**BUILDING A HOUSE FOR THE LORD**

**FIVE FOUNDATIONAL VALUES OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY**

**Proverbs 3:1-12**

**INTRODUCTION**

When our kids were doing school online earlier in the pandemic, I started leading them in morning devotions. We prayed, read Scripture, and sang a hymn, and we recited what we called the “Tong Family Way”. This consisted of a series of pledges that was prepared by one of the teachers at Innova, the Christian school in Newmarket my children attend, to help families at the school start the day off well while learning at home.

Our children made pledges to one another to love God, follow Jesus, and depend on the Spirit. They promised to forgive one another, serve one another, and encourage one another. And they promised to obey us as their parents and to receive our discipline.

I had never done something like that before, but as we went through these pledges every single day, I came to appreciate them more and more, because they reminded our children that this is what our family is all about. This is the “Tong Family Way”, so if you’re a Tong, you’re committing yourself to living out these pledges.

That’s how society used to think. Individuals used to take the mission and values of their community – their university, club, church, or family – and say “I’m part of that, so I want to become like that.” Individuals conformed to the institution. But now, in our radically individualistic society, we have the opposite, where institutions are expected to conform to individuals. “Your moral code of conduct offends me, so change it!” “Your use of words doesn’t make me feel safe, so use different words!”

Today I want to push back against that tendency and talk about the values of the most important institution we have – the Christian family – and how parents have the responsibility of passing on these values to their children.

The title of this sermon is **Five Foundational Values of the Christian Family.**

(1) **VALUE #1: STEADFAST LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS**

The book of Proverbs is an assorted collection of different voices and styles. The earlier chapters, including Chapter 3, consist of a series of lectures in which Solomon is instructing his son. This wise King of Israel takes the divine wisdom that he prayed for and received and passes it onto the Crown Prince so that he would learn to live and rule well.

We may not be kings, but many of us are parents, just like Solomon, and we can look to him as an example of a godly father raising a godly son in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. This does not at all imply that mothers aren’t involved, or that daughters are excluded from parental responsibility. In 1:8 Solomon says,

“Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your *mother’s* teaching.”

The mother can teach, because the mother has been taught. These verses apply to fathers and mothers, sons and daughters. But they are written from the perspective of a father to remind us yet again that it is the father who bears the primary responsibility in the moral, religious, and spiritual instruction in the home.

Derek Kidner writes:

“Not only in these early chapters but in every section of the book it is assumed that truth is to be learnt first at home, instilled there with firmness and affection as lessons for the mind and training for the character.”

The text begins in verses 1-2:

**1**My son, do not forget my teaching,
    but let your heart keep my commandments,
**2**for length of days and years of life
    and peace they will add to you.

Solomon tells his son what he should do, and why he should do it. First, what should he do? He should remember his father’s teaching by obeying his father’s commandments. Note carefully the flow of thought in verse 1. Solomon doesn’t say, “do not forget my teaching, but remember my commandments”. He says “do not forget, but let your heart *keep* my commandments.” Solomon isn’t just interested in memory. He’s interested in action. He wants his son to *keep* his words from the heart.

Why? “*For* length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.” Solomon is teaching his son how to live well, and how to live long, because the life well-lived is the life that endures. There are obviously exceptions to this. You can obey your father’s commands and still die young, because we live in a broken world. Proverbs isn’t so much a collection of promises as it is a collection of statements of how the world generally works. And here, it tells us that if we remember and obey these words, then more often than not we will live long and happy lives.

It will also lead to peace. This isn’t just the “internal peace” that we talk about today. This is *shalom*, which is much more. *Shalom* involves peace in every area of your life. Peace at work, and peace in the home. Peace with God, and peace with others. Peace in the soul, and peace in society. Live this way, and you will have *shalom*.

So, how should his son live? The first thing Solomon emphasizes is “steadfast love and faithfulness”. Verses 3-4:

**3**Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you;
    bind them around your neck;
    write them on the tablet of your heart.
**4**So you will find favor and good success
    in the sight of God and man.

