

## **Proverbs 22-11-09a**

This is the ninth day of November 2022. Welcome to the Wednesday night Bible study at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We continue our study of the book of Proverbs.

We have had what, at least for me, has been a very fascinating in-depth look at what the Bible has to say about the fear of the Lord. And we will see how helpful that is as we move forward in the text tonight. With that background, we have seen its description and its definition from Deuteronomy chapter 10.

We have seen how we can develop and cultivate the fear of the Lord, looking at passages that emphasize the role of the Word of God and the role of the Holy Spirit. And with that background and that fulsome understanding by this time, as we move forward in Proverbs, we will see how the material that is presented underscores and emphasizes that truth, that necessity for the people of God to operate in the fear of the Lord, to be defined by it, to be motivated and encouraged by it, to be sustained by it in times of trial, and to turn that truth of the wonderful character of God in the light of His Word and see its facets and its myriad glorious colors. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and our study, and we'll begin.

Father, it is such a privilege to have the kind of access to Your Word and the ability to study it, to talk about it with other believers who share an enthusiasm and appreciation for the Lord Jesus Christ and for our relationship with You through Him. And we're so grateful to live in the age and the time that we do. We have plenty of opportunities not only to improve our understanding and to seek to walk the narrow road that leads through the straight gate, but we have ample opportunities to have our faith challenged and our thinking tested with the swirling and increasing pace of events around us.

What a time to be alive, what an opportunity to follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ who was pressured from within and without and always focused on Your plan and Your purpose, Your glory and Your will. We pray that we can follow His example as we examine these truths from Your Word tonight. May God the Holy Spirit give us insight and understanding and we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Let's pick up in chapter 2. We're going to return to our travels through the text. We have looked at chapter 2 many times, but what I want to do is back up and take a look at the structure.

I want to focus on, and I think we began looking at this a bit before, but the structure gives us a great clue. And if you've not already written these things in the margin of your Bible, I really encourage you to do so. We're separated by distance in time and distance in language from the way this piece of instruction would have struck the ancient Israelite ear.

And we want to recover that and get the benefit of it because, it's funny to me, there's a lot of use of the word meta today. You know, Facebook changed their name to meta, and it's like we're a level above, we're going to take a more grandiose position. And people aren't content with a narrative, they want the meta narrative.

And they don't want the data, they want the metadata. And everything is meta. Okay, fine.

Well, we want to step back and see, because what does that really mean? In some cases, I have no idea what it means. But in this case, as we have seen over and over again in our travels through various portions of Scripture, God not only communicates content with the words, but structure, and form, and the tools of literary communication are used by these authors under the inspiration of God to make the truth even more clear. You can listen to the content as it rattles along, but wouldn't it be great to have markers such as we have in graphic art? In graphic art, people will take Bible verses.

You've seen this, it's been a commonplace for at least 15 or 20 years for people to take a verse, and they don't just print it in Times New Roman and put it on a card. Some words are bigger, some are smaller, they will use colors, they will use different fonts, and they will try to freshen and enliven your perception of what a verse says with graphic design. I have no intrinsic problem with that, as long as you have an understanding separate and apart from that graphic presentation, because sometimes they shrink words that are really important, and they emphasize words that I don't think are as important, and in some cases aren't even in the original text.

But I digress. What I want to give you right here are some structural clues that help us to see what is going on in chapter 2. I think I have mentioned this before, but I am going to mention it again. This chapter of 22 verses is 22 verses, 22 lines.

How many letters are there in the Hebrew alphabet? 22. And this is the A to Z of understanding the fear of the Lord and finding the knowledge of God. It is not anacrostic.

We do not have each verse beginning with a sequential letter of the alphabet, but we do have some clues. And we are indebted to a man named Skehan, S-K-E-H-A-N, and he is quoted in something that I am quoting, so he is like a second course, but everybody realizes that he really struck something when he saw this. It is not unique to me.

But the verses starting with verse 1, and I know I have given you this before, but I am reviewing it. Verse 1 and verse 5 and verse 9 start with Aleph. So what I would suggest is in the margin of your Bible, now after the vocative here, my son, if you receive my words, that is where the Aleph is.

So my son, and it is like my son, colon, and then you have a new line if. Same thing marks verse 5, then, and verse 9, then. So if, then, then.

These are marked with an Aleph. It is the first letter of the line. And these are clues.

