

“The Art of Godliness”

Proverbs 3:1-12

1 My child, never forget the things I have taught you. Store my commands in your heart. 2 If you do this, you will live many years, and your life will be satisfying. 3 Never let loyalty and kindness leave you! Tie them around your neck as a reminder. Write them deep within your heart. 4 Then you will find favor with both God and people, and you will earn a good reputation.

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. 6 Seek his will in all you do, and He will show you which path to take.

7 Don't be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the Lord and turn away from evil. 8 Then you will have healing for your body and strength for your bones.

9 Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce. 10 Then He will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with good wine.

11 My child, don't reject the Lord's discipline, and don't be upset when He corrects you. 12 For the Lord corrects those He loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom He delights.

Being a good dad doesn't come easily. Being the kind of dad whose kids will one day remember him with fondness and joy is hard work. Being the kind of dad who, although being far from perfect, still manages to love and lead his children well, is no easy task. "Yes, ladies, the man in your life may make it look like second nature, but being the kind of man who knows just when to firmly say, 'Walk it off' to his son and when to put his pride aside and play princess or Barbies with his little girl is tough stuff. Being the kind of father that every little girl wants to one day walk her down the aisle and that every little boy wants to be like when he's bigger takes a ton of work. Father's are important.

Did you know that if a child is the first person in a household to become a Christian, there is a 3.5 percent probability everyone else in the household will follow? If the mother is the first to become a Christian, there is a 17 percent probability everyone else in the household will follow. But if the father is first, there is a 93 percent probability everyone else in the household will follow. --Polly House, "Want your church to grow? Then bring in the men," *Baptist Press News*, April 3, 2003, bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=15630. Retrieved November 28, 2012

Dad's are important! Father's are important, even in the animal kingdom. Let me tell you a story: Several decades ago there was a problem with overpopulation on an African game preserve -- too many elephants. Limited by the technology available at the time, the solution they came up with was to move the babies to new preserves. Everyone watched, gravely concerned, but the babies thrived.

However, unintended consequences emerged. At the new locations, a decade or so after the transfer, someone was killing off rhinoceros! This was bad because they are an endangered species. It turned out the killers were young male elephants. At first the game wardens couldn't believe it; this was uncharacteristic behavior never before seen in elephants.

They deduced that the young males had grown up without fathers -- without male role models. New technology made it possible to transport into these locations some large mature bull elephants. There was concern that it would be too late, that the adolescent males had to have grown up with their elders, that bringing "daddies" in now would do no good. But they tried it anyway. It worked like a charm. The mature bulls arrived and set things straight. The young males immediately stopped their precocious, rampant sexuality, killing and violence. ... We had no idea that the social system of the elephants was so complex, interconnected and so elegant. And so it goes. Daddies do matter, even in elephants. --Diane Sollee, smartmarriages.com.

"Just in case the guy in your life is struggling with the demands of manliness in the form of fatherliness, there is one resource that may help and which you should seriously consider. It's a best-selling book entitled, *The Art of Manliness: Classic Skills and Manners for the Modern Man*. Ladies, this could be a great, last-minute gift for the dad in your life. Also, guys, if you're looking to impress your girl, you may want to order this on your own immediately after church. Not only will it help you brush up on some essential guy skills it will likely win you some serious points. Few things speak to a woman's heart more than seeing her man proactively improving his masculine aptitude and fatherly fitness. Just a thought."

In the book, Brett and Kate McKay, a husband and wife team, offer a treasure-trove, a veritable man-cave full of useful, guy-oriented insights that they claim will help men embrace the waning art of the truly masculine existence. It includes everything from long-lost survival skills to insights on developing one's character, and advice on navigating sticky social situations. The authors contend that each is a tried and tested skill, honed and handed down from true, manly men, like Benjamin Franklin and Teddy Roosevelt.

