

Proverbs 23-09-20a

Good evening. Welcome to Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is our Wednesday night Bible study in the book of Proverbs.

It is the 20th of September, 2023, and we're picking up in chapter 12. We've seen the introduction in this chapter and we're going to be picking up in the vicinity of verse eight, verse eight and nine. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our study and on our time of fellowship, and we'll begin.

Father, it is such an ongoing source of comfort to know that we do not rely on our might or our power, but your spirit, your grace, and your word to enable us to live the life to which we have been called, to exploit the opportunities that have been given to us in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for this section of your word, this passage of scripture, and we pray that through your Holy Spirit, we will receive insight and understanding and see its practical outworking in our own circumstances, in our thought life, in our actions as we seek to reflect a more Christ-like view of the world, in our goals and our values and our priorities. We pray that as a result, the Lord Jesus will be glorified in our bodies and that we will be more fully prepared for service and function in this life and in the life to come.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, this is a corking good passage and I am beginning to come to the conclusion that we are going to have to take dipper fulls out of Proverbs rather than trying to drink the entire well dry because there is so much here that this would be the last series we ever undertake.

And so I have also decided that what might be good for all of us rather than me bringing out the big bobcat and doing the excavation and filling the dump truck with the fruit of that study, that we together will learn how Proverbs works so that each one of us ourselves can crack open this book and by paying attention and understanding the way the book works, we can fish for ourselves instead of just coming every Wednesday and getting a little bit of fish from the dump truck. Ones that accompanied the five loaves. And I think it'll be a lot of fun.

Once we see how this book works, it can be a fruitful source of reflection and investigation and meditation, prayer, and application for us in the days that lie ahead. So we're going to take an example here from chapter 12 and watch how it works. We've already seen that chapter 12 is composed of two sections.

One of the first keys, key number one to understanding Proverbs. And we've seen this many times. It is not a crazy quilt of random sayings that were collected and stuck into the book.

It's not a crazy quilt. It's not a, uh, a, uh, Rorschach ink blot. It's not a splatter painting.

Who was that guy that did the splatter paintings? Remember he would just drip paint on the ground. He was very famous. Yeah.

Jackson Pollock. Remember him? He would just, you know, it's kind of like getting a mouthful of paint and just going, and this is now worth tens of thousands of dollars. And people think that Proverbs is some sort of a haphazard, uh, assemblage and it's not.

Chapter 12 is a classic example of this. This chapter is wonderfully divided. I'm happy to brag on the King James and new King James editors in the, and the others who, who divided the Bible into chapters when they do it right.

In the same way that I express my disappointment when I think they, they misdivided it. This is a beautiful, proper understanding of the text. Chapter 12 is a, an entity unto itself.

It is composed of two 14 verse sections. So as you might expect, first section is chapter 12 verses one through 14. That is a, a half.

And then 15 through 28 is the second half. It divides very neatly, very elegantly, uh, structurally at that point. When you get to this first section, it has four parts.

Uh, the introduction is in verses one through three, and this gives us a, an idea of what the thematic elements are going to be. So we're going to see in verses one through three, as we have seen that there is wisdom, there is ethical exhortation, ethical observation, ethical instruction, and there is theology. And you see all three of those in this.

So the notion of wisdom, if you love instruction, you love knowledge. If you hate correction, you are very unwise. The, the, the word stupid here is something we looked at last time.

Then we look at the ethical side and the theological side. A good man obtains favor. This is not just sort of a law of physics in society or in culture.

This is something that God ensures. So a good man obtains favor from the Lord, a man of wicked intentions, he will condemn. God is behind the outcomes.

This is a part of the, uh, the power that is behind the instruction in these Proverbs. It's, it's not just kind of, well, as I observe things in society, it happens. God is behind it.

And then we have the idea in verse three that is going to recur over and over again, and this is stability and permanence. What is the point of wisdom? What is the point of ethical guidance? What is the point of morality or theology if it doesn't last? Solomon's other work called Ecclesiastes or Kohelet is aimed at this whole idea of what is permanent versus what is impermanent, what persists and survives, what builds into eternity versus that which is ephemeral, temporary, ethereal, a chasing after the wind to

no point. Vanity, vanity as the old King James has it, right? So think about this now.

