


# Parenting, family guidance and spiritual education: Proverbs 1:8–9 and its wisdom ethos for children's moral development

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Received: 22 Aug. 2024

Accepted: 16 Oct. 2024

Published: 15 Nov. 2024

**How to cite this article:**Boloje, B.O., 2024, 'Parenting, family guidance and spiritual education: Proverbs 1:8–9 and its wisdom ethos for children's moral development', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45(1), a3285. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.3285>**Copyright:**© 2024. The Author.  
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This article seeks to provide a wisdom domain moral analysis of Proverbs 1:8–9 on the role of parents in conveying the significance of parental instruction and the development of wisdom in children. As a process through which young individuals acquire and cultivate essential qualities and values that shape their behavior and moral outlook, children character development encompasses various aspects, including moral, social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, and it is influenced by a range of factors, including familial upbringing, social interactions, cultural influences, education, and personal experiences. Whilst the origin of parents as agents of moral guardian is not explicitly stated in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (HB/OT), Proverbs 1:8–9 is one of those key passages whose themes underscore the profound significance of family structure and system, and parental responsibility. The verses highlight the spiritual and moral dimensions of family life, promoting a sense of dignity, submission, and personal development within the context of a supportive family structure. The incisive prescriptions of the text offer a journey into self-understanding, self-development, and self-actualization, by reaffirming the family as a pivotal social institution while balancing the roles and responsibilities of parents and children.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** This article brings together biblical and theological insights from the parental rhetoric of Proverbs 1:8–9 to bear on and help shape the oversight function of parents as agents of children moral development and healthy family life. The verses bridge spiritual wisdom with scientific understanding, presenting a holistic view of how a child grows intellectually, emotionally, and morally.

**Keywords:** Proverbs 1:8–9; parent–child relation; family ethics; wisdom; character development; children; parental rhetoric.

## Introduction

The significance of children in family life is immense and cannot be overstated. They are crucial to the family unit, offering fathers heirs to continue the family lineage and mothers, sociocultural validation (Steinberg 2022:176). They are essential to the survival of the household; they are a gift from Yahweh and their absence creates concerns. Their presence in the household is highlighted by Perdue (1997a:182) when he remarked that, '... they provided their households, including their mothers, both economic security and social status'. Consequently, societies place great importance on raising and educating children with strong moral values. Parent–child relationship is at the heart of family ethics that turns out to be a broad interdisciplinary field in family research with collaborative efforts from experts in religion, family law, psychologists, sociologists and educationalists, philosophers and political scientists (Schaafsma 2023:48; Valavi, Soleimani & Moghadam 2022:1). In both the field of educational sciences and psychology, several factors are recognised as basic influencers and promoters of the personality formation and moral and social characteristics of children. While environmental factors are recognised as important to the process, from the perspective of psychologist and sociologist, the family is considered to be the most important environment for developing value, influencing human space and relationship (cf. Becker & Epstein 1993:85; Eisenberg, Fabes & Losoya 1997:129–131). Within Ancient Israelite society, an established family network provided stability and inclusion for children who are especially on the fringes of society (Perdue 1997a:182; cf. Perdue 1997b:223–258).

Children's character development is a process through which young individuals acquire and cultivate essential qualities, traits and values that shape their behaviour, attitudes and moral

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outlook, as they grow in life. The process itself encompasses various aspects, including moral, social, emotional and cognitive dimensions, and it is influenced by a range of factors, including familial upbringing, social interactions, cultural influences, education and personal experiences. In view of the fact that healthy family dynamics reflect marriage and parenthood that reveal God's character, and where children experience God's love and learn to love others, this article provides a wisdom domain moral analysis of Proverbs 1:8-9 on the role of parents in conveying the significance of parental instruction and the development of wisdom in children and sustainable family life.

Proverbs 1 verses 8-9 emphasises the importance of parental guidance, attentive listening and the value of family teachings in shaping a person's character and fostering wisdom. The verses highlight the spiritual and moral dimensions of family life, promoting a sense of honour, obedience and personal development within the context of a supportive family structure. Following this brief introduction, that article examines the place of parents as children's agents of moral guardian and development and continues with an analysis of Proverbs 1:8-9 and its moral wisdom. The wisdom ethos of the text that serves as drivers of children moral deployment and sustainable healthy family life concludes the Biblical, literary and theological exploration. Consequently, the verses bridge spiritual wisdom with scientific understanding, presenting a holistic view of how a child grows intellectually, emotionally and morally.