For example, Brett and Kate believe that many men today are restless, unfulfilled and depressed, living lives, as Thoreau once said of "quiet desperation." The reason, they argue, is simple. Men have forgotten how to engage in a sense of adventure via nature. They have become couch potatoes watching sports and playing video games! Being outdoors gives men a chance to enjoy unstructured exploration; it invigorates the body and puts a man's problems into perspective they say. The authors then go on to instruct and advise on everything from finding a campsite (best to do it online and in advance), setting up a tent (erect it on a tarp and toward the wind), and digging a latrine (they suggest a trench about a foot wide and 3 to 4 feet long).

Way back in 2009 I felt God leading me to start a men's Bible Study. I prayed for God to show me who He wanted me to teach and over the next month it ended up being me, my son-in-law, and three of the most messed up men I have ever met. None of them

had a Father that had taught them what it meant to be a man. Somehow they had found a Heavenly Father but they just didn't know things because they had severely flawed parents. So I went through this video series called Authentic Manhood by Robert Louis followed by Winning at Work and at Home and the Great Adventure all using the foundations laid in the first series. It made a huge impact on each of them. [NOTE 1]

Now, before you scoff at someone's writing a how-to book on being a man, keep in mind that such books are actually part of a long heritage. It's a heritage of "how-to" wisdom that we even find represented in God's word. In fact, today we hear from the book of Proverbs, arguably the first book of such sage advice. In chapter 3 the writer, a father himself, is offering his son a lesson in something that applies to each of us, man or not. The father is teaching his son something deeper than lessons on camping, shaving and choosing the right tie and how to tie it. No, in Proverbs 3 his son, and you and me, get a lesson on **godliness**-- the art of walking closely with our Creator.

It's clear from his words that, like being a great dad, a life of godliness doesn't come easy. But it does come down to a handful of practices and attitudes that any man or woman aiming for it, will spend their days readily embracing. First, says the father, **godliness is grounded in an attitude of unrelenting love**. At the heart of the Hebrew faith was a belief in Yahweh's *chesed*, often translated as "steadfast love." It's the idea that God's love for his people never gives up or fades away. It's a belief that the *goodness of God*, although at times shrouded in seasons of struggle or pain, is always in hot pursuit of the *people of God*. [NOTE 2]

The godly person then is one who, having been transformed by such unending love from God, displays a faithful, unrelenting love for others. He writes, "Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart." Godliness it seems is first and foremost a God-shaped inner integrity. It's a divinely inspired attitude that drives you to be quick to forgive and ready to reconcile, as well as to be the kind of husband, wife or friend who refuses to run but instead fights for the future of the relationship. [NOTE 3]

In verses 5 to 8 the father continues the inward focus on the art of godliness and tells us that a truly godly person will not only have an attitude of unrelenting love for others, **but also an intellectual humility about himself or herself**. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart," he says. And "be not wise in your own eyes." It may sound simple, but a key skill for the godly is a refusal to believe that he or she already has all of the answers. Truly godly people are going to be well aware of their limitations and not just submit themselves to the wisdom of others, but first to the will and wisdom of God. This means that the art of godliness is also the art of prayer, where we make our needs known to him. It's the art of studying the Scriptures, where we submit ourselves to the truths he's revealed. It's the art of repentance, where we actively turn from our prideful idolatries in all their forms and lay hold of the unrelenting love and wisdom and goodness of God in Christ instead. The father, the mother, the son or daughter who does these things is truly humble, and very godly.

He continues. However, the father now shifts away from inward attitudes and puts

his focus on how a godly person approaches one of the stickiest issues we face as human beings: *the stewardship of our belongings*. Too often we wrongly attach far too much of our identity and personal peace to the accumulation of inanimate objects. We attach far too much worry and worship to seemingly big things, like the amount of money we have in the bank and arguably minor things, like that collection of baseball cards Dad refuses to get rid of, despite the fact that his beloved Justin Verlander rookie card is just collecting dust in Grandma's attic. [NOTE 4]

The godly, however, are slightly different. The godly are those who have begun, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to reverse the effects of our inborn hoarder mentality. Specifically, the godly have discovered the joy of being generous toward the things of God and worshipfully submitting their stuff to God's will. "Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce," writes the father. Doing so, he asserts, unlocks real satisfaction.

