

ALTERNATE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON FOR ADULTS OCCASION: FATHER'S DAY

Following a Godly Father's Advice

By Tom Hudson

Background Passage: Proverbs 3:1-35

Focal Passages: Proverbs 3:1-12,27-30

Biblical Truth: Godly fathers guide their children to live in ways that show they know, trust in, and honor the Lord.

Session Aim: To help adults evaluate the extent they are guided by the biblical teachings of a godly father.

Fast Facts About Proverbs

1. The Book of Proverbs is presented as a training manual for young men. Its spiritual and practical principles, however, apply to men and women alike. The principles in Proverbs apply to husbands/wives, fathers/mothers, and sons/daughters.
2. Reading several different translations of Proverbs will reveal that different translators understand some verses differently. This lesson will follow the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*[®].
3. Generally, proverbs present the usual results of correct or incorrect behavior; therefore, most of them are not to be understood as absolute promises. They typically express general principles of life that prove true in most cases. Not to grasp that fact leads to grave problems of interpretation. In this lesson, for example, Proverbs 3:1-2 indicates that obeying a godly father's instructions will result in a long and satisfying life. Generally, that is the way life works out. However, Ecclesiastes 9:11 reminds us that godly people are not exempt from the uncertainties of mortal existence. Jesus promised that those who trusted in Him would have "life in abundance," but Stephen and James both were martyred for their faith (see Acts 7:59-60; 12:1-2). Abundant life and length of life are not synonymous. Another example is Proverbs 3:3-4, which says that people whose lives reflect loyalty and faithfulness will be held in high regard by both God and people. That certainly is true in relation to God and generally, but not always, with people. Many godly believers have been despised and persecuted because of their loyalty and faithfulness. As you study Proverbs, keep in mind that many proverbs present typical results of particular behavior rather than absolute promises.
4. The Book of Proverbs has the following natural divisions:
 - Proverbs of Solomon (chaps. 1–24)
 - Solomon's Proverbs as Copied by Hezekiah's Men (chaps. 25–29)
 - Sayings of Agur (chap. 30)
 - Sayings of King Lemuel (chap. 31)

Note to Teachers

Each lesson segment contains four parts: (1) suggestions about how the Bible passages relate to life today, especially in light of Father's Day; (2) explanations of the Bible passage; (3) possible applications for spiritual growth; and (4) discussion questions for group Bible study and dialogue. Depending on your teaching preferences and the learners in your Bible study class, you may choose to introduce your explanation of the Scripture with some discussion questions or intersperse them throughout the lesson. More information has been provided than can be utilized in a typical 45-minute Bible study session.

To begin the lesson, use the "Fast Facts About Proverbs" or the following "Introduction" to create learning readiness. Make a transition to Scripture study by indicating Proverbs 3 reminds us that while our fathers were no more perfect than we are, they gave us counsel to help us experience the best life possible.

Introduction

Father's Day was born in the heart of Mrs. John Bruce Dodd of Spokane, Washington, who initiated the observance in 1910. The practice spread throughout the country, and in 1936 a national Father's Day Committee was formed with headquarters in New York City. On each third Sunday of June, many people express appreciation and gratitude to their fathers.

We understand that fathers and mothers form a parental team and seek the best for their children. While this Father's Day lesson focuses on fathers, the principles apply to mothers as well. Of course, the teachings also apply to daughters as well as sons.

Unfortunately, not everyone in our society has grown up with a father in the home. Some who have done so say they wish they had not because their fathers did them more harm than good. The Scriptures for this lesson challenge fathers to please God by guiding their children to live in ways that honor the Lord and demonstrate trust in Him. This lesson challenges us to evaluate the extent we are guided by the biblical teachings of a godly father, for none of us can lead others to where we have not been.

Remember What Gives Wholeness to Life (Prov. 3:1-4)

Relating This Passage to Life Today

In the midst of this world's conflicting counsel about how to live one's life, fathers are to help their children know how to experience the most satisfying life possible. Fathers do that by godly example as well as explicit teaching. Those of us fortunate enough to have received such examples and teachings still must choose whether to follow them. One measure of how well we are practicing the teachings of a godly father is the extent to which we are experiencing wholeness in the full sense of that word.

Explaining the Bible Passage

Proverbs 3:12 leads us to understand this section of Proverbs as a father's instruction to his son (see also 4:3-4). The instructions are in harmony with the Lord's commands, so we view them as coming from a godly man.

Verse 1: The word "teaching" in verse 1 is the Hebrew word, *torah*, which often is used to signify God's law. In this verse the father's teaching reflects God's law. It points out a straight path that would enable the son to avoid life's dead ends.