## Parents as agents of moral guardian and development

Parent-child relationship is an essential aspect of family, which is tied to marriage pair, and which may be absent from some marriage partners. The fundamental issue is the understanding of needs and reciprocity of roles and responsibility; that is, what children, parents and partners need and how and whether these needs can be satisfied in the family setting. Essentially pivotal to the discussion of the role of parents as agents of children's moral guardian and development is the understanding of the notion of family in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (HB/OT), and what moral status means, those who have moral status and who moral agents are.

Within the category of the HB/OT family discourse is one that is pervasive, as it serves as a central component of the patriarchal society of ancient Israel. In its broader cultural and theological context, the HB/OT offers insight into the pivotal role of family and families in shaping the moral development of their children and fostering social growth. Its kinship networks, emerging bonds between people, shared blood, collective lives and common destiny, form an integral aspect of its story. 'Household' or 'family' in scripture reflects a richness of meaning ... It is a metaphor for YHWH's relationship with Israel and a vehicle of grace for human beings (Dearman 1998:117).

Family is regarded as an essential aspect of life that inspires or influences people's chances of development, physical and mental well-being, socio-economic status and so forth (Dutcher-Walls 2009:1-2; Schaafsma 2023:39; Wells 1987: 51-52). The key term that is related to families, from the perspective of Israel's social life, 'the father's house' [בֵּית אָב], functioned as a basic kinship unit consisting of, 'the father, his wife or wives and their unmarried children but also their married sons with their wives and children, and the servants' (De Vaux 1961:8). This kinship structure was not limited by strict family relationship or blood but included other categories of individuals (cf. Meyers 1997:17). The vital, yet distinct roles of fathers and mothers help in ensuring not only biological but also cultural and economic survival of their families (Albertz & Schmitt 2012:11, 21). From a structural perspective, therefore, one can say that the family was 'multigenerational (up to four generations) and included the social arrangement of several families, related by blood and marriage, who lived in two or three houses architecturally connected' (Perdue 1997a:175; cf. Perdue 1997b:223-258). The father's primary responsibility was to give proper education to sons, by ensuring that they develop morally, religiously and socially, while the focus for girls was primarily domestic, that is the life of the home. While the boys were well educated and equipped for war, the education of girls was focused mainly on preparation for marriage (Collins 1997:141-142).

On the other hand, the expression 'moral status' is an ethical and philosophical concept that refers to the degree to which an entity is eligible for moral consideration. According to Cutas and Smajdor (Cutas & Smajdor 2017; cf. Warren 1997):

[T]o have moral status is to be morally considerable, or to have moral standing. It is to be an entity towards which moral agents have, or can have, moral obligations. (pp. 6-7; p. 3)

The moral status of an entity has profound implications for how they are treated. As agents of children's moral guardian and development, parents have moral duties of instruction, protection, care and advocacy, development of empathy and conscience and helping them to learn how they ought to relate to others (Berkowitz & Grych 2006:371; Smetana 1999:312).

While morality can be constructed from reciprocal social interactions such as peer contexts of children, the parents' specific domain, where both cognitive and affective components of interactions with their children are negotiated, most probably enhance and facilitate children's moral development (Smetana 1999:311; cf. Sarukhani 1991:77). According to Smetana (1999:319), children's moral development most certainly originates from interaction with peers and siblings; however, parents underscore and strengthen the lessons that are constructed from such interactive engagements. Thus, parents are important and sit at the heart of children's moral development and welfare, by virtue of their active, affective and extensive relationship and interaction history. Through their emotional attachment

and understanding of sources of children's social experiences that may lead to the construction of different moral concepts, at different stages of their life, parents work towards prohibition of certain actions, providing instructions, and responding to wrongdoings that facilitate moral development (Smetana 1999:319).

