

Proverbs 22-12-14a

Good evening, welcome to Wednesday night at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 14th of December 2022. We're in Proverbs chapter 3. We're going to take a quick look at the end of that chapter and move into chapter 4 this evening.

Let's take just a moment to pause and ask God's blessing on us, cultivate the presence and power of the Holy Spirit so that our time is well spent and the word of God will penetrate deeply, sink its roots into our soil and produce the fruit that God would have be in evidence in our lives. Shall we pray? Father, thank you for this day. Thank you for the wonderful ways that you've provided for us, protected us, challenged us, given us opportunities to increase our faith and practice the principles that we learn from your word.

We pray that this portion we look at together this evening will be beneficial in the hands of the Holy Spirit to thoroughly equip us for every good work. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen. We return to chapter 3 in Proverbs picking up at verse 19.

We have looked at the principle of being a tree of life in verse 18. That's a wonderful idea to pursue in its beneficial effects that reach into eternity and bring quality from God into our lives and the lives of others. We pick up tonight at verse 19, the Lord by wisdom founded the earth.

By understanding, he established the heavens. By his knowledge, the depths were broken up and clouds dropped down the dew. My son, let them not depart from your eyes.

Keep sound wisdom and discretion, so they will be life to your soul and grace to your neck. Interesting there in verse 22, which I didn't point out when we read this last time, but you know the word in Hebrew for soul is nefesh, and it is also sometimes translated throat because soul and breath are linked and you breathe through your neck. So there's a parallelism in that verse with they will be life to your throat, as it were, the breath that enters your body through your throat, and grace to your neck.

Then you will walk safely in your way and your foot will not stumble. So many times we're trying to figure out how to proceed. What should we do next? We've got several options before us, and there can be an element of fear.

If I do this wrong, it could be very costly. There could be a setback. There could be consequences that I don't foresee or can't anticipate, can't plan for, and there's such wonderful confidence in committing our way to the Lord, praying in advance of making these decisions, asking God to illuminate our path, to guide us with a view toward being in the center of his will.

I'm not necessarily praying that God will make me prosperous and happy and fruitful and famous and rich and comfortable, but that he will accomplish his purpose in us and through us. Sometimes that is an unexpected way and an unexpected path, but if we pray it with confidence that God knows what he's doing, if we are trusting him, that even if we have to go take a dark shortcut somewhere, we are going to end up where God would have us doing what he would want us to do, reflecting his glory and accomplishing his purpose. And we have to have the courage to trust God for difficulty.

And there is an idea of that here. You will walk safely in verse 23, in your way and your foot will not stumble. When you lie down, you will not be afraid.

You will lie down and your sleep will be sweet. Kind of a rare repetition of a verb here. It's the same verb for lie down.

Some commentators and students of Proverbs have wanted to amend this verb because they think, well, why would you repeat it? But it is apropos because we all look forward to rest, to sit down and quit for a while, to slacken the pace, catch our breath, be restored and renewed. This is why Psalm 4.8 is so pertinent for us. I want to lay me down in peace and sleep, knowing that my safety is from the Lord.

And you have that idea here. You will not be afraid. You will lie down and your sleep will be sweet.

Do not be afraid of sudden terror nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes. The first phrase there, do not be afraid of sudden terror. This is a surprise that came out of nowhere.

Suddenly there's a threat. Suddenly there's a problem. Suddenly there is a lack.

Suddenly there is a loss. Suddenly the whole landscape changes. We didn't see it coming.

And after a few experiences like this, we can start to be kind of circumstantially paranoid. Well, it's like the two cowboys by the campfire. Sure is quiet tonight.

Ned says, yep, too quiet. And we begin to get nervous that something unexpected is going to happen when there is no sign that it is. Unexpected things do happen, but we should not spoil the times of rest and restoration and comfort and blessing with fear that it will come to an end in some unexpected way.

Once again, this is the exercise of faith. It's not easy to do this. In fact, I think it's nearly impossible in human strength.

Unbelievers have a hard time with this, but because we are believers, because we know we belong to God, we have been purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ. God is looking

out for us. If we're paying attention at all and making some effort to live in a way that is pleasing in His sight, that glorifies the Lord Jesus, that honors our new covenant identity and role as children of God, if we're conscious of that and endeavoring to fulfill it in any way, we should trust that God knows what He's doing.

God has us. Those of you that are old enough will remember, I remember seeing it in black and white, a family cupped in two enormous hands. You're in good hands with Allstate.

