

Proverbs 23-11-29a

Greetings fellow members of Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is Wednesday night, the 29th of November 2023. We're entering the holiday season and we're in Proverbs finishing chapter 12.

This final section is important for understanding and for application. I have found the first sections of this chapter that we've already done immensely convicting and helpful in improving my overall service and function. And I hope you have as well.

So we'll get started on this final section, but let's ask God's blessing on our time of study and fellowship. Father, we are ever grateful for the person and work of your son, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, present at your right hand, representing us, interceding on our behalf. We look to him as our example of how to navigate this life in the power of your Holy Spirit and the guiding light of your word.

We pray tonight as we look at this portion of scripture, that the Holy Spirit will make it understandable and help us to see its pertinence and its application in our conversations, in our thought life, in the things that we prioritize and pursue so that the Lord Jesus will be glorified in our daily lives, even as he is glorified in our prayers of Thanksgiving. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

So this is such a well-organized chapter, and you will remember that this chapter is composed of two subsections that deal with what we say and how we say it, what the motivations are, what the outcomes are of our speechifying, our conversating, our talking and expressing ourselves verbally as others do so, and then also our deeds, our actions. So in looking at this, we saw that there is structure and there is cohesion. This is not a smattering or a pastiche.

There is a clear pattern. Just looking at the second half of this, you will remember that we had an introductory verse 15 that tells us what the theme is going to be for this following section. Is it the way of a fool or is it someone who heeds counsel? And I did not delve too much into counsel.

I just want to make a quick detour to talk about it because we saw in chapter 11 verse 14, I believe it is, where there is no counsel, the people fall, but in the multitude of counselors, there is safety. And the notion being that, well, get the advice of a bunch of people and whatever the collective wisdom is, or take a vote and the other way around. I don't believe that is what this is saying.

You can credibly defend that understanding grammatically, but I don't think doctrinally or comparing scripture with scripture, this really makes a lot of sense. We don't find scripture elsewhere. Certainly, you don't find the New Testament saying, gather around a fellowship and run your decisions and your situations by them and see what the group

says and do that.

This seems to be the suggestion that, well, if you don't have any advice and you just strike out on your own, you're probably going to fail, but in the multitude of counselors, and this is kind of a double-edged sword in terms of understanding because A, that view causes us to want to go out and run our problems and our situations by a multitude of others. And this is dangerous because if it's people problems, you inevitably end up being tempted to gossip, to malign, to say, well, here's my problem. It's person A and person B and person C, and this is what person A has been doing.

And this is what person B has been failing to do. And you sow discord among the brethren if you're not just super careful. It's almost inevitable that if you're going to canvas the group about a relationship problem, you're going to do somebody harm and injury verbally.

So there is that. The other blade, the other sharp side of that sword is people would like to be part of your multitude. And they say, well, that person is obviously facing some difficulties.

They seem to be having a hard time hewing to a good path. In a multitude of counselors, there's safety. So I'm going to be one of those multitude.

I'm going to go provide my counsel, asked for or not, and I'll help them. Most of us, I can say genuinely from the bottom of my heart, I have my hands full trying to keep myself straight, counsel myself to a good path without troubleshooting everybody else. And well, this is what you ought to do.

Have you ever had this occur where somebody's in a fix or facing a challenge? And from your perspective with what you know, well, clearly this is what you ought to do. And the person says, oh, okay, well, I trust your judgment. And they do that.

And it is a disastrous outcome. And now, well, I thought you said if I did this, that would happen. And now you are implicated.

And once again, it is divisive. It sows mistrust. And well, that's the last time I asked you for, you know, this turned out terrible.

And we have to really be cautious about this whole idea of counsel. I want to come into your attention because this is something we are going to encounter several times in the book. In terms of not only Proverbs 11, 14, but Proverbs 15, 22, without counsel plans fail, but with many advisors, they succeed.

Okay, well, that's twice that Proverbs has told me the same thing. You go to Proverbs 20, verse 18. You can write these down by the way.

11, 14 is the first instance. These are all in Proverbs. So Proverbs 11, 14, the one we just looked at 15, 22 without counsel plans fail, but with many advisors, they succeed.

