

Proverbs 23-03-29a

First of all, let me say good evening to everyone that has joined us here at Grace & Truth Bible Church. We welcome you to our Wednesday night study where we continue in the book of Proverbs. This is the 29th of March, 2023.

We're going to take a brief look at chapter six and then move to chapter 10. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, we'll dive right in. Father, we thank you as always for your sustaining grace, the many expressions of your love and faithfulness toward us in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you for him. We thank you for the Holy Spirit that you have sent to us at the Lord Jesus behest to be our comforter, to be our guide, to strengthen us, to cleanse us, to lead us in the way. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together this evening, that the Holy Spirit will find us ready and able pupils, that this information will integrate with what we have learned in the past to give us insight and clarity as we negotiate the circumstances of our own lives, our relationships with others, our representation of the Lord Jesus on this earth as his body in the time that remains to us until you send the Lord to collect us to himself and present us before your throne.

We pray it in Jesus' name, amen. Amen. The Proverbs are in my view, greatly misunderstood and often relegated to a distant place in the books that we want to take a look at for practical application.

I was reading an introduction to the Proverbs by a very wonderful scholar whose work I admire and try to get everything he publishes. He is an Old Testament scholar and along with Everett Fox has published a new and fresh translation of the five books of Moses. I recommend both of those for different reasons.

His name is Robert Alter and he has also published a translation with commentary on the wisdom books, which are Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. If you have an interest in these books beyond what we have covered, I recommend this to you. I didn't have this book.

I'm not even sure it was published when I covered Job. It is published by the W.W. Norton Company out of New York and London. This is copyright 2010.

And I found it for a buck somewhere. I was so tickled because I recognized the name and I thought that's one I don't have, the wisdom books by Robert Alter. Can't get my hand out of the way there to see it.

But I really appreciate his scholarship and his insight from the language. And that's pretty much all he does in the commentary is talk about the way the language is used, the way structure is used. However, the things that we are going to cover tonight out of Proverbs didn't come from Robert Alter.

They didn't come from Everett Fox. They didn't come from anywhere. So I forewarn you that once again, we're at the end of a lonely set of tracks in the unbroken snow and take that into account as you, but I think you will see that it makes sense.

Let's begin by looking at chapter six. I am basically skipping chapter six for now. We may return to it in the future.

I feel bad about doing that, but I've done all my work on chapter 10 and I'm really excited about it. And I don't wanna belabor chapter six too much. It is very self explanatory.

Look at the beginning. My son, if you become surety for your friend, this is basically if you co-sign with somebody, you enter into a partnership with them or you stand behind them as a financial guarantor. And he doesn't say, don't do it.

He says, if you find that you have done it, get out of it. And that's a very interesting approach. Look at what it says.

My son, if you become surety for your friend, if you've shaken hands in pledge for a stranger, you are snared by the words of your mouth. You are taken by the words of your mouth. So here's what you should do, beginning in verse three.

But I'm curious about this situation. If you become surety for your friend, you have shaken hands in pledge for a stranger. This is a representative situation.

It isn't just like so many of these others. This is a parable, meaning that because of your relationship with someone close to you, a friend, a brother, a relative, but you inadvertently become obligated to somebody you don't know because of your association relationship, goodwill and desire to support somebody you do know. And you become implicated.

You have shaken hands and someone has maneuvered the rules of hospitality, which were very deep rooted in the ancient Near East, both biblically and culturally. And there are some situations where you're like that gal, Ado Annie, was that her name in Oklahoma? I'm just a girl who can't say no. There are situations where you can't gracefully refuse.

You're in the presence of someone you know and someone you don't know. And you are somewhat unwillingly maneuvered into participation in something that wisdom tells you isn't a good idea. As soon as you are out of the pressure and out from under the manipulative and coercive circumstances, Proverbs says, "'Do this my son and deliver yourself for you have come into the hand of your friend.

Go and humble yourself, plead with your friend, give no sleep to your eyes nor slumber to your eyelids. Deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hunter's hand." From capture is

what the hand means. The reason they have to add those words in italics is to let you know that this is a captive gazelle.

