

Proverbs 24-01-10a

Good evening. Welcome to the Wednesday night service here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 10th of January, 2024.

We're in Proverbs chapter 13. We have a real fascinating section to look at. We have completed basically the first 11 verses.

We'll pick up at verse 11 and move forward into this next section. There is a very helpful symmetry that we're going to see here that really takes the wrapping paper off of the content here. At a first blush reading, it seems a bit scattered and inscrutable as so much of Proverbs does if we don't slow down and figure out exactly what's happening.

So we'll take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, and then we'll begin. Father, we're grateful for another chance to spend time together being fed through the ministry of your Holy Spirit by looking at the wonderful truths contained in your word. We pray that as we commence our investigation that they will be clear and helpful, meaningful, and applicable for us in the hours and days ahead.

We know that you have orchestrated our lives to bring application of truth to bear so that we can grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus and be fitted for every good work, both now and in the ages to come. We pray that that will be accomplished tonight in each of our hearts, and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

So you will recall that this is instruction. A wise son will heed his father's instruction. A scoffer does not listen.

And at the inception of this chapter, we have a contrast. Are we listeners or are we talkers? There are very few people that neither listen nor talk. If you've got all your faculties, we're usually either doing one or the other.

And the part of wisdom is to pay attention to input from the outside and to use it in the Lord Jesus figure to do lumber removal in our eyes and in our hearts, to plow the soil so that the word of God can be planted deeply and that seed contains its own power. All the soil has to do is be friendly to that seed and not be friendly to the birds or the thorns and the thistles, to tolerate the presence of rocks that make the heart soil impenetrable. You remember that parable in detail.

So a key to fulfilling the good soil idea is to be a good listener. It is a part of human nature. It is instinctive and it is natural to want to tell what we know, to speak our truth.

This is what has become popular in our culture today is everybody's got their truth and they want you to sit and listen to it. So it comes through social media. It comes through alleged news outlets.

Many of these that call themselves news really should change the name to, you know, opinion because they're not trying very hard to be balanced, to be complete. It's amazing how you can give an impression by only reporting part of the details and not all of them. Intentionally including someone's race, in some cases intentionally omitting it in others instead of either always including it or never including it and so on.

So to be good listeners and in particular in this context, listeners to God's truth. This is a choice that we make and what we're going to see tonight is the content here directly ties into our understanding of goals and priorities and values. These are three areas of our thinking that affect our attitudes, our opinions, our words, and our actions.

People who have widely different goals, values, and priorities typically don't get along. One of the keys to successful relationship, especially in marriage, is to have a wide overlap. We share the same goals.

People call this dreams or, you know, my vision, my hope for life, but this will boil down and categorize to what are your goals? What do you consider to be a successful day? What are your values? What do you consider to be? Remember whatsoever things are true, honest, noble, lovely, of good report, that's values. What do you consider to be intrinsically worthwhile, valuable, important, worthy of preservation, cultivation, possession? Those are our values, goals, values. Priorities are given what we consider to be important, given what we consider to be right and proper and true and noble and lovely.

How do we invest our time and our effort? Priorities are, I'm going to do this first because it is most important, or I am going to do this at the expense of that because this has to take a backseat. It is a lower priority. I'm not saying it isn't important, valuable, meaningful, worthwhile, but when I only have so much time, only so much resource, only so much energy, if I can only pick one, how many times have you seen these things, you know, if your house caught fire and you could only pick one thing to remove, what would it be? These are your priorities.

It isn't that I don't value everything in the house, but if I could only pick one or only what I can carry, what would it be? There used to be a game show years ago, and they would turn somebody loose in a hardware store or in a department store, but they could have anything they wanted, but only what they can carry. And then they would watch people to see, well, what is most important to them? What is most valuable to them? Are they smart enough to find something small and extremely valuable that they can take out and hawk, sell, trade in and get the things they really want that are too big to carry? There's strategy involved, but it is amazing how you can organize and evaluate your thought life, your verbal life, and your effort life by stopping to think every day at the beginning of every project when there is an opportunity for service, for function, for stewardship. What are my goals? What are my values? What are my priorities? And I

always leave my priorities for last because I will screw up my priorities if I haven't first clarified in my own mind what is my goal and what are my values.

Our values in particular need to be informed and inspired by the word of God and the presence and power of the spirit of God so that we can identify what is that. Remember Romans 12, I beseech you brethren by the mercies of God, be not conformed to this world with its goals, values, and priorities. Be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds.

