

The Secret of an Understanding Heart

Making Family Work

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Bible Text: Proverbs 24

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Thank you. I ask you to take your Bibles and turn to Proverbs chapter 24 and I want to read verse three and then we are going to jump from verse three down to verse 30.

And before we do that, let's just go to the Lord in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for this day and, Father, I confess that there is nothing in myself that is capable of doing what you have asked me to do and I ask for your strength and your wisdom and your putting words in my mouth and opening the hearts and the ears of the hearers. And, Father, apply this Word to our lives. We pray it in Christ's name. Amen.

Proverbs chapter 24. Why don't you just stand very quickly in honor of God's Word. Proverbs chapter 24 beginning at verse three.

Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established: And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches.¹

Now jump down to verse 30.

I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.²

Thank you. You may be seated.

¹ Proverbs 24:3-4.

² Proverbs 24:30-34.

I hope you will keep your Bibles open to Proverbs because we want to look at about four verses in Proverbs, but before we begin, just looking again at verse three and four of that chapter.

He said, “Through wisdom is a house builded.”³

I don't know how many of you... Just by a show of hands, how many of you have ever been through the experience of having a house built for you or building a house. Anybody here? It is an amazing experience and you constantly are finding things that are wrong with it.

You know, I remember seeing things that the builder had done wrong and going back to the builder and saying, “No, this needs to work.”

I remember one time going in just inside of our front door and what is now the wall of my office, right, just immediately to the right of the front door and about the third or fourth stud over I just noticed I thought, you know, that board doesn't look quite right. It kind of has a bow in it. And so I just took my hand and I pushed on it and the stud just broke in two.

Now it is... they don't sell you studs or solid wood anymore. I don't know if you know that. They get these little short pieces and they are corrugated together and they put them together and they glue them together and that is the way they do studs. They are not like solid pieces of two by four in most homes. Most people aren't aware of that.

And so that was, you know, kind of freaky that that glue wasn't holding real well. And a little shove and, you know, and I am thinking, man, a good wind would blow this house down. And there were so many other things that I would see and I came in and they were, you know putting put a different kind of staircase or they were putting up a railing where there was supposed to be a wall and you just constantly have to stay on top of it.

But one thing I have noticed is that I think it was less work to oversee the building of my house than it is to keep it together now, because there is always something that needs fixing. You know, right now the family is doing without the benefits of the garbage disposal because I am determined to make that sucker work again. But it is a... it hums for a little while till it cuts off, but I have had the broom handle in there trying to turn the blades, trying to get it freed up. That doesn't work. And I have got to find a little key that goes on the bottom to see if I can crank it lose. I can't feel anything stuck in there, but it just doesn't want to turn.

Now it may be that I have break down and buy a new garbage disposal, but by nature I am too cheap to do that without a little effort. And so I am trying to, you know, go through that.

³ Proverbs 24:3.

And then... and then the fence. I don't know who created fencing, but it was a really bad idea. You know, and if you get brick fencing you have to worry about the thing falling over in a few years. I see examples of that all up and down through our neighborhood.

You know, we have the six foot high dog eared picket fence and it is made of cedar which is supposed to not rot. So what I do is spend a lot of time replacing the rotted cedar planks that we have sprayed with preservative so that they don't rot, but they do anyway.

And so right now I have got sitting in my garage about 10 new boards that I am going to have to go out and yank the old ones out and drill new ones in. The problem is my neighbor behind me. They have... their sprinkler system actually sprays right up on the bottom of the fence, so all the boards I need to drill into to secure the fence from my side are... they are all rotted out. And it is hard to screw something into rotten wood.

It is hard.

You know, there is something constantly that goes on. And then after we have been there about six years we noticed a hairline crack formed across the... our tile and we kind of go through and don't notice it anymore, but every now and then I will come out and look at it and I will say, "You know, I know there is a foundation problem there."

We have a 10 year warranty and we have been in the house about seven years. My wife's challenge is to make me call the company before the 10 year warranty runs out. And that is going to be a challenge. It is just hard to find time to deal with that sort of thing in my life and I am just envisioning what all that would entail.

You know, so it just doesn't sound like fun. And there is a challenge to keeping things running once you have got them working. And once you have got them... and I think this is true in our families as well. I think home schooling presents this challenge for us as well.

You know, a lot of us have decided and made the decision to home educate our children because we wanted to make sure they got taught character and virtue before they got knowledge.

