

How Life works Build Strong Families Prov 5:15-23

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- Each child plays two sports and either takes music or dance lessons.
- Each man must take care of his four children, keep his assigned hut perfectly clean, correct all the homework, complete all the science projects, settle all the arguments, do all the cooking and all the laundry, and tuck the kids into bed every night. There's no access to babysitters or fast food.
- They have only one television set between them and there is no remote.
- The men must shave their legs and wear makeup every day, which they have to apply themselves either while driving the van or while making the four kids lunches.
- They have to attend weekly church meetings, clean up after their sick children at 3:00 a.m., make a model marae with toothpicks, and get all 4 kids to eat a brussel sprouts.
- The kids vote the men off the island based on their performance. And the winner gets to go back to his old job!

Today we're continuing our series in the book of Proverbs called "How Life Works." and we're going to look at what it takes to **build strong families**, not just to survive as a parent, but to thrive as a parent. We have been looking at the book of proverbs and it is such a practical book, and extremely straight talking. Admittedly it was written a few years ago so we do need to bring it into today's context, but wisdom is wisdom, it tends to last through the years.

There's a lot of discussion these days on what exactly is a family. Do a husband and a wife without children constitute a family? I think they do. Or how about a single parent with kids? Of course! What about a couple who aren't married, but just living together, what happens when they have kids? And then more recently gay couples living together or now married with or without children? The whole definition of family is up for grabs?

I saw a programme on TV a while back in which they investigated a few homosexual couples who've decided to have kids together. And they asked the children all kinds of questions about what it's like growing up with gay parents. And even though many of us might have trouble getting their mind around that, we need to remember that God loves people who choose those kinds of relationships. He really does. They matter to God. And Jesus died for them too.

When you get into a subject like building strong families the literature out there is enormous. You can quickly get buried under an avalanche of information, mountains of studies that have been done and countless books that have been written on the subject. When looking for help on families, where do you start to gain some wisdom?

Proverbs, one of the wisdom books of the bible, God's wisdom. Proverbs says quite a bit about family, parenting, marriage and relationships in general. And if you shrink-wrap everything that the author says in this book about the family, you come down to two building blocks that are necessary to build a strong family. So at the risk of oversimplifying the subject I'd like to give you those two today. The first is found in Proverbs 5.

Building blocks for strong families

In Proverbs 5:15-19, there is a section that in some bibles is headed up "Warning Against Adultery." In this passage Solomon writes poetically about the importance of keeping love alive in your marriage. Proverbs 5:15-19 says,

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draw water from your own spring-fed well"?

It's true. Otherwise, you may one day come home
and find your barrel empty and your well polluted.

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not to be passed around among strangers.

Bless your fresh-flowing fountain!

Enjoy the wife you married as a young man!

Lovely as an angel, beautiful as a rose—

don't ever quit taking delight in her body.

Never take her love for granted!

A marriage filled with love, Solomon says, is like a refreshing spring of water. And like water in a well, that love is only meant to be shared with each other. This is one case where God commands us to be selfish, very selfish. So he says in verse 20,

*Why would you trade enduring intimacies for cheap thrills with an
immoral woman? For flirtation with a promiscuous stranger?*

The first building block for a strong family is a strong marriage. I firmly believe that the best thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother. And the best a mother can do for her children is to love their father. A strong marriage offers children tremendous security. That's why in our baby dedication services we asked

couples to recommit themselves, to grow together, to strengthen their relationship, so that their children will have the love and security they need to mature into healthy adults.

I think if the writer of Proverbs read all the books today on the family, watched all the docs on relationships, listened to all the rhetoric on gay relationships, watched all the sleazy stuff on spouse swapping and steamy affairs on TV, when all the banter died down he would say, "***rejoice in the wife/husband of your youth.***" Build a solid marriage. When you get married stay together, work on your relationship together, make compromises together, get help when you need it, fast and pray and try and try and try again. Make the most of your marriage because strong families flow out of strong, solid "till death do us part" marriage relationships.

AS I have said many times this series Proverbs doesn't beat around the bush, from verse 20?

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The shadow of your sin will overtake you;

you'll find yourself stumbling all over yourself in the dark.

Death is the reward of an undisciplined life;

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I came across a letter to some American magazine or newspaper. It was written by a man who referred to himself as "Recovering in Washington, D.C." and written in response to some comment made about affairs. This is what he wrote.

