



I'm Not The Perfect Parent

Part 5 – My Kids Are Grown But There's Still Time

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today, we conclude the series I'm Not the Perfect Parent. We're talking to parents with adult children. The prayer today is that parents would leave filled with hope and leave with a few handles. By handles, I mean that they are able to do something with that relationship. We're praying for reconciliation, but we also want adult children, of which I am one, to listen. Adult children, we want you to listen because our prayer for you is that you would cut Mom and Dad some slack. All the parents said... Amen.

Some of you are parents of adult children and you are adult children as well because your parents are still with you. There is a lot to apply in this message, but we're talking today about *My Kids are Grown but There's Still Time*. A lot of people live with guilt and regret. There are mixed emotions with this; there's pain with this. But we want you to know there is still time. We want you to know this: There is plenty you can do and there is nothing God can't do.

We're going to jump right into Proverbs 23 today, as we see what a lot of parents will read, and your hearts will leap with this. Your hearts will say, *That is where I'm at with my child. I want my child to understand that.* When you read Proverbs, you're going to see these words over and over again: my son, my son, my son. I always picture a dad that's just sitting on the edge of a bed, talking to his son about life, giving his son instruction for wisdom and teaching him to avoid foolishness and getting him on the right path.

Today, we're going to talk about two different paths. One being just a different path and then we're going to talk about the wrong path.

Let's jump right into Proverbs 23. If you have your Bibles, you can turn there. ***19 Listen, my son, and be wise, and set your heart on the right path...*** That's what we want to talk about today. ***20 Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat...*** We know clearly from scripture that drunkenness and gluttony are sins. And when you think about these two sins and what we're going to see in the text today, it's very clear that the dad is saying, "Don't hang around people like that because it's not just that it is a sin, but it's what comes out of that sin."

This is why Mom and Dad, young people, before you leave the home, they want to know a couple of things. What are you doing? Where are you going? And the most important question: Who will you be with? That's because you may start the night somewhere, but, depending on who you're with, your destination may change. This text is saying don't join those people who are constantly into the party.

21 for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags. Yes, drunkenness and gluttony are sin, but what we have to understand too is it's taking time away from work. It's the one constantly looking for the party, but people who are hungover are not productive at work. So, even when you're not drinking too much wine, you're suffering the effects of it.

Proverbs 13 says it this way. **20 Walk with the wise and become wise...** Associate with the wise. Be with the wise and become wise. **...for a companion of fools suffers harm.** So, it's who you're with and who is on the path with you and which path you are taking that we're talking about today.

Back into Proverbs 23. **22 Listen to your father, who gave you life...** Now I'm not certain on this, but I'm just guessing. I think this is the text where we get that age old saying from Dad: "I brought you into this world and I will take you out." I don't know for sure, but I think that's the verse that it originated with. Listen to your father who gave you life. "If you don't knock it off, I'm going to take you out and create another that looks just like you." **...and do not despise your mother when she is old.** And all the grandmas said... Amen.

23 Buy the truth and do not sell it—wisdom, instruction and insight as well. Now it's not just about avoiding those and not spending time with those who choose drunkenness and gluttony, but it's the child that's pursuing his faith and the child that is walking with the Lord Jesus.

24 The father of a righteous child has great joy; a man who fathers a wise son rejoices in him. Many of you who are there today, you are very proud of your kids. Your adult children are all doing well. They're pursuing the Lord and they're ministering and taking the responsibility for their family. I want you to know your church family rejoices with you as you rejoice in them. But we're targeting today that parent who is experiencing a lot of pain, the parent who is struggling today with an adult child who has chosen the wrong path. It doesn't mean you check out because there are still plenty of handles that you can take out of this for cultivating that adult/child relationship.

25 May your father and mother rejoice... Young people, please hear this. Choosing the right path and being on the right path is one of the best ways you can honor your parents; it brings joy to them. **...may she who gave you birth be joyful!** Did anybody ever have a mother remind you how painful childbirth was? Did anybody ever have that mom? It would come up every now and then, especially in the teenage years.