And, by the way, that is a good plan. The Bible says in 1 Peter that knowledge puffeth up. But it says what you are supposed to do is first build faith, then build virtue which is faith acted out and influencing the life of others and then build brotherly kindness and then add knowledge. But if you get knowledge without love, it just puffs up. And so if you just fill kids' heads full of knowledge, then what you wind up with is a bunch of arrogant children.

But if you first build in them faith and character and virtue, then they will hold on to that and do you know what? I have discovered that when you go out into the market place today, employers, even unsaved employers are smart enough to realize that what is far

more important than your degrees and your intelligence and how well you do algebra is what kind of character do you have.

See, they can train you in skills that they need for the job, but an employer can't train people in the character they need in a job.

And it is the character that they will recognize. And so it is terribly hard to... you know, we can build our kids, but how do you keep them once they are built. How do you preserve what you labored so hard to do. And what I have noticed in a lot of home schooling families is they get to some place in their lives where they leave home and instantly they look just like the world. They don't keep the same values. They don't kept the same standards. They don't, you know, they don't talk the same. They don't walk the same. They don't dress the same. They don't have the standards that you labored so hard to build in their lives.

And you think, why is that?

And one reason, I think probably the most predominant reason is a lot of families make the mistakes of running their house with rules and regulations.

Now let me tell you something about rules. We don't keep them when we don't have to. Have you ever noticed that?

If you have ever made the trip from Springfield, Illinois, to Indianapolis along that highway.... Now I have made that trip a few times. I would go to Springfield. One of the greatest things I... I actually did some of my growing up in Springfield, Illinois and one of the cool things in Springfield to see is the President Abraham Lincoln Museum and the presidential library that is there. You can go out to the cemetery and you can walk in the building where his casket is still above ground and that is a whole interesting story there. I don't know how many of you know that his body was once stolen, but they got it back. And so it is an amazing story. But he was an amazing man.

And so I took my kids up here to see that one time. But if you go from Springfield, Illinois to Indianapolis, you have to pass through a little town off the highway. It is one of those that has a couple of gas stations and you want to stop and get gas because they are getting... gas stations are not too plenteous not hat road. Let me tell you. But if you stop in this little town, it is called Eureka, Illinois. Interesting name, you know. They have an interesting law on their books in Eureka, Illinois.

In Eureka, Illinois it is illegal for a man with a moustache to kiss a girl. It is illegal for a man with a moustache to kiss a girl in Eureka, Illinois. And I tell you what. I would set up a stand on the side of the road and sell shaving cream if that were where I lived, you know. I think I could make something, you know?

But I am pretty sure that, you know, if the guys with moustaches are even worried about it, you know, if there is nobody around wearing a badge, they probably don't care.

And do you think they still worry about that law when they are not in Eureka? Not on your life. The fact is, they probably don't pay that law much attention and once they are not in Eureka—for those who know that the law actually exists on the books—it is the same way that when we have rules and regulations at home and kids leave, they are not under the rules and regulations anymore and so they quit paying attention to the laws because they no longer apply to them.

But when you can teach principle, the principle will go with them.

You know there is a verse in Proverbs that says to young people that they are supposed to rise up before someone with a hoary head, that is white hair. And mine is getting there fast, so I expect to see you jumping out of your seats to offer them to me any time now.

But the things is you are supposed to... why do you do that? It shows respect for them.

I remember going into an Olive Garden one day with my kids and we were going to go eat some family special meal and my wife was eight months with child at the time and if... most of you have never seen my wife when she is with child, but when she is at four and a half months people are saying, "When is it due? When is it due?" Because it is going to... she is proud when she is pregnant and she just jumps out there early and shows off her months at a time.

And so, you know, here she... and now is eight months. So, sweetheart, I love you, but you were huge. Anyway, so... and she, you know, her... it is summer and ankles are bloated and what not and there was nowhere to sit. The whole room was full. Now I was thinking now if I was on one of these benches and saw this woman come in, I would give her my seat.

Finally this three people get up and leave the seat when they have been called in the restaurant and before my wife could get over there this, I would say probably not too clean cut looking 15, 16 something young man rushed and he sat down right there. And I had an emotional reaction. In fact, I turned to my son and I grabbed him by his ear and I said, "If I ever saw you do that, I would rip this thing off the side of your head."

Now I think I made an impression on him, because this man that was sitting there was not being a gentleman.

And... but when you teach the principles, that principle will go with them through life so you don't have to be there every time saying, "You need to yield your seat to this person or you need to show honor to this person or you need to give your seat to that lady," because you should have taught them the principles of how to show honor and respect to others.

