

Proverbs 22-12-07a

This is December 7th, 2022. We're in the book of Proverbs chapter three, following the outline that was given to us in chapter two. And we're in a very instructive section that has to do with drawing closer to the Lord.

We pick up this evening in verse 11. Let's ask God's blessing on our short time of fellowship and instruction and we'll begin. Father, thank you for giving us another opportunity to have our souls nourished and our hearts strengthened, renewed and comforted through the presence of your word and the power of your spirit, the example of your son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray that our activities this evening and our inquiries into the truth of your word will bear fruit and result in a closer walk before you that more closely conforms to the example of the Lord Jesus and we pray it in his name, amen. So we saw the first 10 verses of chapter three last time. My son, do not forget my law.

Let your heart keep my commands. This comes from the father and so many things here are symbolic, they are metaphoric. They speak of deeper and higher truths.

At first blush, this could be David speaking to Solomon in a higher sense and particularly in terms of our understanding and application. This is our heavenly father and our understanding of truth, our sense of justice and righteousness, our system of ethical behavior and morality comes from the father, not from our peers. We saw this in chapter two with the perverse man and the immoral woman trying to seduce our hearts and minds away from God's path into their own crooked ways, ways that lead to loss, that lead to destruction, that cause a waste of our life, a fumbling away of our opportunities and a general bleak future, both now and in the ages to come.

So when God says, let your heart keep my commands, this of course is synonymous and harmonious with fearing the Lord, fear of the Lord. Length of days and long life and peace, they will add to you length of days, long life and peace transcend simple chronological lifespan. We're talking about life in the sense of its quality.

This is similar to the phrase we see in the New Testament, eternal life, everlasting life. God is not simply interested in granting to us duration, but quality, life that partakes of His eternality, His vast, infinite grace, love, mercy, righteousness, and peace. Let not mercy and truth forsake you.

We saw this in verse three, let them not forsake you. They can leave. We can suddenly find ourselves missing like a pair of glasses or our car keys.

You look around and suddenly we can't find mercy and truth, grace and truth. This is Chesed and Emmet, for which our church is named. Don't let them escape.

Bind them around your neck. Be sure you can find them. You've seen the straps for glasses.

I've been thinking about getting some of those. What I have done, I learned this from my brother-in-law. He needs reading glasses, so he bought like 12 pairs, and he just distributes them all through the house.

He's got a pair in his car, a pair in his office. Everywhere in his house, there's like 19 pairs of glasses. He comes here to visit.

When he leaves, there's three pairs of reading glasses scattered around. But instead of that, bind them around your neck. Find something to attach them so that you can't go anywhere without them.

Don't leave home without them. Don't operate in the home without them. Bind them around your neck.

Write them on the tablet of your heart. Certainly can't go anywhere without your heart. And anytime we reference the heart, that guidance and that influence is going to be there.

This is how important it is. As a wise man of my acquaintance often says, God is not kidding about this stuff. This isn't just religiosity.

It's not a platitude. It's not something to kind of stick on the refrigerator and walk away. God is very serious about the attention that we pay to him moment by moment, hour by hour, day by day.

He's not kidding. It's the only reason we're here. We're not here to accomplish a job.

We're not here to pay the bills. We're not here to just raise the kids and keep the plants alive. We're not here to vacuum and sweep and dust and wash.

We are here because we are related to God. All of the unbelievers in the world, all of the indifferent and apathetic believers that are in the world are basically background for those of us who are taking our spiritual life seriously. And I know you are taking it seriously or you wouldn't be here tonight.

And it is a great start. But God says the truth that we perceive, the grace that we come to understand from the pages of his word tonight, we have got to tie that around our neck and scribe it into our hearts so that tomorrow and the next day and the next, we don't lose track of it. It ought to make a difference.

It has to make a difference or we're gonna become part of the background. So this is how you find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man. Again, this is not talking necessarily about people forming a good opinion of you in the workplace or in

your family or in your circle of acquaintance in time.

