

Task #11 - A Practical Education
The 12 Tasks of an Effective Father

When you go to the mall and you see young people, what comes to your mind? When I walk through the mall what comes to my mind is me. I remember myself walking through the Winter Park Mall and the Colonial Plaza Mall, neither one of which are there anymore, and I remember that I felt like I think young people look today. I remember that I felt clueless, and when you look at young people walking around in the mall, they must be clueless. But you know young people are clueless for a reason.

I remember my parents doing a number of things to help me get a practical education. One thing they did was they asked me if I wanted to take piano lessons. So we tried piano lessons for about half of a week. Then I thought well maybe the accordion, you know the Lawrence Welk Show or something like that, I don't know. So I took accordion lessons, and my greatest weakness in life is that I tend to be persuasive. I convinced my parents that I was deeply and profoundly committed to the science and the art of accordionship and talked them into buying me an accordion which I used for about three weeks and then it went into the closet. Then they finally sold that. I didn't have much musical ability. Then I tried out for the seventh grade basketball team. Rudy Tappia, I think he's the principal at Dr. Phillips High School now. He was the coach of the seventh grade basketball team. I didn't know much about basketball either, and I got cut from the team. I was the last kid cut. I remember going home that night and Mom and Dad were trying to console me, but, you know, I was clueless about basketball. I was clueless about music. I was clueless about mechanical things. I remember I loved the idea of having a fast car, but I didn't know how to make it go fast. I found a kid who had some headers. I don't even know what a header is, but it's something that makes loud noise, and you hook it up and it's supposed to go faster. I installed these headers myself, and because I installed these headers myself, they were even louder than they would have otherwise been because there was a one-inch gap between the header and the block of the engine and you could see the fire shooting out of the ----- I was clueless about mechanical things.

A lot of kids grow up clueless, and the only way to ever have a clue about what life is really all about is to have someone make an investment into your life. I remember another experience this week. I was sitting around preparing for this message and I recalled when I was in the Army. I was sitting in an auditorium at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina and the musical group, Brooklyn Bridge, was playing. They're still around. They're up in the New Jersey area doing a circuit. They had a number of very famous songs. I don't know how they got on the campus of Ft. Bragg, but there were other musical groups so they must have had some "keep the troop happy" program going on. I can remember sitting in the audience and being moved by the music all by myself, in a strange place, looking up at the band members and thinking to myself, "You know, how does that work? How do people get to be people like that?" I remember being overwhelmed with a sense of being utterly clueless about how I ----- Has anybody here ever felt like that growing up? It's ironic because the flip side of this is that you have clueless kids living their dreaming dads???

This verse that we want to look at today; we're just going to start here, but Proverbs 22, Verse 29, it says, "Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before Kings; he will not serve before obscure men." Listen, Dads, isn't it every father's dream for his children that they would become skilled in their work and they would find their place in the world? I know my dream for my children, and I know it's your dream for your children, too. Why is it that Dad's are dreaming that their children will amount to something and the kids end up feeling clueless? It is quite a dilemma.

What I'd like to talk to you about this morning is how we can make this possible. The way that we make this possible, the way we can help our children to not to go off into the world feeling clueless, one of the things we can do is to give them is a practical education. This morning I want to talk to you about a practical education for your kids.

What does the word practical mean? Anybody? Common sense, workable, useful, that's a dictionary word, useful synonym. What does practical not mean? Not theoretical. A practical education is a not theoretical education. All right? What does education mean? What is an education? What is an educated person? An educated person is, right out of the dictionary, a skilled person. "Do you see a man skilled in his work?" Do you see a man educated? Education is a process of endowing our children with skill; practical skill. That's what I want to visit with you about this morning. What would this practical education look like, and I want to give you a few suggestions.

This is going to be a highly practical, but not highly biblical, message this morning. However, in order for a practical education to be effective, I think you need two things. The first thing that a practical education would have to be in order to be effective is that it would have to be scriptural. We know that scripture commands many things which must be obeyed, scripture prohibits many things which must be avoided, and in between these two things is what? That which is permissible. Most of the decisions that we make over the course of the day are not moral decisions; they're really priority decisions. The choice isn't between right and wrong, but choices between right and right. Our children have to make all kinds of decisions every day.