Let's just step back before we involve ourselves deeply in this text. In any given day, you wake up in the morning, do your ablutions and prepare for whatever that day holds by way of appointments, tasks, uh, assignments, obligations, uh, opportunities, things that we would like to accomplish. These are our goals.

We generally take the various things that are required of us or that we would like to require of ourselves and we sort them by our priorities. Well, whatever else I have a job and I don't want to lose it, so I'd better show up and be on time with the right stuff, do the right things and, you know, complete the tasks that are assigned to me in my employment. That's often a part of it.

Other times we have to be places and receive services or meet people or have people meet us. And, uh, you have contractors or you have, uh, others that, that we want to engage or be in, uh, have them undertake our services. So whatever it may be, these are our priorities.

And oftentimes in identifying our goals and establishing our priorities, what's most important. If I don't get anything else done today, I've got to do this. That's a priority.

And we often sort this, uh, these first two categories according to our values. How important is it to me to be on time? How important is it to me to be reliable and to, to meet the commitments that I have made? I told someone I would be somewhere at a certain place in a certain time. If, if my values are such that, well, I don't really worry about my reputation with this person or those people or anybody else.

Um, you know, if I don't feel like making it, I just won't. And I don't value my reputation. I don't value my, uh, the estimation of others on, can they count on me? Um, do I respect them enough to show up and do what I said I would do and be where I said I would be and so on.

And so this interaction and like the essence box of God, remember the summary of, of some of God's most prominent attributes that we've, many of us have memorized just for convenience, but that does not exhaust the character of God and goals and values and priorities do not exhaust our thinking, but it's a convenient summary of some of the major facets, right? We have other components as well, but it's, it's a convenient summary, goals, values, and priorities. Well, Proverbs addresses the level of wisdom that infuses those. How wise am I when I choose and adopt my goals? Is this a worthy goal? Is this really something that is going to stand up when I am before the judgment seat of Christ? And I am explaining why with all of the assets, all of the resources, all of the time that God has granted to me, the ability, the experience, the association with other people.

This is a goal that I established and pursued. Can I stand before God and defend that as a valid goal? This is a useful question to ask, especially at the beginning of each day. We generally wake, if you're like me, let me put it this way.

You all may be well ahead of me in this, but I generally wake up and before I even go from the horizontal to the vertical, when I arrive at consciousness, I ask myself the Admiral Stockdale question, who am I? Why am I here? What is demanded of me today? And I start working through the schedule. This is a piano tuning day. This is a day I need to do this and that for my major area of employment.

This is what I need to do in connection with my family and on the property and so on. And I begin writing through that. And I have been disciplining myself to stop and remind myself that as I go through this list, what if today was the day and the only day that I would stand before God and defend why I do what I do.

When I say, who am I and why am I here? Why are we ultimately here? Are we little ants and all we're supposed to do is go forth from the nest and grab the food and bring it back to the queen. And we're just little drones in service of programming. Where is our heart? Where is our mind? What is the effect of whatsoever you do? Do it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men and so on.

Well, this is the value of Proverbs. When we come to Proverbs, this is its goal. This is its priority.

This is a set of values that it wants to impart to us. That's why we're looking at this book. This is God saying, you want to think your way through a day.

You want to build into eternity and not just survive the moment. Do you want to please God rather than pleasing yourself? Here you go. This is your instruction manual.

So let's take Proverbs chapter 12 as an example, beautifully structured, not haphazard, not catch as catch can. So it begins by saying, if you love instruction, and this is corrective instruction, this is, you know, that that's not really the way to do that. Let me show you how, whether it's operating an appliance, operating a piece of equipment, operating the stuff that's on the dashboard of your car, whatever it might be, we might not be understanding and exploiting its full potential.

So if you love to learn how to do things better and more completely, I've got this wonderful Bible software. I was just thinking about this earlier. This software is so powerful and so multi-featured and has thousands, literally thousands of books and resources in it, journal articles.

There is a wealth of information, but I am so busy using it that I've never really learned it. I have by trial and error figured out how I can get English and Hebrew side by side. I figured out how I can open a commentary and get it to follow whatever verse I'm looking

at.