"Three years ago, my wife had an affair with a co-worker. It not only ended our marriage, it ruined the dream of sharing our lives together. The fallout from this experience shook me to the core. Please tell your readers who may be considering an extramarital affair to understand the reality of their actions. Because of a few passionate hours, your family will never be the same. You will bring dishonour and pain to your spouse, your children, your parents and yourself. Your children will suffer from the fighting, yelling and devastation that follow the discovery of an affair. The money you worked so hard to save for your children's education will be lost to legal fees and the cost of supporting two households. In short, you will seriously traumatize those you profess to love the most, and you will do it for fleeting, selfish reasons. If your marriage isn't working, please, for the sake of all concerned, get help from trained counsellors. If the marriage can't be saved, do your best to end it in a manner that shows respect and dignity. To do otherwise is to suffer wounds that never heal."

That letter's another way of saying what the writer of proverbs says

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Nothing has changed in 3,000 years. Adultery is a wicked thing (and I mean that in the traditional meaning of the word not the contemporary). Don't fall for the glamorization of Hollywood on this one. Most of us know how wicked it is from experience, from friends, family, or your own experience. If your marriage is struggling, get help. Do it for yourself. Do it for your spouse. Do it for your kids. The cost of a good counsellor is a whole lot less than the cost of a broken marriage. I'm especially talking to us blokes in the getting help area, because often it's the woman who wants help, but the bloke who resists it.

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We need to fight for our marriages together. It is very easy for us to give our lives away to everyone else, kids, friends, work, the church, and leave the crumbs for ourselves and our life partners. I am really concerned about the expectation on employees to work longer and longer hours, plus everything else that is expected on parents. I find myself thinking when talking to people about ministry opportunities in the church and hearing what pressure they are under; with all they have on how can I expect them to serve in the church as well. So I back off, that doesn't help us grow a church, doesn't help us meet the needs of people in our church family, but recruiting over worked people into ministry roles is not the recipe for a strong marriage. We all need to be evaluating and talking a lot about what changes we need to make and what those changes will look like. There may be a need for making some mid-course corrections.

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you don't, you end up building a prison of bitterness, later to discover there's only one inmate...you, and if you really make a mess of it, your kids as well.

But when your children see the forgiveness you can have for your ex, who is their mum or their dad, it will make a powerful, indelible impression on them. And it will teach them more about the forgiveness of God than a pile of sermons from me or whoever ever could.

Now before we move on to the second building block of building strong families let me remind you that at the core of our faith is a God who's full of grace and mercy and offers second chances to "no hopers" like you and like me. A God who says to those who have committed adultery or who have gone through the pain of a divorce or who haven't been paying attention to their marriage...

"Listen. I know you've messed up. I know you crossed over the line and made some big mistakes. But there's grace and forgiveness for you at the cross. Accept what my Son did on the cross for you and we can start fresh today."

Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn the world, but to save it. God wants to help us move past the past. I encourage you to take him up on his offer!

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1. First, it means **love your children**. I like the way Solomon's father, King David, put it in Psalm 127:3,

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Children are gifts, expensive little gifts, but gifts to us, treasures from God and should be treated that way. They should be prized and cherished. They were given to make us glad.

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So we need to tell them that. Our kid's need to hear thousands of times that we love them, that we're crazy about them. They need to be touched and hugged and wrestled

with, to be talked to and listened to. They need to have our time. Quality time... and the only way you are ever going to get to quality time, is through quantity time. You will have heard this all before but, children spell love T-I-M-E! And in our fast paced culture spending time with our kids might just be our greatest challenge.

Statistics can never be totally relied on as 74.3 of statistics are made up on the spot, and to back that up I just made up that statistic. However one study I did hear about surveyed 1,000 businessmen in the states on how much time they spend with their children. And the survey said that the average father spent 6 minutes a week with his kids outside of eating with them. Six minutes a week isn't going to cut it! Another study is more positive and says things are improving. That is good to see.

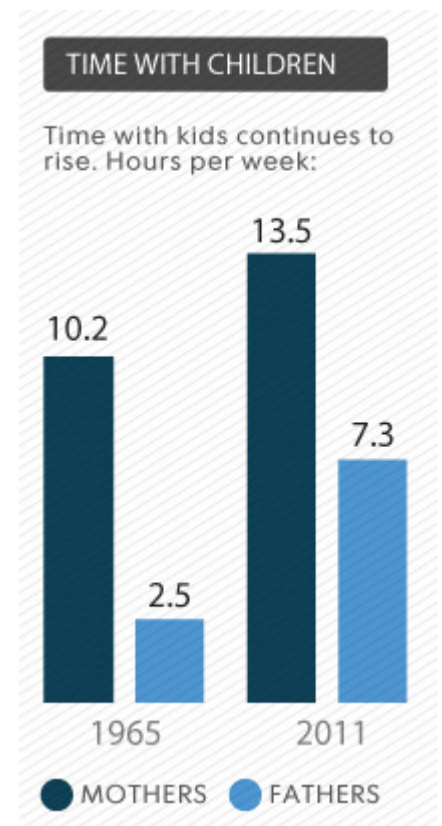
A child development expert concluded that well-adjusted adults have had at least one parent who loved them irrationally. Every human being, just to be normal, has to be loved irrationally. It's what all of us need. To build a strong family we need to pour massive amounts of love and time and energy into our children.