Now, halfway through the Hebrew alphabet, after the first 11 letters, and you start the second set, you are at the letter Lamed. Lamed marks the new second half of the Hebrew alphabet. And interestingly, Lamed occurs in the second half of this chapter at key verses.

So verse 12, to deliver. Two or four, that is what Lamed is. If you find it by itself or connected to a verb, it means two or four.

It is the mark of an infinitive idea. In order to. So verse 12, in order to.

Verse 16, in order to. And then verse 20, so that. It is a beautiful structural clue.

If you put those ideas out in the margin, what you have is, my son, if, then, then. That is verse 1, verse 5, and verse 9. If, then, then. To deliver you, to deliver you.

That is verse 12 and verse 16. I encourage you, at least get this in your notes. If you don't write it right in the margin of your Bible, the chapter begins, if, then, you will understand.

Then you will understand. Makes sense? Then you get to verse 12, to deliver you. Verse 16, to deliver you.

Then verse 20, so that. In order that you may walk. That is verse 20, in order that you may walk.

Beautifully, carefully, intentionally structured chapter. If you treat this information like treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord. Then you will understand, in verse 9, righteousness and justice, equity and every good path.

See the parallelism there? If you want to know what the fear of the Lord is, if you don't happen to have your Deuteronomy scroll with you, he's going to remind us that to understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God in verse 5 is exactly parallel to verse 9. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path. That's understanding the fear of the Lord and finding the knowledge of God. That's what you come to understand.

What is the purpose in verse 12? To deliver you, and look closely at verse 12, you should have this in the margin, to deliver you, to save you from something. The way of evil, the man who speaks perverse things, that's in verse 12. Are we not surrounded by people speaking perverse things, twisted truths, half-truths, bent truths, misdirected and misappropriated pieces of information, and it is used to pave the way of evil? The road to hell is paved with perverse things, possibly well-intentioned by the misguided people who perpetrate them.

You know, the end justifies my means. But look at that, that's verse 12, to deliver you from the man who speaks perverse things. Remember the next to deliver you in verse 16, what does it say? To deliver you from the immoral woman, the seductress who flatters with her words.

The man speaks perverse words to lead you into the way of evil. The woman flatters with her words. One is an appeal to ideas, perverse things, leading you to the way of evil.

This is flattery to seduce you. Flattery and seduction are an appeal to your ego and to your emotion. I love the way she makes me feel.

James Brown, I feel good just like I knew I would in the company of these flattering words. So what does the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God, understanding righteousness and justice and equity, every good path, what does it do? It delivers us from the man who speaks perverse things. This is the idea guy, this is the pitch man, this is the sales tactic that appeals to more of the reasonable side and delivers you from the words of the flattering seductress who is appealing at an emotional and seductive level.

One is more conscious and overt, the other is subconscious and subvert, covert. We don't necessarily see that second one coming. You can engage somebody in the world of ideas, but when they hook into your ego and into your emotion, you can make bad decisions.

So, and then in verse 20, what is the result? So that, this is the third Lamed, we had three Alephs, now we've got three Lameds, and the concluding Lamed is verse 20, so that you may walk in the way of goodness. Perverse things that are spoken by man don't lead you in the way of evil, seductive, flattering words do not cause us to forsake what we should adhere to, which is the companion of our youth and the covenant of our God. That's what you find in verse 17.

This is the purpose, so that you may walk in the way of goodness and keep to the paths of righteousness. This is the goal, this is what we want. Chapter two so beautifully lays this out, structurally, you can't miss it.

And the first half is the positive side, this is how you get the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God, this is what it will do for you, discretion will preserve you, understanding will keep you, and so on. And then the second half, verses 12 through 22, detail the danger. Here's what's going to happen if you miss it.

This is the opposition, this is what we're trying to avoid. The positive in the first 11 verses, the danger in the second 11 verses, and the goal is that we walk in the way of goodness and keep the paths of righteousness, because the upright will dwell in the land and the blameless will remain in it, but the wicked will be cut off from the earth and the unfaithful will be uprooted from it. Verse 21 summarizes the benefits of the first 11

verses.

Verse 22 summarizes the dangers of the next nine verses. And you wind up with that 22 in total. This is the message in a nutshell.

If you couldn't keep all the pages in your book, they keep falling out of your Bible, and you're grasping them, grab chapter 2. This is Proverbs in the condensed essentials version. It's beautifully done. Some of these themes are going to be taken up in greater detail later on.

