

Fatherly Advice

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[0 : 0 0] Teach me your just decrees, O Lord, that spirit of teachableness that's so important for us developing and growing as people of God, that we would hear him speak to us as we turn together in his word. What wonderful sentiments and a great spirituality we've sung of, and now we would make that a reality this evening and turn into 1 Chronicles 28 where we have David's council before the great and the good of Israel, the generals, the leaders, those who were over divisions that served the king, the head officials, the civil servants, they were all there gathered in to hear David's council, instruction and guidance and right at the centre was the prince, Solomon.

And David in verse 9 says, You, Solomon, my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind. For the Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you. But if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever. Be careful now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary. Be strong and do it. Solomon had great responsibility. He had a great task ahead to be king over Israel and to see to the building of the house of the Lord. Be strong and do it. But David just doesn't say be strong and get on with it, Solomon. Here in verse 9, he guides him, he counsels him as to how to be the king that Israel really needs. I'm sure like

Solomon, all of us at some point or other have had been on the other end of being given advice. I'm sure you can remember a time where someone has come along and advised you or counseled you and given you their opinion on something or maybe helped you making a decision or you were at a point of wanting to hear someone's wise words of counsel. And I'm sure at other times you can remember when it was the last thing you wanted, when someone wanted to give you the benefit of their wisdom as you listened to them talking to you. Well, here we have Prince Solomon and he is being advised by his father, David, you Solomon, my son, know the God of your father. And chapter 29 in the first verse begins, David the king said to all the assembly, Solomon, my son, whom alone God has chosen, is young and experienced. The work is great for the place will not be for man, but for the Lord God. And who goes on there to say that he has put much in place to help Solomon? And he insists that those around him, the civil servants, the chief officers, the generals, all the politicians, that they too had their bit in helping the young king who God has chosen. And I'd like us just to be bearing that in mind to zero in on verse 9 and to seeking that teachable heart. Consider the guidance and advice that we read of here. And we can break it down in many ways. And I'd like to break it down first of all by speaking of the two necessities that we find here. The two necessities. Solomon, my son, know the God of your father and serve him. That's the first thing. Two necessities. Know God and serve God.

And it's good to just remind ourselves, isn't it, this evening as we open the scripture that it is the word of God that draws us to the God of the word. Here is the living God speaking to us. And through this ancient text that describes an event of some 3,000 years ago, we come to understand what it is God wants most of all. What does it really come down to? Solomon some years later, in his wisdom, yes, he had faults. And we know that Solomon, for all the potential and privilege he enjoyed, lost his way many times. But this is what he said when he wrote in Ecclesiastes.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. What is the meaning of life? Fear God. Keep his commandments. This is the whole duty of man. And the catechism that we know and have grown up with and number three wonderfully puts it. The scriptures principally teach what we are to believe concerning God and what we are to do. And so here is a great necessity being outlined for us at this moment of change in Israel's story where David, the great warrior king, who has led the nation, who's united the nation, through whom they have known untold success in the battlefield, where their borders have been extended through him. God's chosen. His life is coming to an end. It's a time of uncertainty and danger.

[5 : 29] Is there a potential for Israel to go off the rails big time? That was their track record. We know this. And so David sets out two great necessities as how to get things right in life, in this life.

And he begins, know God. Know God. Now to live for God, we must first know him. And we cannot live in a way to please and honour God, in isolation, to knowing him. And we take our knowledge of God from what God himself tells us. So we come to the word. We must be people of the word, people of the book. That was how Christianity down through the generations and at various times in the history of the world was referred to. People of the book. And we must be people of the book. We cannot please God in isolation to his word. It must never become a closed book, a dusty book, a book that we don't read, a book we don't turn to, a book we don't build and mould ourselves upon, the word of God. And as we do so, we get to know him. And that's what David longed for as a father. He longed for Solomon to know God as he did. Solomon, my son, know the God of your father. And he says again in verse 20, be strong and courageous and do it. Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed for the Lord God, even my God, is with you. David taking this personal closeness with God and saying to Solomon, you want to be a good king, a wise king, a just king, a king that Israel can rely on. You want to be the best king you can possibly be. Here's then the key. Remember that God is with you. Know him. Know him.

