

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Godly Wisdom Is a Father's Legacy**

June 20, 2010

Proverbs 4:1-9

Tell me something, when you think about your father, is your heart filled with hurt or pride? Everybody's looking for answers and hope. I want to help people find it in God. And his amazing grace.

I wonder if you can remember the presidential election that yielded a victory for Barack Obama. One of the documents which helped people make up their minds about him was his book, Barack Obama, Jr.'s autobiography. This is a rather remarkable book because he did not sugarcoat his past and make it seem like his life was magical. He, in fact, told stories from his family past that were painful and embarrassing to the family. His father, Barack Obama, Sr., was an African, basically a goat herder when he was young, but by hard work and hustle and making all the right connections he talked his way into a fellowship at Harvard University. But to do that, he abandoned his wife, his African wife and children, when he came to America. And when he was over here he met and married a second wife, probably illegally, and that was Barack Obama, Jr.'s mother. But after only two years, when little Barack was just a toddler, his father, Barack, Sr., took off and left he and his mom to fend for themselves. When Barack was in law school at Columbia he found out that his father had gone back to Africa, taken up with yet a third woman, and died an alcoholic. He tells all these stories and imagine how painful and embarrassing that must be. We want so desperately to look up to our dads; we want our dads to be sources of strength and pride. What a drag it is on our life to be embarrassed about our own father.

And basically, Obama said there are only two things he could do. If you have a father that you can be proud of give thanks to God for him. But if you have a father that in many ways has made you ashamed, there basically are only two things you can do. The likely one is that you will imitate him; you will think you're doomed to be just like him. Or you can do what Barack, Jr., advised in his book, to break the cycle. Break the cycle and say, "I'm going to be different. I am going to model fatherhood after something other than many of the ways my own father treated me." And I think that's a very powerful and important message today.

Fatherhood, unfortunately, does not get as much respect as it needs. The number of greeting cards that Hallmark puts out for Mother's Day many times over exceeds the number of cards that are bought for Father's Day. In fact, I saw a TV clip once where an 8 year-old kid was asked, "What's the difference between Mother's Day and Father's Day?" And he said, "Well, you got to go shopping and get a present for each one, but you don't need to spend as much money on Father's Day." Well, that's kind of like a sad little joke, but the fact is that in our country on average, forty percent of children in America don't live with their biological dad and in major cities it's even worse. It's like seventy percent.

This is tough! This is not good. I was able to be on a panel discussion a couple of weeks ago at the technical college here in town and I was a participant in a discussion on the sociology of religion. And we were talking about the social impact of what has happened to living your faith in these modern times. One of the questions had to do with, "What has changed in the years

since you've been a pastor?" And I have personally witnessed the disintegration of the concept of marriage in my city, where seventy percent of children are being born in homes where there is no resident dad. Our city does not believe much in marriage anymore. Or, marriage is something for much later, like after your children are raised. School children will tell you that they can't wait to have their own kids; they're looking forward to being dads. They're looking forward to being moms. Then if you say something about marriage they go, "What? I didn't say I wanted to be married."

And I talked about what I thought was a terrible void because my personal experience in loving and living with kids who have to grow up in homes without dads is that they're angry and they are wounded. There is a wound in their heart, an itch they cannot scratch. It's hard on the girls because they miss that daddy love that they need, so they don't have to peddle their body and throw their body at other males to get attention. They can put that off until they're married, confident, rock solid confident in daddy love, that there is a man who thinks they're beautiful, that they're a princess. And that just gives you patience and self-confidence so you don't have to use your sexuality to get attention in a desperate kind of way.

And the boys really need a dad because manhood is not something you can achieve. Manhood is not something that comes with testosterone. Manhood is not something you can get from a woman. In ways much different from how girls turn into a woman, her biology tells her she's arrived; most women don't struggle with the arrival of womanhood. But most men do. The only way you feel like a man is when another man ahead of you, older than you, more with it than you, who's arrived before you gives you manhood and says, "Now you're a man. Now you're in the club." No boy can say to himself, "I've now arrived." It has to be given to you. And if you're missing the number one transferor of your identity as a man, you'll have to get it from somewhere else and it may not be a very healthy place to get it from.

And so, at this conference I said that was one thing that pains me, hurts me, when I look around at the people who live in my city, especially the central part of the city where I live and work. This hurts me. And this woman really kind of chewed me out. Walking out of there later she said, "I'm a single mom. I think I'm just fine." And see, that's what makes this conversation difficult because there are heroic women who've had to raise children by themselves because the man that they had counted on walked out on them. And my intent is not to belittle women who have basically had to be Supermom, a mom and as much of a dad as they could be.