So, in the first verses here, 1 through 8, chapter 2 verses 1 through 8, this looks to the Lord. What is in view isn't the horizontal, it's the vertical. You will understand the fear of the Lord, find the knowledge of God in verse 5. God is the source of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding in verses 6 and 7. He, God, stores up sound wisdom.

He is a shield. He guards the paths of justice. He preserves the way.

Then you will understand these things that are characteristic of God and the way of God. Then in the second section, you have the relationship to people, what's going to happen in the earthly plane. So, being drawn close to the Lord and understanding Him, this is going to be explored in the next chapter, chapter 3. My son, do not forget my law.

He's going to pick up this theme that is condensed in chapter 2 and expand it. So, we'll see the sight of God in verse 4 of chapter 3. We'll see trusting in the Lord in verse 5. His role in making our path straight in verse 6. Verse 7, once again, fear the Lord. We have the command to develop that fear of the Lord that we've been studying so intensively.

Honor the Lord in verse 9. Do not despise the chastening of the Lord in verse 11. So, 3, 1 through 12 expands this idea that is introduced in chapter 2 of understanding the fear of the Lord and finding the knowledge of God. This first third of chapter 3 then is going to turn that in the light.

Then 9 and 10 of chapter 2, when you understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path, which means you've developed the fear of the Lord, what happens? When wisdom enters your heart and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, this is going to be expanded further in chapter 3, verses 13 through 26. So, happy is the man who finds wisdom in 3.13. What we draw out of this, having observed it, is look at the emphasis on this theme. Look at how carefully it is structured and presented.

We should really give this some thought. We should make it some sort of a priority in our soul. This is the key to life.

It is the key to vertical life, spiritual life, our life in the eyes of God, before God seeking to accomplish His will and purpose. It doesn't get any clearer than this. And our relationships, our interactions, our concourse with people in the physical world, the

horizontal realm, at work, in school, at home, our families, people online now.

You've got to consider the whole social interaction that takes place on a flat screen of some kind. All of that is going to be conditioned as a believer, whether it is successful, whether it is meaningful, whether it makes a difference, whether we accurately and properly represent the Lord Jesus Christ in this age. Did you waste the day you were given? Were we good stewards of our time? Did we redeem the time and invest it in the plan and purpose of God, or did it slip through our fingers like sand? And we frittered it.

We had every good intention, but we didn't take that potential and that opportunity and actually do something with it. The importance of this can be seen in the unconscious influence that the fear of the Lord has on us. There is a PBS documentary that I saw accidentally.

It's called Hacking Your Mind. Hacking Your Mind. It's a four-part series, and it is really, really good because it explains the architecture of human thinking, the human mind, and it begins by pointing out that we are built to think in terms of shortcuts.

We do not analyze and reason our way through most of our decisions. We operate on what you might call a gut feeling, a typical reaction for us based on our personality and our character, and we decide a thing and we can backfill reasons for it later. But we have an instinctive-seeming response.

In the documentary, they call this operating on autopilot. I find this fascinating in the light of our study because what they say is we have built-in responses to cues. So we find bright colors and motion interesting, so advertisers will use bright colors and motion.

We find appeals to our reproductive instincts interesting, and so there will be pretty girls and muscular men in advertising. But it's not just advertising. It is also the instinct we have for things that are similar to us or similar to things in our surroundings.

A very fascinating study where they took little kids and had two piles of t-shirts, a green pile and an orange pile, and they bring a little child in and say, okay, let's flip the spinner and see which color of t-shirt you're going to get. They flip the spinner, which is randomizing the choice, and okay, you get an orange t-shirt. Then they would show these children ambiguous pictures where you're not real sure what's going on.

You could construe it one of two different ways. One of the pictures is a swing with a person standing behind the swing in, let's say, a green t-shirt, and they've got a bit of a concerned or frowning expression on their face. These are drawn figures.

It's not a photo, but they've got a little bit of a furrow in their brow, and then there is a person in the orange t-shirt sitting on the ground with tears coming out of their eyes. So the idea being you could construe this in one of two ways. Orange shirt fell out of the swing.

Green shirt has come up and is concerned. Are you hurt? Or green shirt pushed orange shirt out of the swing. What is your snap judgment going to be as to what's going on in the picture? What they discovered is if the spinner said you get the orange shirt, then orange person has been abused by green shirt.

If you got the green shirt, you say green shirt is concerned that orange shirt fell out of the swing. You see what I mean? Just within 30 minutes of wearing that shirt, it colors their view of the world, and they did other things in terms of showing pictures of people in one shirt or another and saying which one would you choose for your team or which one do you think is nicer or whatever. And they begin to identify sameness with rightness and with preference.

