

Proverbs 24-02-07a

Greetings, welcome to Wednesday Night Bible Study at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 7th of February 2024. We are at the intersection of chapters 13 and 14 of Proverbs.

We've seen a very interesting and helpful structural device used by Solomon, the author and collector of these Proverbs to help us understand their purpose and point. There are a lot of ways to take a pithy saying and to have some additional clues is really helpful for us to turn the corner into application, which is of course the point. So we'll pick up where we left off a few weeks ago, looking at these and move forward into the next section of chapter 14.

We are moving from one of our favorite structural devices, the chiasm to the V's. These are going to be, I don't know what else to call them. They're, you know, an X is a V and then an inverted V and it makes an X. Well, this is like a double V. This is like a V, VW almost.

And so, but I think you will agree when once it's pointed out, you really can't unsee it. And then it becomes extremely helpful in figuring out why these aphoristic sayings are here, what they mean to us, what we should do with them, how we can wind them up and make them go. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and our study.

And we'll begin. Father, thank you for another opportunity to spend this time together. We're so grateful that you provide these wonderful, nourishing passages of scripture to strengthen our souls.

We're not orphans. We've not been abandoned or left to our own devices. The presence of your spirit and the light that shines on our path from your word are more than sufficient to lead us, to guide us, to comfort us, and to motivate and encourage us to faith and the righteousness we lay hold of by faith.

The experience that we gain, the perspective that we adopt, the helpful path through life that prepares us for service and function now and in the ages to come. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together, the Holy Spirit will superintend that he will overcome the limitations of the presentation, help us all to understand what you would have us to see and learn so that we can more fully and beautifully represent the Lord Jesus in the time that remains to us in this life. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. I want to quickly retrace the last ground that we covered. It's been a couple of weeks.

This is the final section of chapter 13, beginning at verse 20 and extending through 14,

verse 2. And this began with the idea of walking with the wise. To walk with the wise is wise. And we have many exhortations in scripture to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, that our fellowship in and of itself is a gift and a provision from God that enables us and helps us to encourage each other in love and good works.

To speak the truth to one another in love is to kind of keep each other from straying. If you're traveling in the deep woods at night, it's great to be in a group. You figure there is something to the idea of safety in numbers.

And walking with the wise, someone who has been down this road before, someone who is familiar with the pitfalls and the typical mistakes, can guide us if we have the humility to listen. Humility is a wonderful attribute that is encouraged throughout the scriptures. Lack of humility was Satan's great error and resulted in the fall.

God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. And one of the ways that he gives us this grace is through the spiritual gifts that others of us possess. And we want to be watchful and be ready to receive what God provides through our fellowship and through our interactions with fellow believers.

So to walk with the wise is wise, but the companion, and this is actually a superintending companion. This has a shepherding idea. Uh, the shepherd of fools will be destroyed.

And this is so typical of scripture that it's like a two edged sword. Um, as Mark Knopfler codified in a song many years ago, sometimes you're the windshield and sometimes you're the bug. Uh, sometimes you are the wise with whom others are endeavoring to walk.

Other times we are those, uh, hoping to have the humility to walk with those who are wiser than us. But this second phrase here, the companion or the shepherd of fools will be destroyed. Uh, if it is a fool attempting to walk with the wise, uh, the wise by tolerating foolish company are going to end up getting in trouble.

And sometimes people who are wise find that foolish people are trying to attach to them, trying to go along for the ride, trying to, uh, avail themselves and, and mimic or otherwise, otherwise, uh, take advantage of the wise, but they themselves are not endeavoring to become wise. They simply want the advantages that wisdom confers. And this goes to motivation.

Why is someone attaching themselves to you? Um, you can think of a, of a nice looking girl and one guy can say, you know, she's attractive, but that's not what attracts me to her. I'm attracted by her character and her innate qualities, her humility, her wisdom, her self-possession, her poise and grace and charm. And if she's physically attractive, that's just kind of a bonus, but I would love her whatever she looked like, because she has these qualities that attract someone who is looking for the right things.

There are other guys who say, I would love to have this trophy on my arm. I would like to take this girl to the prom because she's pretty, or I would like to be seen, uh, at my job and going to a company party with this good looking girl because people will think well of me that I'm able to snag this attractive date. And two different guys might be cultivating and seeking the company of this girl for incredibly different reasons.