And we can relate immediately as parents, if we're parents here this evening, or grandparents, aunties, uncles. If we can look to the next generation coming up behind us, we can relate to where David's coming from. Solomon, my son, know the God of your father. And he wants him to know the God of his father. Parents, grandparents, uncles, aunties, look to the next generation and pray for them.

Pray, pray, pray. Pray that they would know God as you know God. Pray that they would know God to be close as you know him to be close. Make this your prayer. Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed, for the Lord God, even my God, is with you. He will not leave you or forsake you. What a prayer that is.

What a statement to take upon our hearts and say to the next generation, know God. It's not just to be the great kings of the world that this applies to. It's to be the best people we can be in whatever role that might be. Men, women, boys and girls. If we want to be the best that we can be, the best we should be, it needs to begin with knowing God. We find then David's heart being revealed in these words, Solomon, my son, know the God of your father. He knew that if Solomon tried to reign for a moment in his own strength, in his own abilities, in his own wisdom, in isolation to the word, in isolation to God, he'd fall on his face. And that's exactly what happened. When Solomon began to harden his heart, he fell on his face. Oh friends, we want to know God this evening.

[9 : 16] A personal relationship with God, characterized by faith in God, dependence on God, and humility before God is the key thing to knowing him. Psalm 29 puts it this way, give unto the Lord the glory due to his name, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. The Lord sits as king forever. The Lord will give strength to his people. The Lord will bless his people with peace.

This we know, and we take to heart tonight, Sunday evening, with the new week before us, the month of December opening up before us. We go into the month with this perspective, a faith in God, dependence on God, humility before God, humility before God. That will mark us out as people who know God.

That's the first necessity. He then immediately, in the same breath, saying, in knowing him, says, serve him. True religion reveals itself this way, and God-centered thinking, and God-centered living.

That's how we reveal that we know God. We reveal we know God by God-centered thinking, and God-centered living. Isaiah put it this way, you will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is fixed on you, because he trusts in you. The peace that we seek in Isaiah 26 and verse 3 comes to us through these words by fixing our minds on the Lord Jesus, and fixing our minds on the God of our fathers, the God who has provided for us in the gospel through Jesus Christ, his Son. We seek not just to know him, but now we go on to live for him. Know the God of your father and serve him. This is how one writer put it. Morally, Christians are called to holiness. Dynamically, they are called to service.

You may know that the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst, which for 300 years has churned out officers for not just the British Army, but armed forces across the world. Sandhurst is right up there.

[11 : 43] It's seen as one of the places to send the elite of your military for training, that they would come out of that place, commissioned officers back to their own armies, wherever that might be in the world, to serve, to lead their soldiers. The motto, the motto of Sandhurst above the gate as you drive in is serve to lead. Serve to lead. That's wonderful, isn't it? That an ancient military academy down there, just outside London, could have such a motto above its gate. Serve to lead. Christian friends, if we want to lead in our community and in our homes, it begins with a servant heart. It begins with being able to bow the knee. It begins with being, first of all, ourselves led in order to then lead others. And that sometimes is a problem. We have in our country people who don't want to be, who have never been led, who want to lead. We must turn that around. And here we're given this great, sound, biblical advice.

Serve. Serve. Bow the knee. Remember the example of Jesus in the upper room. What did he do the night the disciples, the night of the final supper? What did he do with the disciple who would betray him that night? He washed his feet. Washed his feet. We have our example in Christ. Serve. And this here is David calling Solomon to realize and acknowledge and understand that to be a king, that involves service as well. And so then, we consider it this way. It's all about knowing God. And in knowing him, we can't but serve him. So let us have that teachableness, that willingness that says, here am I, Lord. Send me. My soul is laid low in the dust. Give life according to your word.