But you notice the Scripture in Proverbs 24 says it is through wisdom that a house is built. And that is what, you know, some of these even use these things called wisdom books to teach our kids their school curriculum.

But then notice what it says, though. It is through understanding that it is established. In other words, wisdom may build a house, but it is understanding that keeps the walls standing. It keeps the plumbing working and keeps things going. We need to figure out what this is because too many of us are investing a lot of effort only to lose the investment we have made in our children because we have failed to understand what understanding is.

And so that is what I want us to look at for a little bit today. So let's find out what is an understanding heart.

Now I want you to look at Proverbs chapter one and verse... well, let's look at the first four verses here.

It says:

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.⁴

So the first thing you need to know is that to have an understanding heart is to have a perceptive heart. Now there is actually four different words in Proverbs for understanding. And so we are going to look at those and you can look there at the title of the slide. Those are the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* numbers if you want to write them down and go check this out for yourself.

But the word here בִּינָה (bee-naw') means to speak the same language as another. In fact is in Isaiah 33:19, kind of an interesting promise that God makes, the children of Israel are going to go into captivity and they go into captivity several times throughout their history, but in Isaiah 33:19 God makes the children of Israel a rather unique promise. He says that no matter who their captors are, who their conquerors are, that he will give the Israelites the ability to understand the language of their captors.

Now that is a pretty cool promise because I don't know how many of you have tried to learn a second language, but it is not easy. It is not easy. And he says, "I will give you the ability to learn the language of your captors because I love you. I am going to give you that promise that no matter where you go..."

⁴ Proverbs 1:1-4.

And Jews have been in all of the nations of the world and they have adapted to learning the languages of those cultures, I think, because of the promise in Isaiah 33:19. So it means to speak the same language.

Now I have a question to ask you. And that is do you speak the same language as your loved ones? When your children come to you, do you hear just the first part of what they say and instantly assume you know what they mean and then you are off to the races solving their problem or you are off to the races giving them your correction or your discipline or your admonition or do you stop and listening?

Guys, with respect to your wives do you stop when she is talking and listen and then restate what she has already said to make sure you understand it in your own words and make sure that you have got that clarification? Do you really know what is going on? So do you hear? Do you restate and then do you go deeper? Do you ask questions to find out? Because when you do that, when you hear, you restate and you go deep, then you are really communicating and that is what we need to do.

The Bible has an interesting statement in Proverbs 18:13.

“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.”⁵

Another translation says, “A man that answers a matter before he hears it all is stupid.”

You see, when we get an answer before we have heard the whole question, before we have heard the whole issue and I am guilty of this. Jeannie, very often she will get two sentences out of her mouth. I am an engineer. I think, ok, let's short cut the rest of this conversation. Let me get to the solution. And I will give her the solution before I have heard the whole problem. I very often am guilty of answering questions that my wife isn't asking.

I know none of you men do that, but I wanted to let you know that I do.

Ok, so we need to... it is a folly and a shame. You are being an idiot when you don't listen things out. So an understanding heart, then, is a perceptive heart. It also means do you ask for counsel before you render decisions or you make decisions or you have major issues. You know, guys, before you deal with that problem with your child, do you ever go and seek your wife's counsel, because sometimes she has a different understanding about a problem than you have.

And the other day I saw one of my young ladies having an issue and I thought she was being essentially emotional. Imagine that, an emotional girl. Never mind. But I thought she was just being emotional and, you know, and you know, my wife says, “No, no. She is not feeling well. You know, she is ill.”

And I thought, no, she is not. She is just being emotional.

⁵ Proverbs 17:13.

And anyway, so she had a different perspective on it. I need to hear her perspective so that I have the complete picture on something. And so a perceptive heart seeks to get wise counsel before you make major decisions.

And then also to understand your children. You know, every child has a different personality type and there is a whole bunches of different ways of looking at this, you know. Some people divide them up into the four temperaments. Are they the life of the party sanguine person? Are they the clipboard and whistle [?] person? That is me. Is it the laid back phlegmatic that just nothing bothers them or is it the melancholy person who is a wonderful artist, but oh, God help you survive their mood swings? Ok, you know, is it one of those or some people say, "Well, it is the..." What is the otter versus the golden retriever versus the lion, versus what is the other animal, somebody? The beaver, thank you.