Well, we're in good hands with an all-knowing and all-loving Heavenly Father. It is a very direct application of faith to trust Him in uncertain times. When we think things are good, we wonder if they really are, is this all about to end? We either have faith or we don't.

If we have faith, we will relax and trust God. And our sleep will be sweet. We won't be afraid of sudden terror nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes.

Surprise terror can take any form. Many people are unprepared for a sudden earthquake, tornado, hurricane, tsunami, incursion of disease that nobody knew about. Suddenly I've been diagnosed and my whole world has changed.

That's the sudden terror. This other kind is trouble from the wicked. This is humanly sponsored antagonism and hardship.

Sometimes it is targeted and intended. These are criminals who are envious, jealous, feel that they are entitled to what other people have and they just come take it. Other times this is the bursting radius of wickedness.

Someone in our periphery is in the grip of sin and evil and the concomitant suffering that spreads around them like radiation hits us. Trouble from the wicked, but we will not be afraid of it. Why? The Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from getting caught.

You may be in the vicinity of snares. In the modern vernacular, you would think IEDs, landmines, tripwires, but God will see to it that we are not brought down, neutralized, taken out of the picture by these factors, by these forces. Therefore, verse 27, we move from the vertical expression of faith, our faith toward God, His provision and care for us to keep us in safety, to relieve us of fear and uncertainty.

And now we're going to look at the horizontal direction. Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in the power of your hand to do so. What do you think about this? Look at that first line.

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due. I was very curious about the underlying Hebrew for this. And I found out that what this says literally is do not withhold good from its possessors.

Do not withhold good from its owners. IE, there is someone who possesses good, good things, intrinsic good, and some kind of way, I have some power over that, some ability to withhold it. So do I have something of theirs that is good and maybe they've lost it and they need it returned? This is thought to be, the reason they translate it this way is they say, well, if someone possesses it and it belongs to them, if they don't have it, I need to find a way to give it to them or return it to them.

And it is due to them because they possess it. But it's very interesting because in the modern day, people say, well, I see someone who is oppressed or in hardship or needs rights that they don't have, you know, fill in the blank rights and good is due to them. And so I need to funnel some good their way.

But this is good. That is the possession of someone by right. They deserve it.

They are associated with it. They have claimed it. It belongs to them.

And this is Tov. This is good in the sense of divine moral righteousness or good things that are associated in scripture with blessings that God gives to those who are righteous, who are seeking good and good belongs to this person in some way. There are people to whom good does not belong.

It is not their due. It isn't their possession. And we're not called upon in this passage to bless those people.

There are other passages that pertain. You think about your New Testament passage. Love your enemies.

Do good to those who hate you. Pray for those who despitefully use you. Do good to those who hate you.

You can treat people out of your own good. They can be blessed by association with you because you are a possessor of God's goodness. This is a different situation.

These people already possess good. Don't hold it back. Don't take it away from them.

Don't separate them from it. Don't be an obstacle between them and the good that belongs to them. And the parallel always helps us out in situations like this.

Do not withhold good from those who possess it when it is in the power of your hand to do. So isn't even there. When it is doable in your power, the hand, yad, is the word for power.

It isn't always in our power to ensure that someone keeps the good that they possess or that is their due. When it is in our power, when it is within the means, motive, and opportunity that God has given us, we want to be doing the Philippians chapter 2 thing. Look out not only for our own interests, but also for the interests of others.

I don't want to somehow be an obstacle and an encumbrance and this person cannot enjoy or benefit from the good that is their possession. And this takes a lot more thought, doesn't it? This is not just a simple hand a \$20 bill out the car window. We have to first of all ascertain, is someone a possessor of good and am I in some way withholding it? Maybe they need the expression of gratitude or the expression of approval or thankfulness for their kindness.

That is something that would be appropriate to express to them. They quote unquote deserve thanks. If we are unthankful, remember in the latter days men will be among many other things unthankful along with unholy and disobedient and all kinds of vicious violence.

But it is interesting that in this list of very heinous characteristics, unthankfulness. Being thankful to those who deserve thanks, who have sacrificially done things for us and on our behalf is a gift and not to be withheld. And you can think of many other examples.

That's kind of an easy one that comes to mind. But consideration. Do we owe someone a consideration and we're withholding it? And it would be good for them and something that would benefit them and we don't want to hold that back when it is in our power, when it is within our means, when we have the opportunity, when we ascertain that this would glorify God to so do.

But it takes thought. If there's one thing to put in the margin next to verse 27, this requires reflection. This is not a knee jerk.