There are some women I know who have done phenomenal jobs all on their own, but that doesn't make it something to aspire to. That doesn't make it good. I know some of you have only one kidney, that's not the ideal though. That doesn't mean it's something to aspire to, to lose a kidney or lose an ovary or something. God made those things in pairs for a reason. This is like, "I want children, but I don't want to be yoked together to a man. I want to keep my options open." My generation started this. I would like to apologize to America on behalf of all the baby boomers. We started it. But I'll tell you that the millennials who followed us, they've bought in completely to the new reality and fear of commitment and pushing off any kind of entanglements, keeping your options open. But it comes at a frightful cost. Seventy-one percent of high school dropouts do not have a dad at home. Eighty percent of young people in the juvenile criminal justice system do not have a dad at home. Eighty-five percent of young people

with drug and alcohol abuse problems do not have a dad at home. And ninety-one percent of teen runaways do not have a dad at home.

You know, in a sense it reminds me of that old story of the frog and the kettle. You ever hear that story? If you had a kettle of very hot water and you dropped a frog in, he'd jump right back out because of the shock. But if you put him in some nice cool water, a temperature that he likes, and then put him on a hot plate and slowly turned up the heat, the idea is that the frog will tolerate a much hotter temperature before he finally jumps out. Now I don't know if that story is true, in fact, some scientific studies say that doesn't really happen. But the point is that in our culture gradual change has the result of redefining what normal is. And I don't know that our country has ever really fully appreciated the need for married fathers as much as it truly needs to be respected.

For instance, a national day of recognition for mothers existed even before World War I. How long did it take for our country to have a national day of observance and appreciation for fathers? And I say this not to whine because I'm a guy and I'm a father. But I say it just as an observation. Do you know that it was all the way until the presidency of Richard Nixon in 1972 before there was a national day to respect fatherhood and to show appreciation to fathers? And in all fairness, we fathers, we men, have not always been the poster children for how to be great dads. Sometimes we men have been neglectful and careless of our relationships with our women, with our wives. Sometimes we have been very indifferent to how our children are doing or been absent too much or done all kinds of other things. But there have been all kinds of other societal factors that put pressure on women not to respect being married to the father of their children, either. When a woman can get an easy divorce, when birth control is possible, when she has had some bad experiences before actually being married to the father of her children, these have come like the frog in the kettle. It slowly came to seem undesirable because if the guy turns out to be neglectful or abusive or a taker or he won't work or whatever, it's much easier to get rid of a boyfriend than to get rid of a non-performing husband.

There is a better way and Proverbs 4 is something I'd like to dig in with you now. Proverbs is all about wisdom, not just knowledge. It's not about being smart. There are some very smart criminals out to hustle the world. But it's about wisdom, meaning, do you get it? Wisdom in the Bible, especially in the book of Proverbs, isn't about intelligence. It's about do you get it? Do you understand where you came from? Do you understand how you relate to the power source that made you? Do you understand where you're going? Do you have a relationship with the sovereign power of the universe? Are you fulfilling the function and purpose for which you were made? Are you going to live with joy and satisfaction in your life?

When you are judged for the way in which you spent your life, will this be a happy occurrence or will this be the most miserable day of your life, beginning a string of misery? Wisdom is, "do you get God?" The opposite of that is what Proverbs calls, "Folly." Mr. T. would say, "Fools!" "A fool said in his heart, 'there is no God.'" The first ten chapters of Proverbs are an essay, a poetic essay, on getting it. Do you get it? No one is born getting it. And God wants to use his men, his dads, to help their kids get it. And that's the point of Proverbs 4 – Men, dads, dads now, dads for a long, long time and dads to be, listen up because this is your job description.

Chapter 4:1 begins, “Listen, my sons.” Sixteen times in the book of Proverbs that phrase, “my sons,” is used. It may be that Solomon wrote this first part. There are some arguments among biblical scholars because later on in Proverbs it says, “These are the Proverbs of Solomon.” Does that mean that the ones before that were not? My personal opinion is that he wrote these too, and if so, he’s talking to his sons, some of whom turned out to be major league boneheads. And when he talks about, “I was a boy in my father’s house,” that might be David, his father. “Listen, my sons.” One of the things fathers must do is transfer how to be a man to their boys. Listen, boys. “Listen to a father’s instruction.” Now, that sounds pretty simple, right? Pretty basic? Any one who has ever undertaken to raise children knows that that first word is way harder than it looks because the sinner in you and me makes us deaf to God’s word, doesn’t it? Makes us not want to listen. If you got a buck for every time you have said to your kids, “Listen,” you could retire. You could stop working today. We don’t want to listen. But that’s what dads need to do. “Listen, sons.” You can learn things. If you’re going to learn anything in life it will either come by talk or pain. Please let it be by talk so we don’t have to do this the hard way. Or worse, that you suffer the pain and still don’t get it.