In their study on 'the moral status of children: children's rights, parents' rights, and family justice', Brennan and Noggle (1997:1) provide philosophical underpinning for rationalising children's moral status. They highlighted certain claims that constitute an appealing reasonable understanding of children's moral status, such as equal treatment of children like adults, different treatment from adults and limited authority of parents over the direct upbringing of their children (Brennan & Noggle 1997:2). The last claim, which is the legitimacy of the role of parents towards the upbringing of their children, is given attention here. Brennan and Noggle (1997:4) hold that children have limited cognitive power which makes them vulnerable in decision making, regarding their interests and furtherance of such choices. The physical, mental, healthy and emotional development of children requires that someone exercises an oversight function of nurture and protection and the authority to exercise informed judgement on a daily basis. Given the reality of children's vulnerability, it seems most natural to assign parents this oversight function. This oversight function invites reflection on the notion of stewardship that gives parents a complex moral status. Parents' role as stewards presents them with a set of duties toward their children, namely, obligation towards non-violation of children's right, preventing others from infringing on the rights of children and obligation to promote the interest of children (Brennan & Noggle 1997:12). The HB/OT offers an interesting perspective on this oversight function of parents as stewards.

While the origin of parents as agents of moral guardians of children is not explicitly stated in the HB/OT, one can look into a number of key passages and themes that underscore the profound significance of family structure and system, parental responsibility and the transference of religious and moral education from one generation to the other. Evidence from narrative examples, direct commands and larger cultural and theological context of the HB/OT presents parents as fundamental agents of moral guidance. The narrative account of Genesis 1 and 2 establishes the family as a fundamental social unit of human society by highlighting the creative mandate to the pair of Adam and Eve to be 'fruitful and multiply' (Gn 1:28). While the imperative is a comprehensive directive, it is interpreted as a mandate to procreate (i.e., having children), nurture and steward the earth with all of its resources faithfully and wisely. Genesis 2 continues the narrative account with the highpoint of social, ecological and spiritual embeddedness highlighted by the words 'bone of my bone', 'flesh of my flesh' and 'become one flesh' (vv. 23–24). Although these ideas have been taken to imply sexual union, in the Hebrew conception, they are actually applied to the joining of two families (Dearman 1998:119).

In Abraham, one sees the parental role of guiding his son, Isaac with the intriguing narrative of the *Akedah* [the binding of Isaac] in Genesis 22 that demonstrates faith, obedience and selfless devotion to YHWH's command and transferring covenantal promises and obligations. In 1 Samuel 1–2, the narrative of Hannah's plight, prayer, with the promise of dedicating her son that eventually materialised, justifies parents' moral responsibility of devotion to YHWH's concerns for their children. A third narrative example is the relationship of Jacob and his sons. In Genesis 49, Jacob is pictured as having warm interaction with his sons and offering them prayers. The narrative underscores the parental responsibility of guiding their children into their future.

Moving from these narrative examples, the HB/OT offers direct commands and practical teachings on parental guidance. In the Decalogue tradition (Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16), the explicit command: 'Honor your father and your mother' given in the context of parent-child relationship, implies, on the one hand, parents' role of education and modelling of moral principles that are praiseworthy and thus the respect and loyalty that children owe their parents, who are their primary spiritual and moral guides, on the other hand. The Shema (Dt 6:4–9), an essential article of faith in Judaism that serves as a basic text in the religious life of Jewish parents, highlights the continuous and pervasive role of parental instruction and education of their children in the ways of YHWH. Here one finds the role of parents as primary educators of the children in matters of faith and practice, modelling faithfulness through their wholehearted devotion to YHWH and transmission of the faith to future generation.

In the Wisdom Literature, particularly in the book of Proverbs, one finds an abundance of admonitions about the pivotal role of parents in shaping and instilling wisdom and discipline in their children. Two texts that illustrate parents' role of education and guidance are: 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it' (Pr 22:6) and 'Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them' (Pr 13:24). As this article's focus is on parent-child relationship with limited focus on the wisdom ethos of Proverbs 1 verses 8–9 for family life, the focus in the following section would be to examine the richness of this parental rhetoric and wisdom portrait for children's moral development and growth.