This gazelle has been snared. Get out of the snare. Notice it doesn't say, go to the stranger.

You have become surety to a stranger on behalf of your friend. Only your friend can deliver you from this. The friend needs to go back to the stranger and say, "Look, you remember that third party that was standing here and said he would go my bail.

Basically, he would stand, he would co-sign my note. We need to deal him out of this hand. He's, I want you to take him off the contract.

It's between you and me." Only the friend can do this. Make sense? You've been implicated in something that you would have never done on your own without this kind of social pressure or hospitality obligation. And as soon as the stranger is out of sight, you've got to go to your friend and say, "Look, I would never do this.

I don't want to do this. I don't want to be a part of it. Please." And he says, "Look, beg.

Do whatever you have to do. Go and humble yourself. Plead with your friend.

Get your friend to get you out of this. Do not be surety with a stranger." Now, how does this work itself out in application? Certainly in a specific case, if you are sort of big dealed into co-signing a note, that's sort of the parable here. But what does it stand for? Think about charity.

Maybe you get leaned on your, an impulse, an emotional appeal, and you sign up to make a monthly donation to somebody. And the person presenting the charity to you is persuasive and inviting, and you kind of know them or you come to know them over the course of the presentation, but you suddenly find yourself obligated to something that you don't know anything about in actuality. You need to go back to whoever recruited you, whoever signed you up and get yourself unsigned up.

The Bible teaches here, do not obligate yourself in areas where you don't know anything, a stranger. This can be a stranger organization. Maybe you see a commercial with shivering dogs and people going in and delivering these animals, and you sign up for a monthly obligation to support some, help the dogs rescue, but you don't actually know anything about them.

If you actually want to support shivering animals that have been abused and poorly kept and whatnot, do it locally. Talk to your veterinary, talk to your local shelter, work with, volunteer, send monetary support to a local shelter, but somebody off somewhere else with their headquarters in New Jersey who says we send people out and we shelter and preserve and this, that, and the other, you don't know what they're doing, and it is bad

stewardship. And you have put yourself in the power of somebody else.

Now, this is sort of innocuous examples. You can become implicated and obligated in things that are more serious, where bill collectors will come after you if you don't pay up, if you don't send. Most charities, you can just say, oh, I subscribed in a moment of weakness, I want out, but there are other things that we can obligate ourselves to.

And we don't know enough about it. And maybe when we start finding out about it, this isn't what I thought it was. But this is specifically in the case, somebody that you know gets you implicated in something about which you know nothing.

And the Bible says, you should never obligate yourself without knowledge. Do not be surety because of a friend to a stranger. And that works itself out in all kinds of ways.

And it's something to think about. If you say, sign up for a bonus card, or a credit card, or something else that contractually obligates you, and you got into it through an agent, usually somebody that you know or sort of know. That's the beginning of that chapter.

Deliver yourself. The second section here in chapter six is talking about laziness. And the main reason I want to cover this is it bears directly on what we're going to see in chapter 10.

Remember the structure of Proverbs. I'll review the structure of the entire book. All we need to know for now, all we need to remember is the first nine chapters are an introduction.

They are long sections of poetry. It's constructed completely different from what is going to follow. And the next section, which we are starting tonight, begins with chapter 10 and goes through chapter 22.

And these are the aphorisms. These are the two line pithy sayings that Proverbs is known for. And that's the heart of the book.

Chapter 10 through chapter 22 is the second part. Then we're going to get some chunks. We're going to get the words of wisdom and additional words of wisdom of Solomon.

We're going to get the words of King Lemuel. We're going to get the words that Hezekiah's scribes collected and transcribed. We're going to get the final tribute to a worthy woman.

We'll see those sections when we get to them. For now, just remember chapter one through nine, which we have largely completed. We're filling in this little gap right here, but we did in depth chapters one through five.

We did in depth chapters seven through nine. We kind of leapfrogged over chapter six. It's kind of a relief.

It's straightforward. It's simple, but very applicable. So in verse six, go to the aunt you sluggard, consider her ways and be wise.

