

BECAUSE YOU KNOW

When I was a kid, all I ever really wanted to be when I grew up was a dad.

This isn't something I've ever really shared a ton, but it felt appropriate since it's Father's Day.

At some point I wanted to be an NFL star, and at other points I dreamed of being a fireman or an engineer. From pretty early on in high school I'd begun hearing and feeling the tug into a life of ministry as I feel deeper in love with Jesus and gained a passion for learning and explaining God's Word.

But even then, the one deep-pitted desire that has never left me was the desire to be a dad.

Not just a father - a Dad. The kind that is around. That tells bad jokes and embarrasses their kids with their dance moves. The kind of man that is invested in the task of raising mature people - whether they are related by blood or not.

Because the world NEEDS dads.

Our summer intern, Lydia, is here with us today fresh off a mission trip to South Africa. I actually took this same mission trip the summer after my freshman year as well, and it was really transformative.

In particular, I remember hanging out with the orphans in a place called the Valley of a Thousand Hills, and being completely heartbroken by the plague of fatherlessness in the community. The thing that stuck out to me the most was realizing that while it presented its own unique challenges there - fatherlessness was just as much an issue back at home in West Virginia and all over the world.

I remember praying and saying, "LORD, how in the world can the world keep going like this? How long until You intervene and do something about it? LORD, let ME do something about it, what can I do?"

And I heard God answer me pretty quickly on that one, He said, "You really want to do something about this?" I said, "Yes, just tell me what to do."

He said, "Be a GOOD man."

Be a GOOD man.

Because the world isn't in need of more great men with impressive resumes or achievements. The world is in need of people who are so steeped in God's presence that they remember what GOOD is and begin to live it themselves.

This morning, I want to share a passage of scripture from the letter of 1 John. In this letter, the disciple John, who has now become an elder in the church and later in years, writes to leaders in house churches - we believe likely in Ephesus - the same churches Paul was talking about when he wrote his letters to Timothy - but now this is several years later.

John is writing to encourage his brothers and sisters in the faith after a group of people have left the church, specifically because they've given up on the belief that Jesus was actually the Messiah and the Son of God.

READING

1 John 2:¹² I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

¹³ I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

¹⁴ I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father.

I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Let's pray this morning.

I. GODLY WISDOM COMES FROM KNOWING GOD (relevant verses from passage).

I want to talk this morning about wisdom.

In general, wisdom just has to do with knowledge that comes from experience. But there's different kinds of wisdom that come with different kinds of experience.

Practical Wisdom - my dad's dad always taught him that pretty much anything could be fixed by either duct tape or WD-40. If it's moving and shouldn't be - Duct Tape. If should be moving and isn't - WD-40. That's practical...debatable, but practical.

Moral Wisdom - This is the kind of wisdom that governs how we view the world around us and how we ought to live in it.

My dad's coach in high school played a role for him that his actual father often failed at - namely seeing his potential and worth. That didn't mean he was nice about it. In fact, he was usually pretty rough. But he taught my dad much of what he still holds as life-shaping wisdom.

It was from Coach Gains that my dad learned his famous speech that he still uses today when coaching little league football. There's only 2 things you need to succeed - want to and know how. He always said, "I can give you the know how - you gotta bring the want to."

Coach Gains that my dad also learned a much more valuable lesson that really saved him from a lot of trouble. My dad's home life was less than stellar, to put it mildly, and my dad remembers Coach Gains once taking him aside and telling him:

"Listen, I don't know what you've been through and what kind of stuff you've got going on at home...frankly, I don't care. The fact is this - YOU are the only person who can take responsibility for YOUR decisions."

You can go around seeing yourself as a victim of your circumstances, or you can be the one to take initiative and responsibility. That's not just practical wisdom, that's a moral worldview.

But there's another kind of wisdom still, and that's GODLY WISDOM.

Godly Wisdom isn't just about practical tips or a certain kind of worldview - although it has implications for those.

Godly Wisdom is about the way we see God and know God, which in turn affects every other aspect of our lives.