26 My son, give me your heart and let your eyes delight in my ways, 27 for an adulterous woman is a deep pit... Now we're going to move from drunkenness and gluttony, and the destruction that brings upon a person's life, to choosing a life of sexual sin. You're going to see that going with the adulterous woman or the seductress is near fatal. It can take you out. It can ruin your life. It's why Dad and Mom are like on the edge of the cliff, jumping in front of you, saying, "Stop; don't go any further." You get the heart of this father. **...and a wayward wife is a narrow well. 28 Like a bandit she lies in wait and multiplies the unfaithful among men.**

Proverbs 10: 1 says, ***A wise son brings joy to his father...*** But today, we're talking about ***...a foolish son brings grief to his mother.*** And what can a parent do. But before we get to that child who has chosen a wrong path, I just want to talk about a different path for a second.

I tried to find a picture of a millennial couple, and I think I nailed it. They're not necessarily a couple. It's just a young, adult man and adult woman. Let this be your child for just a moment. They have chosen different values and a different path. They don't buy the cars you want them to buy. They don't work a job like you want them to work. They have tattoos. They have two piercing on their ears. And you're going, "Oh no, no, no."

I was in the conversation when a mom was getting on her daughter for the little sparrow that she got on her shoulder. I was just thinking, *Oh, Mom, there are essentials and nonessentials. I call this a nonessential.* Some of you may disagree, but it's a different value and a different path. The Mom said, "Yeah, just so you know, that sparrow, when you get to my age, will be a crow." Some of you have some of those crows on your right now. "I should have listened to my mom."

This week, Amy and I have been processing through a lot of the families that we know. I want you to think about the same kid, but there are two different relationships. We know parents who have great relationships with their kids and their kids have chosen a very different path and have very different values. Then we look at other families where the relationship between Mom, Dad, and the kid that's terrible. Again, the kids may not even be on the wrong path; they're just on a different path and have different values and there is not a great relationship.

We just started naming off... We were trying to isolate what makes the difference. You're like, "Did you name people in this church?" We named everybody. We went through everybody in this church. We weren't judging; we were stereotyping. We went through it because we know that your child chooses different values and different paths. Some of you have a warm relationship with your child. You spend quality time together. You enjoy them and your grandchildren. Every time you're together, it's a great time. We see this and we look from a distance and we're in awe of that.

A relationship that is very public is a relationship between a father and son that plays out on Twitter. It's fascinating to me. It's between James Merritt, who is a very conservative, Southern Baptist preacher. I was actually called to ministry under Dr. Merritt's ministry years ago at Liberty University. He has a son named Jonathan Merritt who has very different values and is very outspoken about it. And yet, James and Jonathan have a wonderful, warm relationship. I know there are times, late at night, where James is going, *Come on, Jonathan, what are you thinking?* But we don't see that. I guess... and maybe it has been in the past. They say they have fights that can peel paint, but they have a deep love and respect for each other, and really, they are both just two that enjoy fighting and they can walk out of a room loving and caring for one another. They have a warm relationship. You see it; it's genuine.

Then on this side, you see parents whose children chose a different path and have different values and their relationships are just cold and toxic. They are only together when necessary. We call those funerals and weddings. Or maybe they're together for family holidays. "We're supposed to be together for Christmas and Thanksgiving," but when they are together, they don't enjoy being together.

So, before we talk about a wrong path, let's talk a moment about a different path. Let's make it really clear. **A different path doesn't mean a wrong path.** Your children may not be living out the life you've dreamed for them and you're letting that effect your relationship.

Let's talk about the different values, different paths. It's going to make some of you want to scream and shout and that's why we're here today. We're just working some things out. **Your kids** (adult children) **want to earn enough to live a life of adventure.** They're not looking at work and life the same way you did. You lived to work; they work to live. Dave Ramsey says it and not everybody agrees with it. "Live like no one else right now so when you're old you can live like no one else." A lot of young people are saying, "We want to live like no one else right now. We don't want to wait. We're not going to make the trade that you made." I'm just speaking on behalf of the generation, so don't go after me even though this is in my heart a little bit. "You sold out for 30 or 40 years to a company that isn't taking care of you like they promised. We see that and we're not going to make that trade." That's all your adult child is saying.