Having no captain, overseer or ruler, the aunt provides her supplies in the summer and gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler and your need like an armed man.

Remember, these are proverbs. I like to think of them as a subset of parables. They are parables.

It is something of a truism. It is something of a self-evident truth that if you are indolent and don't work, you can find yourself in want and dependent in a time of need, right? It doesn't require an inspired book of proverbs to tell us that. This is an Aesop fable.

This is an Uncle Remus story. This can be anything. I'll probably get in trouble for mentioning Uncle Remus.

I thought they were great stories. They were stories that had a point. These fables, these pithy little stories usually have a point.

Well, same thing here. Go to the ant thou sluggard. Here's an ant that doesn't seem to have an overseer.

Nobody is driving it. The ant is out there by itself, looking for food, carrying it back to the ant hill, to the mound, to the ant farm. No captain, overseer, or ruler.

And so the ant is put for an example of a creature that does what it needs to do without being supervised. There is neither carrot nor stick. The ant is doing what an ant should do.

Those workers are out there providing supplies in the summer, gathering food in the harvest. How long will you sleep, oh sluggard? When will you rise from sleep? And there's a very interesting point embedded in this. It isn't just get busy like the ant.

What's the difference between the ant and a person? What is the difference between almost any animal that has a feeding instinct and those that gather have a hoarding instinct? Even your dog will bury a bone. It's a latent instinct to save something for later. Go back and dig it up and you've got it later.

Most domestic dogs, so much of their programming has been bred out that they've got bits and pieces. They bury it, but then they can't find it again. But there is an instinct that is built into animals.

They don't have to think, they don't have to choose, they don't have to prioritize, they don't have to establish their goals and values and priorities. They just do it because they

are programmed to do it. They are bundles of sophisticated, self-preserving, self-replicating programming.

Far beyond what we have so far been able to achieve with artificial creatures, with artificial intelligence. We can't get them to recreate themselves, to provide for themselves. I do see that my robot sweeper will find its way back to the docking station and recharge its own battery.

It's programmed to do that. After it finishes sweeping, the little base station will suck the dust and stuff out of the repository where it was vacuumed up. It will clean the vacuum and the vacuum is ready to go out again.

But it returns, it's got little sensors. It's been programmed to recharge itself. That's a wonderful thing.

My drill driver doesn't go crawl over to the bench and plug itself in. My electric toothbrush doesn't bounce across the counter and hop back onto the stand and get recharged. But we have these things that can move.

And it's one of the first instances you can think of. This thing is kind of like an ant. It will go and get more juice when it needs it.

If it's not finished sweeping a big place, it'll say, wow, my battery's really low. I'm gonna go back and recharge. It remembers where it left off and it goes and finishes the pattern.

This is a great example of human programming in a very distant and crude way, mimicking the greatness of God's design in creation. Well, what is the difference? Why are we looking, go to the ant thou sluggard? Here is a mindless creature that does what it is supposed to do. It follows its programming.

What's the difference in a sluggard? You've got free will. And you can choose whether or not to feed yourself and your decision to not do what is right, proper, natural, and needful is willful disobedience against the divine design. Ants don't willfully rebel against their programming and say, I'm not gonna do this.

I'm gonna get a little tiny parasol, a little tiny folding chair. I'm just gonna sit out here and enjoy the sun. Non-sentient creation obeys the design created by the designer.

There is a design that man work and earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. But we have been given free will and we can choose to disobey. We can choose to stray and depart from the way.

This is what distinguishes us from the animal kingdom and hopefully from the plant kingdom. So verse nine, how long will you slumber, oh sluggard? Why slumber? Why not play in poker or video games or watching dancing girls or something they could have

done in the ancient world? Why slumber? Slumber is the easiest thing. It's a desirable thing.

We're going to see later, there's a great proverb coming up about a door on its hinges. I can't, it's way down the road. We got to get to like chapter 24 or something, but it's a great proverb.

I'll tell it to you now. You'll forget by the time we get there. But as a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns in his bed.

