

## INTRODUCTION

We read stories about prodigies in the news every now and then. They are little kids who have extraordinary talents. I love classical piano music. Lang Lang is one of my favorite artists. He is a true prodigy. At age 2, Lang watch a Tom and Jerry cartoon that featured Franz Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2. It is an extremely difficult piece to play. The music inspired the little Lang. He began to learn how to play piano. When Lang was only 5, he won the first place at the Shenyang piano competition. He was later admitted to Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music. From then on, Lang won many awards in China and overseas. The musical world began to notice to this aspiring artist. Concert tours to different countries and recording contracts kept coming. Lang was also invited to perform before numerous international dignitaries. Lang is now only 36 years of age. He still has a lot to accomplish in his career. Many parents may want their children to become the next artist, professional athlete or Nobel prize winner. There is nothing wrong about being successful and famous. But God never tells us to be smart. He wants us to be wise. In the Bible, King Solomon could be the wisest and richest man ever lived. He succeeded his father, David, as the king of Israel. He humbly asked God to give him wisdom to rule the country. In Proverbs Solomon talks about wisdom. Godly wisdom helps us discern and enables us to do what pleases God. Solomon wanted his sons to pursue such wisdom. We have many parents sitting here. What kind of people do you want your children grow up to be? To our youngsters: what kind of people do you aspire to become? Let us learn four things from Proverbs chapter 3 about how children of wisdom should be like.

## EXPLANATION

### 1. Obey God 聽從神

First, children of wisdom obey God. Look at **verses 1-2**: 1 My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, 2 for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. Children have to keep their fathers' teaching in their hearts and they should not forget what they learned. Our parents accumulate years of life experience and so it is wise to obey them. My mom did not even graduate from elementary school. But to me she is a wise person. Your parents may tell you to look both ways before crossing a street, or not to spend the money you do not have in your pocket. Those are practical wisdom. When the Bible talks about wisdom it is more than good insights. The Proverbs teaches us that true wisdom begins from knowing God and fearing Him. In the Biblical times before the school system was set up the only two places where children, especially boys, received education were homes and synagogues. Parents taught their kids skills to make a living. For example, when Jesus grew up, He learned to become a carpenter like His earthly father, Joseph. Besides passing on their expertise, the fathers were also responsible for helping their children to know God. **Deuteronomy 6:6-7** read: 6 "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." Parents should seize every opportunity to teach their children about the Lord. Many of you send your kids to AWANA, Sunday school and children's church. But the

few hours your boys and girls spend in the church every week are just a very small percentage of their time. The school, their peers, movies, music and the internet all mold them to the persons they will become. We live in fallen world that denies the truth. If you do not nurture your kids with the Word of God when they are small, before long they will not listen to you. When my boys were young, we listened exclusively to Christian music in the car. Now they prefer pop music, because that is part of their culture. I do not just sit there passively. I pay attention to the lyrics. When I hear something contrary to the Biblical truth, I will tell my boys what God sees as right. We as parents are responsible to teach our kids to obey the Lord. Once I attended a Christian conference. I went to a workshop about Christian parenting. I found it quite insightful when the speaker said: "Why do you want your kids to obey you? You are imperfect in every way. Both you and your children should obey the Lord." She was right. But in order to do that, we parents have to know what the Bible says first. Everything begins with your personal relationship with the Lord. Children should obey their parents as long as their requests do not contradict the Bible. They obey the Lord by listening to their parents at home.

## 2. Trust God 信靠神

Besides obeying God, children of wisdom should also trust God. **Verses 5-6** say: 5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Many of you can memorize these two verses by heart. Solomon said we have to trust God completely, rather than relying on our own instinct. The result is that our path will be straight. What is trust? It is the humble acceptance that we cannot know nor control everything, but only God can. God is trustworthy because He will never change. In Genesis, when God called Abraham, He promised to bless Abraham and his descendants. When the author of the book of Hebrews recalled the incident, he wrote in **6:17** - Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. It sounds quite funny that God made an oath with a human. God is faithful and He will never break His promise. But in order to make Abraham feel more secured God swore by His name anyway. When we were young, we fully trusted our parents. We thought that they were super smart and super capable. My boys used to play a simple game with me. They were on one side of the bed and I stood on the floor. They then ran toward me and leaped into the air. My job was to catch them. They fully trusted their dad has the strength to grab them. They did not worry that I might step aside at the last second and allow them to drop to the ground. Their experience verified that I was trustworthy. As they grew older, we quit playing the game. While they still trusted me, I did not trust myself to be strong enough to bear their weight! Trust is built upon relationship. Nowadays when you buy a car or see a doctor you cannot fully trust that the persons have your best interest in mind. They are accountable to their bosses, and they are also mindful about their salary and job security. But if the persons you are dealing with are your best friends then you will gladly accept their opinions. You will invest in a certain mutual fund your good friend recommends, if you know that he is an experienced financial advisor. You will also trust your mom if she suggests a certain brand of soy sauce or instant noodle soup. If we trust our buddies and our family members, how much more should we trust our Heavenly Father? He knows us and He loves us. Just like any human relationship, the more we know God the more we will trust Him. Our trust in God grows when we commit our needs to Him. For students, if you trust God in your weekly quizzes you will trust Him in your final exams. As we mature, if we trust God in our education, we will trust

Him in our career, our marriage, our parenting, our health, our retirement and all the rest. We apply His Word in our daily practice. Our trust in Him will continue to expand even in cases when we do not receive what we ask for. As we look back, we will be amazed that: wow, our Heavenly Father is really who He says He is! Our God is really cool!