Ok, so the four animal ways of looking at things. And that is also a unique thing then. That is part of what is called the disk profile. So there is the dominant and there is the, you know, kind of the introspective person and there is the sensitive or loyal person and there is the cautious person that is part of, you know, always calculating things in their mind.

And so is it part of that? So we need to know that our children are different from birth.

Now for those of you that haven't had any children maybe you have only got one and number two is along the way and you think, oh, you have got it wired because you already know how one works. Boy, have I got news for you. Every one of them is different. Everyone of them is a whole new challenge.

I was talking to a lady the other day and I said... she told me she had two children and I said, "Well, you are one shy of being a real parent."

And she said, "What?"

And I said, "Well, you have got to have at least three, you know, because the first one is your eager, over achiever. The second one is competitive, wants to do everything bigger and better than the first one does. And then the third one comes along and does something and the other two get blamed for it, you know, and it is just..." I said, "After that, they are all kind of some iterations of the first three."

And, by the way, if you don't have three parents I don't mean that to offend you. But it is just, you know, they are different.

But even when you have got eight, I want to tell you, they are all every one of them different.

So the first thing is that an understanding heart is a perceptive heart. It listens. It restates. It goes deeper. It seeks counsel and it doesn't jump to conclusions. So let's look at the second kind of an understanding heart.

Proverbs chapter two and verse two.

It says, "So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding."⁶

Now this is the Hebrew word תבון (taw-boon') which means intelligent insight. And so a understanding heart is also an insightful heart.

We are told in Proverbs 2:2 that we are to apply our heart to understanding. That means that you ought to pick up this book and when you are reading this book you have got a notepad and a pen over to the side and as you are reading it you are asking God, "God, show me something I don't know."

Now I am going to surprise some of you that do real well on IQ tests, but every time you read this book you will find something you didn't know, even if it is the same passage you read last week.

And if you are not doing that I want to make a suggestion. Before you read it, pray. Ask the person who wrote it to tell you something new that is between the lines you didn't get. Because it is amazing how every time I open it up, there is something there.

Sometimes I have accused God of inserting a chapter since the last time I read this book because there is something brand new and I know it wasn't there last time I read the book. It is like it keeps growing on me.

And I want to just encourage you to read with a pen and paper in your hand and ask God to give you insights and then expect him to do so.

Now it is fascinating, though, that Scripture says there is one thing that can hinder you from getting insights to the Scripture more than anything else. And this is an amazing thing. I didn't realize this. But it tells us that anger can keep us from getting insights.

In Proverbs 14:29 it says, "He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly."⁷

Now that is what we call in the studying of poetic literature of the Old Testament what you call synthetic parallelism. It means that the second half of the verse builds upon the idea that is in the first half of the verse. But very frequently in Scripture we have what is called antithetic parallelism which means the second half of the verse restates the truth of the first half of the verse in an opposite form.

⁶ Proverbs 2:2.

⁷ Proverbs 14:29.

So if we had done antithetic parallelism with this verse we could have said something that would have been equally valid. We could have said, “He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding, but he that is hasty to anger is a fool.”

Do you see? It is really putting forth the idea that when we are hasty in spirit which means we blow up quickly, we jump to conclusions quickly, we get angry quickly, when we do any of those things we miss getting insights into the Word of God. And it is the number one thing.

And, by the way, it is fascinating to me that out of 48 people mentioned in Scripture of having a problem with anger, 47 of them are men. It doesn't mean ladies don't get angry. I have seen some of you.

But it does mean that it has a... well, I just saw some elbows fly. That was funny. It is like, yeah, he is talking about you.

You know, it is fascinating to me that I think it is a problem that we have a great deal as men.

Now, another thing about it, why does anger hinder us from getting insight? Well, it destroys our insight and one of the reasons it does is when we are angry we don't hear the deeper needs other people have, we don't hear what they are trying to tell us. We don't hear their hearts because we have already jumped to the conclusion, made up our mind and it is kind of like, hey, from now on it is my way or the highway. I have already decided this. Don't bother flapping your lips at me. You are just creating a breeze.

So it keeps us from hearing the deeper needs of others. I think a good verse for us to remember is Romans 7:18 where Paul says, “That in my flesh there dwelleth no good thing.”