Your kids may not work the same job or career for 30 or 40 years. That doesn't mean they're lazy. More than likely, especially with millennials, they're going to have more than one job at a time. They are going to have multiple revenue streams and there are all sorts of creative ways to earn money. Mom and Dad, the strain in your relationship is that they have a different path because they haven't settled down into a nine to five corporate job. They're not working for the "man."

You see it online and you see it on social media. I just remember partying used to be done on the weekends. Does anybody remember that? And country songs have been written about it. "Friday's Here!" Not true with this generation. "We're going out tonight and it's Monday." "We're going out on Tuesday." "We're going out on Wednesday." They're living life now; they're not making the trade to not live life for 30 or 40 years and then live it in an RV later on. Sorry, Treasure Lake. This is all Treasure Lake down here. They're like, "Hey, we've got so much money, we don't know what to do with. Our kids are broke. We're going to make sure the last check we write them before we die bounces." I'm glad we can laugh about it, I hope. Because this is a different path, it doesn't mean it's a wrong path.

I just want you to know we believe in the gospel. We like Dave Ramsey, but he's not the gospel. Some of you think everything he says is true and correct. Young people are like, "Well I'm just going to do it a little bit different over here," but it doesn't mean that it's wrong.

This one has been an encouragement to me. I have friends who are researchers that are constantly sending me stuff, calling me. One of them called me last week out of Bolder, Colorado with research that he's been doing. **Your kids may wait a while to settle down, but they want to succeed in marriage and family.** We need to be ready for that, church. It may take them a little bit longer to get it started, but they want to be successful in their marriages and in their families. We need to be a church that is helping every generation be successful in that.

It's interesting... I was at a conference two years ago. It was a Kansas Beef Summit. It was a party, let me tell you. I was speaking on relationships, but the guy before me was speaking about millennials. His talk was how to market beef to millennials on Facebook. He goes around the country doing this talk. I

was blown away by how awesome this talk was. He said millennials do not eat beef until they have children. Then when they have children, they become the largest consumer of beef. They just want to know the cow has lived a good life before they eat it. I know we have production farmers in here. I can get into all that... That's why you had all these old guys grumbling.

He was saying they wanted to know the cows were in a pasture with ten acres all to themselves before they were slaughtered, and they had some ducks running alongside them, and a white picket fence and all that. So long as they lived a good life, we will enjoy this burger. Different, not wrong.

Your kids won't parent like you because they face different challenges than you. This one drives some of you crazy. This wears some of you out when they are at your house. Let me tell you... I'm going to encourage you with a book today and we're going to get some application from this book today. My good friend, Jim Burns, wrote a book called *Doing Life with Your Adult Child*. I can sum the whole book up into one statement. **Keep your mouth shut.** That is hard for me. Why? Because I have a lot of thoughts. I have a lot of opinions. And I'm not saying everything I say is right, but it pretty much is. How many of you parents feel like you give great advice? I'm a wise person. I want to remind my kids that people pay me for my advice. They get it for free. "I go places to talk with people about it. You should listen to me." But he says, *Keep the mouth shut and the welcome mat out.* That's the subtitle of the book.

So, when they're over at your house and you're seeing things they are doing with your grandkids... I know what you're thinking and it's a simple thought. *Beat them.* Some of you want to go out with your pocketknife and take a little switch off the tree like your parents did with you. You're like, "I will have better grandchildren if you use this." Keep your mouth shut. It's so hard.

Your kids love Jesus but will worship and serve him in different ways. Church will not look like this 20 years from now. At 45, I'm already preparing myself and I want to do this. It's why we have other younger speakers on the teaching team. I already need to be letting go. I don't want to be that guy sitting down here at 65 years old screaming up to the worship leader, "I want more Tomlin!" Like some of you are screaming, "I want more hymns." "Well I want more Tomlin. I haven't heard Tomlin in months." I don't want to be that guy. They want a great marriage and family; they love the Lord. Again, we're talking about a different path today.