Children grow into young adults who often long to rely only on their own limited experience in choosing a path to follow. They easily can forget or neglect what they were taught at home. Some of them decide to go through the motions of obeying their parents, but only when the parents are watching. Parents are painfully aware that the straight and narrow path on which they place their children is intersected by numerous tempting trails, especially as the children venture out on their own. This godly father urged his son to make a deep, heartfelt commitment to keep the teachings and commands he had learned at home. This is stressed more pointedly in verse 3.

Verse 2: The term translated "many days" means a long life. "Full life" can indicate either living a long time or living a life that truly is worth living. As was mentioned in "Fast Facts on Proverbs," paragraph 3, this verse is more a description of the usual consequences of observing godly parental guidance, not an absolute promise of a long life.

"Well-being" translates the Hebrew *shalom*, a rich word that means "wholeness," thus all that makes life worthwhile. It especially indicates inward and outward tranquility and contentment. The term encompasses all dimensions of health, safety, prosperity, and peace. Only living by godly teachings will one experience life in the broadest sense of the word.

Verse 3: "Loyalty" translates a word that carries the idea of steadfast or loyal love. It was used to describe the united relationship between the two parties of a covenant. The term for "faithfulness" includes the ideas of firmness, fidelity (being trustworthy), and truth. In Proverbs 16:6, "loyalty" and "faithfulness" are parallel with "the fear of the Lord." This reminds us that our faith commitment to the Lord is the root from which the spiritual fruit of loyalty and faithfulness stem.

The importance of loyalty and faithfulness is expressed in the poetic imagery of wearing those virtues around one's neck as ornaments. This does not imply merely making an outward pretence of having those traits. Outward evidences of loyalty and faithfulness certainly enhance one's attractiveness and acceptability, but the attractiveness is sustained only when people are convinced these traits flow from the heart. The father's commands were to be written on the heart, not merely on clay tablets. The father was

telling his son to embrace those virtues as guiding values in his life. They would thus influence all of his outward behavior and relationships.

The father longed for his son to be a man of genuine integrity. He called on him to be consistently reliable and steady. He was to be “a friend who stays closer than a brother” (18:24) through thick and thin. People would be able to count on him as one who always proved “faithful and true,” even when doing so was costly or inconvenient.

Verse 4: God and people regard with “favor” those whose lives are characterized by loyalty and faithfulness. People generally appreciate those who are steady, reliable, and gracious (although we may think of exceptions; see “Fast Facts on Proverbs, paragraph 3). “High regard” is literally “prudence,” indicating the admirable reputation people ascribe to this kind of person.

Applying God’s Word

Fathers are responsible for finding suitable ways to teach spiritual truths and guiding principles to their children.

Children are responsible for choosing the teachings they will follow.

Choosing to practice loyalty and faithfulness enhances relationships with God and people.

Discussing the Lesson

Ask: What are some teachings that our fathers sought to teach us so we could experience “a full life, and well-being”? How did our fathers teach us and then encourage us to live by those teachings? To what extent have you experienced the rewards that come to those who practice loyalty and faithfulness in all circumstances?

Revere the Lord in Everything (Prov. 3:5-12)

Relating This Passage to Life Today

What reveals true reverence for the Lord? We all know that participating in religious activities either can be acts of reverent devotion or of empty pretense. Proverbs 3:5-12 indicates that true reverence for the Lord means choosing to trust Him, fear Him, honor Him, and respond positively to His discipline.

Explaining the Bible Passage

Verses 5-6: In practical terms, trusting the Lord means obeying Him. The root of disobedience is a lack of faith. Many of us have little trouble obeying the Lord when doing so makes sense to us. When it clashes with our “own understanding” of what is

best for us, however, obedience may prove quite challenging. These verses call to mind Paul's words "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

To "consider Him in all [our] ways" means that we allow Him to be Lord over all that we do and think. In other words, we seek to do His will, not ours. "Clear your paths" is literally "make your paths straight." When we seek to know and to carry out God's will, He is faithful to reveal His will to us. He will lead us "along the right paths for His name's sake" (Ps. 23:3).

Verses 7-8: These two verses continue the theme of verses 5-6. "Consider yourself" is literally "in your own eyes." The HCSB translation accurately expresses the meaning of that Hebrew and English idiom. The command not to "consider yourself to be wise" is coupled with the command to "fear the Lord and turn away from evil." Most of us live with the tension of choosing between "our way" and "God's way."

Human wisdom is fully capable of finding reasons not to trust, obey, or fear the Lord and to turn to evil. Some highly intelligent people have presented impressive, persuasive arguments to justify unethical or immoral behavior. Nevertheless, Proverbs 26:12 says "there is more hope for a fool" than for one who is "wise in his own eyes." "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10).

