon writes in Proverbs 4:1a.

Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father . . .

This is the first and only place where the word “son” is plural. However, since the chapter switches later to the singular, it seems that Solomon is making sure, first of all, that this is good advice for all sons; in fact, for every child.

Another point to keep in mind is that although the father is mentioned in this text, both parents are responsible for the teaching process.

Solomon writes, in Proverbs 1:8,

Hear, my son, your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching;

In Proverbs 6:20, he writes,

My son, observe the commandment of your father and do not forsake the law of your mother;

It is clear that the teaching of both mother and father are instructive and necessary in the development of the child.

However, it seems that the Spirit of God is focusing the lens of inspired scripture, here in chapter 4, on the father. These are issues that the father must communicate to his sons.

The fathers must tell their sons the truth about what God said. They must teach them who God is and what He is about. They must build them up in the faith – this is edification.

This was Paul’s desire toward his children in the faith when he reminded them to,

. . . [speak] the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ

. . . [causing] the growth of the body for the building up [edification] of itself in love.

(Ephesians 4:15-16)

Solomon is basing his father-son chat on the delivery of the truth in love. He writes in Proverbs 4:2,

For I give you sound teaching; do not abandon my instruction.

We would easily turn this around and say, “Wait a minute! This text is a command that the child should listen to the father deliver the truth.”

That is true. However, it also implies that the father has truth to deliver.

The word “instruction” in this verse comes from the Hebrew word for Torah. It is saying, “Teach your son the law and the statutes and the principles of God’s word.”

This text is revealing a very personal father-son encounter relating to the word of God; teaching the truth of God.ⁱⁱ

This principle of spiritual edification is expanded in Deuteronomy 6, where Moses records,

You shall teach them [truths] diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. (Deuteronomy 6:7)

What a wonderful text this is. We build up and strengthen our children when we make the word of God our common theme. This is not an event on our calendar that starts at 7 a.m. or ends with a bedtime story. This is a lifestyle – when we are just talking, sitting, walking, getting ready to lie down, and when getting up in the morning. We do this in a fishing boat – it is in the Hebrew text.

The truth is, our children have questions about spiritual things and they come up with them at times we cannot put into our calendar – and when we might not even be fully prepared.

This is Proverbs chapter 4 and Deuteronomy chapter 6 applied in real terms. We edify our children by applying the truth of God’s word wherever life happens.

Someone in our church sent some brand new questions from kids to me last week. I had not seen these before, but they perfectly illustrate what might come out if we provoke our children to talk about the Lord. If these elementary school kids were given the opportunity to ask God one question, this is what they would ask:

- “Dear God,” Neil wrote, “I went to this wedding and they kissed right in church. Is that OK?” (God’s answer was, “Only for weddings,” right?)
- “Dear God,” Jennifer asked, “In Bible times did they really talk that fancy?”

- Robert prayed, “Dear God, I am American. What are you?”
- “Dear God,” Jane asked, “Instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don’t you just keep the ones you got now?”

Some of them did not have questions, but they had something they wanted to say.

- Jonathan wrote, “Dear God, If you let the dinosaur not extinct we would not have a country. You did the right thing.”
- Nan wrote, “I bet it is very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are 4 people in our family and I can never do it.”
- Joyce must have felt the same way when she wrote, “Dear God, Thank you for my baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy.”
- Elliott wrote, “Dear God, I think about you sometimes even when I’m not praying.”ⁱⁱⁱ

I wondered, as I read this, if Elliott’s parents have any idea that there are times that Elliott thinks about God. Who is going to answer his questions and guide his thoughts?

Why is it that most moms do the bedtime reading? This is a great place for dads to get involved. They never know what they will hear. In those unguarded moments, spiritual truth can be reiterated with simple yet profound meaning.

This is the principle of spiritual edification. It is the mission of the parent to base their decisions and conversations on God’s truth; God’s instruction; God’s law. This is a life-long conversation.

This leads me to the second principle of wise counsel from parents.

2. The principle of spiritual imitation.

The first principle of spiritual edification requires mentoring.

This second principle of spiritual imitation requires modeling.

Mom and Dad, it is one thing to lecture about the truth; it is another thing to live out the truth. Our children really do not care if we delineate the truth – if we have no desire to demonstrate the truth.

This is where every parent gets intimidated. This is where it gets hard, right?

However, at the moments when parents are not perfect, they actually get an opportunity to demonstrate confession. They get to model how to

ask the Lord for forgiveness. Is it not great for our kids to know we know how to confess our sins?

At this point, we teach our kids that our Lord is indeed,

... faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (I John 1:9)

Notice Solomon words in Proverbs 4:3.

When I was a son to my father . . .

This is a reference not so much to biological kinship as it is submission to the father’s counsel.^{iv}

Do not miss this – Solomon is saying to his son, more than likely a reference specifically to his son Rehoboam, “Let me tell you what Grandpa said.”

Continue to Proverbs 4:4.

Then he [that is, your grandfather David] taught me and said to me, “Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments and live;”

Two things accomplished by Solomon in this text

Solomon is accomplishing a couple of things in this verse. Let us look at these.

1. First, Solomon is reinforcing his advice with the past.

Solomon says, “Listen, Rehoboam, when I was a son like you, I heard the same thing.”

