

Relational Discipleship

Proverbs 23.26

Please turn in your bibles to Proverbs chapter 23. As a reminder, to our youth, please bring your bibles to these meetings, bring a pen or something to write with – and make sure you get on of these outlines...

Tonight, I want to remind us all of the utter importance of your relationship with the person sitting next to you – your mom, or your dad, or your teen. And we want to consider that in light of Proverbs 23

There is here a great picture of the relationship between parents and their youth in this chapter... it's a picture of what I would call relational discipleship. That's what I want to talk about – discipleship that is built on and flows out of the relationship.

I'm going to focus on one verse mainly – verse 26, but to catch some of the context, let's **READ Prov 23.15-26**

1. The responsibility of youth

Look again at verse 26 – the first part: “my son, give me your heart.” Now, on this one we probably don't need to be bible scholars to see what the responsibility of youth here is... what is it?

Give your parents your heart – please write those 5 words down on your outline. That's your responsibility in verse 26... give your parents your heart.

See on the page of your bible as if God himself were looking out at you... he has great love in his eyes for you, but there is real authority in his voice as he says “give your parents your heart”

That's what God is commanding every youth here – give them your heart. But what does that mean? What is your heart? What is this thing called your heart that you must be giving to your parents?

The heart refers to your inner person, the core of your being - the essence of who you are. We talk about this as well – we say, “I feel it in my 'gut'” – that's kind of the idea of the heart here....

It's not that thing that is pumping blood through your body... don't give that to your parents. God is saying – give the core of your being – the steering wheel of who you are.

In relation to your parents, I think we could sum it up as your **attention and affection.** The responsibility of youth in relational discipleship is to give their parents their highest attention and deepest affection.

But HOW do you do that? HOW do you give your parents your heart? Well, the passage shows us...

Here, the second line explains the first line. The second line shows more clearly of what is meant in the first line. My son, give me your heart, and what's the second part? *"and let your eyes observe my ways."*

The heart is connected to the eyes. You give your parents your heart when you look to their ways that you might learn from their ways. That's how you give them your heart – **by looking and learning.**

You're always looking to someone or something. We're all looking to and learning from someone- the question is who? Who is that you're looking to?

It might be a music star... a band you really like – and you're looking to them and you're learning from them. It might be an actor or actress, or an athlete.

Around here there used to be a saying "I want to be like Mike" – Michael Jordan. Anyone remember that? People were looking to Michael Jordan to learn from him... it might be any number of people or personalities.

We're all looking to and learning from someone or something. Who is that for you? Who most has your heart? Is it your parents?

You might say – I'm not sure... I'm not sure Mr. Trainor, how can I know the degree to which I am looking to my parents? Good question – here's a simple answer: your eyes are observing their ways to the degree that you're listening to your parents.

Notice what the father has already said to him – vs. 19, "*hear*, my son, and be wise" – and you could translate that "listen" – Listen my son and be wise... and direct your heart in the way"

vs. 22, "*Listen* to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old." Listen to your father – again... listen to me!

Verse 26 is the culmination of this idea... it's "listen, listen... give me your heart – observing my ways!" Your parents have your heart when you look to them to learn from them by listening to them!

So look and learn by listening... that's the idea here ... tuning into your parents more than anyone or anything else.

But why should you do that? Why should you give your parents your heart? This is the crucial issue here... I haven't sold you on anything yet. you see the command –but that doesn't mean you're convinced that this is absolutely crucial.

So let me give you two reasons why it's vital that you give your parents your heart. Two reasons why you must look and learn by listening to them....

First, they are for you – and they are for you like no one else. Look at verse 15 and 16 - ¹⁵ *My son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad.* ¹⁶ *My inmost being will exult when your*

lips speak what is right.

Do you see what happens if the son's heart is wise? What happens? The father's heart is also glad! When the son speaks what is right, the father's inmost being exults!

He's rejoicing – he's jazzed! That's how FOR the father is for his son. And the same is true of your father, and your mother. If your heart is wise, their heart will be glad because their hearts are so for you!

Don't believe the lie that says – my friends are more for me than my mom.. or my friends are more for me than my dad.... it's a lie – it's not true.

As much as they care, your friends are not on their knees crying out to God for your every day. But do you know who is? It's your parents – the person sitting beside you right now. They pray for you almost every day, if not every day.