So, you know, plan by committee is always the best way according to this understanding of 15, 22. 20, 18, Proverbs 20, 18 says plans are established by counsel. Well, doesn't that affirm what we just read back in chapter 15? Plans are established by counsel.

By wise guidance, you can wage war. Wage war by wise guidance. Plans are established by counsel.

You go to Proverbs 24, verse five and six, 24, five, and six. A wise man is full of strength and a man of knowledge enhances his might for by wise guidance, you can wage your war and in abundance of counselors, there is victory. Well, so far Proverbs has told me that there is safety in an abundance of counselors.

There are good plans that come from these abundance of counselors and victory in combat in conflict will come by an abundance of counselors. Proverbs 27, verse nine, this is the last one I'll give in this list. Oil and perfume make the heart glad and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel.

Now, do you notice that that one seems to be a bit of an outlier? It doesn't say the same thing that the others seem to say. Oil and perfume make the heart glad this is sort of a comparison distich or two line proverb and the sweetness of a friend. In other words, this is a poetic way of saying the sweet earnest counsel of a friend is like oil and perfume.

What oil and perfume do for your body and your exterior experience, the earnest sweet counsel from a friend does internally, but this is a friend, not an abundance of counselors. Do you see the contrast here? Well, let me go back to these first four and point out that there are two words here. Let's look at 1114 where there is no guidance of people falls, but in an abundance of counselors, there is safety.

First of all, abundance is the word Rav. It's a soft B, R-A-V. It's Resh and it ends in a bait, but this is the V form, Rav.

Rav means great. So is this great in number or great in quality? It is used for both. Well, one of the clues is, do you notice it says an abundance of counselors, but Yoetz here, which is from Yaatz.

Yaatz is the word that means to advise, to counsel, to give some kind of encouragement to somebody. Well, Yoetz, remember the O-E infix, you can turn a verb into a noun. So this is advice or advising, but it's singular.

It's singular. So there shouldn't be an S. So do you say in an abundance of counselor? No, you would say in the qualitative greatness of counsel, this can be counsel or counselor, but it makes better sense based on the singular that where there is no

guidance, a people falls, but in the quality of counsel, there is safety in good quality advice. Now, please keep your finger here and turn back to Psalm 119.

It's really only a 16th of an inch or less of pages back to Psalm 119. And we're looking for verse 24, Psalm 119, 24. Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors.

This is etzah, it's from the very same word as Yaatz or Yoetz. So if I was going to canvas my friends and get a bunch of advice, how would that compare to the advice, the counsel that comes from God's word? Which do you think would be more reliable, more safe, more likely for your plans to succeed and to grant victory in challenging and conflicting times? Your testimonies are my delight and my counselors, the ones that provide my Yoetz. Now this can come in the form of fellow believers speaking the truth in love, but the best truth that we can speak to each other is not, well, you know, based on my experience and the anecdotal information I have from my other friends, I mean, this is not exactly the same as saying, I've got a good recipe.

You know, I've used this recipe and you get wonderful bread or wonderful crust or a wonderful dish from this recipe. We are talking here about counsel that is the path through life, goals, values, priorities, decisions that are made that have importance in terms of relationships horizontally and relationship with God vertically. What kind of vertical relationship might be in question? What if we have a problem with worry or fear or uncertainty or deep questions about whether the Bible really says one thing or another? It's fine to say, you know, I've used this recipe successfully.

I've got two other friends that used it and these sweet potatoes come out great. You know, make them for Christmas. You won't be disappointed.

If it doesn't turn out, that's relatively harmless. But if you say, you know, you really ought to cut off all contact from that person and never have anything more to do with them because they're a rascal and that's just causing you pain. We don't know enough about that situation.

If we have been in something that sounds similar, we may or may not have followed the same course, but there are so many variables, so many things known only to God, the thoughts and intents of the heart. Man looks on the outward appearance. God knows exactly what is going on in every heart.

And the only counsel we should be providing people in terms of life advice should be solidly based on Scripture. And I would be cautious even there and say, well, in times when I felt like I was facing something similar, here is a passage that comforted me or encouraged me. The counsel that I receive from Proverbs chapter 12 is to try to concentrate on my self-control.