2. But kids need more than love. And all parents know that there is a dark side to their little angels. And because of that, **children need limits**. Parenting skill means setting boundaries for your children.

Proverbs 22:15, ¹⁵ *A youngster's heart is filled with foolishness, but physical discipline will drive it far away.*

The Bible knows nothing of the current theory that says "kids are born morally neutral", neither good nor bad. According to God, children are born with a magnetic pull towards mischief. And while researchers still debate this parents know that God is right. The Bible calls it sin and it's found in every one of us from birth. We don't become sinners the first time we say "no" to our parents, we say to "no" to our parents because we are sinners. Not only is that what the Bible teaches when it talks about human depravity, but that's what experience teaches us everyday. You don't have to teach kids how to be bad, they know how to be bad. You have to teach them how to be good. And you spend the best years of your life as a parent doing that.

One of the best things that we can teach our children is that they aren't the centre of the universe. The world doesn't revolve around them. As much as they might think it does, or at least hope it does. They don't get everything they want. That's the quickest way to ruin a child.



Here is what some criminal psychologist wrote. I'm sure it was hotly debated at the time and whether it is all truth I am not going to comment on, but I think it does say something.

"Every baby starts life as a little savage, completely selfish and self-centred. He wants what he wants when he wants it: his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toy. Deny these and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness that would be murderous were he not so helpless. This means that all children, not just certain children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centred world of infancy, given free reign to his impulsive actions, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer."

Sounds scary, doesn't it? Kids need boundaries. They need limits. Whether we choose to enforce them with time outs or other creative forms of discipline, they need to know that there are consequences for their actions. Kids need love and kids need limits. And the challenge of parenting is balancing love and discipline. It's what keeps a parent praying and asking for God's wisdom and help.

3. Love your kids. Set boundaries for your kids. And third, **understand your children.**

Proverbs 22:6, ⁶ *Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.*

Over the years there's been a lot of discussion about the meaning of this proverb. Some have taken it as a magic formula, promise that good parenting will pay off every time. That kids raised with lots of love and proper amounts discipline will never go off track. That is not right. There are no guarantees as long as children have a mind and a heart of their own. There is no airtight, can't miss, magic formula to raising kids.

Instead, I think this passage has two layers of meaning. First, as with most proverbs it is a general truth, not a guarantee, and this proverb is a general truth about child rearing. Most of the patterns that are set in a child's life early on will eventually take root and be owned by them later in life, *when they are old they will not leave it.* Things like right and wrong, truth telling, responsibility, respect, kindness will eventually become their own over time. It may take a season of rebellion to get there, but in most cases they'll return to it.

But there's a second layer of meaning here. The verse can also be translated, *Direct a child according to his way (the right way for this specific child), and when he is old he will not leave it.* Translated that way the verse means pay attention to your kids. Learn about them. They're all different. You can't parent each one exactly the same. A child must be trained according to *his* way or *her* way, not *our* way. We need to learn the way each one of our kids is wired, some are outgoing, some are shy,

some are verbal, some are quiet, some are fearful, some are risk takers, some are athletic, some are arty, some are musical. Find out what's his way or her way, and we need to honour that when we parent them.

Wise parents take time to understand their children, to observe their children, to help their children understand who they are and to encourage their children to pursue the things that they're good at. Children want that guidance from us. They need it.

Conclusion

Building strong families is the most challenging and rewarding job in the world. It takes a strong marriage, lots of love, careful discipline, wise insight into each child. And to do it right we desperately need God's help. We need God's wisdom, God's patience, God's love, and so on we need God.