## Proverbs 1:8–9 and its parental rhetoric of moral wisdom

The book of Proverbs is one whose traditional didactic teachings are aimed at presenting wisdom in a clear and persuasive manner. Although its composition originates in the wisdom schools, the royal court, and of its training of scribes and princes, with contributions from other authors, the collection of sayings and teachings are traditionally linked to the Israelite monarchy and thus mostly attributed to kings, especially Solomon (Pr 1:1; 10:1; 25:1; cf. 1 Kgs 3:5–9;



4:32)<sup>1</sup> (Albertz 1994:512; Hess 2016:459; Kynes 2015:20–23). Structurally, the first nine chapters (chapters 1–9) creatively put together cosmic images from Israel's mythical worldview and parental instruction (cf. Longman III 2002:42). While chapters 10–29 cover the bulk of the private sayings whose role is to work out the wisdom worldview in the particularities of life, chapters 30–31 bring the book to a close by combining cosmic themes with timely and local particularity (O'Dawd 2009:113–114).

The cosmic and practical dimension of wisdom orientation in Proverbs that is typical in the Ancient Near East (ANE) (Estes 1997:21–22)<sup>2</sup> is a worldview that is grounded in a 'Yahwistic theology' (O'Dawd 2009:118–121). According to Routledge (2008:220), 'True wisdom is possessed by and proceeds from God, and may only be properly discovered by those who know God'. While its theological language may have become more or less explicit in different genres and epochs, wisdom in the HB/OT was theologically grounded. Its form of instruction is not incompatible with the law and the prophets but meaningfully corresponds to the rest of the biblical texts (Estes 1997:22).

The author identifies and situates the book's purpose as a matter of acquiring wisdom and leading an ethical life. The syntagm phrase *יִרְאָה יְהוָה* [fear of Yahweh] (Prov 1:7, 29; 2:5; 8:13; 10:27; 14:27; 15:33; 19:23; 22:4; 31:30),<sup>3</sup> which complements a theology of creation (Prov 3:18–20) and is creatively situated at important structural transitions to order wisdom and direct it within theological boundaries. It serves as both the book's credo and its theological and epistemological foundation (O'Dawd 2009:114; cf. Waltke 2004:180). To understand Proverb's wisdom worldview, Bricker (1995) contends, one must understand the:

[T]wo ways' concept used to teach the importance of choosing wisely which path or lifestyle would be followed: the path of the wise and righteous, or the way of the foolish and wicked. (p. 500)

Proverbs focuses on practical wisdom and moral conduct, by providing practical advice for everyday living. It addresses various aspects of life, including relationships, work, speech and decision-making. Its artistic portrayal of wisdom that lays the ground for the moral order in the created order invites readers to embrace its worldview as a foundation for learning wisdom. According to Estes (1997):

Because Yahweh alone fashioned the world, all of life proceeds from him. Yahweh, then, is the foundational authority for the whole ethical system of wisdom. The creative order mandates that the proper stance for humans is humble submission to the ethical demands of the just God, rather than arrogant insistence on choosing their own way independent of the Lord who made them. (p. 36)

1. A number of critical scholars believe that these chapters originated during the exilic and postexilic periods, attributing little or no contribution to Solomon in their composition. However, Steinmann (2000:660–674) defended the Solomonic authorship of chapters 1–9 in his article, 'Proverbs 1–9 As a Solomonic Composition'.

2. Among Israel's religious neighbours were Egypt and Mesopotamia. Their speculative reflections and discussions of some of life's difficult issues, such as the problem of evil and the meaning of life find expression in the HB/OT (see Murphy 1992:928; cf. Arnold & Beyer 2002:175–179).

3. O'Dawd (2009:117) notes that, 'The phrase occurs fourteen times in Proverbs and directly qualifies wisdom at three structural transitions (1:7; 9:10; 15:33)'.

Proverbs welcomes its readers with a preliminary prologue and a theoretical foundation of its purpose in Proverbs 1 verses 1–7 (see Estes 1998:21; Murphy 1998:5). The verses introduce the Solomonic figure and the father's voice and thus authenticate the traditional wisdom significance of the book. According to O'Dawd (2009) the rhetoric of paternity that is expressed in the address to 'son' (Prov 1:8, cf. Prov 2:1; 3:1; 4:1; 5:1; 6:20):

[I]s a typical image for the social setting of wisdom instruction, imagining an audience of more than just boys. Verses 4–5 indicate more broadly that the book is directed to both the 'youth' (נער) and the 'wise' (חכם). (pp. 116–117)

In this way, all levels of readers are invited to join the path of wisdom, as the wise will increase in their wisdom and the youth will learn to value and seek wisdom to move on to a new level of growth, maturity and development.