"Fear the Lord" perhaps is best understood to mean we are to hold the Lord in reverence. He is indeed our Heavenly Father, but He also is the Lord God Almighty, Creator of all that is. He loves us, and we who have trusted in the Lord love Him. Nevertheless, common sense warns us to avoid deliberately displeasing Him.

My father was a physician in a small town. His office was on the second floor over a drugstore. As his son, I was welcome to visit him without having an appointment. However, I knew better than to run up the stairs and barge into his office. Had I done that, I would have received an angry frown, not a smile of greeting. So I went to the receptionist, as did everyone else. Then I sat in the waiting room until she told me I could go in. My father loved me, and I loved Him; but I also respected and feared him. Believers live in a love relationship with the Father; but they also are to respect and fear Him.

Verse 8 parallels verse 2 in showing that following the Lord's ways is beneficial. Evil can be deceptively attractive. For example, TV shows and movies often show happy "party times"; but they seldom show DUI arrests, accidents, hangovers, shame, disease, and divorce, all of which can go along with an ungodly lifestyle. The ways of the Lord are not designed to deprive us; rather, they promote our physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental health and strength. He who created us knows what will enable us to experience the best life possible. He wants us to experience real life, not its cheap and transient counterfeits.

Verses 9-10: "Honor" literally is "make heavy." In English, the expression, "to make light of," means to disregard or to disrespect. In Hebrew, "to make heavy," means to give

due regard and respect, “to honor.” We are to honor the Lord by giving generously to Him.

Why do so many church members complain about lessons and sermons on giving? Could it be that they do not truly “honor the Lord”? The Old Testament teaches the first part of the harvest and the tithe (tenth) belongs to the Lord. The first part of the harvest was given as a thanksgiving offering that acknowledged the Lord as the Giver of all good things. The tithes were used to carry out God’s purposes of providing for those whom He designated to administer worship. Tithes also were used to help meet people’s needs.

New Testament teachings go beyond tithing and call for sacrificial giving. (See Mark 12:42-44; Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 8:1-5.) God gave His Son, and His Son gave His life. One way we honor the Lord is by giving tithes and offerings that minister to the spiritual and physical needs of people for whom Christ died. Malachi 1:6-9 is a harsh denouncement of those who claimed to honor the Lord but whose offerings dishonored Him.

What happens to us if we are generous givers? Jesus indicated that investing in the lives of others provided eternal benefits (Matt. 6:19-21). We are blessed by giving to help others. The full barns and overflowing vats in verse 10 should not be seen as indicating God will make rich those who honor Him in their giving. Such giving is not a formula for becoming wealthy. Perhaps the most complete teaching about giving is in 2 Corinthians 8–9. Paul said, “The person who sows generously will also reap generously.” He went on to explain in verses 10-12 that the increased resources were to be used generously to bless others, not to feather our own earthly nests. Is this to deprive us? No. “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Verses 11-12: Verse 11 adds to the previous exhortations not to forget godly teaching (3:1), not to rely on our own understanding (3:5), and not to consider ourselves wise and turn to evil (3:7). The words translated “instruction” and “discipline” are similar, expressing the rhyming of ideas characteristic in Hebrew poetry. Both terms can carry the ideas of discipline, chastening, and correction, all of which are designed to set us back on the right path when we stray.

Influences of this world, of the flesh, and of the devil can take their toll on our commitment to the Lord. We easily can lose our focus and forget what matters most in life. Again, not to deprive us but to bless us, the Lord disciplines us. He does this because He loves us. He may find it necessary to disrupt our comfortable routines before we are ready to turn back to Him from useless and destructive pursuits.

What forms might His instruction and discipline take when we stray from Him? He may speak to us through His Word and/or His servants to rebuke us and redirect us. He also may speak through circumstances. Some view every adversity as God’s chastisement. Jesus, however, contradicted that view (see John 9:1-5). We live in a world in which all human beings are subject to disease, accidents, losses, and death. How can we know which is a divine discipline? Perhaps in every situation a sensible and practical approach

is to evaluate our walk with the Lord and to ask, “Lord, what do You want me to learn from this?”

Applying God’s Word

We can revere the Lord by obeying His Word and following His leadership, even when we may not understand fully the reasons for doing so.

We revere the Lord when we rely on His wisdom and resist the tendency to be swayed by worldly sophistication that justifies going one’s own way rather than the Lord’s way.

We revere the Lord by honoring Him in our giving.

We revere the Lord by responding positively to His discipline.

Discussing the Lesson

Ask: In what ways has “your own understanding” conflicted with obeying the Lord? What are some examples of worldly wisdom that reveal little or no fear of God? What does it mean to honor the Lord in giving? How have you experienced the Lord’s discipline?