If I'm being foolish, I don't want it to become a shame and to be broadcast like we've

seen in this chapter. The wise hearted person contains himself and covers shame, doesn't broadcast the shame of others to people and causes others to have a lesser opinion. That's judging.

That is inflicting a penalty where someone's reputation and standing in the minds and hearts of others is somehow damaged or reduced, even if you think it's legitimate. It is one thing to warn someone and say, you know, I have learned to be cautious in what I share with this person because you might as well post it on a public bulletin board. If you share a confidence, it's going to become known.

And if this is something about you or your situation or your intimate circumstances, you might want to be cautious. But that's based on Scripture. A soft answer turns away wrath.

So we can encourage one another to not be combative, to not be engaging in conflict and strife and shouting matches and so on. And we can share Scripture with each other. That's the kind of truth we can speak in love, but very cautious, very conservative.

As soon as we start trying to live somebody else's life, every second we spend thinking about that problem is one we are not spending where we need to, which is on our own. And these ought to be short, sweet thoughts, but encouraging people to go to the Lord, to get on their knees, to communicate through the Holy Spirit, to the throne of grace, to appeal to the intercessing ministry of Jesus Christ Himself and take these things to God, you personally, you individual. Jesus knows our every need.

That's another line from a great gospel song. Every need will be supplied. He knows just what I need.

And the other song I mentioned on Sunday, we don't always know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future. And encouraging fellow believers to take advantage of relationship with God through Christ, that's never a bad thing. That's not going to backfire.

Why did you tell me to improve my relationship with God? Why did you tell me to spend more time in prayer? Why did you tell me to keep meditating on these scriptures? Boy, that really backfired. You're never going to hear that. That can't go wrong.

This goes back to our prayer life where we pray prayers that we know God can answer in the affirmative. And we can have great boldness and confidence when we ask God to draw believers closer to Himself and reveal His glory and let the light of Jesus Christ shine out of our lives and the lives of others so that others will see that and be drawn and be comforted and encouraged and come to salvation. It's not God's will that any should perish, but all come to change of mind.

It is the will of God that we live peaceably and quiet in godliness and reverence. And God

desires all men everywhere to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. So I can pray those prayers all day long.

That same idea of how to communicate in the vertical, in thinking about what is affirmative and what can't go wrong, we apply. This is what Proverbs 12 is telling us in terms of counsel and in terms of what we receive by way of counsel, because people are going to tell us how to live our lives. They're going to tell us exactly what we ought to do in this or that situation.

And we say, well, you know, the Bible says in the multitude of counselors, maybe I ought to take this on board and try to do it. We have to filter and be sure that the counsel that we listen to is Psalm 119, 24. Your testimonies are my counselors and any other counsel I receive needs to harmonize.

People will say, you know, your problem, the reason you've got so much angst and feelings of guilt and depression is you haven't forgiven yourself. You've got to forgive yourself. You've got to give yourself the freedom to do this or that.

You know, you have to do this and the other for yourself. You've got to, is that in scripture? Can you give me a single verse indexed to the maps? Where is a verse that says, forgive yourself? That is an abomination from the pit of hell. I don't have the authority or the ability to forgive myself.

Sin is an issue with God, not me. I don't get to decide what is and isn't a sin. I don't decide what I am or am not going to forgive myself for.

That is arrogance. It's wrapped in sheep's clothing. Oh, yes.

And it's subjective. It's eyes on self. And instead of going to the throne of grace to find grace to help in time of need, I'm going to myself.

Well, I have the power to make myself feel better by forgiving myself. Lies, lies, lies. That is a deception and it is a distraction because the more I busy myself deciding what I can forgive myself for, I'm not going to God.

I am not objective. I'm not looking at myself in the light of God's word, listening to God's spirit, looking at the example of the Lord Jesus. Did the Lord Jesus have to forgive himself for anything? Did he tell his disciples to forgive themselves for anything? No.

We are to examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith and whatever the result of that, we then go to God. So this idea of counsel and the multitude of counselors, when you see this phrase cropping up, it is always better whether counsel is in the singular or in the plural. I think when I looked it up in 1522, it says, without counsel plans fail, but with many counsels, plural, they succeed.