This is Value #1 for the Christian family. We are to be people of “steadfast love and faithfulness”. We are to bind them around our necks, and write them on the tablet of our hearts, because that is what God is like. These two values are often used together to describe God:

“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” (Exodus 34:6).

“All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness.” (Psalm 25:10)

“Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, and your faithfulness to the clouds.” (Psalm 36:5).

We are to be a people of “steadfast love and faithfulness”, because we serve a God who is abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. But what does that look like?

The Hebrew word for “steadfast love” is *hesed*, God’s covenant love for his people. It’s not primarily the emotion of love, but the commitment of love. It captures the sacred commitment that he’s made to restore, redeem, and rescue his covenant people. Other Bible translations translate it as “loyalty” or “kindness”. It’s an unending, unbreakable commitment to do good, to be merciful, to intervene in the trials and tribulations of his people, to overflow with acts of kindness. And when Solomon adds steadfast love and *faithfulness*, he means that we are to never stop in our steadfast love towards those around us. We are to show steadfast love faithfully, whenever we have opportunity.

Solomon wants his son to not only believe in the Lord’s steadfast love and faithfulness, but to imitate those qualities, and we should want the same for our children. When they see a need, we don’t want them to ignore it or expect someone else to do something. We want them to take initiative. When their friends are going through a difficult season, we don’t want our kids to abandon them. We want them to move towards them. We want our children to constantly think of how they can serve others, how they can build people up, how they can overflow with acts of kindness, so that they would point people to our God who is abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

(2) **VALUE #2: TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART**

**5**Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
    and do not lean on your own understanding.
**6**In all your ways acknowledge him,
    and he will make straight your paths.

Notice the repetition here. Solomon told his son to let his *heart* keep his commandments, and to write steadfast love and faithfulness on the table of his *heart*, and now he tells him to trust in the LORD with all his *heart*. The heart of the Bible is not the heart of Valentine’s Day. It’s not just a symbol of romantic passion and love. According to Scripture, it’s the center of the human being. Proverbs 4:23 says,

“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”

All of life flows from the heart. What we value, how we live, how we use our time, how we spend our money, how we teach our kids, it’s all rooted in the heart.

And here in verse 5, Solomon tells his son that trust in the Lord should be at the center of his heart. He is to trust in the Lord with *all* his heart, so that everything he does flows from this basic instinct to trust the Lord.

That means that he won’t trust in himself. He says, “do not lean on your own understanding”, because that’s not trusting the Lord. That’s trusting in himself. To lean on your own understanding is to lean on a broken crutch. It won’t hold you up. But to lean on the Lord is to rest on a solid rock that can never be moved.

We’re also not to trust in what we have. Proverbs 11:28 warns us that:

“Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.” – 11:28

What does it mean to trust in our riches? It means that we derive our sense of significance and security by how much we own, or by how much we make, or by how much nicer our house is compared to others. We trust in our riches when what we have changes how we view ourselves and others. People are either more valuable or less depending on what they own.

But verse 5 says, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart”, not yourself, and not in your riches. Verse 6 says, “In all your ways acknowledge him”, literally “*know* him”. Everything you do, and everything you are, flows from your relationship with God.You are to derive your significance and security from the Lord, not from the world.

And so, when your kids think they’re worth less because they didn’t do well on that test, tell them to trust in the Lord, not in grades. Or when they think they’re worth less because they’re not as attractive as that popular classmate, tell them to trust in the Lord, not in beauty. When they’re spending too much time watching Netflix or YouTube, we tell them to trust in the Lord, not in entertainment.

This means directing them to God’s Word. There is an inseparable connection between trusting the Lord and reading his Word:

“Whoever gives thought to the word will discover good, and blessed is he who trusts in the LORD.” – 16:20

“Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise… That your trust may be in the LORD” – 22:19

(3) **VALUE #3: FEAR THE LORD AND TURN AWAY FROM EVIL**

**7**Be not wise in your own eyes;
    fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.
**8**It will be healing to your flesh
    and refreshment to your bones.

In a culture that’s all about pumping up our children’s self-esteem, these verses say the opposite. The Bible’s mantra isn’t “believe in yourself”. It’s “be not wise in your own eyes”. That’s not the same as “be foolish in your own eyes”. Solomon isn’t telling his son that he’s worthless, or dumb, or stupid. He’s telling him not to think of himself at all. It’s like the classic line from C.S. Lewis. “Humility isn’t thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.”