It's not a superficial act. You have to figure out the status of the object. Who is this possessor of good? What is the good that they possess? Is it within my power? Am I somehow withholding it and I should not? Is there a way that I can help the flow of this good to the person to whom it belongs? It takes thought.

The life of faith is a life of thoughtfulness, prayerfulness, going back to the well of truth from the word of God that we've accumulated in our soul, drawing the bucket of that truth up, praying over it, looking for God's guidance, seeking God's glory and ensuring that in our dealings with people in the horizontal, we are dispensing good to those who possess it. That's verse 27. Verse 28 bears on it.

Do not say to your neighbor, go and come back and tomorrow I will give when it's right here with you. Our thoughts shouldn't take so long that we never get around to drawing a conclusion. If your neighbor comes with a need, it's a legitimate need.

There is good that they can and should possess and I've got it right here with me. Why would I say, well, come back tomorrow? What is the motivation for not giving the neighbor what they have asked for? There are times when you should not get, if your neighbor comes and says, I've run out of crack and I need, you know, \$2,000 to get

some more. Can you loan me some cash? Obviously there are situations where we do not accede to the request, but the word neighbor has been greatly interpreted by the Lord Jesus himself.

When he said the second commandment is like unto the first, love your neighbor as yourself and sort of a smart aleck purveyor of legalistic righteousness said, well, who is my neighbor? And then Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan. Here is someone who through no fault of their own is in a bad way. This guy didn't get mugged because he had unpaid gambling debts.

Uh, the, the Jewish man that is in the ditch when the Samaritan comes by after the priest and the Pharisee have walked all around him on the other side of the road, he's in genuine need and the Samaritan has the wherewithal and he doesn't say, well, if he's still here tomorrow, I'll help him. Right? He sees the need. It is clear that this is a mugging that, that this man has been attacked out of the blue and he does what is in his power to do.

And Jesus says, this is an illustration of who is your neighbor, someone who is in your personal periphery, someone about whom you can make a firsthand judgment. The Samaritan doesn't go say, you know, I need to find a charity that ministers to people in ditches and I'll, I'll give them a contribution and hope that they find this guy. I'm not nearly as big a fan, although there are some and there are worthy, uh, outfits that, that are great to support, uh, that are organized charities and, and you can't be there to help a wounded veteran and so on.

But, uh, the Bible speaks of personal individual responsibility to love our neighbor. Our neighbor is someone that we encounter. We can see the need.

We can evaluate the circumstances and prayerfully consider whether this is something we should take action to redress, to benefit. And God will give us the information to know a guy with a cardboard sign at the busy intersection. I don't have enough information to give God's money to somebody who's going to walk around the corner, get into a car nicer than mine, drive to a house nicer than mine and go out and buy liquor and have a big party that night.

Who knows where that money's going to go. Maybe they're just going to go around the corner and, and get high. Uh, I, I can't know.

I don't know. And I can't stop at an intersection on my way to an appointment and spend enough time to find out if this is something God would have me do or not. That is not my neighbor.

My neighbor is someone I know, someone across the road, someone across the fence, someone with whom I work, someone with whom I go to school, a situation that I am well

enough informed about that before God, when standing at the judgment and God says, so I gave you resources. You sent them in this direction. Why? Here's why based on your word, based on my understanding of it, it seemed to me that this is someone who needed to possess the good that I was able to provide.

I did not want to withhold it. And so that's what I did. It seemed to me similar to the story of the Samaritan.

So that's an old Testament truth to not say to your neighbor, go come back tomorrow. And I will give when you have it with you, that's sort of passive aggressive or passive resistance to charity. You think up an excuse why you can't do it right now, go away and come back tomorrow.

Remember the judge that kept ignoring the widow, the unfortunate widow that kept coming and coming and day after day, she just kept coming and he finally had to give in. God says, you need to evaluate and make a decision at that time. Don't keep delaying it and putting it off.

If you've got it with you and it's an easy, it's an easy contribution. Now we go from passive to active. Instead of withholding good to whom it belongs or is due, instead of withholding something that a neighbor needs in something of a crisis or an emergency situation, you say, well, wait till tomorrow.

Now in verse 29, do not devise evil against your neighbor. Now you've got a bone to pick with your neighbor. I don't like his tree hanging over my fence.

I don't like his dog digging holes in my yard. I don't like this or that or the other. He pulls into his driveway and mashes my wife's shrubs.

His house is painted the wrong color. It's an eyesore. It's dropping my property value.

