*“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger*.” -Proverbs 15:1

I’ve never been great at goodbyes. The day I left for college was no exception. I stood at the foot of our driveway, nervously kicking a few small stones back and forth, between my feet. A few minutes felt like an hour. I was trying to say goodbye to my parents.

My father was about as equally uncomfortable with goodbyes. I’m not entirely sure what I said that day, but I do remember what he said. He didn’t say much, but his words were sufficient. **A father’s words always weigh about 100 pounds more than any other man’s words.**

A father’s words are heavy with meaning. They are weighty with approval, wisdom, correction and security. It’s a truth we know all too well as sons, but need to be reminded of now, as fathers. With our words, we have countless opportunities each day for great good and harm.

It’s not surprising then, that the Bible speaks directly to fathers on learning to parent well so our sons and daughters don’t become weary, discouraged, insecure or afraid.

Parenting isn’t easy. But neither is being a child. If we’re not careful, the Scriptures warn us, our children can become discouraged or lose heart in the process of growing toward adulthood.

In Colossians 3:21, the Apostle Paul writes to men by saying, *“Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.” In Ephesians 6:4, he writes with nearly identical words, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”*

It is worth noting that while children are instructed to obey their “parents” in the preceding verses, it is “fathers” who are given the instruction to be careful of causing their children to become weary or discouraged.  Paul doesn’t say, “Fathers and mothers, do not…” He addresses fathers directly.

Why is this important?

First, I think because it speaks to God’s design and desire for dads to be actively involved in leading their families. **In a culture where men feel pressure to “prove” themselves in the gym, on the job, or with their stuff, the Bible calls men to success at home** (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

But secondly, because in general, a lot of men (myself included) can struggle to be the patient, instructive, tender, and thoughtful parent God calls them to be. It seems to me that the mention of “fathers” speaks to the tendency for men to sinfully error in the direction of being “harsh” with their words.

The writer of Proverbs warns that harsh words “stir up anger” (Proverbs 15:1). The Hebrew word for harsh means sorrowful, painful, or hard words. They are words that bring a heavy load to our kids because they leave them feeling like they are never good enough. They can be embarrassing words, making our kids feel shameful. They can be sarcastic or biting words, that stir up feelings of anger or bitterness. Harsh words can be angry words that create fear and insecurity in the hearts of our sons or daughters. Scaring our kids is not the same as shaping our kids.

 I am not implying that parents should be overly permissive. Avoiding discouragement in our children does not mean avoiding discipline (Hebrews 12:5-11). However, I am suggesting that there is one habit every father should avoid as we guide, correct, and nurture our children in the direction of Jesus. It is the temptation to be “harsh” with our words.

It’s old news to say that parenting is hard. But being a child isn’t a walk in the park either. So we need to be careful with our sons and daughters. In Christ, we have a Father who is “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love” (Psalm 103:6). **May His love and patience with us continue to transform our own hearts as we seek to shape our child’s heart.**