

PROVERBS 4:1-6 & 10-15

Listen, children, to a father's instruction,

and be attentive, that you may gain[a] insight;

2 for I give you good precepts do not forsake my teaching.

3 When I was a son with my father, tender, and my mother's

favorite, 4 he taught me, and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live. 5 Get wisdom; get

insight: do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.

6 Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you.

10 Hear, my child, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many. 11 I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness. 12 When you walk, your step will not be hampered and if you run, you will not stumble. 13 Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life, ¹⁴ who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil; ¹⁵ those whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways.

1 Thessalonians 2:9-13

9 Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. 13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

SINCE TODAY IS FATHER'S DAY, I BEGIN WITH A POEM ABOUT FATHERS, BY AN UNKNOWN AUTHOR.

HOWEVER, THE WORDS CAN BE APPLIED TO GRANDFATHERS, AND GREAT GRAND FATHERS AS WELL. THE POEM IS CALLED: "WHAT MAKES A DAD"

GOD TOOK THE STRENGTH OF A MOUNTAIN, THE MAJESTY OF A TREE, THE WARMTH OF A SUMMER SUN, THE CALM OF A QUIET SEA, THE GENEROUS SOUL OF NATURE,

THE COMFORTING ARM OF NIGHT, THE WISDOM OF THE AGES, THE POWER OF THE EAGLE'S FLIGHT, THE JOY OF A MORNING IN SPRING, THE FAITH OF A MUSTARD SEED,

THE PATIENCE OF ETERNITY, THE DEPTH OF A FAMILY NEED. THEN GOD COMBINED THESE QUALITIES, WHEN THERE WAS NOTHING MORE TO ADD, HE KNEW HIS MASTERPIECE WAS COMPLETE, AND SO, HE CALLED IT ... "DAD!"

ALTHOUGH THIS POEM MAY BE A LITTLE IDEALISTIC FOR SOME PEOPLE, IT POINTS US TOWARDS THE VALUE OF FATHERS IN GOD'S PLAN FOR THE HUMAN FAMILY.

BIBLICALLY FATHERS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN LIFE, NOT JUST IN FAMILIES, BUT ALSO IN THE LIFE OF FAITH.

MUCH OF PROVERBS HIGHLIGHTS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF FATHERS- ESPECIALLY, TO TEACH, GUIDE, AND AT TIMES ADMONISH, THEIR CHILDREN.

PROVERBS CHAPTER FOUR POINTS CHILDREN TO THEIR NEED TO SEEK AND FOLLOW GODLY WISDOM, AND TO FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF THEIR FATHER.

THE FINAL INSTRUCTION OF TODAY'S PASSAGE IS FOR CHILDREN TO WATCH WHERE THEY WALK.

IN OTHER WORDS TO BE MINDFUL OF THEIR CHOICES, INCLUDING WHO THEY FOLLOW OR OTHERWISE LET INFLUENCE THEIR LIVES, LEST THEY TURN FROM GOD, AND END UP SUFFERING THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN.

THESE FATHERLY WORDS OF WISDOM APPLY AS MUCH TO CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES, AS THEY DO TO FAMILIES.

THE LETTERS OF PAUL PRESENT FATHERHOOD IN A DIFFERENT AND MORE INCLUSIVE WAY.

HIS WRITINGS POINT TO THE VALUE OF A CHRISTIAN MAN BEING A MENTORS AND SPIRITUAL FATHER TO OTHERS.

THERE IS AN OLD MOVIE THAT OFFERS US A PICTURE OF FATHERHOOD BOTH IN A FAMILY SETTING, AND HOW A MAN CAN BE A FATHER FIGURE TO OTHERS WHOM HE MENTORS.

THE MOVIE- "MR. HOLLAND'S OPUS" IS A STORY ABOUT A MAN, PLAYED BY RICHARD DRYFUS, WHO DREAMED OF CREATING A GREAT MUSICAL COMPOSITION.

BUT HE ALSO NEEDED TO SUPPORT HIMSELF AND HIS FAMILY SO HE TOOK A POSITION AS A MUSIC TEACHER IN A SCHOOL.