Who knows why people get upset with their neighbors, especially in the city. Do not devise evil against your neighbor for he dwells by you for safety's sake. Now, does he dwell by you for, is that the reason he moved in? I want to get close enough to be safe.

This is the way of looking at the proximity of a neighbor in the sense of to the extent that something is good, to the extent that it's noble or lovely or of good report, we consider that aspect. Instead of saying, this is a nosy neighbor, this is an inconsiderate neighbor, this is a troublesome neighbor, this is an annoying neighbor, we say, well, one good thing about having a neighbor is there is safety in numbers. In the ancient world, having somebody nearby, just like on the prairie, you watch stories being told of the prairie days and when problems occur, somebody is sick, someone's having a baby, there's an incursion of the displaced Native Americans who have been driven off of their land and would really like to have it back and violence ensues.

Neighbors nearby were a matter of safety. This isn't just saying, well, keep some people around for safety. This is an exhortation to find the good in a bad situation.

Look on the good side, look on the bright side, glass half full. This is a biblical principle. It is a command.

This isn't an option. It's not, well, if you really want to be happy, try this. It's a command of God.

When you see your neighbor, don't say, this guy's always coming over at odd hours and he wants something and I'm tempted to say, well, go away and come back later. I don't want to give you anything right now. Instead, say, isn't it great that I've got a neighbor on whom I can call or who can call upon me when the chips are down and there is danger and safety in numbers is needed.

Here, I've got a neighbor. There is a positive. There's an upside to this.

This is true and honest and noble and lovely. There is some virtue and there is some praise. I'm going to think on these things.

That's how the peace of God that passes understanding is going to keep my heart and mind in these, in this age, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. But this is a choice. We do this by force of will.

I am not going to let annoyance dominate me. I'm not going to commit attitude sins. It's really kind of arrogant to say, I am about such important business that somebody coming in and asking me for something or asking me about something.

Don't you see how busy I am? Don't you see how important I am? Don't you see how deeply entrenched and invested I am in this particular thing I'm doing right now? It reminds me of a foghorn leghorn. Go away, boy, you bother me. That cannot be our attitude.

It doesn't reflect the Lord Jesus Christ, and it doesn't reflect the Old Testament truth of valuing and loving one's neighbor. Find a way to get it done. Think about the good.

Suppress what you find annoying. Do not devise evil against your neighbor. He dwells by you for safety's sake.

Do not strive with a man without cause if he has done you no harm. There are times when we should not be generous and treat people with outgoing kindness, generosity, love. There are people who come to the door and you are not to give them anything.

We don't devise evil against them, but we do not extend ourselves in their direction. The Bible is replete with guidance on this topic. You can think of it yourself.

If somebody has ought against you, go two or three times with various groups of people. See if you can be reconciled. If they are recalcitrant, if they maintain their evil attitude, separate.

Love them from a distance like a heathen or a tax collector. Nothing in the Word of God says go find the tax collectors and run them out of town, tar and feather them, persecute them, harass them, punish them, try to get them to see the error of their ways. You maintain a distance.

If you're treating someone as a tax collector, you are in distance mode. I love you from afar. Same with the heathen.

No call to persecute the heathen, harass the heathen, oppress and punish the heathen, but those aren't the people you put on your invitation list for fellowship meals and so on. They've made a choice. They're heathen.

Tax collectors have made a choice to be sort of the enemy of their own people. Well, fine. You're going to have to stay at a distance until you start getting interested in repentance and change of mind if you want to come talk to me because like the Lord Jesus coming through town, Zacchaeus says, I want to change.

I want to do something different. Levi, Matthew, the tax collector, here's the Lord Jesus. I'm tired of this way of life.

I want to change. I'm having a change of mind and a change of heart. The Lord Jesus never turned anyone away for their past.

He did maintain a distance from people because of their present choices. So do not devise evil. Do not strive with a man without a cause.

It doesn't say never strive with a man, does it? All strife is evil. Strive with no man. It says don't strive with a man without cause.

If he has done you no harm. If he has done you harm, if he is doing you harm, it may be time to strive. Remember there is a time to every purpose and a season to everything under heaven in Ecclesiastes.

There is a time to strive to war and there is a time to make peace. It's a wonderful thing to make peace. Blessed are the peacemakers.

But there is a time when blessed are the war makers. Because you need a war. You need to establish a border and maintain it.

You need to say this is ours and we are going to keep it. Well this is a good place for us to pause and take our break. When we come back we are going to finish these last five verses in chapter 3 and move into chapter 4 of Proverbs.