What does this mean? Don't proof text. Don't grab one verse or one truth from the word of God. What is our little go-to reminder, our little aphorism for this? For every truth of scripture, there is at least one other passage, one other scripture, one other principle, promise, or doctrine that balances that one and keeps us from carrying it to an extreme.

So I need to look for multiple principles, multiple examples, multiple instances in the word of God that can bear on whatever the issue is, not just grab one verse. You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free. We are not under law, but under grace.

So I can do what I want. I can carouse. I can drink to excess.

I can fornicate to excess. There are people who justify fornication by saying, well, we're not under law, so nothing about that pertains. As long as I love the person, it's okay.

We're under the law of love, and I love him or her. So it's okay because I'm doing this in love. You're going to one verse, and you're not looking at anything else.

It takes more than one principle, or promise, or doctrine, or example, or teaching of scripture to balance us, inform us, energize us, shine a light on our path, and help us do what we're supposed to do. So anytime you do see something that looks like it is clearly talking about more than one, there's your principle. Well, we're back now in Proverbs chapter 12.

We want to finish this section, having looked at that. So we come to, this is the second portion here. Let's just start in chapter 12, verse 22, which says, lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are his delight.

So this is a reminder, and this is the bracket we have back up in verse two, that these aren't just typical outcomes based on sort of common sense and observation of life. God invests these observations and these truths with authority, and he brings these outcomes to fruition for the wise, for the humble, for those who are doing what they're supposed to do. The power of God is in it.

It's not a formula. It is a manner of life, keeping God in mind at all times. So if we are characterized by deceit, if we shade the truth, if we tell events in a way that prevents ourselves from being implicated as having screwed up or doesn't put us in the best light, those are lying lips.

We don't have to confess our faults to everyone all the time. That verse in the New Testament says, confess your faults one to another. That is a fault against that person.

Jesus said the same thing. If your brother has ought against you. So interesting.

People blaze right past the introduction to that saying of the Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. We tend to say, well, if I have ought against my brother, I need to go be

reconciled. I've got a bone to pick with him, so I better go get that straightened out before I take my sacrifice to the altar.

Jesus said if your brother has ought against you, this sounds like he's got a valid beef. We've wronged him in some way. We've shortchanged him.

Vertently or inadvertently, we have wronged him, and he has ought against us. It doesn't say if he wrongly accuses you of something. He has ought against you.

Before you go to take your sacrifice to God, drop that sacrifice and go be reconciled to your brother. And if he won't at the first hearing, take a few more with you. Notice you are explaining where you have wronged, and you are attempting to make that right.

Your little short guy in the tree when Jesus comes by, Zacchaeus, remember at the feast, he says, if I have wronged anybody, I will restore it fourfold. Somebody might have ought against Zacchaeus, and he says, if it's legit, I will make it good four times over. We can have wronged others, and this is what we need to be looking at and looking for, because if we are refusing to admit our culpability, if we are refusing to acknowledge our faults toward the person we have faulted, we are not going to be forgiven.

We are not going to be heard in heaven. Our prayers are going to stop at the popcorn on the ceiling, for those of us that still have it. So this is the idea in verse 22, lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.

Do you think God is going to hear a prayer that comes through lying lips? It is so much better to simply acknowledge. I was thinking about this today because I ordered some parts for my truck, and they have a 30-day return policy. Well, I ordered and received these back in August, and through a series of obligations, I wasn't able to try to install them until this past week.

Well, they don't fit, and they're the wrong part number. I went through the web interface and picked the part. The point being, when I wrote them and I said, I know I am outside the 30-day return window.

It is totally my fault. And I basically just threw myself on their mercy. I said, these things are pristine.

I haven't taken anything out of the package. I took one out and did the dry fit, saw my mistake. Is there any way I can send these back? But I was imagining the people on the other end.

This is my point, because Patty and I, and many of you have been in a customer service thing where you're answering the phone and doing support and so on. And if somebody is unhappy, so often they try to make it your fault when everybody knows good and well it wasn't. And it is so much better to say, mea culpa.

This was my bad. I know it. I'm outside the window.

I'm just kind of throwing myself on your mercy here. I will ship it back and pay the shipping for the other one gladly, but this was on me. You all didn't do anything wrong.