I showed my ways. You answered me. Teach me your just decrees, O Lord. If we're not listening, the Lord can't teach us. And so we want to listen and be humble and acknowledge that in order to give all the glory to God, we must first of all be of humble heart and ready to listen. What does he say here as he draws these things together? Know the God of your Father and serve him with a whole heart and a willing mind. No 50% effort here. No half measures. No leftovers. God is not to be an afterthought in our week, in our plans, in our hopes and aspirations as we make decisions. He is to be the forethought with a whole heart and a willing mind. These two wonderful realities are brought together.

This is what God requires of us all tonight, friends. Devotion and discernment. Devotion and discernment. The whole heart and the willing mind. It's all or nothing, you see. I remember an old rugby coach in Inverness going through school. He was a frightening man to 13, 14, 15 year olds as we tried out for the school rugby teams. And I always remember him saying, never go into a tackle half-heartedly.

You'll get hurt. I've always remembered that. It's the same. It probably applies to most contact sports. If you go in half-heartedly, you're going to get hurt. You go in fully committed. 100%. Don't hold back.

[15 : 30] That way you'll achieve the end that you're setting out to do. Loyalty and willingness. Heart, soul, mind. All or nothing. Everything.

That's what David is calling Solomon to understand here. Two necessities. Quickly then secondly, we have here also two realities. That's what comes next. Two realities. For the Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought.

God searches our heart. God understands our thoughts. King applies his counsel by showing why these principles are so crucial.

God is not mocked. God is not fooled. I mentioned this morning the words that really made me cringe as I watched Richard Dawkins giving that tirade against the Christian church and Christian people. Calling the crowds assembled before him.

Not just to debate with Christians but to mock them and ridicule them in public. That man has so much to answer for. The Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought.

[16 : 47] Nothing is hidden from our God. God is not limited as we are. He sees and hears everything. For Dawkins, the day of reckoning is coming.

But not just Dawkins. For us all of course, you see. God's all seeing eye. He misses nothing. And David reminds his son here that God searches our heart. No heart is hidden from God.

At no point in time is God unsure of our attitude towards him, his son, his word, his people, his day.

At no point is God unsure of these things. The secrets of our soul are open before God. This is where David goes next.

Having put two necessities before Solomon. Having called him to know God and serve him with a willing mind and a wholeheartedness.

[17 : 48] He now says, Solomon, remember the Lord searches all hearts. Friends, we pause. We must pause at words like this. When the Lord searches our heart, what does he see?

When the Lord looks upon us here in Barba's this evening, gathered in worship and praise with the Bible open before us. When he looks in your heart, what does he see?

Does he see loyalty? Does he see a willingness there? Does he see wholeheartedness? Does he see sincerity, humility, dependence, worship? Does he see the tender conscience so torn by sin that all we can do is cry, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner?

For this is what matters above all. Remember the words that are recorded for us in the scripture that drive this home. The Lord does not see as man sees. For man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

Years later. At the completion of this task in building the temple, when Solomon gathered Israel before him, he cried out in prayer, kneeling before them all and said, You, Lord, only you know the hearts of all the sons of men.

[19 : 06] And so he does. And tonight he looks on our heart. And he sees us just as we are. What does he see? Also here in the reality brought before us, he understands our thoughts.

The Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought. He knows our motives, our desires. He knows why we make decisions.

He knows our agenda. He knows what we're up to. He knows what we're trying to achieve. Nothing is hidden from God. We already sung it this evening in Psalm 139.

O Lord, thou hast me searched and known. Thou knowest my sitting down and rising up. Ye all my thoughts afar to thee are known. Sometimes, friends, I wonder if we sing these words so often we forget what we're saying.

Do we forget what these words teach us? O Lord, thou hast me searched and known. Thou knowest my sitting down and rising up.

[20 : 09] Ye all my thoughts afar to thee are known. God searches our heart. God knows our thoughts. He knows what moves us.

He knows what motivates us. These words then are the words of a concerned king and a loving parent. And they reveal for us the desire that Solomon would develop on the right foundation, in the right direction, because he knew there would be a day of reckoning.

And this, friends, is how any of us get it right with God. By putting him first, not last. And following him all the days of our life.

There are then two necessities laid out for us here. To know God and serve God. There are two realities. God searches our heart. And God understands our thoughts.