This is your reasonable service. I'm mixing the order of that passage a little bit, but remember how it ends. Be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you will know what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Some things are good, but not today. Some things are acceptable, but there, I will show you a better way. End of 1 Corinthians chapter 12, I will show you a better way.

Love. What is the way of love? And you remember all of the descriptions of love. That should inform, define, inflate my entire estimation in terms of values.

It is more valuable for me to express and manifest the fruit of the spirit here than it is to accomplish a material checklist item. Which one is more important? Well, which one reflects more of God's righteousness? Which one is a good priority for me in this particular case? Goals, values, and priorities. We've covered this before, but notice in this passage, and I'm going to let you go back and review the first 10 verses or so, because we've covered them in great detail and I'm not going to review here.

Look at verse 11. We're going to pick up where we left off last time. Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished.

The text here says, but he who gathers by labor will increase. You may remember that last time I mentioned that the dishonesty word here in the accepted text is Hevel, H-E-V-E-L. It's vanity, vanity, all is vanity saith the preacher in Kohelet in the Ecclesiastes.

But it is a convincing argument to be made, including the Septuagint translation here, that the H and the B have been swapped, and it is wealth gained in haste. It's behel, not Hevel. B-H-L, not H-B-L, if you will.

And notice the contrast, gathering by labor instead of in haste. You know, this is the idea of get rich quick. I've got a scheme.

I don't have to work. I've got an inside stock tip. I've got, you know, all I have to do is give this person my money.

There's a piano scam going around, which I've been targeted with several times. And the funny thing is, they don't alter or vary the premise of the text very much. And so I get

these emails.

My husband slash wife was a music lover and had this beautiful, fill in your extremely expensive piano name here that is a baby grand or a grand. And they recently passed away and their dying wish was that their wonderful, expensive piano be passed along to someone who would appreciate it. I would like to give it to you for free to a good home.

Contact me. And you think, wow, so really nice, you know, Chickering or Bosendorfer or expensive Yamaha or Steinway, wonderful piano. They'll even send you pictures.

I had a fun time one evening. I had a and Google now has a picture search. You can give it a picture and it will go find if that picture exists anywhere on the web.

And I found this picture on a Craigslist listing up in Ohio someplace. But this person represented themselves as being in Arkansas, just far enough away that it's too far to go pick it up. And the way the thing works is when you say, well, sure, I am, I'm confident I can find a good home for that piano.

Probably me, myself and I. And they'll say, great. Well, but you can't pick it up. It's in storage.

And I must send a truck who will pick it up from the storage. It's secure storage and you can't get in. And so if you'll send me the money for the shipping and to pay the guys with the truck, then the piano will arrive.

Well, of course you send the money and the people vaporize. But this is the idea that I can acquire this wonderful, shiny, pictured, beautiful piano quickly for nothing. I don't have to work.

And that is going to shrink and diminish. It's going to wither because it's like building your house on the sand. You can build it quick.

They throw up cheap houses that don't last, especially when the storm comes. He who gathers by work, who gathers. These are so interesting.

You know, the Hevel word, which we look at the Septuagint and other sources and think those consonants have been swapped. And so hasty wealth. And we talked last time about the fact that this wealth in the ultimate sense isn't even talking about material wealth, although it's a paradigm, it's a metaphor, it's a useful example in the same way that, you know, a, you can try to ride a bubble, you can ride a rising stock or whatever.

But if you live by that sword, you're typically going to die by it. But this is really talking about the wealth of wisdom and a stimulating Bible class, a wonderful thought. Oh, we've got the prayer of Jabez.

That's the key to the Christian life. Oh, we've got spirit controlled temperaments. We've

got joining God, experiencing God, joining him in his work.

This is the quick key. I don't have to learn the word of God. Line upon line, line upon line, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little to express dedication and consistency and interest and assigning value to understanding the word of God and improving my implementation and application of it.

No, it's a, it's a greeting card aphorism. It's a refrigerator magnet. It's an air freshener.

I can hang on my, we're going to do this little Bible study. Some Baptist lady or some interesting guy has, has the key and this is what it is. You've gotten the Sermon on the Mount all wrong.

Oh, you've gotten redemption all wrong. It's this, this is the key. This is the way.

This is the quick fix. And your strength diminishes your faithfulness, your orientation to grace, your understanding of the plan and purpose of God, your closeness and intimacy and relationship with God dwindles and wanes because you're trying to get there on superficialities and haste. I just minimum investment, maximum return.

That's what I'm after. And that's the real wealth that is being talked about here. Treasure in heaven, building up resources in our soul that the Holy Spirit can use to guide and enlighten and illuminate.