Having enticed his readers and/or audience to embark on the journey of wisdom (Prov 1:1–6), Solomon invites them to pay attention to the fundamental laws of morality. To make young people attain knowledge and discretion, they are made to first worship YHWH, by making Him their supreme object of devotion (Prov 1:7; cf. Ross 1991:907) and honouring their parents, by regarding them as their superiors (Prov 1:8–9).<sup>4</sup> An analysis of the rhetoric of paternity in these verses (vv. 8–9) is undertaken here to highlight several key components of the wisdom-moral domain of Proverbs.

#### MT

שָׁמַע בְּנִי מוֹסֵר אֲבִיד וְאֶל־תִּשְׁחַשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמִּי:

כִּי לִנְתִּיחַ הֵם לְרֹאשׁוֹ וְנִזְנָמִים לְגִדְרֵמִיד:

#### ENG

<sup>8</sup> Pay attention, my son, to your father's discipline, and don't ever neglect your mother's teaching.

<sup>9</sup> For they will serve as crown of graceful wreath upon your head, and ornaments of gold around your neck.

In the rhetoric of paternity, the exhortation בְּנִי 'my son' (Prov 1:8)<sup>5</sup> heads the threefold structure of Proverbs 1 verses 8–19 (cf. Prov 1:8, 10, and 15). Whilst verses 8–9 are a poetically firm admonition, they however fit together with the exhortation in 1:10–19. The clear difference in these admonitions is the interference of persons, between the instruction of parents and the voice of evildoers, on the one hand, and the relationship between the content of verses 9 and 19. In verse 9, the teacher describes invincible material gain (education confers grace and success) in the manner of positive inspiration for the student of wisdom. This description is radically opposed to verse 19 that has negative incentive (the desire for gain leads to death). The rhetoric of 1 verses 8–19 is intended to instruct and guide individuals of all classes and epochs to follow the path of wisdom and stay away from foolishness (Hale 2007:928).

4. Although this article chooses verses 8–9 as its primary focus, the twofold reference to בְּנִי in verses 10–19 (cf. vv. 10, 15) indicates that verses 8–9 cannot be interpreted independently.

5. This form of address is commonly used by wisdom teachers to mark their superintendence, affection, and fatherly care and interest over their students. The form is common in the opening chapters of Proverbs (cf. 2:1; 4:10, 20; 5:1; 6:1; 7:1) and reappears again in the closing chapters (23:15, 19, 26; 24:13, 21; 27:11). In Proverbs 31 verse 2, the mother of Lemuel uses it in the strict sense of parental responsibility.

Interestingly, Clements (1992:126–150) has strongly emphasised the importance of the household, highlighting it both as a setting for teaching and learning and as a subject of instruction. According to him, wisdom teaching had its setting within the family or clan, where parents, elders and otherwise individuals shared their worldly experiences and imparted wisdom to each succeeding generation. The details of instruction included lessons on family responsibilities, the value of hard work and the folly of laziness (Routledge 2008:217). The fundamental assumption is that humans learn from experience, and such knowledge, when imparted can be conveyed through the writings of Wisdom literature (Crenshaw 2010:11).

The form of the admonition, בְּנִי [my son] (Prov 1:8), characterises, on the one hand, the mentorship relationship between the wisdom teacher and wisdom student (cf. Qoh 12:12); thus the fatherly responsibility of instruction that he assumes towards his young and inexperienced children and the establishment of the authenticity and authority of the teaching he intends to give them, on the other hand (Clifford 1999:39). Here, Solomon authenticates the paternal authority and affection, so as to make his students (children) more attentive and responsive.