And we close with this. There are two certainties. If you seek him, he says, he will be found by you. But if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever.

[21 : 22] Two certainties. David's counsel to the chosen son who would follow him onto the throne of Israel ends in a note that is both joyful and yet solemn.

And I think in some way we could go as far as saying that this text, this verse, this sentence of counsel and guidance, sums up every gospel sermon you will ever hear.

For it deals with necessity, reality and certainty. And there is always the emphasis in the gospel. That we would get things right with God.

And to get things right with God, we must come to God on his terms. Through faith in Jesus Christ. Maybe you were picking up in the last few weeks there, the various documentaries and programs that were running that were marking the 30th anniversary of the Berlin Wall coming down.

Incredible documentaries that showed how quickly the Soviet Union put up that barrier and cut the city in half. Half was now the east, the other half was the west. And almost immediately, German people and families began to use their ingenuity, their courage, their bravery to develop methods to get through, under, over and round that wall.

[22 : 42] And there was a very famous story told by a documentary recently, I think they called it Tunnel 33, where students got together and tunneled for about 180 metres under the wall and began to ferry family members back through, getting them from the east to the west.

They got round the wall by getting under the wall. It was a remarkable true story. But friends, tonight I once want to remind you of something you will well know.

There is one barrier, much older than the Berlin Wall, that is truly impenetrable, that cannot be crossed by any.

We can't get through, under, round or over it. It's the barrier of sin. We cannot come to God because of sin.

But what God has done is put a door in that wall. You know, when I first pulled up to the church this morning, seeing as it's 22 years since I've been here, I had a bit of an issue finding my way in.

[23 : 46] I parked up the front and went round there. And just almost by default, you expect the old-fashioned church door. You look, where's the door gone? And then very helpfully, someone said, you're going the wrong way, that way, up and in.

I didn't know where the door was. I hope, friends, that you wouldn't go home this evening wondering about where the door to the Lord Jesus Christ is.

For he has said, I am the door. Isn't that wonderful? That we know to be right with God, we take that step of faith in Jesus.

And we ask him into our heart. Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner. And this is where we find David going in this word.

Listen to, if you seek him, he will be found by you. But if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever. Clear promise of the Bible.

[24 : 47] And the commitment of God in his word is that those who seek him with all their heart will find him. I've lost count over the years of how many people have said to me, well, I've been praying, and I've been searching, and I've been asking, but I haven't felt anything.

And I just say, as we take these words to heart, it's not about what you may think you should feel in seeking Jesus. That's putting the cart before the horse.

Go to Jesus. Bend the knee. Bow your head. And ask him into your heart as saviour. And how do we do that? With a whole heart and a willing mind.

Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner. It's the most important prayer we'll ever make. It's the most important decision any of us can make this evening. It's to seek God and keep seeking God until you find him.

Seek him. And he will be found by you. There is the promise given in God's word. And this is the wonderful thing that the Christian church can take heart in this evening.

[26 : 09] That we have been given our orders. We have heard our message. We have God's word. And we have been commissioned to declare, share, teach, and explain his word to everyone.

We are given opportunity. Listen to God. If you seek him, he will be found by you. The Lord God says through the prophet Jeremiah, And you will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.

Not as an afterthought. Not as a PS. Not as a tired note at the end of the day when you have no energy. And you're spent. You're tired. You just want to go to bed and get ready for Monday.

You seek God with all your heart. Give him your entire undivided, wholehearted, and willing mind as you seek him.

And this is what he says. If you seek him, he will be found by you. And that's what every Christian here tonight has discovered. To be the truth. Two certainties.

[27 : 16] But there's a note here that follows on this joyful, this joyous underlining. And it's as solemn as things get. If you forsake him, he will cast you off forever.

The only thing more solemn than someone consciously turning away from God is the thought of that same person entering eternity still turned away from God.

exposed to God's wrath and curse forever. If a tree falls to the south or the north in the place where the tree falls, they that shall lie.