You're going to be esteemed in the future because you will rule and reign with Christ. You will be assigned a place of function and of service and of opportunity. And others are going to see God's favor, God's recognition of your patience, your faith, your fortitude, the fruit of the spirit that has been born on those branches some of which have had to be pruned so that you could bear more fruit.

And that pruning is in the form of loss and suffering and discipline and setback. But we look at this as from God. It is needful and we accept it and welcome it as such.

Therefore, trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. This is so easy for us to do, but the heart is deceitful above all things, Jeremiah tells us in 17.9. It tricks us, it fools us. We've spent some time looking at how our minds can be hacked by influences of which we are unaware.

Our decision-making can be shifted. There's a great kerfuffle going on right now about how social media has not been balanced and transparent in its presentation of information so that one side is filtered and the other side is exaggerated. Search results are not balanced.

Accounts are extinguished in one political sphere and not in another. One realm of opinion is favored, the other is suppressed. And people go to their phone, usually now, looking for information or go to mainstream media or whatever media they look at and the information is partial or distorted.

I have a one and a half minute excursus on distortion. I was thinking about this this past week. This illustration came to my mind.

I think Elizabeth and I were talking and you can read or you can listen to a presentation that purports to be the truth and it will cite evidence and it will cite facts. But how many of you have seen these things? I don't have one, but I've seen it on other people's phone and I've seen the results posted here and there where you can take a picture of somebody's face but then they've got these funny face filters. It's like the old warped mirrors, but it will figure out what are ears and make them really big.

And it'll figure out what are eyes and make them really small. It will exaggerate the mouth and it will shrink the hair and it will take a picture and distort it so that it is a comical, wildly distorted caricature of what it started with. And it's designed to be humorous.

But think about this for a moment. I'm not talking about the ones that add other elements. I'm just talking about the ones that take a picture and by exaggerating some features and shrinking others, create a hugely distorted view of how that thing started out.

If someone was going to defend that and say, this really is Sam, even though he's got enormous eyes and a tiny chin and these elephant ears, they could say every single pixel, look at this, this is a true pixel. This is a pixel and a collection of pixels that depicts features of the guy's face. It isn't that the truth isn't there, but if you exaggerate some aspects and shrink to insignificance other features and other facts, you create something that is not true.

All of the little parts and pieces may have come from truth, but the way you have put them together and presented them, it is no longer true. This is the basis of a lot of deception in the current day. But look, statistics, but look, evidence, but look, science, but it's not all the science.

It's not balanced. It's not from a neutral point of view. And just because any given set of facts that are presented are true, and I mean this on both sides, you have to be careful about listening on any side of politics or social perspective.

You have to be careful. Don't be taken in and led down the nose by people with whom you basically agree. We have to test everything.

We have to come from a biblical perspective, not a social perspective or a political perspective or an economic perspective, biblical. This is why God says, you've got to take my commandments, my statutes, my truth. That's got to be your standard.

And nobody on this earth is always correct. God is, and we are to be people of grace and truth, genuine truth, biblical truth. So trust in the Lord with all your heart, not in a commentator, not in a channel, not in a party or a philosophy.

I am left or right. I'm liberal or conservative. I'm this or I'm that.

You can't trust in that. There are problems with any human collection of people. We were looking at the voting map.

You know, there was just a runoff election in Georgia and they're showing the map and coloring it blue for predominantly Democratic voting and red for Republican. And in all of the rural areas, it's solid red. And in the urban and heavy populated cities, it's blue.

Universally, it goes across the country this way. And it reminded me of the fact that the more human beings you aggregate, it is like nuclear fissionable material. The closer and more densely you pack people, the more likely... Now, I'm giving away a little bit of political perspective there and I don't mean to, but it's interesting that perspective changes and beliefs change and voting patterns change when there is a condensed aggregation of people versus those who are dispersed, spread out and have to rely on neighbors and such, instead of being suspicious and locking their doors against neighbors.

There's just a different way of life in rural areas than there is in the suburbs and especially in the heavily populated cities. And you can see it on a voting map. You can see it on a voter registration map.

You can see it anywhere. It's just different. You might agree with the people in the cities and disagree with the people in the country and say they're backward and fell off the pumpkin truck or something and that's fine.

But just notice the difference. There is a difference when you aggregate people closely. This is why, and there are different kinds of aggregations, not just density of population.

Do you only listen to, do you only assemble with a certain viewpoint? It's fine, birds of a feather flock together, but we can't fall to confirmation bias and a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest. We can't learn if we don't listen to things that we're not already convinced of, that we don't already know, that we haven't taken into consideration. Is there some truth in the other side? There always is.

Almost any opinion and perspective has some element of legitimate observation or legitimate data, legitimate fact. It may have been woven and distorted and perverted into something that's very difficult to accept. But that distorted picture that came from the camera, there might be a nostril that's perfectly in proportion.

There might be an eyelid and an eyebrow that is exactly right and square. And maybe I need some of that to reconstruct the actual picture. And so we should not be too quick to dismiss or to become deaf to opinions and perspectives of others.

It's okay to listen. It's okay to evaluate. It is okay to draw conclusions about what others are saying.

In fact, it is great exercise for the faculties of our soul. But what do we place our trust in? Where does our confidence reside? Trust in the Lord, verse five, with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. When I am confused and unclear about something, I take it to the Lord.

This is what we are to do. Lord, I think I need to make a decision about this, but I am baffled. I don't see a clear path.

I can't tell what's right and what's wrong. Please shine a light and let me practice your wisdom. Let me operate in a way that reflects your glory.

Let me make decisions and follow courses of action and invest my resources in something that you approve of. That is my only goal. And right now, I can't see quite how to do that.

And if you can pray the prayer, search me, oh Lord, and know my heart. Try me, see if

there's any wicked way in me. If you find it, purge me with hyssop so that I can be clean.

Wash me and make me white. If that is your sincere prayer, then you can expect that when you ask God for wisdom and illumination, he will give it. God is searching the earth for people who will pray that prayer, who love him enough, who trust him enough, who look to him fervently enough for him to be able to send an answer that they will then follow and that his glory will be reflected.

That needs to be us. Do not be wise in your own eyes. This is so easy to do.

I am the king of being wise in my own eyes. There are areas of endeavor where I think I know just about everything. And we can be experts and we can be knowledgeable, but our wisdom is different than knowledge.

Our wisdom is different than experience. Our wisdom shouldn't be based on self-esteem. Fear the Lord and depart from evil.

Fear the Lord. And instead of looking at how wise I am, I need to look at where is there evil in my practice? I have got to get rid of this and depart from it. If I fear the Lord, the last thing I want to do is drag evil into his presence.

When I pray, when I enter into the throne by a new and living way, bought and paid for with the blood of Jesus Christ, his torn flesh, allowing me access to the Father, do I want to haul some evil in there with me? Absolutely not. Anytime we're going to go somewhere, we scrub up, we put on nice clean clothes, we make ourselves as presentable as possible. Why wouldn't we do that a thousand times more fervently in approaching the Lord God in heaven? Our Father, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

To be casual, to be flippant, to be uninterested in departing from evil and fearing the Lord is tragic, but it is widespread in the world today, in the world of Christians today. It will be health and strength. Verses nine and 10, this is kind of where we left off last time.

Honor the Lord with your possessions and the first fruits of all your increase so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine. Now, immediately that there are any number of brick and mortar denominational churches that will descend on this verse as they do Malachi, bring your tithes into the storehouse and God will open the windows of heaven and bless you. Churches love to come to this and then say, give, give, give, give until it hurts.

This is your spiritual responsibility. Let's use what we have learned thus far in Proverbs to rightly divide this portion of the word of truth. Let's work backwards from verse 10 to verse nine.

What does verse 10 say? Your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow

with new wine. Barns and vats. Who has barns and vats? Raise your hand, everybody that's got barns and vats.

And I'm talking about wheat barns, not barns full of years of storage and inches of dust. I'm talking about silos. Barns in the ancient world didn't have old stuff and discarded furniture and all the detritus that I could show you in a nearby barn.

These were barns filled with grain, filled with produce, right? Most people would never have a barn or a vat. Most people are not that well off. You have, you might work for somebody that's got those.

You might labor in the fields for somebody that's got those, but this would not apply to the vast majority of people. So barns and vats are metaphors because this spiritual truth, this divine revelation applies to every single believer, Old Testament and new. So it can't mean that, well, God's going to have to build me a barn because he's promised that my barn's going to be full.

He's going to have to give me title to a vat so that I can have a vat that will be full of new wine. And is this the only kind of prosperity there is? A lot of grain and a lot of wine? Metaphors, metaphors, right? Clearly a metaphor. Anybody doubtful that this is metaphorical, that this is symbolic of prosperity and plenty? That's what it means, right? Okay.

If that's what verse 10, that's the territory that it occupies, what do you think about verse nine? Honor the Lord with your possessions and the first fruits of all your increase. In the Old Testament, this was a metaphor of grain, barley, wheat. It was calves, kids of goats, lambs, and such.

Portions of wages that you might earn, shekels and so on. But this is metaphorical. So let me ask you, if I want God to bless me with prosperity that can easily be in the invisible realm, be in the realm of social life, in the realm of intangibles, then what are the intangibles? What is the meaning of the metaphorical language in verse nine? This doesn't mean write a check for 10% of your pay.

You go to commentary after commentary and they say, the first fruits means the first check you write each month when you're paying your bills ought to be 10% to your church for whatever income you made. God will bless people who do that because they love him, but they are not understanding Malachi and they are not understanding Proverbs, I write. God blesses our intention.

And even when we misunderstand, some people observe days and if they do it under the Lord, God blesses them. Others observe every day alike and God blesses them because they're doing it as under the Lord. It isn't what we do, it's why we do it.

There are many wonderful people who tithe, have tithed, will tithe and God will bless

them, but it isn't because of the physical tithe. It's not the check, it's not the money, it is the heart. What is actually being said here? Well, honor the Lord with your possessions.

We possess a lot more than material goods, don't we? We have time, we have expertise, we have abilities, we have opportunities. There are people in our periphery who can be blessed by an investment of our prayer, our attention, our conversation, our empathy, our support in areas that we can provide. And the first fruits of our increase, we get some additional time.

We are suddenly able to do more. Our circumstance shifts. We are prosperous enough that we can provide a meal to someone.

We can spend some time doing something for someone. We can look around in our periphery and prayerfully ask, is there an opportunity here for me to express my love for God by expressing my love to one another? And that is our possession. That is our increase.

Sometimes we don't have time and we don't have opportunity. We are slammed. We're against it.

We're just dog paddling like mad to keep breathing above water. Other times we come into a period of, we got through that and there's a little bit of downtime. There's a little bit of slack here and we can rest.

The Lord Jesus rested after he ministered to crowds and healed hundreds, he would rest. He would go off by himself. And the first thing he did was go to his father in prayer.

He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul. Restoration.

We sometimes need personal time. We need to relax. We need to rest.

We need to recharge. Nothing wrong with that. In fact, it is essential.

But having paid attention to that, looking out not only for our own interests, but also for the interests of others, Philippians chapter two, the mind that was in Christ Jesus, the Lord Jesus looked out for his own interest. And he also looked out for the interest of his disciples, the larger group of those in his periphery and the people of Israel, and even some of them outside of Israel. He looked out not only for his own interests, but also the interests of others.

When we do that, we can dedicate to the Lord, whatever it is we possess. We've got an opportunity. We have an ability.

We've got some resources on hand. Let's do that. If we have an increase, God suddenly grants us a little bit more time, a little bit more resource, a little bit more ability.

The first thing we should do, first fruits means the first thing I do is thank God for the increase and ask him, are you giving me this so that I can use it? Shine a light on my path, shine a light on my opportunities, shine your light into my circumstances. I want to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and my spiritual gifting, my spiritual opportunities. God has the cattle quote unquote on a thousand hills.

Is that really cattle? Are there really a thousand dirt mounds on which God has got cattle? That's a metaphor also, isn't it? God has all of the prosperity that he needs. He doesn't need our money per se. Although there is a time to look and say, here's a financial need, and I've got some extra here.

I can write a check. I can make a donation. I can support this effort financially.

And that's great. But if you make a ritual out of 10%, look at what Jesus said to the Pharisees, you're tithing right down to the spices in your cabinet and you're not thinking. There are deeper principles in the law than physical tithing.

Same thing is true here. And we are responsible, we are accountable for the possessions that we have, all of our possessions, all of our waking time, we're doing something. Well, am I looking to the Lord in the investment? When I serve my family, when I serve within my marriage, when I serve in the parent-child relationship in either direction, in my employment, in my business.

Some of us have our own business. Some of us are semi-retired. Some of us work for others, but that is an arena where there is responsibility for possession and for firstfruits.

What can we do? Honor the Lord. Honor the Lord. This is another facet of fear of the Lord.

It's practical, it's meaningful. Then we come to verse 11, and this is the new section for tonight. Do not despise the chastening of the Lord nor detest His correction.

For whom the Lord loves, He corrects. It says, just as a father, the son in whom he delights. It's interesting that in both the New Testament quote in Hebrews and in the Septuagint, there is an additional verb here.

In the Septuagint, it says, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son. In the New Testament, it says, He scourges every son whom He receives or accepts. And I think this is probably the original reading, and it may be a case where in the Masoretic text, the verb dropped out or got misread somehow.

Instead of a son, as a father delights in his son, this is as a father rebukes or disciplines or scourges his son. This is a fascinating principle that has been greatly abandoned in recent years, the last few generations. You can put with this Proverbs 13, 24.

He who spares his rod hates his son. Do not let your good be spoken of as evil and evil as good. And yet this has become opposite.

Someone who physically disciplines their children is liable to legal action in the modern day. They can call Child Protective Services and get you locked up for spanking. And obviously, striking a child improperly on the wrong surface, with the wrong implement, for the wrong reasons, in anger, out of loss of self-control, without a thought to honoring God like anything else we do that is not dedicated to the glory of God and is not done in a desire to honor Him and obey His word.

There are any number of ways you can go wrong in perpetrating corporal discipline, corporal punishment on a child. That doesn't mean that there isn't a right, proper and beneficial way to do it. And in 13, 24 of Proverbs, he who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.

Promptly. You look at the horrific lag in our legal system, where someone can be convicted of a crime and sentenced to death, and it takes 25 years on death row before they finally, I mean, people are having to go dig through history to find out why is this guy being executed? What was that, 1983? This guy did this heinous crime. Prompt discipline is a biblical principle.

Not tomorrow, not next week, not down the road. Don't dig up some old bone and punish somebody for it. Well, I remember back in 2016, you did this, and now I'm gonna make you pay.

That's nonsense. God's discipline, God's judgment is prompt. It is short term.

He who spares his rod hates his son. I'm talking about individual, by the way, not corporate. When you look at the nation of Israel, God waited some generations for their iniquity to reach its fullness and so on.

We're talking about individual discipline. God works with us individually. He is not going to discipline us for some mistake we made 17 years ago, 25 years ago, 40 years ago, however long you might think.

God deals with us day by day, week by week, in the present, about the present, because he is a good father. He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly while it is fresh in the mind, while that discipline can be good, can be beneficial. It is not punitive.

It isn't revenge. It's not petty. It's not mean-spirited.

Such discipline, such rebuke is not to gratify some anger on the part of the father. It is intended to benefit the son. You remember in chapter two, when wisdom was crying out on the street and she said, turn at my rebuke.

The rebuke is not designed to make her happy and puff her up with I'm right and you're wrong. Turn you at my rebuke. I will pour out my spirit on you.

You will get a benefit if you will turn at this rebuke. The rebuke is intended for benefit. All of our rebuke should be, it often is not in the human realm, but it should be in a spirit of love intended for the benefit of the recipient so that we are built up, not torn down.

Well, much more to say about this after the break, but this is the lead into the last part of chapter three, which is another section on the benefits of wisdom and why we should be so dedicated to the fear of the Lord and the pursuit of and practice of and living in the realm of this wisdom. We'll see that when we come back. Thank you.