One of the decisions my children had to make growing up was whether or not they would say when we went out to dinner, "May I please have a Pepsi?" When the waiter or waitress would say, "What would you like to drink?" They'd say, "Pepsi, Pepsi, please." They knew that Dad would say, "May I please have a Pepsi?" My daughter is 25 years old. It still irritates her that I would embarrass her in public like this. I told her on the phone last night, "Guess why I did that?" I did that so you'd start saying please. Practical education. Well, it's not very practical, but it is a little practical.

Proverbs, the book we have open in front of us here, is a scriptural guideline for a lot of little practical things like saying "Please" and "Thank You." There are just so many practical things. I do want us to look at a number of verses very quickly. If you would turn with me to Chapter 1, and I want to tell you a little bit about Proverbs because Proverbs is a tool, men, that you can use to help give your children a practical education. Solomon is the writer of the Book of Proverbs. Solomon wrote this book. Let's take a look at it. Chapter 1, Verse 8, "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction..."; Verse 10, "My son, if sinners entice you..."; Verse 15, "My son, do not go along with them..."; Chapter 2, Verse 1, "My son, if you accept my words..."; Chapter 3, Verse 1, "My son, do not forget my teaching..."; Verse 11, "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline..."; Verse 21, "My son, preserve sound judgment..."; Chapter 4, Verse 1, "Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction..."; Verse 10, "Listen, my son..."; Verse 20, "My son, pay attention..."; Chapter 5, Verse 1, "My son, pay attention to my wisdom..."; Verse 7, "Now then, my son, listen to me..."; Verse 20, "Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress?..."; Chapter 6, Verse 1, "My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor..."; Verse 20, "My son, keep your father's commands..."; Chapter 7, Verse 1, "My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you..." and on, and on, and on, and on.

Solomon has written this book and given it to the Nation of Israel as a manual for parents to teach their kids not only in moral wisdom, but also in practical wisdom. This is a fantastic tool. "Do you see a man skilled in his work, my son?" That's practical, that's skill or "Don't put up security for your debts," it says. Gosh, I wish somebody had told me that. That's practical knowledge. Or "Don't throw your lot?? in with the wrong crowd," which is what it says. I wish somebody had told me that.

Proverbs is an excellent tool for you to help give your children a practical education. To be effective a practical education does need to be scriptural. Now, the scriptures are all truth. Is there truth outside of the scripture? Of course, there is. There are all kinds of truth in what we call general revelation. There are many different kinds of practical advice. For example, it's a cultural convention that we have that you think better of people if they look you in the eye when you meet them. I don't know if every culture is like that, but ours is. That's certainly not biblical truth, but I'll tell you what, it has served my kids very well. We just emphasize over and over again the practical importance of looking an adult in the eye when you meet them. This has a powerful influence on the way the adult looks at the child because that's just the way we are. We like people who look us in the eye when we meet them. Is that scriptural truth? No. Is it practical? Yes.

Is it founded, is it in any way in conflict with scripture? No. If you had an idea that it was in conflict with scripture then you obviously would not want to impart that.

One of the problems with general revelation, things like looking in the eye and saying please and thank you, all those things, is that the obvious conclusion of general revelation is to lead people into absurdity. If you don't take your practical wisdom and ground it in scripture, Kiki Guard????, who I've quoted here before, he said the wisdom of the years is what? Who remembers? Maybe I need to say it again. Kiki Guard????, the Danish philosopher, said, "The wisdom of the years is confusing. Only the wisdom of eternity is edified." There is truth in general revelation, but it needs to be grounded well in the scripture.

In order to be effective, a practical education does need to be scriptural or at least not contradictory to scripture, and the second thing is that it needs to be intentional; an intentional, practical education. Every little child is basically like a shadow standing besides its parent. The degree to which the parent allows the light to shine on himself, or herself, determines the sharpness on the edge of the shadow. Every little child is a little piece of clay waiting to be molded and shaped into the image that the parent projects.