I love the story about Charles Spurgeon – great preacher and pastor in the 19th century Britain – who once went to a prayer meeting where parents were crying out for the souls of their children

And so Mr. Spurgeon went home and decided to write: "Dear Arthur, you are highly privileged in having parents who pray for you. Your name is known in the courts of heaven. Your case has been laid before the throne of God"

he wanted Arthur to know that his parents were for him... so much so that they were crying out to God for him. And the same is true for you – because your parents are for you....

And here's why this matters for giving your parents your heart... it means you should trust their motives. Seeing that they are for you, that they want good for you, means that you should trust their motives.

Maybe it's when you don't agree.... you have a disagreement about what is best in some situation – but you say, "mom, dad – I know you're out for my good, so I'm glad to follow you here"

That's when your parents have your heart - when you look and learn by listening, because you trust their motives towards you. You know they're for you!

So please consider the question on your outline – do your actions show that you trust their motives?

That's one reason why you should give your parents your heart – here's the second that we see here... they are seeking to help you. Your parents are for you and, second, they are seeking to help you.

¹⁷Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day. ¹⁸Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.

The father is calling his son to listen, and not envy sinners – because, in verse 18, there is what? there is a future... he has the son's future in mind – probably even his eternal destiny in mind - as he says, "and your hope will not be cut off"

No one has your eternal future in mind like your parents... they don't want your hope cut off – they're trying to help you with eternity in view...

Then the father gets even more practical in verse 20 - *Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat,²¹ for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags.*

It's as if the son sees the party and the feast and thinks, let's jump in... look at all the fun dad! But the father has different eyes – he sees the end... he sees the consequences. and so he helps his son by warning his son....

The father is seeking to help his son... seeking to help his son avoid those consequences. It's kind of like a story from Greek mythology. The Greeks had these myths – these legends, and one was of Icarus.

Daedalus and his son, Icarus, were faced with the challenge of escaping from the isle of Crete to the mainland of Greece. Daedalus was a master of innovation – and he fashioned wings of feathers and wax for his son, Icarus, and himself.

But He cautioned Icarus to fly neither too high, nor too low, for the sun would melt the wax or the waves drench the feathers. Icarus ignored his father's warnings and thrilled with the power of flight, flew too close to the sun and perished.

When you get to be your age, the temptation is to think, "I don't need help... I got it mom and dad... don't worry so much – I don't need your help any more". Ever say those things or think those things?

That's what Icarus thought... I got my wings dad – don't worry about it... I don't need help any more – and he didn't listen. He didn't listen, but flew too close to the sun and he crashed

Your parents are trying to keep you from crashing like that. That's why they need your heart.

Or, think of the book *Dangerous Journey* – how many are familiar with it? it's the shortened version of pilgrim's progress – and it pictures the Christian life like this *Dangerous Journey* to the heavenly city...

There are cliffs, and pitfalls, lions and swamps and various dangers lurking – it's a dangerous journey that way... but what if someone comes from far ahead of you on that journey, and has a map of the pitfalls...

They have a map of all the mines in the minefield – and he offers it to you – would you take it? What if they said, I'll go with you... I'll not just point the way, I'll walk with you all the way – help you miss the pitfalls, the cliffs, etc. – take the help? You'd be a fool not to, right?

that's how your parents are seeking to help you... they have gone ahead of you, they know the pitfalls, and they want not just to tell you of them but walk you through them, on this dangerous journey.

They are seeking to help you – and if you see that, you will trust their wisdom for your life. That's what Icarus didn't do, he didn't trust his father's wisdom when his father was just trying to keep him from crashing...

They're trying to help you... consider: do your actions show that you trust their wisdom? Are you saying, "yes, mom/dad show me the way – walk with me in this dangerous journey... I want to look and learn by listening to you – show me the way please, because I know you're trying to help me"

Is that your attitude – or is it more like Icarus – don't bother me with dangers dad... I've got wings now, I'm gonna fly... when all the while, you're in great danger of crashing.

If it's in your media choices.. what music you listen to or what movies you watch, are you trusting their wisdom?

When it's in what friends to hang with... or what clothes you should wear, or what activities you engage in, are you trusting their wisdom?

Even when they correct you – when they adjust you, do you realize that they're seeking to help you?

Don't be like Icarus – refusing to listen... Look to your parents, and learn from them by listening to them – they are for you, and want to help you on this dangerous journey!

That's why God's face is looking out at you from this verse - with love in his eyes and authority in his voice calling you – saying "give your parents your heart"! Give them your attention and affections.... Look to them and learn from them, by listening to them.

This message is a little longer, because I want to speak to us as parents as well. I am a fellow parent with you – I'm not a parent of teens, but I am a fellow parent with you. And I do have a burden for us as parents in this area...