Here's some application for what to do when your child does not share your values and they are on a different path. Not the wrong path, but different path. We're still on that.

1. Stop complaining about your child's generation. Ted, please here this. My kids don't want me to complain. I don't complain much about their generation; it's the generation before them, but it bugs them when I complain about other generations. Stop complaining. Carey Neuhoff says this, and I think this is one of the best statements he's every made. "It is hard to influence the next generation when you are constantly rolling your eyes at them." Let this be a church that influences the next generation and not just influence them, but back off and let them lead.

2. Be the parent of the child you have, not the child you want. This is going to help you a lot. This is just expectation. Just creating expectation.

3. Let them learn from experience. Let them learn from experience without using these words: I told you so. I don't even need to preach this; you guys already have all this; we just can't live it. Why is it so hard? We know it but we can't live it.

You heard this story if you've been here for any amount of time, but it's one of my favorite stories about this very point. When we started the church over 17 years ago, our first youth pastor was Ben Ambuehl. Ben and I have been friends since he left. But young, 23-years-old, he was a youth pastor.

Ben came into my office one day and said, "Hey, would you go with me up to Springfield to look at cars? I have to get a car." I told him I would love to do that, so we hopped in the car and went up to Springfield. We went on a used car lot, so I was proud of him, but the very first vehicle he walked over to he fell in love with. It was an Escalade. It was the most beautiful car on the lot. He told the sales guy he wanted to look at it. He got in the driver's seat and I got in the passenger seat. I'm trying not to roll my eyes, but he goes, "Oh man, this is nice, isn't, Ted." I told him it was really nice. It had a Bose sound system. It wasn't that leather that we had in our minivans; it was the plush kind that you just kind of sink down into. You know what I'm saying. You old people have that leather. You know what I'm talking about. It's has that lumbar support.

I'm sitting there going, "Ben, you're 23. I know what you make; you can't afford this bro!" I pointed to something like a Ford, Explorer that had like 110,000 miles on it. I go, "Ben, we've got to go look at that car." I'll never forget him getting in that car and sniffing it. It was yuck. And he was serious when he said, "After being in that it's really hard to sit in this one."

I budgeted with him. We got out notes. I said, "Well, you'll be able to each Monday through Thursday, but you're not going to have enough money to make it." And we hadn't even discussed gas. Does anybody here drive an Escalade that you'd care to... All tithing Escalade owner, would you raise your hand? No, I'm just kidding.

Ben bought the escalade. Look at all the judgment. Ben has given me permission to share this story because we talk about it every single time we're together. He texted me this week and every time he pops up on my phone, I'm thinking, "*Escalade.*"

I'll never forget him walking into my office. You know, when you get a new car, especially a nice new car, you like to drive it. You don't park it; you drive it. He was all over town. He filled it up a couple of times in a week. I'll never forget him coming into my office and saying, "Do you think they'll take it back?" Jim Burns, in *Doing Life with Your Adult Child*, says, "Trust that experience is a better teacher than advice." Let me tell you, Ben learned.

Jim says unsolicited advice is received as criticism. So, just let them learn by experience.

4. Speak words of honor over them every chance you get. We've talked about honor. We talked about it last week. It's esteeming others as highly valuable. Speak words of high value over your kids. I asked a friend this week, "Hey, does your dad offer unsolicited advice to you?" He looked at me and said, "All the time." I said, "Tell me about that." My friend is tatted up head to toe. He said, "Ted, every time I'm with my dad, he has a comment about my tattoos. Every time I'm with him, it feels as though he holds my childhood mistakes and even my adulthood mistakes against me. I'm constantly reminded of the things I didn't do well." Keep your mouth shut. And when you open it, speak words of high value over your adult children.

Proverbs 18: 21 says, ***The tongue has the power of life and death...*** And that's true for your relationships as well. It can kill relationships; it can bring life to relationships. ***...and those who love it will eat it's choice fruit.***

The question is this: "Are my words as a dad pushing my kids away or drawing them in? Am I speaking life over them?"