So wealth gained by haste, scratch out dishonesty, take my word for it. This is haste. Wealth gained in haste.

And I'm going to do a quick seven minute Bible study before I go to work. And that's going to sustain me through the next 18 hours of waking life and opportunities. That's haste.

You can't get there in seven minutes. Try reading 10 verses in Proverbs in seven minutes with comprehension, understanding and potential for application. It can't be done.

I am spending more time studying in Proverbs than I think any previous book I've ever done, because it has to be unzipped. It has to be unpacked. You have to think you have to marinate in it.

It's got to cook like smoking a turkey overnight for Thanksgiving. There is no quick way to get your Thanksgiving. You can't microwave a turkey.

That's disaster. You can't microwave your spiritual life. Stick it in for three minutes and it's ready to eat.

That's what this verse means. In reality, wealth is a metaphor. It's a parable.

It's a one line parable. If you wanted to expand this into colloquial English, in the same way that hasty wealth quickly evaporates. Why is that also true? Because anybody that's got the poor judgment to try to ride those get rich quick schemes is going to have poor judgment in hanging on to it.

Look at the people that win the lottery. There are entire books and articles online tracking lottery winners and what happened to them after they got all of this money. They were playing the lottery because that's a fool's game.

They happened to win, but you look at them a year, five years later, it has devastated and destroyed them because they don't have good judgment about money to begin with. Wealth gained in haste is going to evaporate as a general rule. It is the rare person that can strike it rich and has the good sense to not squander it, get big deal out of it, have the vultures descend and pick it off of your bones, etc.

He who gathers, and this word for gathers is really fascinating. This is Q-B-T-S. Hebrew is just a consonant alphabet.

Q-B-T-S. If you put A's in between those consonants, you get Q-B-T-S. This is Q-B-T-S.

Remember O-E is like I-N-G in Hebrew. So this is the one who is gathering, but you know this word. This word came into English in about 1920 and has been in regular use ever since.

What do Israelis call the little communities they form so that they can farm? What is that called? Kibbutz. It's this word. It's a gathering.

It forms a community. Communities don't form overnight. Relationships develop, roles assigned, work that is accomplished, land that is planted, infrastructure, plumbing, wiring, dwellings.

This takes time. You gather these things and you build them into a permanent, lasting, communal structure. Kibbutz.

They consciously chose this noun that comes from this verb because it embodies the idea of taking your time, building well, with the idea of permanence. Permanence. We don't want to be the seed in the shallow soil that springs up in a day, but as soon as the sun shines on it, it withers and it's like it was never there.

Kibbutz. Kibbutz. You gather and you work at it.

The thing about work is it's work. How hard do we work at our spiritual growth? When you're working at something, if you work at a job, what do you do? You have to employ skills. You have to devote time.

It takes so much effort that they've turned the noun effort into a verb. You are now

efforting when you are spending yourself in what you hope is a worthy cause. But that's what work is.

The workman is worthy of his hire. The Lord Jesus says it. Paul says it.

The workman is worthy of his hire. It's coming up in our Timothy study. Jesus says it in Luke and it is a one of the faithful sayings.

A workman is worthy of his hire. Muzzle not the ox that treads out the grain. The ox that is doing the work gets first crack at that threshed, cleansed, and more condensed and useful grain.

Gets first crack at it. Muzzle not the ox. But it's work.

It's not easy. It's not quick. It's not a hasty slap dash lick in a prayer, which is almost literally what so many of us as believers do.

He who kibbutzes, who builds something permanent and intricate and lasting over time with a view toward permanence and usefulness and productivity. Such a beautiful word. I have a whole lot of fresh appreciation of kibbutz.

And I know people that have lived in kibbutzim. I know accounts of life in those. And the idea of that community is a deep and lasting thing and very meaningful to those who participate.

But you do that with work, with labor. That does not diminish. It increases.

It begins to take on a life of its own. It's like assembling nuclear fissionable material. The more you have, the more likely it is to produce something far beyond itself.

To release energy. Fellowship of believers. Two are better than one.

And a threefold cord is not quickly broken. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. And this happens when we invest work.

So how does this look in real life? Well, I wake up in the morning. I spend time during the day. And then I pass out, fall asleep at night.

Do I have a well-developed plan? Do I schedule? There are things that other people schedule. Got to go to the doctor. Got to go to the dentist.

Got to be there to get your car fixed. Woe unto you if you're not there on time. Sorry, you can sit in a waiting room for 45 minutes.

But if you're five minutes late, they'll say, sorry, the doctor will not see you now. Come back in a month or whatever. But when other people put us on a schedule, we move heaven and earth to get there.

Well, what about our schedule for prayer? Our schedule for reflection and rumination and meditation and investing thought in the Word of God that we've already heard. We've already seen it. We've already heard it explained and extrapolated.

We've got notes, perhaps. We've got earlier studies in the margins of our Bible and remembering examples and scripture compared with scripture. But for that to have an effect, do you think it's like putting a cassette player under your pillow and sleeping with somebody talking and you're going to wake up knowing stuff? It's going to happen at an unconscious level.

It doesn't. Our growth and our understanding for the purpose of the Holy Spirit, enabling and empowering us for application is conscious. It's work.

We gather by work. And once you have gathered the grain, was that the end of the work? After you harvest and thresh and you get the grain into the storehouse, then what? I sure have a full tummy now because we harvested and threshed and put it in the barn. Sorry, no.

You've got to take that grain and grind it and mix it with oil, oil representing the Holy Spirit to produce something that is energizing and upbuilding, edifying, useful to power you through your assigned tasks and responsibilities. Well, as we so often say, I was telling Patty the other day, well, that firewood's not going to split itself. Switching out a car battery, that battery's not going to trade out itself.

It's got to be done. The Word of God that we have accumulated isn't going to apply itself. It isn't going to spring up out of nowhere and be useful to the Holy Spirit.

We have to grind it. We have to mix it. It is work on our part.

And if we find that our spiritual strength is lacking, if we find that we're kind of flaccid in the face of testing, if we're not doing well, what does that mean? Somewhere the work has not been done. That grain is not going to grind itself. The oil and the grain are not going to mix themselves.

Remember when Elijah came and stayed with the widow and the limitless crews? Why wasn't it a limitless oven? Every time you open the oven, here's a freshly baked piece of bread. What did she get? She got a limitless barrel of flour and a limitless cruise of oil. But you can't just drink that oil straight.

You can't just eat spoonfuls of flour. The provision of God to the widow and her child was, here is the wherewithal. You make your own bread.

You measure it. You mix it. You roll it out.

You bake it. You prepare it. You eat it.

You're given the mixing. And that's the same thing we have. So I can't emphasize too much that spiritual life isn't automatic from hearing Bible class.

And this was a huge mistake that I think crept into and overcame much of what used to be called the ICE movement. We studied the word of God with isagogics and categories and exegesis, and we're a verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book. And that's, by the way, my tongue-in-cheek version.

It's verse by verse. If you think that the approach is the key, that the delivery and the preparation is what makes it all happen, it's wrong Indian. It's cart instead of horse.

It isn't the style of delivery. It's not the kind of preparation. It isn't the consistent verse by verse, word by word, chapter by chapter, book by book approach that accomplishes anything.

The Lord Jesus was the greatest teacher that ever lived. And what happened to most of the people that heard him? Nothing, because it wasn't the delivery or the quality thereof. It is the reception and what we do with it after we get it.

And that requires getting that cruise of oil and getting that container of flour and doing our work. That's what makes it go. And you can think you've got a wealth of Bible understanding.

There are people who think, well, I'm a great Christian because I go to a wonderful church with so many different ministries, and we've got outreaches, and we've got classes for this category and that category and the other category, and we're down doing this, and we visit that, and we assemble for this, and we go through that study, and we do this, that, and the other. Wealth that is easy and superficial, where you don't do the work, won't last. Think about exams that you cram for at the last minute.

How much of that do you actually retain? And later on, when you really need the knowledge, how much of it's actually there? Big difference. He who gathers by working, who kibbutzes and does the work, will increase. Well, this brings us to verse 12, which is actually our first new verse, but this is a kind of a summary of everything in these first 10 verses, beginning with the wise son who, when his father's instruction comes, he does something with it.

It's not just a rain shower that passes, and you dry off, and it's as though it was never there. If we don't listen and do differently by way of rebuke, we make no progress. We've got nothing that lasts.

Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to pick up with this idea. This seems like an obviousity, like a truism, that hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.

In the same way that in Timothy, we looked at all of the faithful sayings of Paul, we're going to look at all of the places where the Bible mentions tree of life. Proverbs uses it almost half a dozen times. So what does it mean, a tree of life? And why would a desire that arrives be a tree of life? I might just be waiting on a book in the mail.

Is that book going to be a tree of life? I'm waiting for spring. I'm waiting for deer season. I'm waiting for Christmas.

What is this really talking about? In the same way that we saw poverty and wealth and labor over time versus haste means a lot more in the spiritual realm. We're going to find the same is true here, and we'll see it when we come back from the break.