It's a great one. Like a door on his hinges. You know, other people are moving around.

You don't move. You just swing on your hinge. It's great.

But it is a reminder that we are responsible and accountable for our choices. And there are consequences for bad choices. There's a reason God gave us this design.

It's not arbitrary. It's not capricious. It's not out of the blue.

There are reasons, but the ability to choose creates accountability. So that is all in here. With a little folding of the hands to sleep, your poverty will come on you like a prowler and your need like an armed man.

It will overtake you like a thief. Is this not a New Testament truth that we've heard from the lips of the Lord Jesus? You'd better straighten up or that day will overtake you as a thief. Behold, I come as a thief in the night.

And if you have not been doing what you're supposed to do, that day is going to be a day of loss. A day where you thought you had something and you find out you don't. So it is foreshadowed.

It is foreseen in Old Testament truth. Look at verse 12 through 15. A worthless person, wicked man, walks with a perverse mouth, winks with his eyes.

Circle it. We're going to be coming, we're going to be referring back to this. We're going to see it referred to in chapter 10.

So what do you know about somebody who winks? You know, the old people will wink at a kid or, you know, an inside joke, somebody will wink. Winking is used in a humorous way in our culture. Winking was a different thing in the ancient world.

A worthless person, a wicked man, walks with a perverse mouth. Isn't that something? You would think he would walk with a perverse foot or he would talk with a perverse mouth. But the, I'm going to make up a word here, the compactitude of these sayings, they are tight, they are compressed.

They're a zip file of wisdom. And so instead of combining two different lines about lifestyle and speech, it's compressed. So you walk with a perverse mouth.

You get both ideas in one beautifully condensed statement. He's not using his lips to walk, but he is, as he goes through, walk in the Bible is almost universally put for lifestyle. In Greek New Testament, it's peripateo, to walk around.

Walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called. So he walks with a perverse mouth. Just in the course of daily events, for no good reason, there will be perversity of speech.

You didn't need to say that. You didn't need to bring that up. You didn't need to point that out.

You didn't need to deceive or outright lie about that. There's nothing on the line. Why would you speak perversely instead of speaking truth? Instead of speaking something upbuilding, something helpful, you had to say something that pulls down, that degrades, that is sharp, critical, unkind, unhelpful, distracting, deflecting.

It's perverse. So a worthless person, a wicked man, notice wickedness and worthlessness are combined. You could say, let's take a politician, practical example.

Can somebody be worthwhile and worthy and yet be wicked? Well, this is the question. There are people who oppose various present and past presidents or presidential candidates and others in high office. And they say, well, it doesn't matter if he does a good job because he's a wicked person.

Well, is he worthless in that job or worthy? But he's wicked. Look at his personal life. Look at his language.

Look at his behavior at times when he's not doing his job. The question becomes where is the wickedness being expressed? You can say this person has a tacky personality, has a tacky personal life, but when it comes to their job, there is worth, there is value, there is production. There are results that benefit.

So everybody has wickedness. You have wickedness. I have wickedness.

Point to any living, breathing human being who is awake at the time. There is some wickedness there. Somewhere, somehow we are all as an unclean thing.

All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. We all do fade as a leaf and our iniquities, not his iniquities, not her iniquities, our iniquities, like the wind, carry us away. So the question becomes when is someone a worthless fellow as well as wicked? It is when the wickedness is in the job.

In the job. If your wickedness is a part of the job, if you are an influential politician and

you are selling your influence, if you are brokering deals with international types for your personal benefit and the benefit of those around you instead of for the good of the country, that's wickedness in the job. You are worthless in the job.

If your job performance is good and doesn't reflect bribery, doesn't reflect influence, doesn't reflect a desire for personal gain, then your wickedness is elsewhere. So it is important to observe what the scripture says here. A worthless person, a wicked man, the worthlessness and the wickedness are combined in the same place at the same time.

A worthless and wicked man. Do you see it? It's not just wicked, it's not just worthless. They are combined and there's a reason for it.