And that's in our **responsibility as parents in this area of relationship**. Our responsibility is to pursue their hearts.

We are after discipleship – following Jesus and growing in Jesus – growing in love for Him and likeness to Him. And as our children get older, we parent more and more out of our influence, than our authority.

We still have authority, but it's a lot different then when they were 3 – right? We still have authority, but we lead them and disciple them more and more out of our influence in their lives, as they get older.

And the foundation for that influence is relationship. Relationship is the railroad track that carries the freight train of influence into their lives. We must lay down that track – and

maintain that track of relationship for the trains of our influence to keep running into their lives.

That's how we pursue their hearts – and I want to mention three ingredients here for this pursuing of their hearts through relationship....

The first ingredient is also our **attention**. That means time with them, walking with them through life. This passage is another great picture in Proverbs of what I would call relational discipleship.

I call it that because it's discipleship flowing from the context of relationship. It's discipleship – this father helping his son to grow – but not with not dry lectures, not some classroom format for discipleship – it's walking through life together, side by side, in the context of relationship

A pastor friend named John Loftness some years ago wrote the following after his 50th birthday: “When the family gathered to celebrate my 50th, everyone had some kind words for me. I won't go into the details. But one thing did strike me. Each of my children mentioned my availability. This was very encouraging to me. I've found that children typically want to talk when their hearts are stirred to talk, and you can't expect them to keep an agenda on their PDAs to talk on command. As I reflected on this, I realized that children tend to remember the little things: fixing the broken bike, going for a walk down at the river, taking out the nasty splinter, and best of all, being available when they need to talk.what our kids need is us.”

Isn't that true – our kids need us. Let them have our attention.

The second ingredient for pursuing their hearts is **affection**... affection and encouragement. Bruce Waltke refers to the warm endearment in this passage... vs 15 - if your heart is glad, mine will be glad too” Verse 16, “if you speak what is wise, my inmost being will exult!”

Do you hear the warm endearment – the motivation by encouragement that the father is providing? A good question to ask is – is my teen more aware of my encouragement or my correction?

Parenting involves correction – we must be courageous parents, and correct. But let there be much encouragement too.... let them always here from us the ways we see God at work in them!

Son, you took the trash out with joy – you're serving... well done! Thank you – I have seen you grow in this way my son – and that means that God is at work in you do you realize that?

Motivate like this father with your affection, your warm endearment, and your encouragement.

Last ingredient for pursuing their heart – **intention**. Attention, affection – and now intention.

And what I mean by that is that we must purposeful here, strategic – and not just assume that we have a strong relationship or that it will always be strong.

“A parent should spare no effort to make himself the companion of his boy: the victory is half won when the boy learns to like the company of his father.” William Arnot, on Prov 23 – Studies in Proverbs, p 475

Spare no effort.... be intentional – make yourself your teen’s companion. Build this railroad track of relationship. Because without it, the train of influence won’t be able to run

This can look different in different families, but essentially means that we’re creating context for this kind of relational discipleship to occur. There are questions you’ve received – it has questions both for parents to ask and for youth to ask. They’re not intended for one setting, but for many, many conversations.

I would encourage you to consider how you can create contexts to have conversations like these. You can just take a couple of these questions and ask them each time you get together, and you’ll be pursuing their heart!

The best thing we have done with our older kids is getting them out to build into their lives. I take Ryan out regularly, and Sung takes Abigail out regularly – because we’re trying to build into them.

We’re trying to build this relational discipleship now... and we’ve had some great talks – well worth the \$2.00 brownie at Panera. That’s just a practice – practices will vary from family to family. But let us be intentional my friends...

I know that for some, this might be a message you hear with some regret – so I want to end a note of hope! This part of Proverbs, perhaps gathered under the eye of King Solomon – we’re not sure.... but perhaps.

Here’s what we do know – one greater than Solomon has come. And he is able to help and transform... let me give you an example.

I put on here a resource of Bob Kauflin’s – a message he gave. and in parts, he alludes to a very hard time he had with his son Devon – when there really was no relationship with him.

Devon was in rebellion – and there was only a difficult relationship. Bob has mentioned publicly how he didn’t like being with Devon because it was so difficult.

But Bob pursued his son’s heart – and the one who is greater than Solomon worked... and things have significantly changed. And if you want proof, just notice who wrote the last song we sang: God Over All.

Let us have hope – because One greater than Solomon has come! Youth, you must give your parents your heart! And parents, let us pursue their hearts – for God’s glory.... amen!