Instead, he is to think more of God. If we are to believe in anyone, it’s God. We see that in verse 7: “Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.” Solomon wants to free his son from being consumed with thoughts about himself, so that he could be consumed with thoughts about God.

And when God fills our minds, it inevitably produces the fear of the Lord, and Proverbs says that’s the beginning of wisdom. You can’t have wisdom if you don’t have the fear of the Lord. Wisdom isn’t found in having the right knowledge. It’s found in having the right relationship with God, a relationship that is characterized by reverential submission to God’s will and God’s commands.

Proverbs 26:12 says,

“Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”

Teaching our kids the Disney ethic of trusting themselves, or following their instincts, or letting their hearts lead them, is dangerous territory, because we’re making them fools. We’re making them worse than fools, because at least some fools can be taught. The fool who is wise in his own eyes will never be taught, because in his mind, he’s not in need of teaching.

How do we pass on this value? One way is to teach your kids to seek the counsel and advice of others. Sometimes we imagine that our goal as parents is to teach our kids to be self-sufficient. It’s to help them get to the place where they don’t need anything or anyone. We want to make them independent, self-sufficient, and completely capable of making their own decisions. But that’s no different than teaching them to be wise in their own eyes. That’s no different than teaching them to trust in themselves.

If they are to learn to trust in the Lord, and to fear the Lord, then we need to teach them to seek out wise counsel. That’s true maturity. True maturity isn’t depending on yourself. It’s learning to depend on the wisdom of godly counsellors. It’s the heart that says, “I have a hard decision to make, and I’m going to seek out counsel, because I don’t trust myself. I don’t trust my own wisdom. But God will guide me, and he will use others to do that.”

(4) **VALUE #4: HONOUR THE LORD WITH YOUR WEALTH**

**9**Honor the Lord with your wealth
    and with the firstfruits of all your produce;
**10**then your barns will be filled with plenty,
    and your vats will be bursting with wine.

I think most parents recognize the need to teach our kids how to manage money well. We need to teach them to save, invest, work, be responsible, etc. But I wonder how many of us recognize the need to teach our kids to use their wealth to honour the Lord. This is where theory meets action. We can talk about trusting the Lord and fearing the Lord all we want. If it doesn’t affect how we use our money, it doesn’t mean anything.

If we really trust the Lord with all our hearts, we will use our wealth to honour the Lord. That means we give generously to those in need. We show kindness to others with the means that God has provided to us. There’s a close connection between honouring the Lord and serving the poor in the book of Proverbs:

“Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor.” (Proverbs 14:21)

“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed.” (Proverbs 19:17)

“The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the Maker of them all.” (Proverbs 22:2)

We honour the Lord with our wealth by using it to serve others. But we also honour the Lord with our wealth when we use it to support the worship of God. Verse 9 says, “Honour the Lord with your wealth, and with the firstfruits of all your produce”. The firstfruits were the best parts of the harvest. They were the biggest, sweetest, tastiest parts of the crop. But rather than letting his people enjoy them, God commanded that the firstfruits be brought into the Temple as a sacrifice. They were to be offered to the Lord in joyful worship as his people believed that it was God who had richly provided everything that they had.

In contemporary terms, these verses are calling us to give to the needy, and to give to the church, which is the New Testament Temple of God. We are to give for the purpose of mercy, and we are to give for the purpose of worship. We are to give so that people would be lifted up, both body and soul, to know and worship God as the Maker and Redeemer of all. And we are to do so with our firstfruits, not with our leftovers. We aren’t to spend our wealth on everything we want and budget for and then see if there’s anything left. We are to take the best of our wealth, the firstfruits, and offer it first to the Lord.

If we do, then verse 10 tells us that our barns will be filled with plenty, and our vats will be bursting with wine. This isn’t so that we can be self-indulgent, but so that we can have more to serve others. Ray Ortlund writes:

“If you invest for his sake, he will give you more to invest for his sake.” – Ray Ortlund

We are to teach our children to honour the Lord with their wealth, the firstfruits of all their produce. That could mean teaching them not just to save, but to give. Teach them to work, not just so that they appreciate the value of a dollar, but so that they can experience the joy of being generous to the poor, and to the church.

