**BUILDING A HOUSE FOR THE LORD**

**WISE AND FOOLISH COMPANIONS**

**Proverbs 13:20**

**INTRODUCTION**

One of the oldest debates in the parenting world is the relative influence of nature verses nurture. To what degree are our children shaped internally by their genetics, nature, and personality; and to what degree are they shaped externally by their upbringing, influences, and experiences?

The answer to this question has shifted from generation to generation depending on the prevailing worldview. The Enlightenment taught that children are born *tabula rasa*, or as a “blank slate”. They are morally neutral beings who are completely shaped by their experiences and perceptions. It’s all nurture, not nature. The scientific revolution brought about the the idea that human beings are merely a series of one chemical reaction after another. Everything regarding who we are and what we are like is predetermined by our genetics, and there’s nothing we can do to change that.

What is the Christian answer? Nature or nurture? Many of us would say that it’s almost all nature, because we believe in the doctrine of sin. Every person is born with a sinful nature, an inclination away from God and godliness and towards self and selfishness, and unless the sin is addressed, nothing’s going to change. It doesn’t matter what you do or what you say. Unless sin is put to death by the power of the Spirit, changing our children is impossible.

For those of us in the Reformed tradition, we also believe in the doctrine of God’s sovereignty, that nothing happens except through him and by his will. If change is going to happen in our children, it has to be sovereignly ordained by God. He has to call them to conversion. He has to give them the gift of faith. He has to work in them by his Spirit. And until he does, our efforts as parents are powerless to make any lasting difference.

That’s all true. But if we take these doctrines and use them as excuses to practice passive parenting, we’ve completely missed the mark. If we say, “Our kids are going to be whatever God decides they’re going to be, so I can just sit back and observe”, then we’ve forgotten that God uses human means to accomplish divine purposes. That’s why we take them to church. That’s why teach them to read their Bibles and pray.

And that’s why we heed the parenting lesson in Proverbs 13:20:

“Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.”

Who our children walk with contributes to who they will become. Walk with the wise and become wise. Walk with the fool and become foolish.

This doesn’t undermine God’s sovereignty. In fact, Proverbs 2:6 says:

 “For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding”.

Wisdom comes from the LORD. But one of the ways he delivers that wisdom to us and to our children is through walking with the wise.

There is no joy in raising children who say the right things but do the wrong things. We don’t just want religious children. We want *wise* children. Proverbs says,

“He who sires a fool gets himself sorrow, and the father of a fool has no joy.” (Proverbs 17:21)

But it also says:

“The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice; he who fathers a wise son will be glad in him.” (Proverbs 23:24)

Parents, this is our goal. It’s not just to raise children who say that they’re Christians. It’s to raise children who live like Christians, and that means raising children who are wise.

In order to do that, we need to teach them to walk with the wise and not with fools. That’s easier said than done, because fools are everywhere. They’re in Christian schools. They’re in homeschool co-ops. They’re in the shows and podcasts that our kids listen to. We need to carefully discern who our children are walking with, and teach them to walk with the wise.

This doesn’t necessarily mean that we cut fools out of our lives. It can mean that, but in most cases it simply means that we don’t let them influence us or shape our values. We don’t become their companions.

Parents, you remember what it was like when we were younger. We’ve all gone through a season where the main influence in our lives wasn’t our parents or our church. It was our friends. They’re the ones who shaped the ways we dressed, and spoke, and acted. They’re the ones who taught us how to use our time and how to treat other people. We wanted to be just like them.

Proverbs 13:20 says don’t have a relationship like that with fools. Fools may be in your life, but you shouldn’t let them influence you. You should influence them. We must help our kids to choose wise companions, because if they don’t, they will suffer harm.