Which request, even in the secular material world, is more likely to be fulfilled? Would somebody say, boy, it's nice that this guy didn't try to pervericate and shine us on and take advantage of us and try to say that it was our fault? Yeah, we're getting back a pristine part and sending him another. There's no skin off our nose and it's not even costing us shipping. I think they're more likely to do that than me refusing to acknowledge that I screwed up.

People are much more kind and merciful when you own up than when you try to act like, well, who knew lightning struck a meteor hit our warehouse showroom. So that's the idea here. Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord and they don't go down too well with people either.

But those who deal truthfully are his delight. We delight ourselves in the Lord and if we are people of the truth, if we endeavor to speak the truth in all circumstances, do it in love, do it in acknowledgement that we are certainly imperfect. We have this treasure in earthen vessels, but we want to be people of the truth.

This is going to be a blessing because God will see it. He will bless our horizontal situations and he will hear and respond favorably to our prayers. So this verse all by itself is life changing.

If we can keep it in mind and say, you know, my human nature says if I admit this stuff is going to come unglued. Well, do you believe experience and our desire for self-defense and insulating ourselves from criticism and shame, is that really going to work out better than trusting God that if I deal truthfully, it's going to end up much better. The only thing that really counts is the glory of God.

Anything else, me avoiding shame on myself at best, that's transient. I'll do something next week that's going to bring shame on me anyway. We're fallen, we're inadequate, we're easily mistake prone and accident prone, but it is so much better to have the humility and the inner strength from God to be people of the truth.

So verse 22, this is a great one to just memorize and bring to our minds frequently throughout the day. It's so easy to just omit certain things. If you want to listen to people arguing on any side of these international conflicts and issues and upcoming elections and candidates and whatnot, many times they will give you a factoid and it is in and of itself true.

But if you balance it, for example, I saw a quote attributed to Mr. Trump about veterans. They led with one that is patently false, that he didn't want to go to the veterans

cemetery on Veterans Day when he was president because he said, I don't want to spend time with a bunch of losers. People think, well, yeah, Trump would say that, he's such a rascal.

Well, you go research it and track it down. There is no primary evidence for that whatsoever. Somebody said that somebody said that somebody said that Trump said that, and there's no independent verification.

People don't want to believe that there's Hamas tunnels under the hospital because they have no independent verification, but they'll believe that Trump said veterans who died in combat are losers because it fits their narrative. But you see the danger. We are so quick to hear what we want to hear and believe what we want to believe and not be people of the truth.

Find me the truth. Well, after having given this spurious quote, they then gave a legitimate quote where, and right after that, they put in quotes, I don't understand these guys, what's in it for them. And it sounds like Trump thinks you shouldn't do anything unless there's something in it for you.

That wasn't the context at all. The context of that comment is these men were so self-sacrificial, so dedicated, so patriotic, so selfless here they are in the graveyard. What was in it for them? And yet they did it.

And he is admiring their selflessness. He's not mocking it or condemning it, but you take a thing like that out of context. And even though he said it, it is no longer true.

You put that in a different setting and you're taking something that's true and making it false. We need to be people of the truth, both in what we express and in what we believe. That's verse 22.

A prudent man conceals knowledge. Now this isn't a blanket statement that anything I know I'm going to conceal. Look at the context.

The heart of fools proclaims foolishness. So in verse 23, a prudent man may know about foolishness, may know about a failure, may know about a fault, but he doesn't run around broadcasting it. Guess what I just found out? Guess what I heard? You know what just happens at what so-and-so just did? A prudent man conceals that knowledge of some instance of foolishness.

But the heart of fools proclaims foolishness, whether it is their own foolishness or foolishness that they find out about or observe. They are going to broadcast it. Wisdom has the characteristic of self-control.

Just because I know a thing, I don't have to tell a thing. I stop and consider, is this likely to edify and build up and encourage, unify, comfort, promote the fruit of the Spirit? Is

this going to draw someone closer to fellow believers and to God? Or is this going to be upsetting and divisive and contrary and create a root of bitterness that springs up? I stop and consider if I'm prudent, if I'm wise, before I tell tales, before I spill whatever beans I happen to have collected. Many times it is better to take knowledge of things to your grave than to ever mention them.