5. Create fun memories with them. Here's the secret: it has to be what's fun for them. This is one of the greatest things. It's already a value in our home. It's a value in this church. They are going to get to an age where they take you places, hopefully. They'll invite you on the adventure. But I'm in a season right now, with a 14 and 16-year-old, a son and a daughter, they have very different ideas of fun. For Carson right now it's rollercoasters. I'm not a big fan of rollercoasters. I have a tolerance to about four and then after four, I have to take about an hour break, maybe get a little corn dog in me, a little Diet Coke. Because that helps for the next time you go on a rollercoaster. Maybe a funnel cake, something... But he wants to go, go, go and as a dad right now, I'm doing the best I can.

My wife knows my daughter is into shopping and so she takes her someplace they can just shop. She doesn't buy a bunch, but she loves looking. She's into I think it's called junking. It's like going into all these flea markets and stuff and just seeing all the stuff you guys are tired of. I'm really going after you today. I love my Treasure Lake friends.

Look what Jim and Cathy Burns say, and they live by this, "Words don't always lead to connection, but enjoyable connections lead to words." Isn't this true from the time our children are very small? Like talking to Carson about the death of his grandfather when he was very young. Sitting him down and saying, "I'd like to talk to you about what happened to Grandpa" isn't as effective as when I was playing Legos with him on the ground. He would go, "What happened to Grandpa's body?" I knew right there that with a seven-year-old, I only had a couple of minutes, maybe seconds, but we have this connection and it allows me the opportunity to share.

What should I do when my child is on the wrong path? They're not pursuing a relationship with the Lord. They've chosen another lifestyle that you know is contrary to the word of God. What do you do? There is still plenty you can do and there is nothing God can't do.

#1 Delete the narrative that keeps repeating it's too late and it's my fault. You've played that over and over again in your mind and you need to know your adult child has to take personal responsibility for the way they are living their life right now.

Whenever I challenge adults with taking personal responsibility for the anger they're dealing with, the bitterness, the resentment, they sometimes hear that I'm telling them they are to blame. I didn't say you were to blame, I said you're responsible now for the path you're on 100%. Mom and Dad, yes you've made mistakes. That's why we're doing this series. You're not the perfect parent. I'm not the perfect parent. And I'm not going to live out my days with *it's too late, it's my fault, there's nothing that can be done*. There's plenty that can be done and there's nothing that God can't do.

#2 Love them unconditionally and don't withhold love to make a point. You call them. You speak to them. Love your kids unconditionally. And remember you have a Father in heaven... I can say this. It's a quote from Phillip Yancy. "There's nothing you can do to make Him love you more, and there's nothing you can do to make Him love you less." That's unconditional right there. Be the parent that there's nothing they can do to make you love them more, and there's nothing they can do to make you love them less.

#3 Share when asked without belaboring your convictions. You'll be asked questions. You may step into their life during a painful time. Something happens at work or something happens in a relationship and you're able to step in... They're coming to you for your advice, for your thoughts, for your wisdom. At that point, it's not unsolicited; they're asking for it. Share when asked without belaboring your convictions. A lot of the mistakes we make as parents are we think *Okay our child is tender right now; it's a soft moment I can speak into this and I need to bring up these other ten things I've been thinking about*. Let them go. Don't get historical. Stay on what it is.

Stephanie Watson and I have been emailing back and forth about this book, doing life together. She said that one of the things she had to realize - her kids are sitting in here right now - is that you have all this influence in their life up until age 18. At age 18, the word picture Jim uses is that you've got to tear the old job description to pieces and throw it away. That job is done. And there is a new job description that you need to take. And in that process of ripping up the old job description and taking the new job description, there is going to be mourning, there's going to be difficulty. It's going to be challenging for you, but write the new job description. Mom and Dad, earn the right to be heard. Keep the door for conversation open so that they will ask.