You know, sometimes it is hard when people share criticism with me. I don't like criticism. And sometimes I am more sensitive to it than others. And... but I need to remember that when somebody shares criticism with me, whether or not it is valid, you could call me a lying, thieving adulterer and I have broken every one of the 10 Commandments at one time or another in my lifetime. That would be a perfectly accurate description of my flesh. That is now who I am in Jesus Christ. But that is who I am in my flesh, because, you know, I have told a lie before. I have taken something that didn't belong to me before. I have lusted after someone of the opposite gender before which Jesus says is adultery. I have done all those things and all of you have, too, pretty much.

And he that says he has not sin is a liar, Scripture says.

So let me give you some keys to an insightful heart. One is... and, dads, I really want to focus on you for a minute. You daily because you are the high priest of your house. You are the leader of your house. You daily need to go to God's Word and spend a little time and if you are busy like I am, you may not have three hours in the morning to give to the

Lord. I wish we could tithe our time every day. Wouldn't it be great if we got 24 hours we could give 2.4 hours every morning to the Lord and that is a great goal, but sometimes it is just really hard to do. You know, you are lucky some days if you can squeeze in 15 minutes.

So here is one of the things I would challenge you to do. Make it your habit to get up in the morning and say, "I am going to read my Bible until God gives me an insight, till God shows me something I haven't known before, till God gives me a new truth."

Now some days that will take you two minutes to get to the new truth. Other days it will take you 35 minutes. Other days it may take you 2.4 hours, but just read until you get a new truth.

Now, let me shock you with something. Keep your ribbons here in Proverbs, but turn over to Ephesians five for just a minute because I want to point out a Scripture that I know you have heard read a few thousand times, but you may not have realized what it meant before.

In Ephesians chapter five when it is talking about the relationship between husbands and wives he says this in verse 25.

"Husbands, love your wives."⁸

Now the first thing you need to understand is God commands husbands to love their wives. He didn't actually say that for the ladies. He said that they are to reverence their husbands and that is because men thrive on respect. We want to be honored and admired and looked up to. But women thrive of being accepted and loved and listened to.

And he says, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it..."⁹

Now think about this for just a minute. Let me jump in here. He is talking about Christ and the Church, but he is saying it is a parallel for what happens between a husband and his wife.

How many of you would like to see your wife be more holy? How many of you would like to see her be free of all the worries and the things that just plague her mind and clutter up her thinking?

Well, this is what he is talking about. Now, watch the secret.

"That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."¹⁰

⁸ Ephesians 5:25.

⁹ Ephesians 5:25-26.

¹⁰ Ephesians 5:26.

Now in Greek that word there is not λογος (log'-os) which means the whole Bible and a lot of guys read that verse and say, "Oh, I see what I have got to do to help my wife. I have got to read the Bible to her."

That is not what it is saying. It is saying that you cleanse her with the washing of water by the ρημα (hray'-mah). That means that you, husband, got in God's Word, you got an insight that you hadn't had before and rather than coming and just saying, "Honey, we need to have our daily Bible reading. Let's read this chapter together," you come and say, "Honey, I just got a word from the Lord. Let me share with you what God just gave me."

And when you do that, when your wife sees you, guys, not only going to church and writing tithe checks and taking the kids apart and spending time with them and praying with them, but when she sees you coming home with a fresh word from the Lord, you have no idea how much she will reverence and respect you. You will be awesome. You will be beyond awesome. You will be awesome when you are that kind of a man.

So an insightful heart and we need to seek a prophetic word from God and then we need to help people in our family explain the lie. That is not easy.

You all pray for Liz. She was asking, you know, yesterday, why? That is a hard question. But we need to explain to our kids the why, explain to them why things are happening, why things are taking place, explain what the possible benefits of God are in that situation.

Now let's look at another meaning of the word understanding, Proverbs three verses three through four.

He says:

Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.¹¹

This is the Hebrew word שכל (seh'-kel) which means to have a heart of mercy and truth.

You see, the fascinating thing in Scripture is that any time that mercy and truth are mentioned together, it always mentions mercy first. It always mentions it first. In fact, as you will see a graph here, I think, maybe, on the next slide. And go ahead and hit it first, Donald.

So there is a line of mercy and we can see from the left side going to the right side is increasing in mercy. Then there is another line on the right side—go ahead—that says truth. And these are principles. And you have seen me give this diagram before. And you

¹¹ Proverbs 3:3-4.

fit in one of four quadrants as a parent. And, husbands, you fit in one of these four quadrants.

The first quadrant we can possibly fit in is you could be a credible messenger. I call this the Bible and apron crowd. These are people like Aquila and Priscilla who had the credibility that they understood God's Word, but they also loved people and they loved equipping them with God's Word.

