

Proverbs 1:8-9

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[0 : 0 0] Today is a special day. Today, as has already been mentioned, we will be baptizing Lucia Jane MacLeod. Today, her parents, Donald and Donna, will commit themselves to bring up Lucia in the instruction and discipline of the Lord. And today, many of you, many of us, will be reminded of the vows that we made to do the same with and for our children. And this is a solemn commitment.

It is a task that is far from easy. But we do have help. The Bible teaches us concerning how we can fulfill this duty and privilege of bringing up our children in the instruction and discipline of the Lord. And there are two verses in particular that I want us to consider this morning, and they're in Proverbs chapter 1, verses 8 and 9. We're going to read from the beginning of the chapter through to verse 9. But our particular concern this morning will be to focus our attention on the final two verses of our reading, verses 8 and 9. But we'll read from Proverbs chapter 1. It's on page 635 in the Bible. Proverbs chapter 1, from the beginning. The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel, king of Israel, king of Israel. The Proverbs chapter 1, king of Israel, king of Israel, king of Israel, king of Israel, king of Israel.

For understanding words of insight. For acquiring a disciplined and prudent life. Doing what is right and just and fair. For giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young. Let the wise listen and add to their learning. And let the discerning get guidance. For understanding Proverbs and parables.

the sayings and riddles of the wise. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. Listen, my son, to your father's instruction, and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck. The Word of God. Verses 8 and 9 that we have just read are not addressed to parents. They are, as we can clearly see, addressed to sons and daughters. But in these two verses, though they are not directly addressed to parents, there are implicit and very clear lessons for parents, which is our particular concern this morning. Though there is, of course, a teaching here for sons and daughters, and we all are sons and daughters. But this morning, our focus will be particularly on the duties that are identified, the teaching that is identified here for parents. The subject matter addressed in these verses is the matter of the instruction of our children. And there are four things that I want us to notice and to consider concerning that instruction, and I'll mention what they are, and then we can think of each in turn. First of all, the identity and authority of the instructors, those who are responsible for this instruction, who are they, and what authority do they enjoy. That's the first thing. The second thing we want to notice is the nature of the instruction, or the content of the instruction, if you wish.

What hints do we find in these two verses concerning this matter? Thirdly, and more briefly, notice the manner of the instruction. This isn't really touched on in any detail in the two verses, but there are hints that I think we can notice and learn from concerning the manner of instruction.

[4 : 36] And then finally, we have, in verse 9 particularly, identified the rewards of faithful instruction. What are the rewards for those who faithfully instruct their children, and indeed for children who faithfully receive such instruction? So those four things we want to consider this morning. First of all then, the identity and authority of the instructors, of the teachers. Who is responsible for instructing our children? Is it granny? Is it the super nanny? Is it the flat screen plasma in the corner of the living room? Is it the parenting experts who we can see on breakfast television and on different media?

Is it the school teacher? Are they the ones responsible for the instruction of our children? Well, no doubt some of them can play an important part, but you know the answer to the question. You know where I'm coming to. It's not a difficult question. The verses very clearly identify that those who are responsible for the instruction of their children are dad and mom. Verse 8, listen, my son, to your father's instruction. Do not forsake your mother's teaching. The writer of the Proverbs very deliberately identifying both mother and father as being jointly responsible for the instruction of their children.

There is a particular responsibility for the father as the spiritual head of the family. To involve himself and to take responsibility for the instruction of his children. But it is very clearly a joint responsibility. Father and mother. Mother and father. Mom and dad are the instructors.

They are the ones God has given this responsibility to in the matter of instructing their children. Now that is clear enough. It's not difficult to understand. But though it is clear enough, it is often ignored. And it is necessary. It is time for fathers especially to stand up to the mark and fulfill their responsibility in instructing their children. It's simply not good enough to delegate, or perhaps the better word would be abdicate, that responsibility to mothers. Too often that has been the practice. It's not enough for a father to say, well, I go to work and I'm very busy and I put food on the table. Well, well done. That's your responsibility also. But that does not free you from your God-given responsibility to instruct your children.

One of the disturbing realities in many families is that if Solomon himself, the one who was inspired by God to write these proverbs, if Solomon himself were to address these words to a son or daughter, to your son or daughter, to my son, if Solomon himself were to address these words, listen to your father's instruction, how often would the answer be of the son? How can I? He never gives me any. How can I listen to my father's instruction when he doesn't give me any instruction? He's so busy. He's working. He's never there. And when he is there, he's watching TV or reading the newspaper.

[8 : 40] You say that I am to listen to my father's instruction. I would love to listen to my father's instruction. But it's never there. I never heed it. How can I listen to what is not said?

Listen, my son, to your father's instruction. Now, as we stress the joint responsibility of father and mother in the instruction of our children, I do so conscious and sensitive to the fact that life is complicated. And families are complicated.

And I'm very conscious and sensitive to the fact that there are families where there is no dad or where there is no mom. And where in those situations one parent must carry all the burden of responsibility.

And I am sure that God in His grace grants strength to those in that situation. We're not ignorant of that or insensitive to that.

Equally, there are families where one or other of the parents are not Christians, perhaps take no interest in the spiritual instruction of their children.

[9 : 52] And so even though they are physically present, this particular matter of instructing in the faith ends up being undertaken by one of the parents, be it the mother or the father.

We recognize that so. But the general principle remains very clear that in God's economy, in God's plan, the instruction of our children is the joint responsibility of mother and father.

Before moving on, I also mentioned that under this first heading, we would touch on the matter of authority. The authority that parents enjoy for this task of instructing their children.

Now, the passage and the two verses in particular that we are focusing on take as a given that parents enjoy this authority. The son is told there in verse 8, Listen, my son, to your father's instruction.

And the word there translated listen carries the idea of obey. It's not simply pay attention and then do what you want. It is listen and honor and respect and obey the instruction that your father gives you.

[11 : 14] Now, that, as I say, implies very clearly that the father enjoys the authority to instruct, that the father enjoys the authority to command, as does the mother in the raising of their children.

What we have here addressed to sons and daughters are not gentle suggestions, but imposed duties. A son is duty-bound to listen to his father.

He is duty-bound to obey the instructions of his father and of his mother. Indeed, the very word that we have there in verse 8, the word translated instruction, presupposes parental authority as the word, again, carries the idea of discipline or correction.

And so I say to moms and dads this morning, of course there is a word here very clearly for sons and daughters, but particularly I address moms and dads.

God has not only given you the responsibility to instruct your children, He has also delegated to you the authority to do so.

[12 : 30] God is the one who enjoys absolute and total authority, but He chooses to delegate that authority. And in the family, He has delegated to mothers and fathers the authority to instruct, not only the responsibility, but the authority to do so.

And as that is a God-given authority, it is to be exercised carefully, seriously, and indeed lovingly. Let us be very clear, and though the experts may tell you otherwise, let us be very clear, the family is not a democracy.

You, moms and dads, are in charge, or you ought to be in charge. You are the boss. You ought not to be ashamed of that.

That is how God has established matters. And to reverse that order, as some would suggest, or at least some would practice, is not only a piece of nonsense, it is also very damaging to the very children that we are seeking to instruct, and to nurture, and to raise.

So, the identity of the instructors, the authority that they enjoy, but moving on, secondly, to the nature of the instruction.

[13 : 52] Now, we've been talking about instructing our children, but we haven't actually defined what this instruction is, what is the content of this instruction. Now, as we consider that, we can begin very broadly, very expansively, and then narrow in to the heart of the matter.

It is, of course, true that our children need instruction in so many areas. How to feed, how to sleep, how to walk, how to talk, how to say mama, how to say dada.

They need potty training. They need to be taught to avoid dangers, how to sit at the table, how to wash their hands, how to brush their teeth, how to read and write and do sums.

And moving on to the really important stuff, how to kick a ball, and how to use the TV remote control. Like all of these things, although they learn that by themselves, they don't need to be instructed in that.

There are lots of things that our children need instruction concerning, and the list could go on and on and on, and they are important. But the words that we find here in verses 8 and 9 allow us to focus in more precisely on the content of the instruction envisaged by the author, envisaged by God through the author here.

[15 : 14] The first word that we've been commenting on but have yet to define, or we touched on its definition, but we want to focus in on more, is this word instruction.

Listen, my son, to your father's instruction. As already commented on, as we were touching on the matter of authority, this word instruction carries the idea of discipline, or correction.

So it is instruction concerning what is right and what is wrong, with the implication that there should be encouragement and reward for doing what is right, and there should be correction and reproof and punishment for doing what is wrong.

Now that is simple enough to state, but it brings us to the crucial question, the six million dollar question, what is right and what is wrong? We are saying that instruction concerns this very important matter of teaching your children what is right, what is wrong, what is true, what is false.

We'd all be agreed that's very important, but the huge question is, well, what is right and what is wrong, what is true, what is false, that we might teach them.

[16 : 30] A parent might say, well, I really want to teach my children these things, but how do I know what these things are? Well, the next word used here in verse 8 points us very clearly to the answer to that question.

What is right? What is wrong? How can I know? The second part of verse 8 instructs the son, do not forsake your mother's teaching. Now, the Hebrew word there translated teaching is a word I'm sure many of you are familiar with.

It's the word Torah. It's the Hebrew word for the law of God, the teaching of God. And here, the son is being told, do not forsake the Torah.

Do not forsake the teaching that your mother brings you that is God's teaching, that concerns God's law, that concerns God's truth.

God has revealed to us what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is false. And we must cling firmly to that conviction in our confused society, in our mixed up generation where nobody seems to know what's right and what's wrong.

[17 : 51] You turn on the TV one day and an expert is telling you one thing and the following day they're telling you the opposite. And who is right? Who am I to listen to? Well, God has spoken.

God has spoken in His word and He tells us what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is false. It's in the Torah, it's in the book, it's in the Bible.

And the instruction to be given to our children is what is explicitly taught in the Bible and the principles that can be derived by good and necessary consequence from the Bible.

Now, the writer of Proverbs would have had the Pentateuch particularly in mind the first five books of the Bible. today, we are blessed in that not only do we have God's law, but we also have revealed to us in the New Testament the one who is the fulfillment of God's law.

God's law in the flesh as it were, Jesus Christ. And so, the instruction that we as parents today must give to our children is concerning the person of Jesus Christ, who He is, what He has done, and what He requires of our children.

[19 : 14] And so, I say to the moms here today, tell your children about Jesus. Tell them about how He perfectly kept God's Torah.

And tell them about how He died in the place of those unable to do so. All of us, your precious little daughter, your precious little son, unable to keep God's law, but in Jesus we have one who did keep that law and who died for those of us unable to do so.

Tell your children about Jesus. Dads, tell your kids about Jesus, about why He came into this world, what He did and what He continues to do as our Lord and Savior, as our great high priest seated at the right hand of the Father.

Tell your children about Jesus. Now, it goes without saying that this will be very difficult, if not impossible, if you are not a disciple of Jesus yourself.

If you don't know Jesus yourself, how difficult it will be to do these things. That then, just a brief comment on that second element, the nature or the content of the instruction that is to be given.

[20 : 39] Even more briefly, I want to mention in the third place the manner of instruction. I already commented at the beginning that these verses, verses 8 and 9 of Proverbs chapter 1, don't touch on this in any detail.

There are other passages of Scripture that do so in much greater detail. But there are a couple of elements I think we can notice concerning the manner of instruction.