Much hay has been made about critical race theory and the rest of it, but the worst thing to wade through is twisted truth or leavened truth. It is true that birds of a feather flock together. It is true that people like to be with others that share their interests, their goals, their values, their enthusiasms, their culture, their language.

And it's natural. We tend to group by familiar things. It's a fact.

It doesn't necessarily mean that some groups are evil because they do that or that after they have done that, that they don't make some bad choices. But it is nevertheless a fact that we choose similar things. Awareness of what conditions and colors, if you will, our quick thinking responses, our autopilot responses, awareness of that is helpful in taking a breath, taking a beat, pausing before we speak or before we choose and on important decisions especially to get out of autopilot mode and into reasoning mode.

But here's what I find fascinating related to our study. What the Word of God tells us is that understanding the fear of the Lord and finding the knowledge of God, understanding righteousness and justice and equity and every good path, what is the Word of God saying? If you fulfill the if condition and you succeed in acquiring the then conditions of the first half of chapter 2, your autopilot is going to change. And even when you don't have the luxury of slowing down, the secular world says, well, you've got to slow down and get your thinking mind engaged and you've got to overcome these cues and this knee-jerk response that is leading you down a bad path.

That's all they can do is try to slow down and think. But good luck, Charlie. We typically don't have time, luxury or the self-discipline to do that.

Retrospect makes us regret that we didn't. Hindsight is much better than foresight. But here's the blessing that God has given us.

We can retrain the inner man. We can be transformed by the renewing of our mind so that our mind doesn't get hacked by the evil that is in the world. And our instinctive response comes from the new man that is created in righteousness, that reflects the

influence of the Holy Spirit and the presence and power of God's Word in our soul.

And even when we are not able to stop and think, our innate, inherent, autopilot responses will reflect the work of God within us. What a gift. The world without God is without hope.

Believers who do not treasure the Word of God and do not cultivate the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit consciously with malice of forethought miss out on this tremendous blessing and wind up playing for the wrong team, wind up being enemies of the cross. Paul says, I tell you, even weeping, you are traitors to the cause of Christ. You are fallen from grace, grace.

God built us to have these quick responses and he gives us the means to make them automatically good. It's a process. It doesn't happen overnight.

This is why consistency. This is why the way of God is pictured as a way, as a path, something we travel and we move closer to the goal as we take those steps. But we can be delivered from what the PBS people think is a development from evolution.

Well, hunter-gatherers, they actually go to some far off place where they think people are primitive and say, this serves, you know, Tambuku well when he goes out to hunt because he instinctively throws his spear and gets his food and his quick reactions and unthinking. This is great for hunter-gatherers, but it doesn't work in the modern day because these instincts and automatic responses have been co-opted. There are those who understand them and who subvert them.

And as you watch this episode, they will take a recent political campaign and show the depth into which research was done based on data collected on people from Facebook. You can buy from Facebook, the data that has grouped people into these categories. They didn't list the categories.

You have to freeze the frame to see these labels. Sophisticated urbanite, you know, happy shopper. I don't know what they are, but they've made these categories of what people are like.

Once you're in the category, then they test out marketing on that category and see what works. Are they going to be swayed more by a negative ad or by a positive ad? Are they going to be swayed more by statistics or by emotion? And then on Facebook, they will pitch into your stream political ads targeting what they believe will be most likely to get you to decide their way. Fascinating.

You are a target. You have a bullseye on your back, not just from the people in the world who have political aims or commercial aims. But don't think Satan doesn't know how we're built and isn't going to bring those same kind of cues into our periphery through people who are under his influence and forces at work in the kingdom of this world that

he controls to subvert us spiritually.

The importance of developing the fear of the Lord, understanding it, finding the knowledge of God, doing the Proverbs 2 thing is critical to our success in navigating this earthly life and in our preparation both for service and function in this life and in the next. I strongly encourage you to watch this. Find a way to get it.

I think it's free. It's on PBS. It's called Hacking Your Mind.

Four episodes. Watch them. Watch them all.

And look at it from the spiritual perspective. Factor in the deliverance. Did you see the Lameds? To deliver you, to deliver you, to deliver you from the man speaking perverse things, to deliver you from the woman who flatters and seduces with her words.

This is the world in which we swim. And this is the provision of God to deliver us from this present evil age. More about this when we come back from the break.