They saw Apollos out one day and Apollos was preaching and Apollos had his heart in the right place, but didn't quite know what he was talking about. So the Bible says they took him aside and showed to him the more excellent way.

All right? So then the next quadrant is right there. I call it the Bible notebook crowd. These are the people their heart is in the right place. They want to learn, but they are still maybe not quite on top of God's principles and this is somebody like Apollos.

And then we have what I call the carnal crowd. They don't even have a Bible. This is the, you know, the remote control, the magazine, the newspaper crowd. All they think about is what is related to this world. They don't really spend time in God's Word. They think about themselves so they are low in love for others, but they are also low in understanding of God's Word.

And then you have the Pharisees. I call this the Bible and the proud look crowd because these are people that have learned Scripture, understood it, but he knowledgeable has puffed them up because they are low in love even though they are high in knowledge.

Now the amazing thing is the Bible says that mercy always comes before truth, so if you are on the right side of that diagram anywhere, that is a pretty good thing.

It is a whole lot better to be somewhere on the right side than just to say somewhere on the top. Because that might be good. It might be bad.

Mercy and truth is important. And the fact is there are verses I have looked at. It seems to me that God mentions mercy twice as often as he mentions righteousness and truth. That is hard for me, because I am a teacher and I think truth is it. But it is all about that.

So we need to understand this diagram and then we need to look at the heart of mercy and truth. The word for mercy here is the Hebrew word **חֶסֶד** (kheh'- sed) which means the loving kindness of God.

Now I want to ask you a question. When you listen to your kids, do you listen with an attitude of humility and loving kindness? And when you listen to one another, do you have an attitude of humility and loving kindness to one another? When you speak to them about a character issue do you approach them with the love of Christ or with the judgment of Mount Sinai.

And the fact is, I think you should consider which of two mountains you are really on, because the Bible says in Hebrews 12 there are two mountains that are significant in Scripture, but look at the differences.

Well, let's look at Mount Sinai. Hebrews 12 verses 18 through 21 says this.

For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire [he is describing Mount Sinai here], nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight...¹²

And I find this a fascinating comment, because this is talking about Moses' reaction when he saw Mount Sinai.

It says, "And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake."¹³

Boy, if Moses was scared, what would that do to us?

But look. There is another mountain, Mount Zion. It is described in verse 22 through 24.

It says:

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.¹⁴

So let me ask you by way of contrast, when you have a discussion with a spouse or you have a discussion with your children because something is not working out right, which mountain are you on? Are you on Mount Sinai where there is fear and trembling, where there is judgment and darkness and tempest, where there is thundering, where there seems to be little hope? Or do you speak to them from Mount Zion where you communicate to them that you love and accept them that way that you give them an effort to mature, to make them perfect which is what that word means to be mature, where there is a mediator, where you will pray for them, you will get on your knees when you are having a problem with them and

¹² Hebrews 12:18-21.

¹³ Hebrews 12:21.

¹⁴ Hebrews 12:22-24.

said, “Let me pray for you,” rather than just let me whip the tar out of you, ok, here there is a sacrifice, where you give up some of your own selfishness to help them with their problem?

Now, to provide a safe place, because that is what mercy and truth do together, we need two things to give our wives, our husbands, our children a safe place. One is we need mercy. So we need to have unconditional love. They need to know that we will love them regardless of what they do, what they say or what they have done that we still love them, that we will listen to them here. We will try to speak, the same language and that we will have humility.

By the way, I think one of the greatest things you dads can do for your kids and it is painful and I can tell you it is painful, but I try not to hide what is going on in my heart from my kids and I have shared with my kids some of my own, what I call instances in the hall of shame.

Do you all ever do that? Do you ever have anything hanging in your hall of shame? You need to take your kids into your hall of shame once in a while and show them the pictures on the wall and say—and maybe not in too great detail, mind you—but take them in and say, “You know, I failed here and let me tell you about it. Let me tell you what I learned from it. Let me tell you how I hope that you won’t follow me in this failure.”

I don’t want my kids to repeat my failures. I want them to improve upon my successes. That is what I want for my kids.

But take them in there. Show them that you have that humility to have transparent honesty, to be without wax. That is what the word sincere means. It means to be without wax. You know, and if you let yourself get set up on a pedestal you will do like David did where all his men thought he was a humdinger and then they go off to battle and come back and their wives were gone and their children were gone and their goods were gone and this was at a place called Ziklag and the Bible says the first thing his men wanted to do was stone him.