#4 Pray for them and with them. This one sounds simple, but I think this could probably be the most important thing you walk away with. When they come to your house, they're expecting prayer before a meal. They're expecting you to pray with them. My kids know when they leave the car, I'm going to pray with them. Now that they are going to the car without me and driving off, I pray with them at the door. They know we pray as a family before meals. There are going to be opportunities where your kids visit you later in life and they know their mom is a mom of prayer. Be known as the Dad of prayer. I want to be known as that.

I've been a part of these where I sit down at a table to eat and the host gets up and before we eat, walks around the table, stops at each person, and prays a blessing over them. There is plenty you can do and there's nothing God can't do. Let the food get cold and walk around the table and pray and speak a blessing over each person.

I want to end with the story of the prodigal son. We're going to pick it up where he has left his father, chosen foolish living, as we looked at in the beginning of the message. He's living with pigs. He squandered it all with the party lifestyle, if you would.

Here's what it says in Luke 15, **17** *"When he came to his senses..."* There are a lot of parents in here right now praying for children that would come to their senses. And let this be for you, adult child, that you are on the wrong path. Let the Holy Spirit of God convict you this morning and may you come to your senses and repent your sin before your Father in heaven and your parents. *"...he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!'* You've come to poverty. Drowsiness clothes and you end up poor.

18 *'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned..."* "I have sinned" is the confession of a sinner; it's a confession of one who said, "I'm on the wrong path, I'm repenting of that sin, and now I am turning toward God." That's the picture we get of the prodigal son. *"...against heaven, and in your (his father) sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son..."* Whatever you do for me, I'm not worthy of it; I don't deserve it; I didn't earn it. *"...make me as one of your hired men."*

20 *"So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him..."* Probably the first time I've ever seen this in the text that the son continues to repent after his father shows him compassion. What is that for us? That's an understanding of safe arms. The safe parent wraps their arms around the child and what that safety does is create a desire to repent even more. When the child is met with judgment, it's backing off, but this is how your heavenly Father treats you when you say, "I have sinned." It's immediate acceptance. You are saved. This isn't a process; this isn't a season that you have to go through. You are immediately declared righteous when you say, "I have sinned." And the Father embraces you. May we have the same arms for our children, standing ready to embrace them.

"...and ran and embraced him and kissed him." So, he's already received the mercy from his father. **21** *"And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'"* So he continues to repent. **22** *"But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate..."* Verse 24 is this beautiful picture of life transformation complete. **24** *"'for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate."*

This is how we want to close today. We want to pray for families that they would have this celebration. Maybe it will take place in here today because there are so many generations that attend this church

together and online. Today is the day... You've been on the wrong path. You know you're on the wrong path. Don't let this be about your parents. Don't let this be about this church. Don't let it be about me. Don't let it be about this screen. Let it be about God convicting you. Today, some of you have chosen drunkenness, gluttony, sexual immorality; you have sinned. May your cry out to your heavenly Father today be "I have sinned against you and I have sinned against them." That is repentance. And when you say, "I have sinned," and you turn toward God, it is immediate acceptance, arms wrapped around you with compassion on you. We're going to pray this happens in many families.

Father, it is in the name of Jesus that we thank you for what you continue to do at our church. There are young people in here today, young adults in the 20s, 30s, 40s who are on the wrong path. I pray that today would be the day they confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord, believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead, and that they would turn to you with the simple statement, "I have sinned. I have sinned against you. I have sinned against my parents." May that confession come freely from them and may they leave here today understanding the compassion and the mercy that has come to them at the moment of their salvation.

I pray for moms and dads that they would continually pray, pray without ceasing for their adult son, adult daughter, that they would be praying for that celebration. That they would take these handles, that they would share when asked without belaboring their convictions, that they would care for their kids and love them unconditionally, embracing them, having warm relationships, enjoying spending time together, and creating fun memories together. We pray that for the families of this church.

And may this always be a church that rejoices with those who are rejoicing in their children and may we be a church that walks alongside those, joining them in prayer and locking arms with them until their children come home for the celebration.

It is in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen.