

Proverbs 22-11-09b

We're ready now to resume our study looking at the Proverbs, and as I mentioned, Chapter 2 really summarizes and gives the key points that are going to follow in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, for example. In Chapter 3, my son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you. Let not mercy and truth forsake you, bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man.

This is fascinating to me when you slow down and take a look at it because I would think if I were writing this, it would be the other way around. Take a look at Chapter 3, verse 3. Let not mercy and truth forsake you, bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. This is an interesting expression if you look at it.

Do not let mercy and truth, this is Chesed, you know, loyal love, and Emeth, truth. Do not let them forsake you. Why doesn't it say, don't forsake mercy and truth? It says, don't let them leave you.

You get the idea that mercy and truth are going to escape if you don't take steps to keep them with you. Being passive, they leave. It's just fascinating to me that it's not the other way around.

Here is the path of mercy, here is the path of truth, don't walk away from it. No, you're sitting still. They are capable of leaving.

The potential is for them to disappear and be gone. You're still here, they're gone. Don't let them leave.

Keep them here. So how do you do that? Bind them around your neck. Now, if you bind them around your neck, I've got a tie around my neck.

You can see it. I was telling Patty how much fun it is. I have perfected the art on many of my ties.

There's something that I want right in the center of the knot. And you know, ties, you put them around your neck and they can be every which way, but I've gotten to where, I've done this for so long and all of my ties are so old, that what I want to be at the center of the knot, I can get it first time every time. So when I tied this tie tonight, the EGA is right there in the center of the knot.

I don't know how many times I've tied this tie, but I only have to do it once. Don't have to adjust it, don't have to take it off and try again. I always get that eagle globe and anchor right where I want it.

But it's around my neck and it's around my neck for a reason. I want you to see it. I want

you to celebrate the Marine Corps birthday coming up tomorrow.

But it's for you. God doesn't care if I'm wearing a Marine Corps tie or not. It doesn't play into much in terms of his larger purposes for the universe, the world, the planet, human history.

What Sam puts around his neck isn't really directed to God or very often used by God. It is primarily, not exclusively, maybe this tie is around my neck for this very illustration, but to bind them around your neck makes them visible to those around you. That's the point.

Binding Chesed and Emmet, loyal love, mercy, and truth around your neck means when somebody looks at you, they can't help but see it. You look at, if you can see somebody's neck, you can typically see their head, right? That's in normal, unless you're wearing a motorcycle helmet or something, or a face diaper for germ prevention. Normally, if you can see the neck, you see what's above the neck.

So when you bind something around your neck, it is an ornament of grace. It is something visible to those in the horizontal realm. So if you make sure that mercy, loyal love, which is sensitivity to others, this is the mind that should be in us that was also in Christ Jesus.

It is humility, sacrifice towards self, benefit toward others. That's what Chesed is. That's what God has expressed toward us.

It is what should characterize us. People see us, they see that love in the horizontal realm. Bind them around your neck.

Notice it is not just Chesed. This is so fascinating. I could go for an hour and a half just on this verse.

The more you look at it, it just unfolds like one of those Mandelbrot sets. But bind mercy and truth. There are truths that circumscribe and limit the expression of mercy.

God commends His love toward us and toward the world in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. God commends His love. He expresses His love.

He puts His love out there. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. It's love.

But there is a truth about that love that accompanies it. That love cannot come to its completion and its consummation and its goal and purpose without a response on the part of those to whom it has been commended. God commends His love toward us.

We were sinners and Christ died for us. But a response is required. Repentance, change of mind, and faith toward God is required for the further action and expression of that

love.

This is a truth that must accompany the love. If you just talk love, love, love, all you need is love, you're just the Beatles. You don't have the plan and purpose of God.

You don't come to a full appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ if you just say, well, love. It's love and truth. Mercy and truth.

Love, Chesed and Emeth, E-M-E-T or T-H. It's kind of a soft T at the end there. Chesed, C-H-E-S-E-D or D-H.

Chesed and Emeth. Do not let them forsake you. Do not let them depart from you.

Because this is a command, it means that if you're inattentive, if you are distracted, if you get your mind on something else, these can leave when you're not looking. Did you ever get into a conversation, there's several people in the room and you're talking and laughing and listening and having a snack or whatever, and suddenly you look around and somebody's gone and you didn't notice they left? I had an aunt who was famous for this. In the early evening hours, after supper, everybody would be in the living room and they're visiting from a distance and we're talking and all of a sudden you look around and my aunt is gone.

She was early to bed and early to rise and she didn't say, well, I'm going to bed now. She would be gone and she could have been gone for 20 minutes and nobody noticed. Do not let these things depart.

And the only way to do that is to pay attention. Keep your eye on them all the time or don't let them slip away. And to do that, bind them around your neck.

Don't just not let them slip away. Did you ever have an article of apparel or jewelry, you've got a ring, you've got a watch, your keys or whatever, and they've somehow gotten misplaced. And so what do you do? Some people, in order to not misplace their keys, put a big ring or a big pendant type of thing on them so that you can't miss them.

Gas stations are famous for putting something large on the key to the restroom so that you remember when you go there to not lock it inside and it's easy to find on their cluttered cigarette and mint filled gum candy bar display there and lottery tickets and such. Here's the key. You can't miss it.

There's this huge thing on it. So the the wisdom here is bind them around your neck. They can't get away if they're tethered to you.

You don't put a collar on them. You make them your collar. Isn't that an interesting picture? I don't want my dog to go across the road and cause trouble.

So I put a collar and a leash. But because I don't want mercy and truth to depart, I'm

going to make them my collar. They will characterize me.

They will be one of the first things people see when they look at me. Then it says, write them on the tablet of your heart. This is invisible.

Look at me right now. What is written on the tablet of my heart? You have no idea. I mean, you could guess, but you can't see this invisible metaphorical tablet.

The tablet and the heart are both metaphorical for an inner and invisible conceptual truth, right? Something written on the tablet of my heart is a truth that defines my heart. Labels my heart. It is what my heart expresses if you read it.

If my heart gets read out, if it gets expressed, if it gets communicated, this is what comes out. Mercy and truth. If you talk to me over time, if someone talks to you over time, if we are following this proverbial wisdom, what is written on our heart is invisible.

So what does verse four say as a result of this? In doing this, binding mercy and truth around our neck and writing them on the tablet of our heart, we will find favor and high esteem. Favor and high esteem. In the sight of God and in the sight of man.

Which part is God looking at? Famously in first Samuel, man looks on the outward appearance. The Lord looks on the heart. We will find favor and high esteem from God because it is written on the tablet of the heart.

We will find favor and high esteem in the sight of men. Again, in Hebrew, this is literally the eyes. E-Y-N-E-I or E-Y.

Ene. It's the eyes. And the eyes stand for the perception, for the sight.

It's a metonymy. But the vertical is what happens in my heart. God appreciates what is written on the tables of my heart.

He's the one that sees it. He's the one that knows it and judges accordingly. People will see truth and mercy around our neck.

Now, what if we fail and they do depart from us? What's the opposite? Well, you've got no necklace. And something else is written on the tablet of the heart. And we are not going to be respected by those around us or appreciated.

These attributes that reflect the glory of God will not be present. Therefore, our life does not shine as a light in a dark place. It doesn't shine as a light in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

People do not see our good works that are defined by grace and truth. They see something else. They do not see our good works and they do not glorify our Father who is in heaven.

And when God the Father looks at our heart, He does not find grace and truth written on the tablet of our heart. And so we do not find favor. We are not receiving the expression of God's love.

We have disqualified ourselves. And we have disqualified ourselves from our primary function in the world, which is to represent Jesus Christ and to be conformed to the image of God's Son. Not conformed to the world, but transformed by the renewing of our mind.

No, sorry, without this written in the tablet of our heart, these cues and these evil influences are going to get a hold of our autopilot and we are going to be jerks and we're going to be like the world. We're going to blend. We're going to conform.

We'll be accepted by the world, which is a fleeting glory and a momentary fickle approval that vanishes like vapor when the sun rises. We do not find favor with people of genuine quality and we do not find favor with God. So then verse five says, trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

The word understanding here is, we've seen it before. It's, it's bin or binah in Hebrew, it's B-N-H. And sometimes you find it with a T in front of it.

T'binah, binah, bunah, t'binah. All of these come from the same root, which, which talks about grasp of things. And we saw it back in verse three of chapter two.

If you cry out for discernment and lift up your voice for understanding, there are different kinds of understanding. Lean not on your own understanding. Cry out for understanding that comes from God.

Understanding is what gets inside us and becomes a part of our autopilot system. Cry out for God's understanding. Do not rely on your own understanding.

I've used many times the example of this compass needle that tells us something is right or something is good. And that needle is, can be influenced in negative ways by what is outside. We want a constant reference.

We want a divinely ordained and defined standard to tell us what is right and what is wrong. That is God's understanding, not leaning on our own understanding. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and don't rely on your compass needle.

In all your ways, acknowledge him and he will make your paths direct. Direct really ought to be an adjective here or a predicate adjective, not a verb. He will make your path straight.

The advantage of a straight path is not that it gets any shorter, although it can be shorter, you know, the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, a direct

path. But you can see further down that road, a twisty turny path, an up and down path with obstacles and visual interference. You don't really always keep in mind where you're going or where that path is going to lead.

You know, the seductive woman, her paths lead to death. The perverse man who speaks perverse things puts you on an evil way and you don't see the destination. God's path is direct and straight.

And because it's straight, you can see way down that road. That's a part of our hope is I know where this path leads. I know where I'm going.

I can see the gate in the distance. I'm heading on the upward way and I can see the top of the hill. And that's where I'm going.

Doesn't mean I don't have to climb. Doesn't mean that I'm not going to have friction and forces working against me. But I know where I'm going.

I can see it. It's real to me. You will make your path direct.

Do not be wise in your own eyes. Wow. Easily said, not so easily done.

But everybody is built to be wise in our own eyes. This is that needle. This is that understanding.

My understanding, I lean on it because I'm smart. I'm experienced. I've seen this.

I know this. I've got this. I understand this.

I've calculated it. I've developed it. I've explored it.

I've Googled it. I know. I know how this works.

What is the key to not being wise in our own eyes? It starts with an H and ends with illity. Humility. It is required to not be wise in our own eyes.

We have to be humble. We have to admit that we may well not know what we think we know. That we may not understand what we think we understand.

And we need to refer to an outside source for wisdom and knowledge and understanding. How many times have we visited it in John chapter 9? Pharisees come to Jesus and he's talking about those who see and those who are blind. And the Pharisees come and say, are we blind also? And Jesus says, if you were blind, you would have no sin.

But because you say we see, because you lean on your own understanding, because you are wise in your own eyes, your sin remains. And what does that sin do? It disqualifies us from being recipients of God's love. Does God love the world? Yes.

Does God love the world? No. God commends his love toward us. We were sinners.

Christ died for us. He sent his only begotten son because he loves the world. But we are commanded, love not the world or the things that are in the world.

Well, if God loves him, how come I shouldn't love him? There is a kind and a quality and a limited expression of love that is universal. The rain falls on the just and the unjust. That doesn't mean that the love that God has for the nation of Israel and the patriarchs or the love that God has for those who are in Christ and are called according to his purpose is the same.

There's love and then there's love. There is a great distance between the general expression of God's love to the world that is a free sample. It is the loss leader.

It is the teaser. If you see this love, come and get more. If you recognize this love, accept it and come into the place where that love can be fully expressed.

This is just the exhortation to taste and see that the Lord is gracious. Taste and see. Old Testament and new.

That verse is repeated. Taste and see that the Lord is gracious. When you taste it, now come to the feast.

Come to the fountain. If you're thirsty, take a sip. Once you taste that living water, you yourself can become a fountain of living water that wells up within you and becomes a blessing to you and those around you.

Do not be wise in your own eyes. Here's our command. Fear the Lord.

Develop the fear of the Lord. Because it is an imperative, it means it's not automatic. We do not automatically retain grace and truth.

We have to not let them forsake us in verse three. Fear the Lord. This is a command.

I need to cultivate this. I need to pursue it. I need to understand what it is and how to get it.

That's why we have spent a month and a half looking at what it is and how to get it. Fear the Lord and depart from evil. You cannot fear the Lord and fail to depart from evil.

You can't practice evil and fear the Lord. To depart from evil is required to fear the Lord. Fear the Lord.

It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones. Interestingly, verse nine, honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first fruits of all your increase, so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine. Honor the Lord with

the first fruits of your increase.

Honor him with your possessions, your material goods. Now, has this been suspended? Is it just Old Testament and the deal is off because grace, church, New Testament? Not one quit. This is just as true now as it was then.

What does it mean to honor the Lord with your possessions? Well, what does it mean to honor the Lord? There is little to no distance between honor the Lord and fear the Lord. Fear the Lord when it comes to your possessions. What does this mean? Does it honor the Lord if you are a spendthrift? Does it honor the Lord if you go into debt for things you don't actually need? Does it honor the Lord if you're self-indulgent and self-gratifying at the expense of other opportunities to use your possessions to bless, to support, to not cause a stumbling block? I mentioned, I think sometime within the last week, in connection with the bread and the cup and our study of the body and blood of the Lord, to stock a complete bar in your home is hundreds of dollars.

Is this honoring the Lord with your possessions? Is it going to cause many in the body of Christ to stumble when they walk in and see that your den looks like a liquor store? Regardless of whether it is technically free to do without sin and what you do or why you do it, I will go on record saying, I don't think a wall of whiskey, I'm not sure you can find a way to say, I am honoring the Lord in doing that with my possessions. I just don't see it. The purpose of hard liquor is to get inebriated.

That's what it's for. That's what it does. There are other beverages that are much milder in form and have a different place in society and so on.

And even partaking of one glass of Jim Beam on the rocks or old tennishoe or whatever, out and about. But to purchase a wall, and I've been in homes of believers where, I mean, you could have a party of 25 or 30 people there and not run out of hard liquor. I'm not sure that's honoring the Lord with your possessions.

If you purchase well above your needs, and it puts you in debt and leaves other things undone, if you buy a Jaguar and your kids are going to school in shoes that don't fit and clothes that are hand-me-downs, is that honoring the Lord with your possessions? I'm just casting about for illustrations here. You can make up your own. We have to decide this for ourselves.

Honor God with your possessions, with what you do, with what you've got. And if it is used for self-indulgence and self-gratification, that is by definition not honoring the Lord. And it is also the impression that you make on others.

If you think it's good, then you've got to find a way for that good not to be spoken of as evil. If you've got a \$65,000 brand new truck and your kids are shivering in the cold going to school, if you think that's good, you need to be able to justify it so that your

good is not spoken of as evil because it looks evil to anybody with a pair of eyes. And with the first fruits of all your increase, what does this mean? Uh, there are denominations that will tell you, well, this means tithe.

Take 10% of everything you make and send it to us. Honor the Lord with the first fruits of all your increase. This is the first fruits of what you pull in by way of profit.

This is not your expenses. This is not what you need to live and to stay debt-free or keep up with whatever payments you make on your debt. This is the first fruits of your increase.

You get a windfall. You get an unexpected benefit financially. How do you honor the Lord with that? Well, does it mean you have to go take every bit of that first fruit and give it to a church or a ministry or a charity? What does it mean to honor the Lord? If you recognize his role, that he is the source and the bounty that comes from him, that this increase is a blessing, how would you honor the Lord? Let's say you are entered against your will in a sweepstakes and you suddenly get a check for \$7,500.

That's increase. That's above and beyond. That's a profit that is over and above your usual income.

How do you honor the Lord with that? Well, first ask the question, how can I honor the Lord with this? Did he give this to me for a purpose? Is there an outstanding need or debt that this may have been provided to fill? The thinking process that these things come from God, what purpose would he have in sending this under my stewardship, putting it in my hands and under my control? Honoring the Lord is being conscious of the fact that he is involved in this coming and I have a responsibility to figure out what his will is in what I do with it. Oh boy, new boat is probably not it. Unless you're a fisherman.

Unless somebody needs transportation across a lake so that they can get educated or come to church or whatever. Honor the Lord with the first fruits of your increase means as soon as it comes in, the first thing to do, the first fruit, the first of it that comes and you say, what is God's will? What is God's purpose? How can God be glorified in my stewardship of this asset? He gave it to me first. That's a recognition.