“Listen, my sons, to a father’s instruction; pay attention, gain understanding. I give you sound learning, don’t forsake my teaching. When I was a boy in my father’s house, still tender, an only child of my mother, he taught me.” Kids need their dads to teach them, to teach them about life. Little girls need to know about respectful love from their daddy to feel secure so they don’t have to peddle their backend and wiggle it to get attention. They’ll get love and respect from their dad. They can say, “No” to pressure from the hustlers on the street because they know they’re secure in a daddy’s love.

The boys need dad. They need their dads to help them feel self-confident and feel strong. Every male feels weak and strives to feel strong in some kind of way. Dads can help their boys get away from that feeling of being weak and help them feel strong in constructive ways and can praise them and build them up. A boy who has not had a big regular dose of dad is going to feel a wound. And President Obama will tell you and explain to you what that wound feels like, if that’s missing. And so, we must not give up and settle for dad-less childrearing. I know it happens! Sometimes that’s your only choice. But we must not aspire to it or plan for it or allow for that to become normal. That has to be exceptional and it has to be something we work around to compensate for. But it must not be something to plan on or aspire to because the kids need loving discipline and teaching.

“He taught me and said, ‘Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live.’” This is a life or death thing. Get wisdom! The book of Proverbs said, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” You know squat. You don’t know jack unless you know God! That’s what wisdom in Proverbs means. Know what about God? Know that he’s your maker. You didn’t self-synthesize. Know that you’re part of a grand design. You’re part of an intricate, gorgeous, beautiful universe and you’re important. You’re shaped by intelligence and planning. You have a purpose and your purpose is to be part of his family.

You have a rescuer named Jesus. You don’t know this by nature. It has to be revealed to you. Who better to reveal your Savior than your parents, your mom and your dad? You need to know

about the word of God that the Spirit gives us. Who better to get you into the word than your daddy? To teach it and then to live it and show that this is real.

Wisdom, then, is all the things we need to know for a happy, joyful, successful life and a blessed life from God. To know who is our Maker, to get to know the name of Jesus, our Savior, and to trust and believe in him and to get to know the name of the power source behind everything, the Holy Spirit, the one who speaks God's word to us and fills our hearts with strength and wisdom.

In the end of this wisdom section Proverbs says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Through me," wisdom is talking, "your days will be many and years added to your life. And if you are wise, your wisdom will reward you and if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer." So, knowing your God, something that your parents, especially dads, you the fathers, can teach their children is going to give you a much happier and much more productive life and thus fulfill your God-given agenda for why you were made.

One of two things is going through your head right now and that's what I want to leave you with today because I've got just Part A and Part B that I want to put on you today, I put out there for you to seize onto. Some of you are thinking, "I am blessed. I've argued plenty with my dad and I pushed against him and disappointed him a few times and he does have feet of clay sometimes, he has some weaknesses, but I have been blessed by a godly man who helped keep my life from falling apart and helped me until I could stand on my own two feet." This is a day for you to thank your God for him. For being a good dad doesn't happen automatically. It comes with labor, sacrifice and choice because dad-hood is also a chosen activity. It doesn't happen instinctively. It has to be chosen to be a good dad and it costs a man to be a good dad. It costs him energy, costs him pain in his heart and it will cost a fortune. Thank your God. And if he's still alive, thank him today. It's a gift.

And I want every young man in here who's headed for fatherhood someday to take that privilege and responsibility very, very seriously. You are going to represent the heavenly Father who's gathered us all as his children. And you're going to model God to the little people in your life. They will not find God, a heavenly Father, very believable if their earthly father's memories give them pain. Why would worshipping a heavenly Father be a thrill? That's number one.

Part B that I put out for you is what if your own dad was not so hot? I just heard a story an hour ago about a twenty-seven year old woman who still has painful memories of being beaten when she was two. What if instead of painful memories of your dad you have no memories, nothing at all, just a hole? And that pain, you've been wounded. Where do you go with that pain? What do you do with that ache, with that void? I'd like to put out there that you do what President Obama has chosen to do. And I give him a lot of props for that. He said that instead of taking out his anxiety, his fear, his anger on someone else, instead of repeating the sins of the fathers, he said it's going to stop here. This dysfunction stops right here. And he, in his book, admits his own failings of his own ambition in being the dad to his two girls that he would have liked to have been and he said it stops here. And he said one of the greatest parts of being elected president was now he gets to be home with his kids every night. He's proud of his girls and he's going to try and do a good job for them. I'm not trying to make him out to be Superman, but he certainly is a high profile example of someone who is not going to repeat that cycle, who says, "I

am going to do what a man ought to do and that's honor my woman. And I'm going to teach my children to honor their mother."

So what? Let's wrap this altogether into a big "so what" this Father's Day. First of all, if you had a dad who was good to you that you can be proud of, thank God for him and if he's still living, thank him. Second, if you had a father that's left you with pain and shame in your life, ask God for healing for your heart so that you don't put that same kind of shame and pain on somebody else. Ask God to help you forgive and to let go of your own hurt and anger.

If you are a dad right now, reconnect yourself to the critical importance of your job. Lift up the woman in your life, the children's mother, and show respect to her so that the boys, especially, can watch how you treat the woman. Women out there – speak well of the children's fathers in their hearing so that they know that you will be able to show respect and they can learn to be proud of their dad. And above all, give worship, honor and glory to God, your heavenly Father.

I'll be back in just a moment to pray with you.

I'd like to pray with you now on this Father's Day. Let's join our hearts together.

Dear Lord,

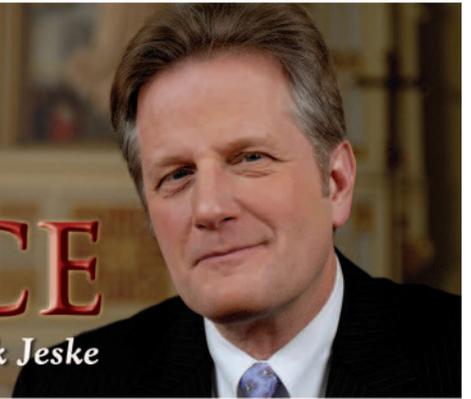
All of us who are fathers know that we have fallen so far short of your ideal for us and today we all ask for your forgiveness and strength to be better dads. All who are women, who are moms, or have sons, we all want to appreciate our dads and ask for your help in lifting up fathers in our world. And all who are children, help us to show love and respect to our dads.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

For Time of Grace, I'm Pastor Mark Jeske reminding you that every day is a day of grace for you.

# Journey into GOD'S GRACE

Guides for Personal Bible Study with Pastor Mark Jeske



## Godly Wisdom Is a Father's Legacy

### SCRIPTURE VERSE

Proverbs 4: 1-9 Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. I give you sound learning; so do not forsake my teaching...Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you...Listen, my son, accept what I say, and the years of your life will be many.

### POINTS TO PONDER

- What kind of father do you have? Do you want to be like him as a father or different? Why?
- What is your definition of *manhood*? Has your definition changed after hearing this message?
- **Read Proverbs 9:10-12.** What must we as parents, fathers in particular, teach our children? Jesus is the Holy One. Knowing Jesus is the only way to heaven, we pass wisdom, joy, and happiness to our children. Give some practical ways you can teach your children about Jesus.
- Mothers, wives, sons, and daughters, how can you show your father and others around you that you believe in the importance of godly fatherhood?
- Future and current fathers, take this privilege and responsibility very, very seriously. You are the model of your heavenly Father to your children and others. Make it believable!

### IN SUMMARY

In nearly half the homes in the United States, fatherhood isn't the way God intended it to be. Even our president came from an upbringing that didn't include his father for most of his life. Thankfully we have a loving God who is the perfect Father to us. He also gives us the guide to fatherly wisdom in his precious Word! Godly fathers teach their children how to have lives filled with wisdom, joy, and happiness. They do this by teaching their children to serve and respect God and to know Jesus and how he saved us. Fathers get to model this wisdom by continuing to walk with Jesus as godly examples to all! Thank God for being our perfect heavenly Father, and show your earthly father that you love him, whether he deserves it or not! Happy Father's Day!

### FOR REFLECTION

You can dig deeper into your Bible by reading more about these truths from the lesson:

- **God, our Father!** Psalm 2:7; Psalm 68:5; Hebrews 12:1-13; James 1:17; 1 Peter 1:1-5
- **Be a man!** Psalm 103:13; Proverbs 19:18; Ephesians 6:4; Hebrews 12:7-13
- **Fear the Lord!** Joshua 24:14,15; Job 28:28; 1 Samuel 12:24; Psalm 34:4,7,9; Psalm 111:10
- **Honor your father!** Exodus 20:12; Luke 2:51; Colossians 3:20