And a wise girl recognizes that there is a guy seeking her attention for the wrong reasons and will not long tolerate that company. Why that kind of company can destroy you. It can drag you down to the level of fools and end up with a lot of harm and grief and sadness attached.

So it is a wonderful thing to recognize that someone is wise and that there are advantages that are associated with that wisdom. But what is the motivation when others seek to keep company with the wise to walk with the wise is itself wise in many cases. But if you wind up being, being tracked by fools, if they're following you around, you're going to be destroyed.

And a wise person will not long tolerate the company of fools and they will trim off unhealthy attraction, unhealthy interest, interest that is motivated by the wrong desires. And you have to separate from destructive relationships. And pity is not a good reason to spend time with someone feeling sorry for someone if they maintain a pattern of foolishness.

If there's not genuine humility and genuine interest in becoming wise oneself, not just parasitically attaching to the wisdom of others, drafting in their wake, following behind them, hoping to glean benefits without doing the work and gaining the wisdom for oneself. This is destructive. So we have introduced in this section, in this first verse, a lot of divine wisdom about human relationships as they are conditioned by the presence and absence of wisdom.

And it behooves us to think about our relationships. Think about the people in our periphery with whom we spend time. This used to be time spent in person.

You would be at the table with someone. You would go to lunch with someone. You'd meet with a fellow employee after work or a fellow student after class.

And these were human interactions. We live in a weird and strange world now where relationships can take place in the virtual world. Apple has just released their latest VR goggles that try to integrate reality with artificial computer-generated perceptions and information.

And it has opened a complete can of worms in the sense that they don't know what the impact on society is going to be. We already have people who spend way too much time looking at the online world and existing as avatars and having conversations with people

who aren't in the room with you, investing a great amount of time in following what someone is doing and commenting on them, whether it's celebrities or singers or whatever. And now you put this thing on your head.

It's \$3,500 to stick this thing on your head, but you look through it and there's a transparent computer screen and you see the world, but you don't see the world without this augment, augmentation. You look at a building, a little sign will come up and tell you the name of the building, what its address is, what kind of businesses might be there. People that you know can walk up to you.

People maybe you don't know well, there will be facial recognition. People who opt in, their personal information can pop up. Hi, I'm Susie.

I'm 21. I'm single and on the make. I'm a student at such and such a college majoring in this.

And so there was a picture of somebody sitting like on the subway with one of these on and someone just took their phone, which is itself an internet appliance and filmed this person sitting on the subway, typing and pulling objects and doing things with their hands. I thought it was strange when we got cell phones because used to be when you would drive down the road and you would see somebody expostulating and waving their arms and talking. This was a crazy person, but now it's just someone with Bluetooth.

And we've gotten used to that, but now people will be waving their arms and expostulating and they're manipulating objects in virtual reality, organizing both real and virtual reality at once. And right now this thing is bulky and awkward, but it's very soon going to shrink down and become like a pair of glasses. And you want to talk about a strange society where you see people walking up and down New York sidewalks, waving their hands and grabbing invisible pieces of flotsam and jetsam and moving it around.

And the nature of human interaction has changed in the last couple of decades beyond anything that has happened since Adam and Eve walked out of the garden. It has never been this way, nothing approaching this level of paradigm shift. But the truth of the word of God is timeless.

And regardless of how this interaction is achieved, whether through technology, through my avatar shakes hands with your avatar, I grab your face out of the crowd and look you up on, I don't know, Facebook or whatever it is. The principles are the same to the extent that we engage with and spend time with people who are not seeking wisdom, who are not walking in wisdom, who don't reflect wisdom. And this is divine wisdom.

This has been the subject of all of the preceding chapters of Proverbs. Proverbs, get wisdom. And with all you're getting, get understanding.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. My son, if you will receive my words,

hide my commandments with you, lift up your voice, cry out, incline your ear, apply your heart, seek it as silver, search for it as for his treasure. What do you find? Not an enhanced social experience and more information to manipulate.

You will understand the fear of the Lord and you will find the knowledge of God. All of this, it has never been more true. The things that Peter and the other apostles warned us about, the forms of this world are passing away.