I've got the rudimentary features of it down enough that it is useful to me. It would do so much more if I would be instructed and corrected in how I'm using it. I go to do a search and I don't get what I want, and I just give up and I go to the internet and use BibleHub.

I can make BibleHub sit up on its hind legs and beg. I paid money for this software and it doesn't do what I want. It will do what I want, but I don't know how to make it do it.

I need instruction of a corrective nature. I'm using the software, but I'm not using it to its potential. And that's on me.

I should carve out a couple of hours and just sit down and say, this thing that every time I try to do it, it fails and I go elsewhere. Let me learn how to do that right. If you love instruction, if you love learning how to do a thing better and more correctly, then you love knowledge.

And this word knowledge, yada, and it's cognate noun, that's the verb and the cognate noun is da'at. And you need to know that because it's something we're going to see in our Proverbs 12 study tonight. But this is how the section begins.

So it's introduced as a theme, this yada and da'at noun that goes with it is to know. There's one of the most famous verses in the old Testament in our passage tonight, and this verb yada is in it. And knowledge, the cognate noun is here at the beginning.

So if you love instruction, you love knowledge, but if you hate correction, if you say, don't bother me, this works for me, I don't want to figure out how to do it right. Um, well, that's not smart. You're, you are lacking everything that is a component of wisdom.

So this one through three is the introductory section, and it introduces all the concepts that are going to permeate these two 14 verse sections in Proverbs 12. So it's good to look at the beginning. A good instructor tells you what he's going to tell you.

He tells you, and then he tells you what he told you. Well, this is chapter 12 telling us what it is going to tell us. So you have these concepts of instruction and knowledge, and it ought to be corrective.

And if you don't pay attention to chapter 12, you're not smart. What is going to be in here? How to obtain favor from the Lord, what genuine good is. And you would say, well, anybody knows that a good man's going to obtain favor from the Lord.

Why is that here? Is it just a tautology? Is it just an obviousity? Is it just a, well, that doesn't really, you know, anybody knows that if you believe in God and you're good, God's going to favor you. That's not why it's here. It's not here to reveal a deep truth.

It's here to tell us the content of this chapter. Watch for this God's favor and what it is to

be good. What is it to be good? What kind of good, outward good, inward good, good thoughts, good motivations, good actions, good words, a good wife.

What is it? Well, watch for that in the chapter. That's why it's here. It is telling us what it's going to tell us.

A man of wicked intentions, he will condemn. Wicked intentions. Well, in what realm, in what sphere, in what field? What kind of wicked intention? Wicked intentions toward others, wicked intentions about himself, wicked intentions in business.

What kind of wicked intentions? Well, whatever it is, God is going to condemn it. And the importance is conferred by God's reaction. The Tetragrammaton is used here, Lord in small caps, which means God is going to have a covenant response.

Something he has talked about in other places is going to be the response here. It doesn't say Elohim. It doesn't say, you know, any of the other names for God of which there are a multiplicity.

This is Yahweh. This is in Israel. This is in response to the blessings and curses in Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim.

If you need expansion on what the Lord is going to do, you've got the law at this point, circa 1000 BC. So the use of the word, the Lord means he is going to guarantee that this is what happens. And if you want more fulsome understanding, think back to what you have heard at the tabernacle or at the temple or in Solomon's day, it will be the temple.

David's day, it's the tabernacle. So good versus wicked intentions. And each of these informs the other.

What kind of good? Well, this is the thoughts and intents of the heart because it is contrasted with wicked intentions, wicked motivations. So this is good motivations that result in good actions and good words and good thoughts. Just the word Tov, got to find out from context how to limit and focus it.

That's what verse two does for us. Verse three, a man is not established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous cannot be moved. Circle verse three, permanence versus impermanence is going to characterize both of the coming sections in chapter 12.

So I'm not going to review everything that we've covered. We are down to, let's take a look at verse seven. Notice the wicked are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous will stand that you can circle that parallels and echoes and ties back to verse three.

Do you want your life to stand for something? People build monuments. They have wings of hospitals named after themselves. What good does it do when you're gone for you? It

may benefit others, but you yourself, are you going to be established? Are you going to have a root that can spring up a sprout and branches and shoots and leaves and flowers, buds, fruit, something permanent, something lasting.