And I'm sure you, as I have a locker where there is information, it's never escaping my lips from now till glory. It just isn't helpful. Nobody needs to know that.

Not going to do anybody any good for that to come out other than, guess what I know? Guess what I saw? It's just not helpful. So are we prudent or is this the heart of a fool? And this notion of the heart is also something of an inclusio here. When you have the content of verse 25, the hand of the diligent will rule in verse 24, but the lazy will be put to forced labor.

This is a relatively self-evident truth. However, remember this is guaranteed by God's superintending power. This isn't just sort of a cause and effect in the physical material realm.

The hand of the diligent will rule. Who assigns authority? Why is it that we are to pray for kings and all those who have authority when you get to first Timothy chapter two? Because it is ordained by God. So when it says the hand of the diligent will rule, that doesn't just mean diligence is going to promote you until you are in authority.

God is going to see to this. Diligent people will be rewarded. You have been faithful, Jesus said, over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.

He that is faithful in that which is least will be faithful also in that which is much. This is taught in our gospels by the Lord Jesus himself. The hand of the diligent will rule.

The lazy will be put to forced labor. If you aren't diligent, then somebody else is going to have to tell you where to go and tell you what to do and ride you until you complete that task because you don't have the internal motivation to do it. If we don't hold a gun to our own head to get things done, somebody else is going to be holding the gun.

And as you know, if you know Clint Eastwood at all, there are only two kinds of people in the world, those with guns and those who dig. Are you in authority or are you at forced labor? It's a biblical principle. That's why it resonates so beautifully.

And then you come to 25. Anxiety in the heart of a man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad. All of us at one time or another struggle with being depressed, with times and seasons of depression.

And if you want the biblical solution to depression, or at least a biblical approach to addressing and combating depression, I'm not saying this is a cure and the Bible doesn't

say it's a cure, but the Bible identifies the cause. The cause of at least some depression is anxiety. So rather than saying, what can I do to not be so depressed? What we can do is look for what is it that worries me? What is it that I am not trusting God enough? What is it that I am not doing enough that I'm supposed to do? You can get very anxious because you have failed to do something you're supposed to do and the time of the deadline is drawing near.

So some of this anxiety can be self-induced and I can overcome depression that is caused by that if I solve the anxiety problem. Anxiety feels quite different from depression. Depression, people just want to pass out.

I want to go to bed and stay in bed. I want to sleep. I just don't want to even be conscious.

You're immobile in many cases. You just don't have the motivation to do anything. It's just all too depressing.

There's a black cloud of darkness over everything. You just don't want to be, do, see, talk, anything. It's just a funk.

But anxiety can often cause hyperactivity and elbows and knees and I want to distract myself with, I want to busy myself so that I don't have to think about what I'm worried about instead of stopping and saying, what is it that I am uncalm about? Is there something I should be trusting God for that I'm not? I haven't taken it to the cross and left it there. I haven't taken it to the throne and left it there. I'm worried about somebody else.

I'm worried about a situation. I'm worried about this, that, and the other. If we have unresolved worry, some of that can be we're not concentrating on our faith.

And to bolster our faith, I don't try to generate more faith. Where is the merit of faith? It is in the object. And if I'm having trouble taking something to God and leaving it there because of a lack of faith, it's a waste of time to try to generate more faith.

What I need to do is give myself more of the object. Soak myself in the Word of God, in the examples of His faithfulness, of His power, of His long-suffering, of His mercy, and His kindness, and His goodness to His people. And if I put more of the object in my soul, my faith will get stronger because the merit of faith is in the object.

If I find myself weak in the faith, pour more of the object in. Cram in an extra time for devotions. More time to review your notes from Bible class.

Listen to a Bible class. Read your Bible. Get more of the content and the object of faith in there.

That's where the power and the merit is. It is not my faith that is alive and powerful, is it? It's not my faith that's sharper than a two-edged sword. It's not my faith that is God-breathed and profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction.

It is the Word of God. If I lack power in my inner life, I need more of God's stuff in me. That will solve the problem.

And if I address my anxiety, I will address my depression. And many of us can tell you from personal long experience, that is the key. That is the key.

Well, more about this when we come back from the break.