(5) **VALUE #5: DO NOT DESPISE THE LORD’S DISCIPLINE**

**11**My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline
    or be weary of his reproof,
**12**for the Lord reproves him whom he loves,
    as a father the son in whom he delights.

This is the final value in our text, and it’s the one that we least expect. We are to teach our children to respond to discipline in a godly manner. Sometimes we think that our job is done once we’ve imposed discipline on our kids, but it’s not, because teaching our kids to respond well to the discipline is just as important as the discipline itself.

Parents, you know what it’s like to discipline your child and then have them respond to you with anger. You invite them back into your arms but they run away. My dad used to send me to the washroom to sit in the dark if I was acting up at the dinner table, but when he called me back, I would just stay there as an act of rebellion.

Parents, we need to teach our kids to not despise our discipline, or to become weary of it, because it’s only a matter of time before God’s discipline comes to them as well. And the question is, how will they receive it? With humility? Or with anger?

How we respond to discipline is a central part of wisdom.

“Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.” (Proverbs 12:1)

“Poverty and disgrace come to him who ignores instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is honoured.” (Proverbs 13:18)

“Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence.” (Proverbs 15:32)

We are to be a people who love discipline. That doesn’t mean it’s easy. Hebrews 12:11 says, “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant”. But the wise learn to endure discipline, and even welcome it, because “later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

Verse 12 says “the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.” C.S. Lewis wrote that when we complain about God’s discipline, we’re not asking for more love, but for less. God’s discipline is an expression of God’s delight. He disciplines us not despite his love, but because of his love, because he knows that our sin and our foolishness are keeping us from living truly happy lives.

But how do we know that God loves us? How do we really know that his discipline is an expression of his delight? Because it’s only discipline that we receive from his hand, not punishment. We deserve his punishment, but we receive his discipline, because Christ took our punishment on our behalf. On the cross, God’s beloved Son, the Son in whom he has delighted before the creation of the world, that Son bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that sinners like you and me could become God’s children.

Christ died for you so that God could delight in you, not because you’re good enough, or beautiful enough, or strong enough, but because Christ is enough. The same delight God reserved for his Son now extends to all who repent and believe the gospel, so that there is no condemnation, no punishment, no abandonment in hell. Only love.

Sometimes God’s love takes the form of gentle instruction. Sometimes it takes the form of discipline and reproof. But always, always, it comes to us as an expression of his loving, fatherly heart.

**CONCLUSION**

These are the Five Foundational Values of the Christian Family. These don’t just describe “The Tong Family Way”. They describe “The Christian Family Way”. There are obviously other Christian values that we want to pass onto our children, but it all starts with these.

Here’s the main lesson of these verses. All of us want to raise responsible, compassionate, hard-working children. But these verses teach us that we can’t separate ethics and faith. We can’t separate morality and piety. We can’t teach our kids to live rightly if they don’t have a right relationship with God. There is certainly moral instruction in these verses. We are called to teach our children to pursue steadfast love and faithfulness. But the overwhelming emphasis of these verses isn’t on what that looks like, but on where it comes from. It comes from trusting the Lord, fearing the Lord, honouring the Lord, and submitting to the Lord’s discipline.

The foundation of right living is a right relationship with God. It’s teaching our children to have a Godward orientation through every season of life. And parents, God has given us the distinct and sacred responsibility of showing our children what that looks like. We do that by teaching these values, and we do that by modelling these values.

And so, let us bind steadfast love and faithfulness on our hearts by showing kindness to those in need. Let us trust in the Lord with all our hearts by engaging in regular Bible reading and study. Let us not be wise in our own eyes by seeking counsel from godly, mature believers. Let us honour the Lord with our wealth by being generous to the poor and to the church. And let us not despise the Lord’s discipline, but receive it with open hands, believing that it comes to us in love.

And by the grace of God, may our children bind these values around their necks and write them on the tablets of their hearts to the glory of God.