I want to conclude today's service with a song for you to dwell on... enjoy

I need thee every hour <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3wSbLa2uGg>

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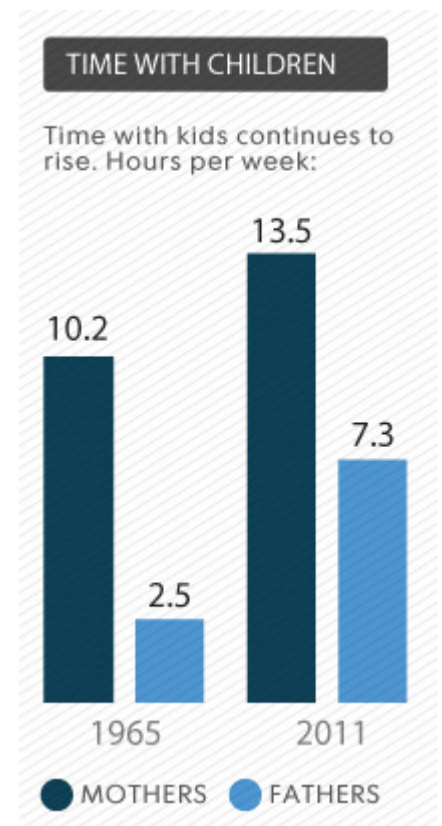
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2. But kids need more than love. And all parents know that there is a dark side to their little angels. And because of that, **children need limits**. Parenting skill means setting boundaries for your children.

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The Bible knows nothing of the current theory that says "kids are born morally neutral", neither good nor bad. According to God, children are born with a magnetic pull towards mischief. And while researchers still debate this parents know that God is right. The Bible calls it sin and it's found in every one of us from birth. We don't become sinners the first time we say "no" to our parents, we say to "no" to our parents because we are sinners. Not only is that what the Bible teaches when it talks about human depravity, but that's what experience teaches us everyday. You don't have to teach kids how to be bad, they know how to be bad. You have to teach them how to be good. And you spend the best years of your life as a parent doing that.

One of the best things that we can teach our children is that they aren't the centre of the universe. The world doesn't revolve around them. As much as they might think it does, or at least hope it does. They don't get everything they want. That's the quickest way to ruin a child.



Here is what some criminal psychologist wrote. I'm sure it was hotly debated at the time and whether it is all truth I am not going to comment on, but I think it does say something.

"Every baby starts life as a little savage, completely selfish and self-centred. He wants what he wants when he wants it: his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toy. Deny these and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness that would be murderous were he not so helpless. This means that all children, not just certain children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centred world of infancy, given free reign to his impulsive actions, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer."

Sounds scary, doesn't it? Kids need boundaries. They need limits. Whether we choose to enforce them with time outs or other creative forms of discipline, they need to know that there are consequences for their actions. Kids need love and kids need limits. And the challenge of parenting is balancing love and discipline. It's what keeps a parent praying and asking for God's wisdom and help.

3. Love your kids. Set boundaries for your kids. And third, **understand your children.**

Proverbs 22:6, ⁶ *Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.*

Over the years there's been a lot of discussion about the meaning of this proverb. Some have taken it as a magic formula, promise that good parenting will pay off every time. That kids raised with lots of love and proper amounts discipline will never go off track. That is not right. There are no guarantees as long as children have a mind and a heart of their own. There is no airtight, can't miss, magic formula to raising kids.

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Conclusion

Building strong families is the most challenging and rewarding job in the world. It takes a strong marriage, lots of love, careful discipline, wise insight into each child. And to do it right we desperately need God's help. We need God's wisdom, God's patience, God's love, and so on we need God.

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There's a lot of discussion these days on what exactly is a family. Do a husband and a wife without children constitute a family? I think they do. Or how about a single parent with kids? Of course! What about a couple who aren't married, but just living together, what happens when they have kids? And then more recently gay couples living together or now married with or without children? The whole definition of family is up for grabs?

I saw a programme on TV a while back in which they investigated a few homosexual couples who've decided to have kids together. And they asked the children all kinds of questions about what it's like growing up with gay parents. And even though many of us might have trouble getting their mind around that, we need to remember that God loves people who choose those kinds of relationships. He really does. They matter to God. And Jesus died for them too.

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Proverbs, one of the wisdom books of the bible, God's wisdom. Proverbs says quite a bit about family, parenting, marriage and relationships in general. And if you shrink-wrap everything that the author says in this book about the family, you come down to two building blocks that are necessary to build a strong family. So at the risk of oversimplifying the subject I'd like to give you those two today. The first is found in Proverbs 5.

Building blocks for strong families

In Proverbs 5:15-19, there is a section that in some bibles is headed up "Warning Against Adultery." In this passage Solomon writes poetically about the importance of keeping love alive in your marriage. Proverbs 5:15-19 says,

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draw water from your own spring-fed well"?

It's true. Otherwise, you may one day come home
and find your barrel empty and your well polluted.

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not to be passed around among strangers.

Bless your fresh-flowing fountain!

Enjoy the wife you married as a young man!

Lovely as an angel, beautiful as a rose—

don't ever quit taking delight in her body.

Never take her love for granted!