THIS OF COURSE, WAS ONLY GOING TO BE FOR A FEW YEARS. BUT MR. HOLLAND KEPT THIS" TEMPORARY" JOB UNTIL HE RETIRED WHEN BUDGET CUTS DID AWAY WITH HIS POSITION.

DURING HIS MANY YEARS AS A TEACHER IN THAT PUBLIC SCHOOL, HE AND HIS WIFE HAD A SON. AS PARENTS THEY REJOICED IN HIS BIRTH.

BUT SADLY THEY SOON THEY DISCOVERED HE WAS BORN ALMOST COMPLETELY DEAF.

THE GRIEF HIS FATHER FELT WAS PARTICULARLY KEEN SINCE HIS SON'S DISABILITY PREVENTED HIM FROM SHARING HIS LOVE FOR MUSIC WITH HIS SON.

THUS THE MAN WHO TAUGHT MUSIC TO SO MANY OTHER PEOPLE'S CHILDREN GRIEVED WHEN HE THOUGHT HE COULD NEVER SHARE HIS PASSION WITH HIS OWN SON.

FORTUNATELY, WHEN THE BOY WAS ALMOST A MAN- COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY ENABLED MR. HOLLAND TO SHARE THE BEAUTY OF MUSIC WITH HIS SON, AND WITH OTHERS WHO WERE ALSO DEAF.

THIS HAPPENED BECAUSE OF THE ABILITY TO WIRE LIGHTS TO SPEAKERS SO THAT THE LIGHTS WOULD FLASH AS THE MUSIC WAS PLAYED.

IT WAS THEN FATHER AND SON WERE FINALLY ABLE TO BOND IN A WAY NOT POSSIBLE BEFORE, AS EACH GAINED A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE OTHER.

THIS TEACHER, OVER THE YEARS, ALSO BECAME LIKE A SECOND FATHER TO MANY OF HIS PUPILS.

HE HELPED THEM TO NOT ONLY TO PLAY MUSIC, BUT ALSO TO BUILD UP THEIR SELF ESTEEM AS HUMAN BEINGS.

THE SCHOOL GAVE AN ASSEMBLY FOR MR. HOLLAND WHEN HE RETIRED, WHICH BROUGHT MANY OF HIS STUDENTS, PAST AND PRESENT, TOGETHER.

THEY JOINED TOGETHER TO SURPRISE HIM BY PLAYING IN PUBLIC FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE ONE COMPOSITION HE MANAGED TO WRITE DURING HIS DECADES AS A TEACHER.

HOWEVER, BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE ONE OF THE STUDENTS HE HELPED THE MOST, WHO BECAME THE GOVERNOR OF THE STATE, SPOKE ON BEHALF OF ALL.

SHE SAID TO MR. HOLLAND THAT SHE, AND HIS OTHER STUDENTS WHOM HE MENTORED SO WELL, WERE HIS TRUE OPUS, HIS LIVING COMPOSITION.

THE LESSON OF THIS STORY IS THAT OUR GREATEST LEGACY AS HUMAN BEINGS IS NOT OUR OCCUPATION, BUT WHETHER OR NOT WE MAKE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE LIVES OF OTHERS.

THIS SAME IDEA, FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE, COULD BE DESCRIBED AS: OUR GREATEST LEGACY IS HOW MUCH WE ARE ABLE TO SHARE WITH OTHERS THE LOVE JESUS HAS GIVEN US.

ONE FORM THIS LOVE CAN TAKE IS- OUR MENTORING OTHERS IN THE CHRISTIAN FAITH- WHETHER THEY BE CHILDREN, TEENS, OR ADULTS.

THE APOSTLE PAUL, ALTHOUGH HE NEVER HAD ANY BIOLOGICAL, ADOPTIVE, OR FOSTER CHILDREN OF HIS OWN, WAS INDEED A “FATHER IN THE FAITH” TO THE MANY.

HE SAW HIMSELF AS THE SPIRITUAL FATHER TO A YOUNG PASTOR NAMED TIMOTHY, THE SLAVE ONESIMUS, TO OTHER YOUNG MEN, AND TO THE CONGREGATIONS HE HELPED FOUND OR NURTURE.

THE THESSALONIAN CHURCH WAS AMONG THOSE WHOM PAUL HELPED ESTABLISH, AND HE HAD A SPECIAL CONCERN FOR THEM.