The title of this sermon is **Wise and Foolish Companions.** There are three main categories of people that Proverbs tells us to avoid, and they will form our outline today:

1. The Greedy
2. The Sensual
3. The Angry

(1) **THE GREEDY**

Proverbs 1:10-14

**10**My son, if sinners entice you,
    do not consent.
**11**If they say, “Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood;
    let us ambush the innocent without reason;
**12**like Sheol let us swallow them alive,
    and whole, like those who go down to the pit;
**13**we shall find all precious goods,
    we shall fill our houses with plunder;
**14**throw in your lot among us;
    we will all have one purse”

This takes me back to one of the bigger cases I worked on as a criminal defence lawyer. It was a wiretap investigation into a criminal organization in the Jane and Finch area that called themselves YBK, short for the “Young Buck Killers”. They did all these things. They lay in wait for blood, kidnapping members of rival gangs, ambushing their family members in drive-by shootings, selling drugs and stealing property to fill their houses with “precious goods” and “plunder”.

You know what? They were mostly teenagers. They were kids. Even the older members of the gang had immersed themselves in gang culture at an early age.

Two things drew them into that life: greed, and community, and we find both in these verses. The promise of easy money is found in verse 13 when they say “we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder”. Why work for minimum wage for 40 hours/week when you could find someone else’s wealth and take it by force? Why get an entry-level job and struggle to pay the bills when you can sell drugs and wear diamonds? These are greedy people who define themselves by how much they have.

The promise of community is found in verse 14: “throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse”. This is a microcosm of communism, where everything they own is shared. Everyone is equal. This is what surprised me most about gang culture. When you strip away the guns, the drugs, and the violence, what you find is a community of people who watch out for one another. They have “one purse”, which means that if you steal from one, you steal from them all. You mess with one, you mess with them all. They’re like a twisted version of a family. They may exploit and extort people, but they watch each other’s backs.

Solomon tells his son in verse 15:

**15**my son, do not walk in the way with them;
    hold back your foot from their paths,

Solomon wants his son to keep his way far from them. He’s not to walk with them. He’s not even to place his foot on their paths, because it’s a path of self-destruction. He describes that in verses 16-19:

**16**for their feet run to evil,
    and they make haste to shed blood.
**17**For in vain is a net spread
    in the sight of any bird,
**18**but these men lie in wait for their own blood;
    they set an ambush for their own lives.
**19**Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain;
    it takes away the life of its possessors.

People who live this way think that they’re the ones lying in wait for the blood of others, but they’re really lying in wait for their own. This is a major component of biblical wisdom. Wisdom lifts the curtain from the glamour and fun of sin and shows us that there’s nothing but death behind it.

Jesus himself said in Matthew 26:52 that “all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” If you live violently, you’ll die violently, because eventually, the people you hurt will come for you, and you’ll get what you gave. You’ll reap what you sowed.

Given where we live, our children may not rub shoulders with gangs and criminal organizations, but they will be surrounded by the greedy. And if those greedy people are willing to break a few rules, or be ruthless towards their competitors, the same end awaits them. Verse 19 says, “Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.”

Parents, we need to teach our kids that to walk with the greedy is to be the companion of a fool. It will poison their souls. It may not start that way, but over time they’ll start compromising their morals, sinning against their conscience, and doing things they never thought they would.

Instead, we must teach them to heed the wisdom of Proverbs 13:11:

“Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it.” (Proverbs 13:11)

(2) **THE SENSUAL**

One of the major themes in the book of Proverbs is the dangers of the forbidden woman. Solomon writes mostly of the adulterer, the married woman who strays from her home seeking alternative male company, but the concept of the forbidden woman applies to anyone who’s not your wife. It could be your girlfriend who doesn’t believe in abstinence. It could be the explicit images on your screen late at night. Whatever it may be, the dangers of the forbidden woman are so serious that Solomon devotes all of Chapter 5, most of Chapter 6, and all of Chapter 7 to convincing his son to stay clear of her and to delight in no one but his wife. Failing to do that only brings destruction.

Proverbs 5:1-6:

**1** My son, be attentive to my wisdom;
    incline your ear to my understanding,
**2**that you may keep discretion,
    and your lips may guard knowledge.
**3**For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey,
    and her speech is smoother than oil,
**4**but in the end she is bitter as wormwood,
    sharp as a two-edged sword.
**5**Her feet go down to death;
    her steps follow the path to Sheol;
**6**she does not ponder the path of life;
    her ways wander, and she does not know it.