A worthless person, a wicked man, walks with a perverse mouth. This means the walk, because a man in his walk is doing his job. People in the ancient Near East worked unless they were a sluggard.

So he's walking with a perverse mouth, winks with his eyes, shuffles his feet, points with his fingers. Perversity is in his heart. He devises evil continually inside the job, outside the job.

This perversity, this wickedness, these schemes and plans are constant. The self-centeredness is pervasive. He sows discord.

Therefore his calamity shall come suddenly. Suddenly he shall be broken without remedy. Watch and you will see it happen.

When someone's like the pre-flood civilization, if a man's thoughts are only evil all the day, he is going to suddenly come to ruin. You can see this in society today. This is generally true, generally true.

That brings us to a new section. We have seen three sections now. We have seen the surety, the obligation to a stranger.

And when you find that it has happened, you get maneuvered into it in a way you can't. It doesn't say don't ever do it. It says it's going to happen.

And when it does, you've got to get out of it and go to your friend to do that. Very practical, wise advice. The second one is the folly of not carrying out known responsibility.

And this is going to recur and repeat time and again in Proverbs where this diligence and this sense of responsibility is to wisdom. This is right in the middle of the introduction that talks about the absolute crying, essential need for wisdom and the absolute harm, folly, destruction and ruin that comes if you don't pursue it. So being a sluggard in this context is not being diligent, not overcoming natural desire to slumber, sleep, do

something comfortable, do something else, be the door on its hinges, just swing whenever you get pushed.

You only move when somebody pushes you, right? That's the door on its hinges. Such a great proverb. Your poverty will come on you like a prowler.

For us, the return of the Lord Jesus will be as a thief in the night and what we think we have, we will discover we don't. And we will be poor, miserable, blind and naked entering into the coming kingdoms. How tragic is that? So when you see go to the ant, thou sluggard, this is not get busy and mow the lawn.

This is get busy and make sure you are on an active path of acquiring and reflecting on wisdom. Reflecting on wisdom. One of my commentaries I got back when we were doing Ecclesiastes covers the books of Solomon and it's called Reflecting with Solomon.

I love that title. It's not, you know, digging with Solomon. It's not piling up aphorisms with Solomon.

It's reflecting, thinking along with, learning to, what they used to say, metabolize, digest, internalize, get your soul strengthened and in the grip and hands of the Holy Spirit through these sayings. The third one is the worthless and wicked man. I think in my New King James, it's the wicked man.

It needs to be the wicked and worthless. Everybody's wicked somewhere. We're constantly, we're battling wickedness until we get transformed, but wicked and worthless.

There is a difference, perversity, and there is going to be sudden destruction for those who are both wicked and worthless. Now, verse 16, these six things the Lord hates, seven are an abomination to him, a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who spreads lies and one who sows discord among brethren. And you can see anticipations and adumbrations of that in the preceding context, right? This is what the wicked man does.

This is participation in behavior that God hates and that he considers an abomination. When you go to the law of Moses, what is the punishment for committing abomination in Israel? Stoning to death. Can you imagine a crowd assembling and stoning someone to death for a proud look? This is not a proud glance.

This is the aspect that you bear as you walk through life. You are continually arrogant. You are unapproachable.

You are unteachable. You are unquestionable. You react with indignation and with harshness at any suggestion that you misdid something, misspoke something,

misapprehended something.

Your knee-jerk response to anyone who questions or who points out or who offers an alternative view is harsh rebuttal. This is what you might put here as a translation is a proud aspect. It's how you look.

It's not how you look at other things. Someone looks at you and says, boy, that person is full of themselves. There used to be a professor critique at the end of every class at the Naval Academy and you would rate your professor.

I hope they took those with a heavy grain of salt. But one of the things was in terms of their approach to the subject and there were levels, basically just kind of read the book to you, a few helpful explanations, willing to answer and help with your queries. And the bottom one's the only one I remember word for word, full of his subject.

When you go to the professor, you tap them, anything that spills out is gonna be that subject. They're full of the subject. They know it inside out.

They're enthusiastic about it. They'll talk to you about it till the cows come home. They're just full of their subject.