THEY WERE MOSTLY PAGAN CONVERTS. THEY STRUGGLED WITH THEIR NEW FAITH IN THE MIDST OF OTHERS WHO WERE PRESENTING FALSE TEACHINGS, AS WELL AS THREATS OF PERSECUTION BECAUSE OF THEIR NEW FAITH.

THE APOSTLE DESCRIBED HIS AND HIS CO-WORKS CALL BY GOD TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL AMONG THEM, AND TO CARE FOR THEM.

HE USED TWO METAPHOR IN CHAPTER TWO TO DESCRIBE HIS ROLE AMONG THEM.

FIRST, PAUL WAS LIKE A GENTLE AND NURTURING MOTHER OF YOUNG CHILDREN.

SECONDLY, AS TODAY’S PASSAGE STATES, HE WAS LIKE A HARD WORKING AND CONCERNED FATHER.

HE DESCRIBED HIS FATHERLY DUTIES AS HE SAW THEM, WHICH BEGAN BY HIM WORKING TO SUPPORT HIS FAMILY.

PAUL WORKED DILIGENTLY TO PRESENT THE GOSPEL OF SALVATION AND NEW LIFE THROUGH CHRIST, IN BOTH HIS WORDS AND HIS ACTIONS.

HE ALSO, AMONG THE THESSALONIANS IN PARTICULAR, LABORED TO SUPPORT HIS MINISTRY AMONG THEM SO THEY DID NOT HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF HIS NEEDS.

THE APOSTLE OFFERED HIS LIFE, THAT IS HOW HE LIVED AND TREATED OTHERS, AS AN EXAMPLE FOR THESE NEW BELIEVERS TO FOLLOW.

HE SOUGHT TO MODEL FOR THEM HOW A CHRISTIAN IS SUPPOSE TO LIVE. HE URGED THEM TO LIVE A LIFE WORTHY OF THEIR CALLING.

AND TO US, PAUL MIGHT SAY: WE SHOULD LIVE A LIFE WORTHY OF THE NAME “CHRISTIAN”.

HIS WORDS ARE IN ESSENCE MEANT TO BOTH TEACH AND ENCOURAGE BELIEVERS TO FOLLOW THE APOSTLE’S EXAMPLE OF LIVING IN CHRIST.

IN THIS SENSE PAUL ALSO ACTS AS A FATHER WHO DISCIPLINES CHILDREN BY POINTING OUT ERRORS, AND THEN POINTING THEM IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

LET’S LISTEN AGAIN TO VERSES 11 AND 12 FROM THE KING JAMES TRANSLATION.

“¹¹AS YE KNOW HOW WE EXHORTED AND COMFORTED AND CHARGED EVERY ONE OF YOU, AS A FATHER DOTH HIS CHILDREN, ¹²THAT YE WOULD WALK WORTHY OF GOD, WHO HATH CALLED YOU UNTO HIS KINGDOM AND GLORY”.

PAUL’S INTENTION WAS TO CALL THE THESSALONIANS, AND NOW US, TO BE FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

HE ALSO OFFERED COMFORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT IN THEIR STRUGGLES, AND TOLD THEM TO STAY ON THE RIGHT PATH.

MUCH LIKE THE FATHER’S MESSAGE IN PROVERBS, PAUL WARNED THOSE IN HIS CARE TO BE CAREFUL OF THE CHOICES THEY MADE.

THERE IS A STORY ABOUT SOME FRESHMEN BOYS AT A MILITARY ACADEMY THAT MAY HELP US SEE THE DIFFERENT WAYS A FATHER’S DISCIPLINE AND INSTRUCTION MAY BE GIVEN.

THE METHODS DIFFER DEPENDING ON THE NATURE OF THE PARENT AND THE CHILD, AND EACH CAN BE SEEN TO HAVE THEIR PLACE IN TEACHING CHILDREN THE RIGHT WAY.

A GROUP OF BOYS IN THEIR FIRST YEAR INITIATED A SMALL REVOLT AGAINST THE STRICT ATMOSPHERE OF THE MILITARY SCHOOL.