The introductory imperative שְׁמַע [hear] is akin to Deuteronomistic שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל [hear Israel] (Dt 6:4–7) and of its teaching concept (Dt 6:6–9), where Israel is required to transfer YHWH's commandment to 'your sons' [לְבָנֶיךָ]. The father's call to his son is an exhortation aimed at stimulating the son's intellectual capacity to intelligently discern and rightfully make sound judgement in moral, religious and psychological matters (Goldingay 2016:326). In verse 8a, מוֹסֵר is not associated with מִצְוָה [command, commandment] (cf. Prov 6:20a) but with 'correction', 'chastisement', 'discipline' or 'education'. מוֹסֵר assumes a prominent place in the journey of wisdom (Prov 1:1–7), especially verses 2, 3 and 7 as it represents a concept of an imperative instruction, if and when associated with שֵׁבֶט [the rod] (Prov 22:15; cf. 10:13; 13:24).

In the second half of verse 8, וְאַל-תִּשְׁכַּח תּוֹרַת אִמְךָ [and do not ever neglect your mother's teaching], the fundamental meaning of נָשַׁח [neglect, reject or forsake] is tied to תּוֹרַת [Torah] of the mother. This is indicative of instruction usually given by wisdom (cf. Prov 31:1–9). Here the diligence of mothers in imparting instruction provokes their involvement in the nurturing process of children. In Proverbs, תּוֹרָה is used essentially as a guide to life and life's directions. Where its appearance and usage are definite (cf. Prov 28:9; 29:18), it is interpreted to mean the divine law (a Jewish term applicable to the Pentateuch). Here, תּוֹרַת אִמְךָ [your mother's law 'Torah'] (Prov 1:8b) refers to the insightful, sensitive maxims and home teachings, which the mother imparts orally to her son, based on the divine law but distinguishable from it (Kidner 1975:63). Thus, a mother's תּוֹרַת must be the right application of YHWH's תּוֹרָה. By using his childhood experience to teach his children

(students), and to pay attention to parental instruction, Solomon makes clear that parents have it as their moral duty to discipline their children and of warning them to be careful of relationships that will negatively affect them. The proper application of YHWH's תּוֹרָה to their children's upbringing will develop into a fundamental principle and fabric of their life's orientation and direction.

Proverbs 1:9 invokes the consequence of compliance to the father's מוֹסֵר [discipline] and the mother's תּוֹרָה [instruction] namely, 'crown of graceful wreath upon your head, and ornaments of gold around your neck'. The metaphor of discipline and instruction are לְיָתֵב הָהוּא [crown of grace] (cf. Pr 4:9) and עֲנָקִים [ornaments] on the head and neck of the obedient child. Typical of Israelite's orientation, no emblem or insignia of honour and glory were held in high esteem than 'crown of graceful wreath upon the head, and ornaments of gold around the neck' by which kings and their favourites are adorned (cf. Gn 41:42; Jdg 8:26; Dn 5:29). These metaphors of ornamentation and honour suggest that the wisdom and moral instructions imparted to children through their parents are not burdensome but rather, they are embodiments of honour and a source of dignity and enhancement of reputation and development of character. When parental disciplinary measures and instructions are obeyed, it will render them acceptable and honourable before YHWH and man. Conversely, forsaking such discipline and moral instruction will thrust them into the realm of contempt and misery.

## Wisdom ethos for children's moral deployment and healthy family life

Although Scripture is, in many ways, an unlikely source for a 21st century ethic of family life, it, however, contains a vision for family, which can help to sustain commitment when family life becomes tough. The HB/OT clearly presents parents as the primary agents responsible for the moral and spiritual development of their children through direct instruction, exemplary living and the faithful transmission of covenantal values and teachings. This responsibility is woven into the fabric of many Old Testament commands, narratives and the broader theological framework, emphasising the crucial role of parents in guiding their children towards a righteous and God-fearing life. What ethical deductions do reflection on Proverbs 1 verses 8–9 offer its readers within the context of a supportive family structure and children moral deployment? According to Delitzsch (1950), Proverb's wisdom is:

Designed to state that the life which springs from the doctrine of the wise man, as from the fountain of health, for the disciple who will receive it, communicates to him knowledge and strength, to know where the snares of destruction lie, and to hasten with vigorous steps away when they threaten to entangle him. (p. 279)

The hermeneutical function of the parental rhetoric of Proverbs 1 verses 8–9 indicates that the discipline and

admonitions of the pair of father and mother in a supportive family structure are fundamental for healthy development and viable living of their children. The combinatory role of father and mother in the text serves as a testament to the fundamental place and role of mothers in ancient Hebrew family structure. This role was relatively remarkable in light of ancient Near Eastern cultures.<sup>6</sup>