And this is the old Testament metaphor that talks about eternity, not just later down the road, this root survives into the resurrection and into the kingdom of God. So you pick up here at verse eight, a man will be commended according to his wisdom. He who is of a perverse heart will be despised.

Does that remind you of any verse I have recently read? How about verses one and two, a man will be commended. Good man obtains favor from the Lord in verse two, according to his wisdom, chapter 12, verse one, he who is of a perverse heart, wicked intentions, verse two will be despised. So you begin to see a collection of responses from God and outcomes that he ensures in Israel for his people based on the content of this chapter.

And in the same way that we observe, interpret, and apply much of what happens in national Israel and the principles that guide God's dealing with his people in the old Testament. It applies to the individual believer in this age. So these are unchanging principles of how God deals with those who belong to him.

And if this is how he deals with national Israel, how much more so his special gift to the Lord Jesus Christ, those who are the body of Christ and who are essentially citizens of heaven, royal family, partakers of his Holy Spirit, availing themselves of the entirety of his revealed word. If he held old Testament Israel, who individually were basically limited in what they could access, we have all of the privileges detailed in Ephesians chapter one. Remember the menorah of privileges we have in the Old Testament? Oh my goodness, from those to whom much is given, much is required.

So these principles apply to us exponentially more so. Now here's where it gets interesting and it's going to take us my next 10 minutes and all of the second session to look at these next three verses. Verse nine, better is the one who is slighted but has a servant than he who honors himself but lacks bread.

Close your Bibles, get out a piece of paper and something to write with and write me a paragraph on what verse nine actually means. And I don't doubt that we can all come up with something. Better is the one who is slighted but has a servant.

Hmm. Okay. So according to the Bible, any slave owner is better than somebody in the second verse here.

Anybody who honors himself, well, a slave owner is better than him. Thankfully, we don't have to try to untie that Gordian knot. That is not what this verse says.

And this is a tribute to the structure and the symmetry and the beauty in Proverbs in

general and this chapter in particular. First of all, the word better is the word tov, T-O-V or B, and it's the word for good. It is the word for good.

Now, have we seen anything related to good in chapter 12? It is the first word in verse two. Good. Notice *man* is in italics, tov, good, good obtains favor from the Lord.

That's what verse two says. So in verse nine, we have the very same word tov and context encourages us to translate this as better because we have the word from that starts the second section. You can think of these halves as if this is a verse, then they are verse etc.

They are half verses, strophes, lines, stitches. They've been called all kinds of things. But when you have tov in the first line and *ma*, the preposition from, so it's good from or good compared to.

So better this than that is a great English way of translating it. So we're on solid ground here with better. We get the first word nailed down.

And by the way, in Proverbs, there are a number of these, better this than that. This is the first one. Can you believe we've made it over 11 chapters and this is the first better this than that.

But, but this is the introductory one. So we have better. Well, better what? Um, if you want to see the future iterations of this kind of thing, just keep your finger here and you can go to chapter 15 verses 16 and 17.

Uh, better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure with trouble that you can work that proverb. Can't you be content with such things as you have. Paul says, I have learned in whatever state I find myself there with to be content.

I know how to be abased. I know how to abound better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure with trouble. That's 15, 16 of Proverbs.

And the next verse has the same structure. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fatted calf with hatred. Better to be a vegetarian with love than a omnivore with hatred.

You have another example in chapter 16 verse eight. Better is a little with righteousness than vast revenues without justice. The next, uh, iteration is in that same chapter, chapter 16, verse 19.

Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud takes this concept of having a little, but being pleasing in God's sight with having a lot in this life. And you're associated with the proud. There is strife.

There is contention. There is division and there's no future in it. Uh, the last example I'll

give you of many is chapter 17, verse one, better is a dry morsel with quietness than a house full of feasting with strife.

This is a great devotional. If you just put those verses together, I'll give them to you one more time. You have the first one here in chapter 12, verse nine.

You could put with that 15 versus 16 and 17 chapter 16, verse eight and verse 19 and chapter 17, verse one, better this than that. And they all revolve around a common idea of being satisfied with less than being distracted by more being righteous and having the fear of the Lord and being properly oriented to time and eternity than getting distracted by prosperity, success, um, acclimation, uh, association with people that seem to be really on the move and it's short term. And that concept is introduced here in verse three, the root of the righteous will not be moved.