This sounds a lot like, “Let me tell you about the time when I was a boy. I used to walk three miles to a one-room schoolhouse in the snow. So stop complaining about the bus ride at 6:30 in the morning. And be grateful for the lunch you have – and don’t waste it. Why, when I was a boy, I took my lunch to that one-room schoolhouse – and it was a raw potato. Most of the farm boys did the same thing. We’d put our potatoes on top of the black wood-burning stove during school and by lunchtime, it would be cooked through and ready to eat. I’d have a little pat of butter in my pocket and that potato and butter would be my lunch.”

You might say, “Oh, c’mon, nobody did that.”

Oh? My father actually did.

This was actually his true story. He really walked to a one-room schoolhouse out in the farmland of Minnesota, carrying his potato and butter for lunch. Sometimes he would shoot a rabbit on the way home for supper – no, I made that part up. My brothers and I would say, “Yeah, but Dad, were you barefoot?”

“No, I had one pair of boots.”

How does someone complain about not having butterscotch pudding in their lunchbox after a story like that? And this is not to mention the stories of my grandfather arriving in Minnesota in a covered wagon.

There is something powerful about a heritage that passes on to us the contexts of gratitude and grace and courage and grit and determination and honest work and speaking the truth.

Tell your children stories about your childhood. Trust me, they will think yours are just as strange. However, let them know how you might have struggled or felt out of place. Tell them how the word – the law of God – intersected your life. That is the ultimate father-son chat.

Tell your children how and when you accepted Christ. That is far more important than the “birds and the bees,” learning to drive a car, operate a bank account, dress for success.

The truth of God and about God and for the pleasure of God is the ultimate father-son chat.

Solomon is saying, “Listen, let me back the tape up. When I was a boy, I received this instruction from your Grandfather David. He attempted to model it – not perfectly, but progressively. And now, I’m giving this hidden treasure to you. This truth of God’s word mattered back then and it matters today – and it will matter in your future.”

Solomon reinforces his advice with the past. Let us look at one more thing he is accomplishing.

2. Secondly, Solomon is identifying with his son in the present.

Solomon says, in Proverbs 4:3,

When I was a son to my father, tender and the only son in the sight of my mother,

The word “tender” can be translated, “pliable and weak; impressionable”.

Solomon is basically saying, “I know what it’s like to be young. I know how you feel. And listen, just as your grandfather told me, now I’m passing it along to you.”

Look at Proverbs 4:5-6.

Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth.

. . . [wisdom] will guard you . . . and . . . watch over you.

Get wisdom!

How many fathers have said, “Get a haircut . . . get your room cleaned . . . get a job . . . get an education . . .”? How many have said, “Whatever you do, get wisdom!”?

Nothing matters more than finding the hidden treasure of wisdom!

You can be an educated fool. You can be highly paid and miserable. You can be the best dressed and the most likely to succeed, but filled with yourself.

Get wisdom – first and foremost.

This is the urgency of a father toward his son. Notice Proverbs 4:8-9.

Prize her [wisdom] and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.

She will place on your head a garland of grace; she will present you with a crown of beauty.

“Sweetheart, let me tell you what real beauty is all about. Let me tell you what will draw people to you.”

“Son, let me tell you what will make you handsome . . . what you really ought to wear . . . what will make you stand up and stand out. It really has nothing to do with the way you look, or what you own, or what you wear. It has to do with who you are and who you serve.”

This is stuff that lasts. Wisdom delivers grace and beauty. In this context, these are not physical attributes; they are the fruit of wisdom in the inner attitude and spirit.

Do you want to have a father-son chat? First of all, it is not a one-time event; it is often in life. You will always be a parent and you will always be someone’s child.

How blessed are the children whose parents care deeply about the hidden treasure of wisdom – and communicate to the next generation with this principle of edification and this principle of imitation.

Conclusion

Charlie Shedd is a father that I envy. He not only dedicated his wisdom to his children, but he wrote much of it down for them to have later in life.

It is just not quite the same for me to say to my kids, “Here, listen to this CD series.”

Charlie’s son would become the recipient of a number of letters from his father. These letters eventually were published in a small book.

Charlie told of this event.

[My son] and I had been out in the country for a ride. It was evening and we ran out of gas. We were walking along after we had been to a nearby farmhouse and I was carrying a can of gas. Philip was only four years old at the time. He was playing along, throwing rocks at the telephone poles, picking flowers, and then, all of a sudden it got dark. Sometimes night comes all at once in the country. Philip came over, put his little hand in mine and said, "Take my hand, Daddy. I might get lost."

Later, Charlie Shedd would write,

Son, there is a hand reaching to you from the heart of the universe. If you will lay your hand in the hand of God and walk with Him, you will never ever get lost.^v

What great advice this is. What lasting encouragement.

This is the truth that our children and grandchildren must hear from our lips. This is the truth they must see modeled in our lives.

Now, it might not change your child's life. I do not know whether it will or not, but I do know that it will change yours. And that is the best place to start.

ⁱ Stories for the Heart (Multnomah, 1996), p. 97;
http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larry_Walters.

ⁱⁱ Bruce K. Waltke, New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Proverbs 1-15 (Eerdmans, 2004), p. 277.

ⁱⁱⁱ Compiled by Stuart Hample and Eric Marshall, Children's Letters to God (Workman Publishing, 1991).

^{iv} Waltke, p. 277.

^v Charles Swindoll, Family Life (Multnomah Press, 1988), p. 44.