### 3. Honor God 尊榮神

Children of wisdom obey God and trust God. Thirdly, children of wisdom also honor God.

**Verses 9-10** read: 9 Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; 10 then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine. We should honor God in what we do – our education, career and family, etc. Solomon emphasized that we should also honor God with firstfruits. The command comes with a promise that God will bless those who honor Him. The Feast of the Firstfruits was one of the seven major festivals the Old Testament Jews observed. Moses commanded the Israelites in **Exodus 23:16** – “Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field....”

Another name for the Feast of the Firstfruits is the Feast of Harvest. As the first green heads of grain formed on the spring barley, workers would tie a ribbon around each budding stem to set them apart from the still immature barley. When those marked grains ripened, they were brought to the temple. It was an expression of thankfulness to God for His provision. It was also a demonstration of faith. People honored God with the first and possibly the best produce without any fear that God would withhold His future blessings. How do we honor God with our firstfruits? Naturally, you think of money offering. For those who are employed, usually we contribute our money once a month after we received a paycheck. Do not wait until the end of the year after all of your expenses have been covered. That may be why some churches receive the biggest offering in December. Instead, whenever your money comes in, set aside a portion as your contribution without even thinking about it. It is a matter of faith. You can also use it as a teaching moment for your kids. A brother shared that once his young daughter saw him writing a check on Saturday. She asked what he was doing. The dad answered: “It is the money for God.” It is a simple action. But when your children see you do it, they realize that it is a proper way to honor God. Besides offering money to the church, there are of course other ways we can honor God. The holiday season is here. There are tons of ways to honor God by sharing His love to others. You can donate money to charities. Other than money, you can donate food, used clothing, gifts or even blood. There are many underprivileged people in the society who need help. Also, the other day I read an article about one family that shows its appreciation by writing thank-you notes to others. Nowadays most people communicate through messaging. Writing and sending a card in the mail will make people feel special. Overall, the keys are to pay attention to the people around us and to share the love of God to them by taking actions.

### 4. Submit to God 順服神

Children of wisdom obey God, trust God and honor God. They also submit to God. Look at **verses 11-12**: 11 My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke, 12 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in. Discipline is more than physical punishment. It is a process to correct disobedient behaviors. We adults need God’s discipline too when we go astray. In the book of Hebrews, the purpose of discipline is further explained. **12:10-11** say: 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but

God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. God disciplines us so that we will grow to be more like Him in His holiness and righteousness. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sins in our hearts. If we choose not to submit to God and confess, then He will turn up the heat. He may remove our close fellowship with Him and with other believers. We lose interest to read the Bible and we feel ashamed to come to church. In extreme cases, God may weaken our health. You can think of some examples in the Bible where God used sickness and even death to discipline His people. We should submit to God before our hearts are hardened. From adults, let us now talk about discipling kids. **Proverbs 13:24** reads: He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him. Solomon encouraged us to smack our children with a stick. In case you wonder, in every state, corporal punishment is allowed by the law as long it is reasonable and does not cause injury. As long as the child can connect the penalty with the misconduct, shows remorse and turns back, then it is an effective discipline. After making tons of mistakes as a father, let me share with you some advice on discipling a child. First, you have to tell the child upfront what behaviors are not permissible, and the consequence for violation. Second, when your child breaks the rules, give him a chance by repeating your warning. Third, when the same wrongdoing is committed again you need to take action. You spank the child at the spot where there is a lot of cushioning. Always use a tool, not your hand. You want your kid to be afraid of the rod but not your hand. Step four is the most important. After the punishment, you have to reassure your love to him. A hug or a kiss will do. Christian experts on child development tell us that the ideal ages for spanking is from 1.5 to 5. It is never too early to start the process. Some parents may ask: is spanking the only form of discipline? Of course not! You can give your child a timeout and ask him to sit at a corner to cool down and ponder on his mistake. You may also take away his favorite toy for some time. What if your child is already a teenager? I can guarantee that if you remove his phone or lock up his computer it is worse than chopping off his arm. For older children you can also ground them and disallow them to go out with their friends, deduct their pocket money or confiscate their car keys. No matter how old your kids are, the goal is the same. You use the authority God has given you as a parent to train up your children. They submit to God by submitting to their parents at home.

## CONCLUSION

Godly wisdom helps us discern and enables us to do what pleases God. What kind of children you will have depends on what kind of parents you are. There is nothing wrong about sending your kids to renown colleges, hoping to equip them to become the best doctors, accountants or engineers. But that should not be the final goal of your nurturing process. God's blessing should be passed down and multiplied. A double-bass musician who plays for the Mexico City Philharmonic Orchestra once shared that the best instruments are made of wood that is allowed to aged naturally to remove the moisture. The wood is set aside for 80 years. After a craftsman made an instrument it has to be played for another 80 years before it reaches the best sound. The master who makes the instrument uses wood prepared by someone else. However, he will never hear the peak performance of the instrument in his life-time. We as parents will go through the same progression. We provide the best spiritual nourishment to our kids, hoping that they will in turn become godly parents in the future. In doing so, from one generation to the next, we will build a legacy of people who have godly wisdom.