A marriage filled with love, Solomon says, is like a refreshing spring of water. And like water in a well, that love is only meant to be shared with each other. This is one case where God commands us to be selfish, very selfish. So he says in verse 20,

*Why would you trade enduring intimacies for cheap thrills with an
immoral woman? For flirtation with a promiscuous stranger?*

The first building block for a strong family is a strong marriage. I firmly believe that the best thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother. And the best a mother can do for her children is to love their father. A strong marriage offers children tremendous security. That's why in our baby dedication services we asked

couples to recommit themselves, to grow together, to strengthen their relationship, so that their children will have the love and security they need to mature into healthy adults.

I think if the writer of Proverbs read all the books today on the family, watched all the docs on relationships, listened to all the rhetoric on gay relationships, watched all the sleazy stuff on spouse swapping and steamy affairs on TV, when all the banter died down he would say, "***rejoice in the wife/husband of your youth.***" Build a solid marriage. When you get married stay together, work on your relationship together, make compromises together, get help when you need it, fast and pray and try and try and try again. Make the most of your marriage because strong families flow out of strong, solid "till death do us part" marriage relationships.

AS I have said many times this series Proverbs doesn't beat around the bush, from verse 20?

Why would you trade enduring intimacies for cheap thrills with an immoral woman? For flirtation with a promiscuous stranger?

²¹⁻²³ Mark well that God doesn't miss a move you make; he's aware of every step you take.

The shadow of your sin will overtake you;

you'll find yourself stumbling all over yourself in the dark.

Death is the reward of an undisciplined life;

your foolish decisions trap you in a dead end.

I came across a letter to some American magazine or newspaper. It was written by a man who referred to himself as "Recovering in Washington, D.C." and written in response to some comment made about affairs. This is what he wrote.

"Three years ago, my wife had an affair with a co-worker. It not only ended our marriage, it ruined the dream of sharing our lives together. The fallout from this experience shook me to the core. Please tell your readers who may be considering an extramarital affair to understand the reality of their actions. Because of a few passionate hours, your family will never be the same. You will bring dishonour and pain to your spouse, your children, your parents and yourself. Your children will suffer from the fighting, yelling and devastation that follow the discovery of an affair. The money you worked so hard to save for your children's education will be lost to legal fees and the cost of supporting two households. In short, you will seriously traumatize those you profess to love the most, and you will do it for fleeting, selfish reasons. If your marriage isn't working, please, for the sake of all concerned, get help from trained counsellors. If the marriage can't be saved, do your best to end it in a manner that shows respect and dignity. To do otherwise is to suffer wounds that never heal."

That letter's another way of saying what the writer of proverbs says

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Nothing has changed in 3,000 years. Adultery is a wicked thing (and I mean that in the traditional meaning of the word not the contemporary). Don't fall for the glamorization of Hollywood on this one. Most of us know how wicked it is from experience, from friends, family, or your own experience. If your marriage is struggling, get help. Do it for yourself. Do it for your spouse. Do it for your kids. The cost of a good counsellor is a whole lot less than the cost of a broken marriage. I'm especially talking to us blokes in the getting help area, because often it's the woman who wants help, but the bloke who resists it.

Building a strong affair proof marriage doesn't just happen, it takes energy, it takes commitment. Gay and I, like any couple, have had our ups and downs and every now and then have had to put in a bit of extra time and effort upping our commitment to our marriage. That's important when you have the busyness of life with kids. But we are discovering that it is equally important when your kids leave home. It's really important to make sure you like each other if you are going to sit with each other at a dinner table without the distraction of your kids to pass the time.

We need to fight for our marriages together. It is very easy for us to give our lives away to everyone else, kids, friends, work, the church, and leave the crumbs for ourselves and our life partners. I am really concerned about the expectation on employees to work longer and longer hours, plus everything else that is expected on parents. I find myself thinking when talking to people about ministry opportunities in the church and hearing what pressure they are under; with all they have on how can I expect them to serve in the church as well. So I back off, that doesn't help us grow a church, doesn't help us meet the needs of people in our church family, but recruiting over worked people into ministry roles is not the recipe for a strong marriage. We all need to be evaluating and talking a lot about what changes we need to make and what those changes will look like. There may be a need for making some mid-course corrections.

Now if you're a **single parent** today, raising your children without their father or without their mother due to a divorce, please don't despair. You can still do a phenomenal job raising your children, with God's help and the help of family and friends. However can I just say, loving the father of your children, or the mother of your children, who is now your ex, first of all means that you extend forgiveness to them for the hurts of the past. Now some of you will be saying, "yeah right, you don't know my ex". You're right I don't, but hear me out. Forgiveness is choosing to release them from you needing to hurt them back. Forgiveness doesn't mean you forget the hurts they've caused you, or continue to cause you, or don't feel the hurts anymore, or that you excuse the wrong they've done. Forgiveness means that you give up the right to punish them back. Why is this forgiveness important, because if

you don't, you end up building a prison of bitterness, later to discover there's only one inmate...you, and if you really make a mess of it, your kids as well.