I remember very well my son, when he was real little like five or six years old, maybe, taking a father-son shower together. He watched everything I did, so when I wrapped a towel around my waist and tucked it in, I suppose the way I saw my dad do it, I don't know, he took the towel and wrapped it around his waist and tucked the edge in, then I took my wet hair and I combed my hair straight back. He took the comb when I was done and combed his hair straight back, and there we were, these two mirror images of each other standing side by side. That was intentional. I did that on purpose. It was part of a plan. A lot of the mentoring we do as dads is situational mentoring. Things just come up and you respond to them. Kids have questions about sex, or they have fear or they have anger, and they want to have an answer, so you just sort of respond to the situation.

Better write this down. Intentional mentoring determines situations. You create the situations that you want to talk to your kids about. Enough about all that; let's get to the application stuff.

I am going to throw a ton of things at you in the next few minutes. Okay? We haven't passed out the questions yet; should have done that. Let's go ahead and do this now and let me have one for myself. I want to make the rest of this into like a clinic or a workshop. I guess it would have been a good idea to figure all this out before. Do we have something printed on the back of that? Do we have another sheet, Jim? Is there a second sheet? Is there a third sheet? There probably is another sheet in the bag. Why don't you check for that.

I want to give you four ideas. The first one, if you'll look at the bottom of these questions when you get them, there are four bullets at the bottom of the questions and that's what I want to talk about. The first thing is a written plan or file of practical things that your children can learn. There are several sheets of information, and there is no way we could possibly process all of this, but one of the things I want to suggest to you is that you create a sheet of paper or maybe a manila file of the things you would like to make sure you cover with your kids basically.

A few weeks ago, I assembled a group of 15 young men to help develop the Table of Contents for a book that I'm writing called, "The Young Man in the Mirror." These were young boys from eighth grade all the way up, with a couple of college boys, as well, and a couple juniors and seniors in high school. On your tables in the center is a list of possible topics for the "Young Man in the Mirror." Some of you may want to pick that up; some of you may want to take that with you. What I did with these young guys was to take this list, and had e-mailed it to all of them in advance of this meeting, with the idea that what I wanted to do was pull out of here the 12 most important topics that these young men would like to learn about in the book. I began at the beginning of the meeting reading down this list and I said, "If anybody would like to have this topic possibly included in the book, we'll vote later, but if you just want it to be considered as a topic for the book, raise your hands as I mention it." I went down the list, "Manhood, how many of you would like to have Manhood?" Half the guys raised their hand. Then I did Identity. "How many of you want that included?" About half raised their hands. "Self-esteem?" Half hands. "Purpose?" Half hands. "Dating?" Half hands. "Sexuality, etc.....(oops- couldn't catch it all)....." Would you believe

they wanted everyone of these topics included in the book, except two: sexuality and heritage. Do you want to know why those two were on there? Because I had also put together a group of youth pastors and they said that two of the most important things men need to know about is sexuality, and they're dealing here with gender confusion and culture, and heritage, a sense of where they came from, their history. Basically, how do you write a book on that many things? You can't write a book on that many things. It's interesting, men, your sons and daughters want to know about all of these things. They want a practical education about everything. That might be for some of you a possible list that you could take a look at.

Also, handed out is a thing called "A Few Thoughts As You Leave for College." I just did this for a man who has a child going off to college who was putting together a compilation of letters, and so forth, about some various people, and I thought it was pretty interesting, and I spent a couple of hours actually putting this together, but I was thinking that ought to be something that should be presented here this morning. Some of you may want to take that and stick it in your file, and as the guy said, he was going to go over one of these each day in family devotions or a family dinner time. So that's a possibility.

Chris, right here, was telling me on Saturday that he took the five ideas from last week which were the five practical things we talked about to nurture a child. Number one was respect, number two was positive, number three was to listen, number four was care, and number five was available. That will keep me going for six months, thank you. He took those five subjects, and, if I understood him correctly, wrote down a few of his thoughts on each of those areas, then he posted that on the refrigerator, and he's inviting his kids to write down their comments. He created interaction on the face of the refrigerator about those things. That's one way of giving his kids a practical education.

The second practical thought here this morning is to help them determine their intelligence. Turn your questions over to the back, if you will. There is a very famous thinker, Howard Gardner, Harvard University, who has pioneered some research on different types of intelligence. This comes out of general revelation, this is not biblical revelation, but I think this is very useful. I think one thing that a father could do to help give his children a practical education would be to help them figure out their different types of intelligence.