The godly man or woman knows this. He or she has realized that when, through the tithe, one consecrates his stuff as having come from and belonged to God, one is set free from the enslaving, idolatrous attitude that our possessions *are god*. Intellectually we all know our possessions are not God, but sometimes our actions say different. I remember a Bible Study I was leading at the home of a family from my church in Wayland. I said it would be a good practice to walk around our homes and put our hand on everything one at a time and say the words, this is God's. I was just demonstrating and I happened to put my hand on their piano and said the words and the wife said, Oh no, that belonged to my grandma and is an antique. She was immediately ashamed but I wonder how many things each of us has in our homes that it would be difficult to put our hand on and say the words, this belongs to God. A life lived in the art of godliness is a life lived in financial generosity toward the work of the kingdom and the needs of others. A life lived in the art of godliness is a life where one's heart is attached to and anchored in the unshakable, life-giving things of God because one's stuff is being leveraged for the work of God. After all, as Jesus once said, "Where your treasure is, there is your heart."

Last, the writer of Proverbs gives us one description of the godly life that seems particularly appropriate on this Father's Day. The godly realize that God is sovereignly molding and shaping their lives, even to the point of correcting us. *The godly embrace, and do not despise, divine discipline*, knowing that, "the LORD reproves the one he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights" (Proverbs 3:12). [NOTE 5]

As much as we'd like to live our lives writing our own rules, devoid of correction or consequence, it simply doesn't work that way in the family of God. Through faith in Christ as your forgiver and reconciler, we've been brought into the family of God, and as such, the Father in heaven has become, well, our Father. And like any good dad, he gets a say in our lives, and will discipline us – not *punish* us, there's a difference -- when life gets too far off his intended path. The godly will not hold this against God, but wisely see it as evidence of the love of God. God is not cruel when God disciplines us. No, *God would be cruel if God left us alone*. But God doesn't do that! God is at work in our struggles, using them to refine us as though through fire and chisel, through brokenness

and repentance, to draw us back to His word, His ways, and His Son, Jesus Christ.

As part of God's family, the godly realize that there is purpose in pain, not punishment, and that very often God will allow us to hit rock bottom so we will realize that God is the Rock at the bottom.

Godliness, like manliness and fatherliness, is no easy task. Thankfully, God grades all three on a curve; choosing to see us in light of what Christ has done for us on the cross instead of how well we parent the kid, start a fire without matches, or how frequently we fill the offering plate. They are not easy tasks. But they are noble ones.

[NOTE 6] And the rest in the congregation can be encouraged to embrace the art of walking closely with the Creator by saying: "Let us pursue the art of godliness. Let us be a people of unrelenting love and intellectual humility. May we be the kind of people who steward our stuff for God's purposes and refuse to despise the Lord's discipline. Such a life will certainly make our Father, who is in heaven, quite proud." Let's pray ... AMEN

Sermon Notes for "The Art of Godliness" based on Proverbs 3 **Given on June 21 Father's Day 2026 at Doster Community Church**

- I. The first authentic manhood/how-to book is Proverbs. We find how-to wisdom here. Here is a lesson on "Godliness", the art of walking closely with our Creator.
- II. Being a great Dad and Godliness is rounded in an attitude of unrelenting love. A Godly person demonstrates a faithful unrelenting love for others.
- III. A Godly person will have an intellectual humility about him or herself. "Do not be wise in your own eyes but depend wholly on the Lord. This includes familiarity with the art of prayer.
- IV. The Godly person knows how to steward their belongings. He/She does not attach too much worry or worship to money or material things. They know the joy of generosity, the joy of giving. Where your treasure is, there is your heart.
- V. The Godly person does not despise discipline. God is sovereignly molding and shaping our lives. We need to be more like Jesus. There is a difference between discipline and punish. Being part of God's family we realize that often God will allow us to hit rock bottom so we realize that God is the Rock at the bottom.
- VI. What are you going to do about it? What will you do this week to pursue the art of Godliness? How will you be a person of unrelenting love,