Now that root might get cut off at the ground. It may be like the stump of Jesse, but the stump of Jesse produces the root shoot that is the Nazarene, the Lord Jesus, the Netser from the root shoot of the stump of Jesse comes deliverance comes salvation comes our entire future in Christ. So that's a wonderful concept that is being introduced right here.

Tove better from better is the one who is slighted. This is such an interesting word. The one who is slighted, this is the word that is, uh, used in other places for lightly esteemed, lightly esteemed.

This is in, uh, Deuteronomy chapter 25 verse three. Remember when Paul was beaten with stripes, 40 stripes minus one on three different occasions that minus one idea comes from Deuteronomy chapter 25 verse three, which says 40 blows may be given to this individual who is being punished 40 blows. You may give him and no more lest he should exceed this and beat him with many blows above these and your brother be lightly esteemed, humiliated in your sight.

39 expresses a respect. We're not going to do 40 or more now, 39 gracious sakes, you know, you can flay somebody with 39 stripes, but this imposes self-control and limitation on the one inflicting this punishment and forces respect for the victim, for the punish. He lightly esteemed Isaiah chapter three, verse five.

If you remember the structure of Isaiah, we did all 66 chapters of Isaiah. And you may not remember way back in chapter three, verse five, when God is talking about the evil that is characterizing Israel. And you remember it was just such a dismal journey through those first 39 chapters of indictment and condemnation before you get to chapter 40, comfort you, comfort you, my people.

And we had that spine of the book. And then you have the remainder, but in chapter three, verse five, God says, the people will be oppressed everyone by another and everyone by his neighbor. Neighbors are supposed to be the kind of neighbor Jesus

described.

Who is my neighbor? Good Samaritan puts himself out on behalf of someone who is in need and in distress. And he sets other prejudices and issues aside. There's an issue of need.

I will meet that need. I'm not going to let frivolous distinctions get in my way. Who is my neighbor? The people will be oppressed everyone by another and everyone by his neighbor.

It's not enough that there are people you don't know oppressing you. Your neighbor next door will oppress you. The child will be insolent toward the elder.

Does that remind you of the present day? And the lightly esteemed will oppress the honorable. Those who have no business being listened to, who have no purchase, who have no character, who have no value, have no honor. They will oppress those who do have honor.

That's what's happening today. The lightly esteemed from God's point of view. So this is the concept in verse nine, better.

He who is lightly esteemed, look down on by the group, but has a servant. This has been garbled a little bit, but the Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate based on the Septuagint actually figured this out. And this is one place where they really help us.

This has been mispointed by the Masoretes. This is all it says is a servant to him. This is the word Eved, E-V-E-D.

Uh, this is the word for, for slave or servant. And then La, O, Lo, to him, a servant to him, but it's been mispointed. And what it actually means is who serves himself.

He is his own servant. He does his own work. I can give you this understanding with certainty.

Uh, and we'll see how, uh, in the next session, but before we depart here, um, the rest of this is good. Better is the lightly esteemed man who works for himself, serves himself. He may be lightly esteemed because he has no servants.

He's not Boaz with a field full of workers. He's working. He's plowing his own field.

He's tilling his own soil. He's milling his own grain. He's taking care of his own, doing it himself.

And this first says better the one who isn't respected. People don't look up to him and steam him and give him honor, but he's working for himself maybe because he's working for himself. And he doesn't seem to be, you know, certainly not by the shallow crowd.

Uh, he's, he's not a success. He's not a, a big noise, but that is better than what is coming in the second half, which is someone who honors himself, lifts himself up, blows his trumpet, but he's got no bread. He's got no bread.

He's all hat and no cattle. As they say in Texas and Oklahoma, all hat. And he's putting that hat on.

He's dressing the part. He's making his noise, but he's actually got nothing. He's leveraged up to the hilt.

He's, he's not a success, but he's putting on all the errors and the trappings. And he actually finds a crowd that will look up to him, even though he's got no bread, great verse to ponder. And we'll do so during the break.

When we come back, we're going to see the illumination that the structure and the order in this chapter lends to this interpretation and this understanding. We'll see it when we come back.