THEY WERE DISCIPLINED, AND THE PARENTS OF THE BOYS WERE NOTIFIED ABOUT THEIR BAD BEHAVIOR.

THE HEAD OF THE SCHOOL RECEIVED SEVERAL MESSAGES, EACH MEANT TO BE PASSED ON TO THE ERRANT BOYS.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES: ONE FATHER ORDERED HIS SON- "YOU BETTER OBEY." ANOTHER WARNED: "I'LL CUT YOU OFF WITHOUT A PENNY IF YOU DISGRACE OUR FAMILY."

BUT ONE FATHER TOOK A DIFFERENT APPROACH, HE SENT A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT WRITING: "STEADY, MY BOY, STEADY."

YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED IN HIS VARIOUS LETTERS, THAT PAUL USED MANY WORDS OF DISCIPLINE, COMFORT, WARNING, AND ENCOURAGEMENT.

HIS METHOD OF INSTRUCTION VARIED DEPENDING ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE PEOPLE TO WHOM HE WROTE. OFTEN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE SAME LETTER VARIED IN HOW PAUL SPOKE.

HIS MESSAGE TO THE THESSALONIANS, AS WE HEARD, INCLUDED A VARIETY OF WAYS, MEANT TO SET THOSE WHO STRAYED BACK ON TRACK, AND TO ENCOURAGE THEM ALL TO HOLD ON TO FAITH IN CHRIST.

PAUL UNDERSTOOD MANY OF THESE BELIEVERS WERE STRUGGLING- NOT ONLY TO CHANGE THEIR WAYS, BUT BATTLING FAMILY PRESSURE, AND PRESSURE FROM THE COMMUNITY.

REMEMBER, MANY FAMILY, BUSINESS, AND SOCIAL EVENTS EITHER TOOK PLACE IN PAGAN TEMPLES OR INVOKED IN SOME WAY THE BLESSINGS OF THE GODS AND GODDESSES THE PEOPLE WORSHIPPED.

THUS THESE CONVERTS TO FAITH IN CHRIST WERE CONFRONTED WITH THE DILEMMA OF EITHER MISSING OUT ON FAMILY, BUSINESS, AND COMMUNITY EVENTS, OR WORSHIPPING IDOLS.

THIS PORTION OF PAUL'S LETTER OFFERS A REMINDER TO MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE, WHICH IS THAT OF CHOOSING TO WORSHIP GOD ALONE.

AND HE ALSO ENCOURAGES BELIEVERS, IN THE MIDST OF THE TROUBLE, TO PERSEVERE BY CONTINUING TO FOLLOW JESUS.

IN ADDITION TO THOSE WORDS PAUL, WHO SUFFERED FOR THE FAITH, REMINDED THEM OF WHAT HE ENDURED.

HE THEN OFFERED HIMSELF AND OTHERS, AS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW ONE CAN PERSEVERE IN FAITH, EVEN IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES.

TODAY'S READING CONCLUDES WITH PAUL LETTING THEM KNOW ABOUT THE PRAYERS OF THANKS OFFERED TO GOD FOR THEIR FAITH, AND THEIR TRUST IN THE WORD OF GOD.

IN THIS ALSO WE HAVE AN EXAMPLE FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY. WE DO NOT, IT SEEMS, THANK GOD OFTEN ENOUGH FOR THE FAITH OF ONE ANOTHER, OR THE FRUIT GOD'S WORD AND SPIRIT PRODUCES IN US AND OTHER CHRISTIANS.

LET US THEREFORE OFFER UP A PRAYER OF THANKS: HEAVENLY FATHER, WE THANK YOU FOR THE CHURCH AND THE PEOPLE IN HER, AND FOR THE FAITH OF OUR FATHERS. WE GIVE YOU THANKS FOR JESUS AND THE HOPE AND GRACE WE HAVE THROUGH HIM. WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE GOOD NEWS WE RECEIVE BY WORD AND SACRAMENT, AND FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO BRINGS US TO FAITH AND GUIDES US. MAY OUR LIVES BE GOOD WITNESSES TO YOUR LOVE, AND TO THE SALVATION YOU PROVIDE THROUGH YOUR SON, IN WHOSE NAME WE PRAY. AMEN

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1 THESSALONIANS 2:9-13

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