Now, this bit will seem self-explanatory and maybe a little tongue-in-cheek, but it's important:

GODLY WISDOM ONLY COMES FROM KNOWING GOD

As John the disciple, now John the Elder, writes to his fellow believers, he includes in this passage a great line, which he even repeats. He says,

I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

He addresses the young men as well, but to the fathers in the church he gives a reminder that they play a special role in their community. Because they KNOW the God who is from the beginning, the same who revealed Himself through the Law and Prophets and who has now revealed Himself most fully in the person of Jesus Christ.

There is a wisdom that they bear that uniquely comes from cumulative lived experience in relationship to this God.

This isn't the kind of wisdom my dad learned from his own dad or even from Coach Gains. And so he wasn't able to pass it on to me.

Fortunately, I had some other great mentors and adults in my life that could show me that kind of wisdom.

This is the kind of wisdom that scripture says begins with the humble and reverent Fear of the LORD...and yet it ends with peace and gratitude in the wondrous reality of God's faithful loving-kindness towards us.

This is my Father-in-Law who so often reminds us and any other couples with kids - Remember that you're just 2 sinners who got married and birthed more sinners.

That's not supposed to be disparaging. It's freeing. When we remember how prone we all are to sin, it reminds us to stop taking ourselves so seriously and start taking God more seriously.

That's a wise saying that would be useful to reflect upon more...but I'm actually more interested in HOW my father-in-law came about that bit of wisdom. So I asked him.

He couldn't quite pinpoint exactly when he first articulated it that way, but he was pretty sure no one had ever said it to him before. Instead, it was just something that bubbled to the surface for him through years of reading scriptures, living life with God, counseling other couples and experiencing the reality of sin and repentance in his own marriage and parenting life.

GODLY WISDOM COMES FROM KNOWING GOD, and living life with Him. That's the only way to attain it.

Another way of saying this is that the only way to be a GOOD man or woman is to Know the one who made ALL GOOD THINGS.

II. GODLY WISDOM PRODUCES LOVE AND HOLINESS (relevant verses from passage).

John writes all this specifically to warn his fellow believers about 2 great temptations:

1. Disunity and hatred that can arise in God's family, and
2. An over-fondness for the ways of the world.

But in this poetic interlude, John reminds them that wisdom in those areas really all comes down to knowing God - the perfection of light and love.

John uses the language of light and darkness as a metaphor for walking in the wisdom and understanding of Christ. And in the verse right before the passage we just read, in verse 9, John says that people who CLAIM to be in the light but carry around hatred and bitterness for one another are only fooling themselves.

Likewise, afterward, in verse 15-17, John says that anyone who claims to love God but goes on harboring affection for things of the world that stand in direct opposition to God - things like lust and pride, or like the greed we talked about last week.

GODLY WISDOM PRODUCES IN US TRUE LOVE AND HOLINESS.

It's the kind of wisdom and experience of God that transforms us and equips us to love one another and reject love for the ways of the world.

That concept of living “in the world but not of it” can be confusing. It takes wisdom to discern.

My father-in-law again told me the story of a pastor he’d worked with during his seminary days whose son was starting to raise some eyebrows in the church. Hitting his teenage years, Pastor Harry’s son Andrew had started growing his hair out and dressing a little more rebelliously - he even got an earring.

Lydia’s parents didn’t have kids themselves at the time, but Steve - my father-in-law - remembers Pastor Harry’s response to the whole thing. He just didn’t really care about the grumblings of other people, because he knew his son’s heart. He told Steve that what he most cared about was his son’s heart - the inside stuff - because all that outside stuff could change.

He said, “Keep the main thing the main thing.” And in this situation that meant affirming to Andrew that Jesus was Lord and that He was loved and valued as a child of God, whether or not Andrew was wearing earrings.

That gave Steve a model to follow in his own family and ministry life. It’s the kind of wisdom that starts from a place of humility and relationship with God and flows out into a genuine love for others in our lives and a genuine concern to avoid patterns of sin.

The LOVE Pastor Harry had for God was reflected in his love for his son that refused to drive a wedge in their relationship over trivial things. And Pastor Harry did REJECT the ways of the world, just not the ones the church culture emphasized at the time - he didn’t care about earrings or ripped jeans, he cared about the dangers of a prideful, self-righteous or hypocritical heart.

He displayed the kind of wisdom written about in James chapter 3:

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

This verse also shows us that wisdom is more than just words. You can speak all the snappy sayings in the world, but if they don’t match up to your life, they’re meaningless.