Proverbs 1 verses 8–9 underscores that the genuine, authentic voice of spiritual experience and modelling of parents conducted in compliance with YHWH's חֻקֵּי in ways of wisdom and virtue, do certainly embellish the moral character of children (Kinder1975:103). The enticing capacity of the metaphors in Proverbs 1:8–9 is an important component of the proverbial worldview and essential to the understanding of its wisdom-moral domain. Characteristically embedded in the parent-child relation is the call to obedience that connects with ethical living. This call incorporates the role of parents as teachers, the curriculum and process of instruction, expectation from children (learners) and the values and goals of education (Estes 1997:13–14). The text embodies ethical behaviours, sound judgement and devotion to moral principles.

The prescriptions of the text imagine and advance a parents' domain proposition that is basic and appropriate to the development and promotion of children's moral understanding in social relations. Such proposition should stimulate parents' optimistic role and responsibility in children's moral development, by being embodiments of values and communicating the same in ways and manners that are agreeable to their mode of comprehension (Smetana 1999:319). The wisdom ethos of the text encourages a family framework where parents are expected to create, develop and nurture a value driven and reverential environment, where their wisdom and education are held in high esteem, with the ultimate goal of furthering their children's well-being and holistic development.

The parent-child relationship of Proverbs 1 verses 8–9 strengthens the formation of moral values, as it provides a secure attachment for children with a sense of safety and confidence, allowing them to explore and learn from their environment. This is fundamental to developing self-regulation, empathy and moral reasoning. Proverbs 1 verses 8–9 resonates strongly with key concepts in human development sciences, such as secure attachment, moral development, sociocultural learning and self-regulation. Both frameworks emphasise the foundational role of early influences in shaping a well rounded, morally grounded and successful individual.

The moral nature of parenting for honour and dignity as Proverbs 1 verses 8–9 presents, places a burden not only on parents to live up to the expectations of their responsibility but also on children to imbibe by deliberate

choice the admonitions and discipline of their parents. While the text does not explicitly refer to spirituality, its emphasis on listening and obedience could be regarded as part of a broader spiritual education, which in many religious interpretations, is considered as a fundamental role of parents in imparting moral and spiritual values to their children. Although there are contexts where children's interest in autonomy limits parents' moral responsibility of shaping their children's values, Proverbs 1 verses 8–9 offers a journey into self-understanding, self-development and self-actualisation, by reaffirming the family as a pivotal social institution while balancing the roles and responsibilities of parents and children. Thus parent-child relationship, when properly developed and nurtured holds the capacity for fostering a healthy, viable and stable family and society, anchored on sustainable values that can be transferred across generations.

## Conclusion

Moral education does not only enrich individuals within family units but the moral health of society generally depends on it. This article reveals that parenting for honour and dignity requires a unified family structure where parents model ethical values, providing appropriate education, guidance and discipline for their children. The verses bridge spiritual wisdom with scientific understanding, presenting a holistic view of how a child grows intellectually, emotionally and morally. In line with principles of educational psychology, the parental instruction and teaching highlighted in Proverbs 1 verses 8–9 reflects a child's early cognitive and emotional development that modern education considers crucial for academic success and personal growth. Children are vulnerable in social settings if they are not properly nurtured into desired and appropriate ways of life. Thus, the ethical prescriptions of the parental rhetoric of Proverbs 1 verses 8–9 are ways of transmitting faith, inspiring children's towards growth and development and shaping their spiritual, moral and social imagination.

## Acknowledgements

This research article is a revised version of the paper presented at the International meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature held at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Netherlands from 28.7–1.8.2024. It forms part of the author, B.O.B.'s, current research project on 'Family in Ancient Israel' at Ruhr University, Bochum.

## Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

## Author's contribution

B.O.B. is the sole author of this research article.

6. See Stol (2016:339–390) for women's role in and outside the home, in the highly researched volume on *Women in the Ancient Near East*, trans., Helen Richardson and Mervyn Richardson.



## Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

## Ethical considerations

This article does not contain any studies involving human participants performed by any of the authors.

## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

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