But when your children see the forgiveness you can have for your ex, who is their mum or their dad, it will make a powerful, indelible impression on them. And it will teach them more about the forgiveness of God than a pile of sermons from me or whoever ever could.

Now before we move on to the second building block of building strong families let me remind you that at the core of our faith is a God who's full of grace and mercy and offers second chances to “no hopers” like you and like me. A God who says to those who have committed adultery or who have gone through the pain of a divorce or who haven't been paying attention to their marriage...

"Listen. I know you've messed up. I know you crossed over the line and made some big mistakes. But there's grace and forgiveness for you at the cross. Accept what my Son did on the cross for you and we can start fresh today."

Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn the world, but to save it. God wants to help us move past the past. I encourage you to take him up on his offer!

The first building block for a strong family is a strong marriage. The second building block is **good parenting skills**.

In the book of Proverbs, parenting your children well or skilfully means three things both for two parent families as well as for single parent families.

1. First, it means **love your children**. I like the way Solomon's father, King David, put it in Psalm 127:3,

Children are a gift from the LORD; they are a reward from him.

Children are gifts, expensive little gifts, but gifts to us, treasures from God and should be treated that way. They should be prized and cherished. They were given to make us glad.

Proverbs 23:25 says, ²⁵ *So give your father and mother joy! May she who gave you birth be happy.*

There's nothing like the joy of a baby. The excitement and raw emotion of being in the delivery room when your kids are being born, being supportive, being yelled at. And there's nothing in the world that can compare with taking your new-born, fresh from God, still looking a bit prunish and holding it in your arms. What a gift! What a blessing! What a responsibility! What Joy! Children make their parents glad.

So we need to tell them that. Our kid's need to hear thousands of times that we love them, that we're crazy about them. They need to be touched and hugged and wrestled

with, to be talked to and listened to. They need to have our time. Quality time... and the only way you are ever going to get to quality time, is through quantity time. You will have heard this all before but, children spell love T-I-M-E! And in our fast paced culture spending time with our kids might just be our greatest challenge.

Statistics can never be totally relied on as 74.3 of statistics are made up on the spot, and to back that up I just made up that statistic. However one study I did hear about surveyed 1,000 businessmen in the states on how much time they spend with their children. And the survey said that the average father spent 6 minutes a week with his kids outside of eating with them. Six minutes a week isn't going to cut it! Another study is more positive and says things are improving. That is good to see.

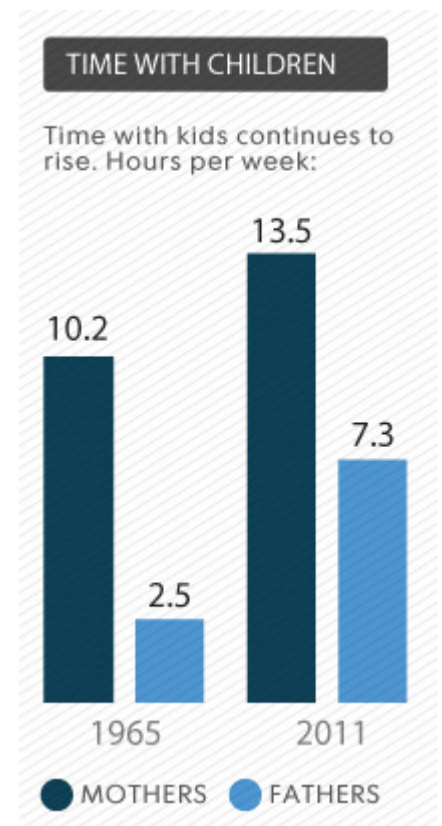
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Nothing has changed in 3,000 years. Adultery is a wicked thing (and I mean that in the traditional meaning of the word not the contemporary). Don't fall for the glamorization of Hollywood on this one. Most of us know how wicked it is from experience, from friends, family, or your own experience. If your marriage is struggling, get help. Do it for yourself. Do it for your spouse. Do it for your kids. The cost of a good counsellor is a whole lot less than the cost of a broken marriage. I'm especially talking to us blokes in the getting help area, because often it's the woman who wants help, but the bloke who resists it.