I'm going to say two things simply concerning this. First of all, that the manner of instruction is to be verbal and also visible. Now, the first element, verbal, is in the passage before us.

The Son is told, listen, my Son, to your Father's instruction. Now, that verb, that exhortation, very clearly implies verbal instruction.

Now, this may seem so blindingly obvious as to not require comment, but I think it does require comment. You need to speak to your kids.

[21 : 42] You need to tell them what is right and wrong. They won't learn by osmosis. They won't learn if you don't say anything. They won't learn if you are quiet.

They need to listen. And you need to set aside time for this. Your children, some of you have your children in Sunday school right now. Well, as you go home today, speak to them about the Sunday school lesson that they had.

Learn the Bible verses with them over the holiday and not limiting yourself to the holiday. By the way, it's a good way of you learning the verses yourself. Read the Bible and pray together with your children at family worship.

to talk with them in the ordinary stuff of life. We've already read. We're not going to concentrate on this or comment on this, but we've read in Deuteronomy chapter 6 and there in verses 4 to 8 or verses 7 and 8, just to limit ourselves a little.

What have we read there concerning the instruction of our children? Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

[22 : 55] Tie them as a symbol in your hands and bind them on your foreheads and so on. In the ordinary stuff of life, speak to your children. This instruction is to be verbal.

It is to be heard. But also, it is to be visible. The teaching of the Torah of God, of the law of God, involves speaking, but it also involves living.

The law of God is to be enfleshed in you as a parent. Your children should see in you and indeed in how you relate one with another as mother and father.

They should see what pleases God. But there is one final thing I want to comment on. We've considered, first of all, who are the instructors, the identity and the authority of the instructors.

We've considered briefly the nature of the instruction even more briefly, the manner of the instruction. But there is a final thing that I want us to notice this morning, and that is the rewards of faithful instruction.

[24 : 00] Bringing up a child, instructing your son, disciplining your daughter can be difficult. It involves hard work and sacrifice, but be assured that it has its reward.

Verse 9 describes the result of instruction, given and instruction received. It is important to stress that there are those two sides to the coin.

There's one thing for instruction to be given, that is the parent's responsibility, but there is also a responsibility on the child, especially as he grows, to receive that instruction.

And the rewards spoken of are to be enjoyed when both sides play their part. Our concern this morning has been particularly concerning parents, but it is worth noticing that both sides have responsibility in this.

But there is a reward spoken of when instruction is given and instruction is received. The verse speaks of it in very poetic language.

[25 : 04] They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck. What is being said there? What does that mean? Well, certainly, it is speaking of something very beautiful, of something very attractive.

But what is it? Well, it seems reasonable to understand what is being said here in verse 9 as referring beyond the instruction itself.

If you read these two verses very literally, you would say, well, clearly, the reference is to the instruction and to the teaching mentioned in verse 8. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.

And that's fair enough. But I think it goes beyond that. It goes beyond that to also refer to the effects of that instruction on the life of the one instructed.

What is being said here is that this instruction molds the growing child into an attractive and beautiful human being. The word translated grace there in verse 9 is often used in the book of Proverbs with the idea of that which is visibly charming or beautiful.

[26 : 19] And what we are being told here and what we are being encouraged with here is that a child who is instructed lovingly and responsibly in the Torah, in God's law, in the faith, a child who is carefully and consistently directed to Jesus as Lord and Savior, a child who sees in mom and dad lives that love and honor God will, as he or she receives that instruction, become a winsome and beautiful human being.

He will, in fact, become more and more like Jesus. And so I say to you as we draw this message to a close, I say to you, I ask you, is this your greatest and highest aspiration as a parent, that your children would love and follow Jesus, that they would, in fact, become like Jesus?

And if that is, indeed, your greatest and highest aspiration, then recognize your authority and responsibility to instruct them and just do it.

Let us pray. that'll happen. Then, you can't yet can't they?

You can't you can't overcome the whole