Respect Your Neighbor (Prov. 3:27-30)

Relating This Passage to Life Today

Many of us were taught at home the importance of getting along with others, but few of us have found it easy to get along with some people. We can appreciate the humor and the bite of reality in this couplet:

To live up above, with the saints that we love, that will be glory.
To live here below, with the saints that we know—that’s another story.

The Lord commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Lev. 19:18; Mark 12:31; Rom. 13:8-10). Jesus defined a “neighbor” as anyone who needs our help (Luke 10:29-37). Proverbs 3:27-30 shows us some practical ways we can demonstrate love to a neighbor.

Explaining the Bible Passage

Verses 27-28: To love others means being a give-the-shirt-off-his-back kind of neighbor. Jesus said, “Give to the one who asks you, and don’t turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you” (Matt. 5:42).

Our human tendency to look for loopholes might lead us to debate whether or not “it is due” to a particular person. “The one to whom it is due,” however, translates the word

baal, which has the primary meaning of “possessor.” In this verse it refers to the one who possesses need of the “good” within our power to bestow. God’s Word clearly teaches that when we have an opportunity to help someone, we are to help. While we may debate how best to meet a particular need, acting to meet it is not debatable.

Furthermore, verse 28 shows that we are to render aid immediately. What if the time is inconvenient? What if we are busy? What if it may interfere with our plans? What if it costs us money? All those questions are irrelevant. The only questions that count are (1) *Is my help needed?* and (2) *Is it in my power to provide this help?* If the answer to both is yes, then we are to act in love.

That verse also implies we are to show respect to those who need us. Asking for help or simply accepting help when it is offered is difficult. It cuts against the grain of self-respect. Most adults feel deep inside that they ought to be able to take care of themselves and those for whom they are responsible. Not to achieve that, regardless of the reasons, can make them feel to some extent like failures. We need, therefore, to offer our help readily and with graciousness, kindness, and consideration.

Verse 29: Why would anyone plan harm to a trusting neighbor? Well, if we remove love from the equation of relationships, any number of reasons may be given, including just plain meanness. Maybe the neighbors are “different” in some way—race, religion, language, economic status, or whatever. Maybe jealousy could motivate malice.

Hopefully, no one who reads this lesson would “plan any harm” against a neighbor. Consider, though, do any of your nearby neighbors ever get on your nerves? Irritate you? Thoughtlessly inconvenience you? Have you ever been tempted to let the air out their tires in retaliation? If so, you’re not alone. I once had a neighbor who owned a loud motorcycle. Oh, was I ever tempted to plan harm! The solution to that problem had nothing to do with the noise and everything to do with my lack of love. Actually, the noise was not constant; it was not even daily. After all, my neighbor intended no harm to me. When I put love back into the picture, I could appreciate his enjoyment of his bike.

Verse 30: The word translated “accuse” means literally “to strive or contend.” It could describe conducting a legal suit. We do not usually get crossways with someone over nothing. Sometimes, however, we may find ourselves overreacting to minor slights or offenses. This verse encourages us not to wear our feelings on our sleeves or to carry chips on our shoulders. It encourages unselfishness and generosity of spirit. It goes hand and glove with Scriptures that teach us to live peacefully with one another, to overlook faults, to be patient, and to forgive those who wrong us. In other words, it means giving others the benefit of the doubt.

Any of us may offend someone by acting without thought or consideration. Someone who acts thoughtlessly or inconsiderately certainly will offend us. We may think we know exactly what the offender was thinking and completely understand the reasons behind the offense. Occasionally, we may be right. Probably more often than not we will be wrong. We may take as a personal affront something that really was unintentional.

Our Lord Jesus never was obsessed with having people treat Him as He deserved. He loved everyone and gave up His rights and His life to bless others in time and for eternity. He even prayed for God to forgive those who put Him to death. Peter wrote that His suffering for us was an example we should follow (1 Pet. 2:21). Let's show respect for our neighbors by ignoring slights and giving them the benefit of the doubt.

Applying God's Word

We respect our neighbors when we stand ready to help them in any way we can.

We respect our neighbors when we are careful to do them no harm.

We respect our neighbors when we give them the benefit of the doubt.

Discussing the Lesson

Ask: What kinds of help might we be asked to give someone? How does 3:27 relate to situations in which we see needs we could help meet but are not asked to help? In what ways might we be tempted to harm a neighbor? How have you found yourself overreacting and violating the teaching in 3:30? When have you needed someone to give you the benefit of the doubt? In what ways has your father helped prepare you for living respectfully of neighbors?