You know what? If you will be honest about your failures and your humanity and you will let the kids know that you are in the same boat with them and you struggle with some of the same things they struggle with, they will respect you. But if you go along and you are always on top of it and you make them think that you are always on top of it then when one day you are not on top of it, they will be the first ones to pick up the rocks.

Now let’s look at the last kind of understanding and this is the big one to close with.

In Proverbs 24 we read these verses. I used to think these verses were just about the lack of diligence in some people.

It says, “I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding.”¹⁵

Come back to that. But then listen to the rest of what it says.

And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.¹⁶

See, I always thought that whole verse was about you better work hard because if you are sitting around idle you are going to be broke. That is good, but I don’t think that is the big thing in that verse. I think there is more to it.

See, this is the heart that eliminates competing affections. This is the real key to understanding this verse. See, at first glance it looks like diligence, but if you look at Psalm 128 and verse three it says in Psalm 128:3 that the righteous man, his “wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.”¹⁷

And I could talk for three hours on what that means to have young olive plants around the table. But what I want you to think about for a minute is that God says the family is a little bit like a vineyard. The wife is the vine and it is a vineyard. It is also a little bit like an olive grove. You have got the trees that are going to make the olives. So he... so there is a reason in Scripture because God himself makes the analogy between the vineyard and the family. So maybe we need to look at these verses in Proverbs 24 a little closer. And I want you to see that there are three things that happen without an undemanding heart. Number one, there is lost productivity.

Did you notice it says that the vineyard that he looked at, he said, “I saw this vineyard about a man void of understanding. It was grown over with thorns.”

There were thorns everywhere.

Now if it is grown over with thorns, what happens to the real vine? Because thorns usually, you know, they grow in vines, too. It chokes them out. They are not productive. They can’t get the light they need to make the fruit. The grapes don’t grow and so there is lost productivity.

And let me tell you something. You can home school your kids, but if you don’t build godly character in them and if you don’t have an understanding heart toward them, the

¹⁵ Proverbs 24:30.

¹⁶ Proverbs 24:31-34.

¹⁷ Psalm 128:3.

day will come when they are not really doing anything for Christ. And I want to tell you that personally for me as a dad, I think the greatest tragedy I could experience in this life would be to watch my kids grow up and not serve Jesus Christ. If they didn't serve Jesus I would have failed and that would, I think in many ways my life would not have been worthwhile if they didn't serve Christ.

You have got lost productivity. Then there is lost proclamation. It says it was covered over with nettles. And the Hebrew word there where it talks about covering over with nettles basically says that there were so many of these tall weeds and nettles out there, you couldn't even tell that it used to be a vineyard.

Have you ever known a family that invested a lot of time in their kids, maybe educating them at home and then when you grew up you saw those kids and you couldn't tell anything different about them. There wasn't a thing different.

I knew one family that lived up here in the northern middle part of the metroplex and they grew up using the same home school curriculum we did and they went through. It seemed like they were fine people. But today if you see them, they have the same number of tattoos and the same number of body piercings, listen to the same music, always dress in black that you see so many of the kids in the world do. And it will break your heart. They have, you know, ungodly dress standards. Why? I don't know what happened in that specific family, but that is not what I want. And I want to see the harvest preserved, but that is what happens. You get a lost proclamation. In other words, they keep speaking both by word and by deed about the need in the world for Jesus Christ.

And then there is another thing. There is a lost protection. He said the walls were broken down.

How many of you parents have built some kind of walls around your kids? You do something to protect them from the internet. You do something to protect them from ungodly television programs. You do something to protect them, maybe, from the wrong kinds of friends or the wrong kind of music or the wrong kinds of influences, the wrong kinds of magazines. And he says basically if you don't have an understanding heart, the walls will all fall down and they will be exposed to everything that the world will expose them to.

And when you see the walls starting to fall down, you need to stop. Maybe it is just a little hole in the wall and you need to stop right then and say, "Now wait a minute. One of my kids just got exposed to something they shouldn't. I need to see. Do I have an understanding heart?"

Now what this really means, the word "void of understanding" in this passage actually means void of heart. It basically means they don't have a heart. Have you ever heard somebody say, "Have a heart, man"? You know, there are people that just act like they don't have one. So what happens to a person's void of heart.

Proverbs 10:13 says, “In the lips of him that hath understanding [that means heart] wisdom is found: but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding.”¹⁸

So in other words, first thing, if you are void of heart you get God’s reproofs.