When I asked my mother-in-law about wisdom her dad shared with her, she couldn’t even think of any one saying she’d learned from him over the years, but instead she was immediately drawn to the fact that he faithfully brought them to church every Sunday, had dinner with them

every night with prayer and family time. He was diligent in paying bills and taking care of the household. He was constant. He never let them down.

She said it was always easy for her to believe in God because she had a constant and steady dad. And although she couldn't point to a time it was explicitly mentioned, she KNEW that his character had been shaped by a lifetime of knowing and walking with God.

CONCLUSION

Whether you're a dad, a mom, or even just an individual with influence in someone else's life - meaning all of you - there is a lesson to be learned here about wisdom.

You only cultivate Godly wisdom by Knowing God.

And you only share Godly wisdom to the extent that you share God through words and actions.

If you want to make a difference in the world, be a GOOD man, and be a GOOD woman.

If you want to know what GOOD is. You must know God.

If you want GOOD to be known to the world, you must make God known.

As I wrap up this morning, I want to share something a little more personal with you. I haven't been at this fatherhood thing for all that long - nor have I been at this pastor thing for all that long. As I was sharing with our Life Group on Wednesday, there are times when I feel completely unqualified for everything I'm doing in my life because I just don't feel all that wise.

But while I lack the same length of life experience as others, I DO have experience of a life lived passionately following Jesus - at least 19 years worth.

As we were talking on Wednesday night I shared with them that Lydia and I had actually set up email accounts for both our kids when they were born so that over the years we could share pictures and stories with them. And someday - assuming the technology isn't completely outdated by that time - we'll be able to give that over to them.

Being the dramatic guy I am, on the days they were born I tried to share with my kids the bits of wisdom I thought I'd absolutely want them to know should anything unfortunate happen to me while they're still young.

I'd like to share some of that with you this morning. This is the little bit of fatherly advice I feel I can offer at all, and I hope it's beneficial to you all as well.

FIRST, KNOW THIS: Love is a gift and a choice.

The world we live in often tells us that love is a really great feeling you get when you find someone you like and want to spend all your time with. This is only half-true.

We don't always like others, but love is the choice we make to be with them, fight for them, and want their best no matter what. Your mom and I love each other because we chose each other, and we love you because we choose you!

TO DEACON: Real men own their mistakes. The last thing I want to share with you is about manhood. None of us are perfect. We make mistakes, and it can often be tempting to hide them, pretend they didn't happen, or try to make excuses. The real measure of a man is not in how few mistakes you can make but in how you respond when you fail.

Always remember that you are loved, and there is nothing you could ever do to make us love you less. Knowing this makes it easier to say the words that are so hard for so many of us to say - "I'm sorry."

I know that I'll probably have to tell you I'm sorry quite a bit while you're growing up (this parenthood thing doesn't come with instructions!), but I hope that I can teach you a lot of things along the way as well.

TO ANNABELLE: Real women find strength in humility. I *think*. I mean, I'm not a woman myself, so I'm just making observations. BUT I *know* the strength and grace that your mother exudes is rooted in humility.

A note on that word: it doesn't mean thinking little of yourself... it just means thinking of yourself less. That kind of selflessness can give you the clarity to see yourself as God sees you, in all your perfect imperfections. And that gives you the ability to love yourself as God loves you, which is unconditionally.

You are beautifully and wonderfully made, and you are yet flawed by wounds, choices, and the unfortunate failures that both your mother and I will make. Claim it all without hesitation, knowing that God claims you as part of His wonderful family (and so do we).

Your dad is hopelessly in love with you. I'm pretty sure your mama is too, though I'll let her tell you herself. Deacon also thinks your pretty great. He even asked to hold you the first time he saw you in the hospital (even though he's only 21 months old). Welcome to this wacky family!

FINALLY, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY: Jesus is a really cool dude. The God of the Universe loved us so much that He came here like one of us in the flesh as a man named Jesus of Nazareth. God has always loved us and chosen us, but we haven't always chosen Him. So, in Jesus, God showed us that He wanted to be near to us. People didn't understand why God would want to do that and rejected Jesus, thinking that they needed to trust in the sin and brokenness of the world. But Jesus defeated death and has given us the chance for a life of true love and hope! I hope you can get to know Jesus someday too.

And with that. Let's pray.