Solomon only mentions the forbidden woman because he’s speaking to his son, but if he were to speak to his daughter, the same would apply regarding the forbidden man. Both men and women can seduce our young people to sin, and they do so with honeyed-tongues and smooth words. Verse 3 says, “For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil.”

It could be a little compliment here. A little suggestive joking there. It sounds sweet and tastes good. But once again, Solomon shows his son the true realities behind these sinful pleasures. “In the end”, he says, “she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.” His son may think that he’s found some hidden, precious treasure, but Solomon opens the lid and shows him that inside, there’s nothing but skulls and bones.

And so, he says this in verses 7-8:

**7**And now, O sons, listen to me,
    and do not depart from the words of my mouth.
**8**Keep your way far from her,
    and do not go near the door of her house,

This is the second fool that our children must avoid. They must avoid the sensual, the forbidden men and women who would seduce them into sin because they don’t honour marriage. Solomon says “Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house.” That’s not easy, because there’s something intoxicating about being noticed. Young people can easily get addicted to the feeling of being pursued, seduced, and singled out. But Solomon tells us that this isn’t the path of life. It’s the path of death.

It could be physical doors that they need to avoid, or it could be virtual doors, the doors that are entered by typing select words onto your computer. Far too many Christian men regularly walk through the virtual doors of the forbidden woman on the internet and eat from her poisoned table. To those men, Solomon’s counsel is the same. “Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house.”

If it were a physical door, we do that by avoiding certain roads and neighbourhoods, or by putting ourselves in a position to hear her honeyed words. But with virtual doors, we need to get a little more creative. We may need filtering software that censors out anything that is inappropriate, or install programs that block certain websites, or use accountability software so that someone always knows what you’re looking at. There are so many options out there that we really have no excuse.

Some people say, “Oh, it’s too expensive.” Is there any price that you could pay that is more valuable than your life? We’re not just talking about your purity here. We’re talking about your very life. Solomon describes some of the consequences of going into the forbidden woman in verses 9-14:

**9**lest you give your honor to others
    and your years to the merciless,
**10**lest strangers take their fill of your strength,
    and your labors go to the house of a foreigner,
**11**and at the end of your life you groan,
    when your flesh and body are consumed,
**12**and you say, “How I hated discipline,
    and my heart despised reproof!
**13**I did not listen to the voice of my teachers
    or incline my ear to my instructors.
**14**I am at the brink of utter ruin
    in the assembled congregation.”

You may not regret going to the forbidden woman now, but you will later. By then, it will be too late. The one life God has given you will have been wasted, and you can only look back at the foolish choices you made with regret. Pay the price, keep your way far from her, and live.

Other men say there’s really no point installing this software or keeping away from the forbidden woman because lust is a heart issue. They say if they don’t deal with the heart, then all these rules and efforts at self-discipline are pointless. If that’s you, let me ask you this: are you wiser than God? Do you have a better way to deal with your heart than what God tells us to do in his Word? God doesn’t say, “You can walk up to her house as long as your heart is fine.” He says “Keep away. Don’t go near”. Paul tells Timothy “Flee from youthful passions”, because no matter how spiritually strong and mature you are, you’re not strong enough to resist her.

Parents, we need to teach our kids to keep away from the sensual. That means teaching them not to date someone just because that person paid attention to them. That means teaching them to wisely navigate their way through the internet and to be accountable to you. That means teaching them that so-called “missionary dating” isn’t a good idea, when a Christian dates a non-Christian with the hope of converting them. That can work out in rare cases, but more often the unbeliever has more of an effect on the believer than vice versa. That’s what happened to Solomon himself. He was the wisest man who ever lived besides Jesus, but even he strayed from the Lord because of the influence of forbidden women.

If we are to teach our kids to walk with the wise and not be companions with fools, they must keep away from the sensual.

(3) **THE ANGRY**

This is perhaps the most surprising of the list, but it may also be the most timely, because anger is on the rise. In fact, in some circles, anger has become a virtue. The angrier you are at the idiocy of people you and your followers disagree with, the more credible you become.

But Scripture points us in a different direction. Proverbs 22:24-25 says:

**24**Make no friendship with a man given to anger,
    nor go with a wrathful man,
**25**lest you learn his ways
    and entangle yourself in a snare.