We see the first type on her is the linguistics. Some children are just going to be very good with words. They have the potential of becoming writers, speakers, and so forth. This is a special mastery of language.

The one that we used to think that everybody had, or didn't have and that was the only kind, and that was logical mathematic intelligence. That, basically, is the ability to process logical problems and equations.

Musical intelligence is another type of intelligence; the ability to compose and understand music.

Spacial???intelligence. I'm going to put these up on the board and then I'm going to ask you for some examples of people that do these; bodily, kinesthetic intelligence, and interpersonal intelligence. It's amazing that when you look at some people at what they can do athletically and that other people would never have any possibility of doing that. Gardner calls it "a special ability to use the body in skilled ways." Interpersonal is the ability to interact and understand other people. Intrapersonal is the ability to understand yourself; your own emotions and motivations. In recent years he has added another category called the naturalist intelligence and that's the ability to look at nature and see patterns and connections.

You find a lot of this going on in the Bible. Solomon, for example, collected and classified many proverbs. He had linguistic intelligence. Paul, when you read Paul's theology you realize he logical mathematical intelligence. Musical intelligence, in the Bible, ---- was in charge of the singing. That was his responsibility because he was skillful at it. Spacial, you see the stonecutters, masons, carpenters; men skilled in every kind of work. Interpersonal. David shepherded them with integrity; with skillful hands he led them. So you see a lot of these different kinds of intelligence. Now again, I am trying to set you very quickly, so you're going to have to unpack this on your own, but I encourage you to think about how you can help your children understand their unique types of intelligence; the things they are good at.

Third is to have regularly scheduled time to build into their lives. One man recently told me he is planning to begin taking his grandsons, because his son-in-law is basically a.w.o.l., he's not doing anything, so he's going to take his grandsons to lunch on a regularly-scheduled basis. I said, "What will you talk about?" He said, "Everything." He is going to give them a practical education.

I am going to close with this. The last bullet here on these questions, at the bottom of the page, is to create special occasions to teach them special lessons. A man was telling me recently about what he did for his high school senior graduating son. They have three boys, all of whom have been buddies in high school; they're all Christians, they're all athletes, and they all happen to have girlfriends. This father had the three girlfriends set the three boys up for a date toward the end of the school year. The three girls blindfolded the boys and, of course, they thought they were going to have a really fun night together with their girlfriends. They drove them around until they got themselves confused and lost and then took them out into the woods by the Wekiva River. They walked them over a little footbridge to a small island in the Wekiva River that has a fire pit in the middle of it owned by a friend of this guy. Then the three girls set the three boys down in chairs still with the blindfolds on. They told them not to take the blindfolds off until they were told to. Then they walked back across the footbridge. The boys heard car doors slamming, the automobile start and the girls drive away, and there they are sitting in this deathly silence. Now, this father, who is sitting right here, was standing about four feet away from these boys. Suddenly, one of these boys heard a sound; a little rustling. "What was that? I think there's an animal out here?" Mike, the father, let them sweat for a few minutes and then he said, "Adam, Drew, Scott remove your blindfolds." These three, clueless boys took their blindfolds off and across the fire pit from them they saw sitting in a semi-circle many of the men who had been investing into their lives for many years as friends of this dad.

He proceeded to lead these men through a ceremony where the three short torches were extinguished and the three tall torches were lit. These men gave little homilies, practical advice, and spiritual advice to these boys, and then each of the boys was asked to kneel down. Each man went to each boy and prayed a blessing on his life. You know what strikes me about this? A lot of men have good ideas like this, and they never do anything about it. If you want your children to have a practical education, you are going to have to do something about it. It has to be intentional. There are a few ideas for you.

Let us pray:

Lord, part of giving children a spiritual education is to give them a practical education. Lord, to take a clueless kid and to help him discover the dream of a dad as well as your sovereign plan for a child's life is no easy task. Father, I pray that you would put one little thing out of this talk into the lives of these men that they might be better fathers or, if they are fathers to be planning their fathering in the future, or if they have kids who are grown and gone, that they might hear something here to pass along to their sons and daughters or to invest in their grandchildren. Just one little thing out of this message, this I ask in Jesus' name. Amen

/cjb