This is what we ought to be in terms of our Christian faith. We're full of our faith. We're full of our Lord.

We're full of our enthusiasm and delight. And when you look at us, there's somebody that they used to say, he's on fire for the Lord. I don't wanna be on fire.

Something that's on fire, unless you're the bush Moses saw, it tends to burn up. This is why we wanna be lamps and not candles. A lamp you fill with fuel and the fuel burns.

The lamp persists and stays and remains and serves. Candle is consumed in the burning. So those are golden lampstands that Jesus walks between in Revelation chapter one, the seven golden lampstands.

They're not candlesticks. The churches are not candles that burn down. We don't wanna be consumed by our subject.

We want to be full of our subject. And this is the opposite of a proud look. A lying tongue, notice these are all patterns.

These are consistent across time. This isn't somebody that told a lie. It's a tongue, all it does is lie.

There's just deceit high and low. Deceit when there's no need to deceive. That when it's trivial, it's unimportant, it doesn't matter.

But it's a tongue that just twists the truth, perverts the truth. You remember we saw on Sunday looking at the truth as it is detailed in the gospel of John. And Jesus was describing Satan and said, he is the father of lies.

He has lied from the beginning. He is the father of liars. This is the lying tongue.

You can't trust anything he says. Somewhere in it is deceit. Proud look, lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood.

And you say, well, the days are long gone where people would go around just wantonly murdering other people. For us, what does Jesus say about murder? You have heard it said, thou shall not murder. I say, if you harbor hatred in your heart, you are murdering.

You are shedding innocent blood when you hate on someone, when you bear a grudge, when you are hypercritical. There are some Christians who harbor an intense hatred for politicians, whether Democrats or Republicans, present or former presidents, and hate them. And they are shedding blood that should not be shed.

Now, whether it's innocent blood, do you really want to try, convict, and execute somebody on your own behest, judge, jury, and executioner? I say, I've heard, I've gotten second, third, and fourth-hand testimony that bad things are going on. I have great deep reservations. I'm not a fan.

But to hate, to be willing to go to any length or do anything to destroy this person, destroy their career, destroy their reputation, destroy their future opportunities to be or do anything. To the extent that a Christian does that, they are shedding innocent blood. These are hands that shed innocent blood.

They're hands of the heart because it's coming out of hatred. Are these individuals believers? If they're a brother, you're in double trouble because now you're hating on a brother. Not worth it.

A heart that devises wicked plans. I'm going to maneuver for my own benefit. That's all you need to say.

It's a wicked plan. If the priority is my benefit, my good, this is premeditated evil, premeditated sin. Planning is premeditation.

That's the difference between manslaughter and murder. Did you plan it? Well, God hates a heart that schemes plans characterized by a wicked purpose. Feet that are swift in running to evil.

Something evil is happening. I'm going to go join it. There's an opportunity for evil.

I'm going to run there. I don't run to goodness. I don't run to honest labor and bread by the sweat of my brow, but if something bad's happening, I'm chasing that ambulance.

I'm following that fire truck. Is there a mob I can join? Feet that are swift in running to evil. If you have to run to it, it means you had to hear about it from somewhere else.

Wow, that sounds like an opportunity. Let me head that way. A false witness speaking lies.

You are shading the truth, twisting the truth to someone else's harm and detriment. You are a witness, and you're getting somebody in deep trouble and one who sows discord among brethren, someone who is divisive. Notice how many of these are heart and speech related or can be accomplished in the heart and through talking.

Pride starts in the heart, a lying tongue, shedding innocent blood. This is a heart crime for us, more so than an overt act of murder. A heart devising wicked plans.

Feet swift in running to evil. This is motivation to be near and be a part of something that is inherently opposite to God's righteousness. False witness speaking lies, another sin of the tongue.

Sowing discord among the brethren. This is always done with the tongue. Man can bridle his tongue.

He's got his whole body in subjection, says James. Well, that is the substance of chapter six. We'll take a quick glance at the end of it, and then we'll go into chapter 10 after the break.