There is probably something he wants me to do with it. What is that? That's honoring the Lord. You don't have to send it to a church.

Who knows if that church, this reminds me of my taxes. I don't know what these nefarious rascals are gonna do with my taxes. I pay them because fear God, honor the King, render to Caesar, whatever he exacts, or blind charity.

Bomb on the corner with a cardboard sign, hand him 40 bucks. I don't know what he's gonna do with that. That doesn't honor God.

I think when something bountiful and something unexpected comes in, how can God be honored with this? And I spend some time thinking about it. I don't let my autonomic nervous system go in and say, wow, there's a \$600 pair of tennis shoes I've just been salivating over or whatever appeals. I don't think any of us are tennis shoe freaks.

That's why I use that example. Honor the Lord with your possessions and the first fruits of all your increase. Why? Because if we demonstrate that we are good stewards and we seek to accomplish God's purposes with what is given to us, well done, thou good and faithful servant.

You have been faithful in a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine.

You look at Job and what he did with his wealth. He details it across 39 chapters over and over again. Job says, I haven't been stingy.

I have benefited the poor. I've looked out for the widow and the orphan. Exactly.

That's one of the reasons he was a wealthy man. And it's the reason God doubled his wealth at the end because he honored God with his possessions, offered sacrifices on behalf of his children. He was concerned about God and the things of God in every area of his life.

He didn't get tested and he didn't come under the sway of Satan because he was failing in these areas. It's because he was faithful in these areas. And sometimes God takes the most faithful servant and those who are honoring the most and uses them to demonstrate the value of these truths.

We're gonna have more to say about this in the near future. Verse 13 of chapter three, happy is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver. You're going to have profit.

He has just got through saying by honoring God with your possessions and your first fruits from the increase. But that's not really what counts. The proceeds that come from wisdom and understanding are better than those material prosperities that come from God.

God will give you material prosperity but that's not what's gonna make you happy. It is the understanding and the wisdom that you are exercising as a steward of those things. That's what's going to be the asset.

That's what is a treasure greater than silver. More precious than rubies, verse 15, all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her and happy are all who retain her. We're back to verse three.

Don't let mercy and truth forsake you. This is the tree of life. Seriously? The tree of life? Think about that.

Where was the tree of life? How important is the tree of life? It's in the garden of Eden and when man leaves there's no more access to it. What is going to define the center of the new Jerusalem? The tree of life. It was in the past in Eden.

It's in the future in the kingdom of the father. No tree of life mentioned in the kingdom of the son. Have you noticed that? One of the interesting contrasts in the millennial kingdom.

There's no tree of life. No tree of life in Jerusalem. It's in the kingdom of the father.

It's in the ideal past in the garden. It's in the ideal future in the Jerusalem of the kingdom of the father. But you can reach out your hand and pull fruit off the tree of life and eat it right now.

You don't have to wait. How? Wisdom and understanding are a tree of life to those who take hold of her and happy are all those who retain her. We can eat from the tree of life right now.

Can you buy the tree of life with silver? Can your barns and your vats of wine be swapped out for it? Chesed and truth. Grace and truth. There's no accident when we got together and named our church Old Testament and New.

The key to life, the key to the fear of the Lord is grace and truth. Tie it around your neck. Write it on the tablets of your heart.

Nothing can be compared. Nothing can take its place. Nothing can draw us closer to God.

Nothing can vindicate us in our life on this earth beyond the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God. Well, we'll pick up in chapter four. We're going to see that chapter two has introduced us not only to this wonderful content in chapter three, but also in chapter four.

So much here that is a fuller expression of this beautiful structure. We saw it tonight in chapter two, and we'll see it next time. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the gift that you have given us in your grace of access to the truth and the ability to comprehend it, retain it, and apply it through the presence and power of your spirit. We pray that as we reflect on these things, God, the Holy Spirit, will enlighten us, convict us where we fall short, awaken us when we are in danger of letting them slip away so that we can fulfill all of the potential that the Lord Jesus Christ died to give us.

We pray it in his name.

Amen.