Now look at the next thing.

Who is void of heart? The Bible actually gives examples of four kinds of people it says are void of heart using this same Hebrew word.

First of all in Proverbs six and verse 32. It says one who commits adultery is void of heart. In Proverbs 9:16 one who easily yields to fleshly temptations shows that he is void of heart. In Proverbs 12:11 one who follows vain people and empty pursuits shows that he is void of heart. Proverbs 17:18 one who cosigns for another.

By the way, there is a translation that actually says he that cosigns for a friend is an idiot. I love that translation. But, you know, if you ever cosign a loan, the Bible tells you not to do it and if you do it you will probably get to suffer the consequences of it. He says you are void of heart.

Now, by the way, why would God pick these four examples? They all have something in common. Let me just show you two of them and maybe you will get the idea.

So one is, of course, is adultery. How does adultery happen?

Well, it is bowing to a human pressure and a fleshly urge. It is choosing an unworthy relationship and it is failing to see the consequences. The Bible says in the adulterous [?] are the gates of Sheol and poverty and ruin come your way.

Look at cosigning. What does adultery have in common with cosigning? Well, cosigning means that you value what other people think of you, that person who wants you to cosign more than what God things of you who told you not to do it. And you are choosing as a partner someone who is unworthy because the bank has already said, “Hey, we are not going to give him a loan, you know, unless you sign for it.”

So he has already been deemed unworthy. And then it is a failure to see the consequences because the Bible says you cosign for a loan it may damage your relationship. Because I tell you what. There is an old joke says that if you loan 10 dollars to your brother-in-law and he never calls you again, was it worth it? Do you ever notice when you loan money to somebody, when you cosign a note with them, they don’t communicate with you anymore?

And then it can bring you poverty and ruin. So the root cause in all of this is competing affections. It is loving what somebody else things of you more than what God thinks of you. That is the real problem. It is not making God our first love.

¹⁸ Proverbs 10:13.

And we know what heart means. You know, you have heard the phrase heart and soul or his heart is in the right place or I did that from the bottom of my heart or my heart goes out to him. It means that the deepest, inner most feelings, the deepest motivations that you have are for the Lord.

So I just want to challenge you, especially guys, but you girls, too, that dads, you know what your family wants more than anything else? They want a dad who loves the Lord his God with his whole heart and soul and mind and strength. They want a dad who loves Jesus so much he doesn't have room to love anybody else. He has to pray for God to love his family through him. They want a dad who understands his family is his priority, his ministry, his gift from God and he treats them accordingly.

I remember a young man who I just found on the internet. We just crossed paths. He sent me a little note and I wrote back instantly. I had performed a wedding ceremony. He was a seminary student, went to school when I did. And so I wrote him back and I said, "How is your beautiful wife, Diane?"

Next email I had he said, "Well, we are divorced."

And then he tried to explain it to me. He said, "Well, she thought that I wasn't spending enough time with her. She didn't understand how important ministry was at my church."

And I wrote him back. I said, "You are an idiot. She was your ministry. She was the credentials for your ministry."

And he even told me, "Oh, my girls are fine."

Well, the last time I checked on his girls one of them had gotten pregnant out of wedlock and was living with a guy. The other was at home following the same path. They weren't ok without dad. Dad makes a difference, guys. Don't ever think you don't.

But and then, of course, I later found out the real story was not that he spent time too much time at church. He was spending too much time with another woman and that is tragic. It is amazing to me how many of the guys I went to seminary with don't have their families together now. They missed out on the most important thing in their life, the most important aspect of the ministry. It would be a whole lot better for you to lose the MDiv off your wall than to the lose the Mrs. off of your finger. Do you know what I mean?

And they have lost the most important credential.

Well, I want us to do something. Will you stand with me? Because I want to make it personal for us and I want us together, you will see it on the screen over my head. I just

want us to read 1 Corinthians 13 together. The Bible says, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”¹⁹

So I thought in the interest of that we should all read the same text from the same version here because it will just make it easier if we do. But would you just read this out loud with me as we close? And this will be our conclusion this morning. We will have the prayer after this.

1 Corinthians 13 and think about what you are reading as you say.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.²⁰

Let us go to the Lord in a word of prayer and I pray that God will bless you and your family regardless of how your family looks, whether it is a single mom raising kids or one where there is the dad at home, regardless of whether dad is doing his job or not. I pray that God will help each one here to develop.

¹⁹ Amos 3:3.

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 13:1-13.