Building a strong affair proof marriage doesn't just happen, it takes energy, it takes commitment. Gay and I, like any couple, have had our ups and downs and every now and then have had to put in a bit of extra time and effort upping our commitment to our marriage. That's important when you have the busyness of life with kids. But we are discovering that it is equally important when your kids leave home. It's really important to make sure you like each other if you are going to sit with each other at a dinner table without the distraction of your kids to pass the time.

We need to fight for our marriages together. It is very easy for us to give our lives away to everyone else, kids, friends, work, the church, and leave the crumbs for ourselves and our life partners. I am really concerned about the expectation on employees to work longer and longer hours, plus everything else that is expected on parents. I find myself thinking when talking to people about ministry opportunities in the church and hearing what pressure they are under; with all they have on how can I expect them to serve in the church as well. So I back off, that doesn't help us grow a church, doesn't help us meet the needs of people in our church family, but recruiting over worked people into ministry roles is not the recipe for a strong marriage. We all need to be evaluating and talking a lot about what changes we need to make and what those changes will look like. There may be a need for making some mid-course corrections.

Now if you're a **single parent** today, raising your children without their father or without their mother due to a divorce, please don't despair. You can still do a phenomenal job raising your children, with God's help and the help of family and friends. However can I just say, loving the father of your children, or the mother of your children, who is now your ex, first of all means that you extend forgiveness to them for the hurts of the past. Now some of you will be saying, "yeah right, you don't know my ex". You're right I don't, but hear me out. Forgiveness is choosing to release them from you needing to hurt them back. Forgiveness doesn't mean you forget the hurts they've caused you, or continue to cause you, or don't feel the hurts anymore, or that you excuse the wrong they've done. Forgiveness means that you give up the right to punish them back. Why is this forgiveness important, because if

you don't, you end up building a prison of bitterness, later to discover there's only one inmate...you, and if you really make a mess of it, your kids as well.

But when your children see the forgiveness you can have for your ex, who is their mum or their dad, it will make a powerful, indelible impression on them. And it will teach them more about the forgiveness of God than a pile of sermons from me or whoever ever could.

Now before we move on to the second building block of building strong families let me remind you that at the core of our faith is a God who's full of grace and mercy and offers second chances to “no hopers” like you and like me. A God who says to those who have committed adultery or who have gone through the pain of a divorce or who haven't been paying attention to their marriage...

"Listen. I know you've messed up. I know you crossed over the line and made some big mistakes. But there's grace and forgiveness for you at the cross. Accept what my Son did on the cross for you and we can start fresh today."

Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn the world, but to save it. God wants to help us move past the past. I encourage you to take him up on his offer!

The first building block for a strong family is a strong marriage. The second building block is **good parenting skills**.

In the book of Proverbs, parenting your children well or skilfully means three things both for two parent families as well as for single parent families.

1. First, it means **love your children**. I like the way Solomon's father, King David, put it in Psalm 127:3,

Children are a gift from the LORD; they are a reward from him.

Children are gifts, expensive little gifts, but gifts to us, treasures from God and should be treated that way. They should be prized and cherished. They were given to make us glad.

Proverbs 23:25 says, ²⁵ *So give your father and mother joy! May she who gave you birth be happy.*

There's nothing like the joy of a baby. The excitement and raw emotion of being in the delivery room when your kids are being born, being supportive, being yelled at. And there's nothing in the world that can compare with taking your new-born, fresh from God, still looking a bit prunish and holding it in your arms. What a gift! What a blessing! What a responsibility! What Joy! Children make their parents glad.

So we need to tell them that. Our kid's need to hear thousands of times that we love them, that we're crazy about them. They need to be touched and hugged and wrestled

with, to be talked to and listened to. They need to have our time. Quality time... and the only way you are ever going to get to quality time, is through quantity time. You will have heard this all before but, children spell love T-I-M-E! And in our fast paced culture spending time with our kids might just be our greatest challenge.

Statistics can never be totally relied on as 74.3 of statistics are made up on the spot, and to back that up I just made up that statistic. However one study I did hear about surveyed 1,000 businessmen in the states on how much time they spend with their children. And the survey said that the average father spent 6 minutes a week with his kids outside of eating with them. Six minutes a week isn't going to cut it! Another study is more positive and says things are improving. That is good to see.