There is certainly a place for righteous anger. God is righteously angry against our sin. Jesus himself turned over the tables and scattered the vendors in the Temple out of righteous anger. Jesus called the Pharisees a “brood of vipers” and “whitewashed walls”. But he also ate in the Pharisees’ homes and taught them, even as they plotted to kill him.

Jesus shows us that there is a place for righteous anger, but we also need to remember that we are not Jesus. Our anger is rarely righteous. And even when it is, it is tainted by self-righteousness and pride. When Jesus was angry with people, he still had compassion on them. When we’re angry, all we feel is rage.

Proverbs tells us that the more time we spend with angry people, the more we become angry people ourselves. “Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.”

Anger is one of those gateway sins that open up the floodgates of temptation. That’s why Paul exhorts fathers in Ephesians 6 to not provoke their children to anger. That’s why he tells Christians not to let the sun go down on their anger, lest they give an opportunity to the devil. That’s why Proverbs 29:22 says:

“A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression.”

Parents, this is the Trojan horse when it comes to fools. We know that we should look out for companions who are liars, drunkards, and thieves. But we don’t know that we should look out for companions who are angry: men and women of wrath who stir up strife and cause much transgression.

Once again, this could apply to their real-life companions, and it could apply to their virtual companions. So many of the cultural commentary podcasts out there are characterized by anger. They’re helpful and insightful, but they’re also demeaning and condescending towards those who disagree with them. If you listen to them enough and make them your regular companions, you’re bound to sound just like them.

**CONCLUSION**

Parents, part of our responsibility is helping our kids to avoid becoming companions with the greedy, the sensual, and the angry. This doesn’t mean we tell them that they can’t be friends with Jimmy down the street because he’s always yelling at his sister. But it does mean that we teach our kids to put up boundaries in those kinds of relationships so that they don’t become the same.

And then we need to realize that protecting them from those relationships is only half our responsibility. The verse doesn’t say, “Whoever hides from the world becomes wise.” It says, “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise.” Merely removing negative influences isn’t enough. This isn’t about isolation, or seclusion, or extreme protectionism where all we do is we shield our children from the negative influences of the world. It’s about addition as much as subtraction. We subtract the foolish, and we add the wise. How do we do that? Let me briefly suggest three ways.

First, help them find friends who are functionally shaped by God’s Word. I add the word “functionally” because there are a lot of kids who know that they should be reading, believing, and obeying God’s Word. But there aren’t a lot of kids who actually do it. I don’t just want my children to be friends with kids who know Bible stories or go to church on Sundays. I want them to be friends with kids who know that they’re sinners, who confess and repent of their sins, and who find their greatest comfort in the gospel.

That’s hard to find. If our kids only became friends with kids like that, they might end up being quite lonely. But if you meet kids who are your children’s age who are like that – kids who are humble, grateful, and prayerful – then point your kids in their direction.

Second, help them find spiritual mentors. In some ways, Proverbs 13:20 is reminding us that having peers isn’t enough, because so few of their peers will actually be wise. That changes as they get older, but when they’re young, walking with the wise will often mean walking with those who are older.

And so, if you meet someone at church who always seems to be encouraging you, or spiritually sharpening you, or reminding you of God’s grace, then think and pray about asking them to spend some time with your kids. You know the old saying that it takes a village to raise a child. You can help setup that village around your child by introducing them to godly and wise mentors.

Lastly, help your kids walk with Jesus, because Jesus is not only wise. He is wisdom itself. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in him.

All of us are sinners. Even the wisest among us sins every day. But not Jesus. Jesus is none of the things that Proverbs warns us about. He wasn’t violent. He let violence be done to him out of love for sinners. He wasn’t greedy. He had no place to lay his head and yet he was content. He wasn’t sensual, even though prostitutes washed his feet with their hair. And he wasn’t a man who was given to anger, but one who was “gentle and lowly in heart”, a friend of sinners, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Parents, let’s help our children walk with Jesus. Let’s bring them to the cross, again and again, where Jesus bled and died for their sins. Let’s help them believe in him, to follow him, to sit at his feet and listen. And let us watch and see as our only wise God makes our children wise in him.