I've told this in Ecclesiastes chapter 3. Words written to record us, to tell us and teach us by Solomon. Don't forget this counsel.

That he was given before the crown was placed in his head. If you forsake him, he will cast you off forever. It has been written and summed up in this way.

[28 : 22] Eternity to the godly is a day that has no sunset. But eternity to the godless is a night that has no sunrise. I would urge you and counsel you, friend, this evening, if you have not yet sought the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, to do so now.

Don't wait till this evening. Don't wait till tomorrow. Don't wait till next Sunday. Now is the appointed time where God, by his grace and mercy and love, has seen to it that everything might pause so that you once again would hear the good news that through faith in him, you too, like everyone else who has come to him in faith, can be forgiven.

And just notice as we close this evening, what David said finally, Be careful now.

The Lord has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary. Be strong and do it. This evening we thought of two necessities. Know God and serve God.

Two realities. He searches our heart. He understands our thoughts. Two certainties. If you seek him, you will find him. But if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever.

[29 : 45] Given this counsel, David then turns to Solomon and says, Be careful. Be strong. Do the work you're called to do. And that, Christian friend, applies to us tonight.

There's a work to be done. There are people to be spoken to. There is a witnessing to be engaged with. And if we don't do it, who will? Why else has God raised up his people and placed you here, but to be his witnesses?

Let me just encourage you tonight by reminding you, as you witness and serve, you are not alone. It's one last story to finish with this evening.

There is on the battlefield of the Somme, a stone cairn. It's been raised and put in place outside the village of Bowman Hamill. And there in 1916, many, many Scottish soldiers lost their lives as they took part in that awful conflict in the campaign that became known as the Battle of the Somme.

And we were there visiting a number of years ago and we took part in an act of remembrance before the stone. And I noticed on the stone a Gaelic inscription, which is transcribed or translated as, in the day of battle, it is good to have friends.

[31 : 09] And I thought, I've never forgot it, because to me it speaks so much of what it means to be a soldier. In the awfulness of combat and conflict, terrified and uncertain, disorientated, facing death, here was a call to remind them they're not alone.

But it also speaks to me of the work of the church. Because sometimes the greatest temptation we face as believers is to feel and think we're alone. But we're not.

And if tonight you're thinking or feeling you're alone, just look around. Remind yourself you're not alone. There are brothers and sisters here. Take encouragement from them.

Share with them. Engage in fellowship together. Share your concerns. Talk about your uncertainties. Share together whatever fears it is you may feel. And engage in the work.

Be careful. And do it. And may God have mercy on us. And bless us with his grace and peace. As we engage with the work he has called us to do.

[32 : 17] We'll pray together. Lord our God, we pray tonight that you would be with us and go before us. We bless you that we face this week.

And we do so not alone. But with brothers and sisters in a family. And above all, with the Lord Jesus Christ, by his spirit within us.

We rejoice that we face the world, the flesh and the devil. Fully equipped and prepared for the task ahead. Grant us Lord insight, wisdom, patience and understanding.

To know not just how you would have us live, but what you would have us do. And may we render to you, Lord, all the praise and all the glory as we seek to serve you.

So be with us, Lord. Part us with your blessing, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. We'll close our service by turning to the Psalter.

[33 : 29] And singing from Psalm 31 in the Psalter. Psalm 31. And we'll sing from verse 21 in the Psalter. Verse 21.

We'll sing to the end of the Psalm from verse 21. All praise and thanks be to the Lord, for he hath magnified his wondrous love to me within a city fortified.

Psalm 31 from verse 21 to the end of the Psalm. All praise and thanks be to the Lord, Lord, for he hath magnified his wondrous love to me within a city fortified.

Far from thine eyes cut off I am I.

Yet my haste hath said, my voice hath heard, O love the Lord, God.

[35 : 10] All praise and thanks be to the Lord, for he hath made his face. Because the Lord doth guard the faithful, and he plenteously proud to earth doth reward.

Be all good courage and strength, unto your heart shall send.

All ye who hope and confidence doth all the Lord, for the Lord, for the Lord, for the Lord, for the Lord, may the grace of the Lord,