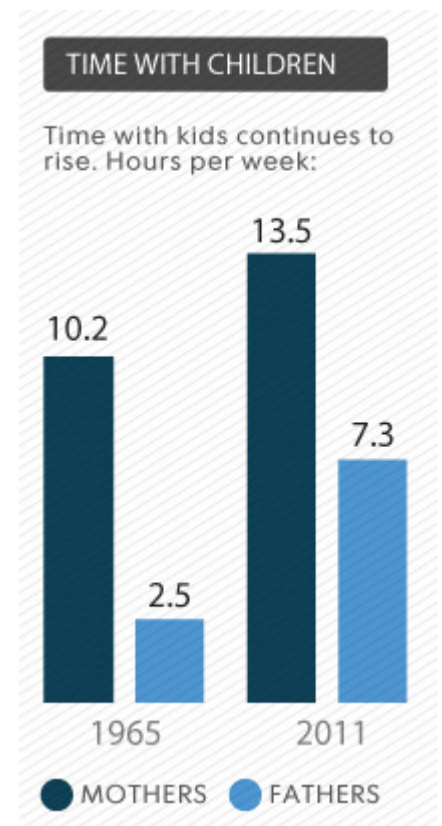
A child development expert concluded that well-adjusted adults have had at least one parent who loved them irrationally. Every human being, just to be normal, has to be loved irrationally. It's what all of us need. To build a strong family we need to pour massive amounts of love and time and energy into our children.

2. But kids need more than love. And all parents know that there is a dark side to their little angels. And because of that, **children need limits**. Parenting skill means setting boundaries for your children.

Proverbs 22:15, ¹⁵ *A youngster's heart is filled with foolishness, but physical discipline will drive it far away.*

The Bible knows nothing of the current theory that says "kids are born morally neutral", neither good nor bad. According to God, children are born with a magnetic pull towards mischief. And while researchers still debate this parents know that God is right. The Bible calls it sin and it's found in every one of us from birth. We don't become sinners the first time we say "no" to our parents, we say to "no" to our parents because we are sinners. Not only is that what the Bible teaches when it talks about human depravity, but that's what experience teaches us everyday. You don't have to teach kids how to be bad, they know how to be bad. You have to teach them how to be good. And you spend the best years of your life as a parent doing that.

One of the best things that we can teach our children is that they aren't the centre of the universe. The world doesn't revolve around them. As much as they might think it does, or at least hope it does. They don't get everything they want. That's the quickest way to ruin a child.



Here is what some criminal psychologist wrote. I'm sure it was hotly debated at the time and whether it is all truth I am not going to comment on, but I think it does say something.

"Every baby starts life as a little savage, completely selfish and self-centred. He wants what he wants when he wants it: his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toy. Deny these and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness that would be murderous were he not so helpless. This means that all children, not just certain children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centred world of infancy, given free reign to his impulsive actions, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer."

Sounds scary, doesn't it? Kids need boundaries. They need limits. Whether we choose to enforce them with time outs or other creative forms of discipline, they need to know that there are consequences for their actions. Kids need love and kids need limits. And the challenge of parenting is balancing love and discipline. It's what keeps a parent praying and asking for God's wisdom and help.

3. Love your kids. Set boundaries for your kids. And third, **understand your children.**

Proverbs 22:6, ⁶ *Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.*

Over the years there's been a lot of discussion about the meaning of this proverb. Some have taken it as a magic formula, promise that good parenting will pay off every time. That kids raised with lots of love and proper amounts discipline will never go off track. That is not right. There are no guarantees as long as children have a mind and a heart of their own. There is no airtight, can't miss, magic formula to raising kids.

Instead, I think this passage has two layers of meaning. First, as with most proverbs it is a general truth, not a guarantee, and this proverb is a general truth about child rearing. Most of the patterns that are set in a child's life early on will eventually take root and be owned by them later in life, *when they are old they will not leave it.* Things like right and wrong, truth telling, responsibility, respect, kindness will eventually become their own over time. It may take a season of rebellion to get there, but in most cases they'll return to it.

But there's a second layer of meaning here. The verse can also be translated, *Direct a child according to his way (the right way for this specific child), and when he is old he will not leave it.* Translated that way the verse means pay attention to your kids. Learn about them. They're all different. You can't parent each one exactly the same. A child must be trained according to *his* way or *her* way, not *our* way. We need to learn the way each one of our kids is wired, some are outgoing, some are shy,

some are verbal, some are quiet, some are fearful, some are risk takers, some are athletic, some are arty, some are musical. Find out what's his way or her way, and we need to honour that when we parent them.

Wise parents take time to understand their children, to observe their children, to help their children understand who they are and to encourage their children to pursue the things that they're good at. Children want that guidance from us. They need it.

Conclusion

Building strong families is the most challenging and rewarding job in the world. It takes a strong marriage, lots of love, careful discipline, wise insight into each child. And to do it right we desperately need God's help. We need God's wisdom, God's patience, God's love, and so on we need God.

I want to conclude today's service with a song for you to dwell on... enjoy

I need thee every hour <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3wSbLa2uGg>