Everything you see is going to catch fire and melt with a fervent heat. And you can't take your VR goggles into the kingdoms that are to come. They won't be there and you won't need them.

These, I think, are just the latest human contrivances to get around the need for genuine internal love, joy, peace, long suffering, and so forth. But this verse 20 of Proverbs chapter 13, to walk with the wise is wise. Find those people who have identified and are pursuing and endeavoring to practice wisdom.

That's where to spend your time because wisdom is on the table. Wisdom is in the shared cup. Wisdom is informing perceptions and opinions and attitudes and reactions to events.

And young people in particular, children in particular, seeing wisdom in their parents. People talk about modeling good behavior. You don't have to model anything.

If you're walking in wisdom, the stability, the reflection of the glory of God that comes with that wisdom. And never more so than when two or three are gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus, gathered in the name of wisdom and the word of God. This is the best possible influence on those around us.

But at the same time, the companion of fools will be destroyed. And if someone is going to endeavor to walk with the wise, they themselves need to be an active and genuine seeker of wisdom. And if we are in any way wise, we have to curate our associations.

That's what the word of God says. If you tolerate and maintain contact with those who are manifestly not actually interested in wisdom, it will eventually destroy us. The companion of fools will be destroyed.

Usually the easiest way to to separate from fools is to continue to focus on wisdom and don't compromise it. Don't soft pedal it. Don't put it on the back burner or out of reach on a shelf.

Make an issue. Remember when the Lord Jesus made an issue out of who he was? Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, many turned away and no longer walked with him. And those people needed to go.

They needed to go and Jesus needed to offload them, their weight, their distraction factor, their hilarity, their incredulity, their sensationalism. They're popularizing him for all the wrong reasons. So Jesus made an issue out of wisdom.

That's a hard saying, eat my flesh and drink my blood. It takes wisdom to understand it. And only the wise stuck around.

The rest turned back from following after him. And Jesus looked at his 12 disciples and said, will you turn away also? And. Peter famously replies.

To whom should we go? You have the words of life. You have wisdom and we're here for wisdom. But it's it's a powerful and very applicable point of the word of God.

We need to curate our relationships and did not be the captain of a ship of fools. Don't tolerate people who drag us down and lead us astray and distract us from the truth of God. It is destructive and it will destroy us.

It will destroy our growth. It will destroy our fruit of the spirit, our peace. And if we don't have peace and we seem to miss it the most right after spending time with somebody, we need to check and see, am I shepherding a fool? Am I tolerating a relationship that needs to be tapered off? Well, this again is pointed out to us by the structure.

I mentioned before, when we looked at this section, that the symmetry here goes all the way down to chapter 14 verses one and two. And the way you can tell this is are the structural markers, the vocabulary that ties these things together. What do you have in verse 20? To walk with the wise and companionship.

Who is leading and following? There is a leader follower motif here. And you find that in verses one and two of chapter 14. This is the wise woman will build her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands.

All you have to do is think about verse 20 in terms of a wise husband that's got a foolish wife. For that matter, a wise wife, that's got a foolish husband and the foolish half of the marriage will destroy the relationship and they will destroy the house. They'll pull it down with their hands.

You have the idea of productive association or destructive association. It's the simplest thing you can say about verse 20, isn't it? Where wisdom is at the center of the relationship, it's constructive. It's wise to spend time with the wise.

It's a productive, constructive association and relationship. Where foolishness enters in, it becomes the opposite. It is destructive.

And that's what you have here. The foolish pulls her house down with her own two hands. So you say, well, what you need to do there is dissolve that relationship.

Well, that's not the answer in a marriage. And the part of wisdom is to eliminate the foolishness and cultivate wisdom. Wisdom can fix virtually any relationship if both parties will pursue it.

The wise woman builds her house, cultivating and recognizing whatever wisdom exists. It may be small, it may be scattered, but if there's wisdom, cultivate that. If you've ever watched people in a survival situation start a fire, it reminds you of the Kumbaya song at camp, you know, it only takes a spark to get a fire burning.

So you got people with these little fire starting things, you scrape metal on it and a little tiny spark. But how do people get a fire going with just that spark? Think about the principles of fire building. First of all, you have to know how fire works.

It's about airflow and combustible materials of the right sort. When you're starting a fire, you don't start with logs. You don't start with heavy sticks.

There are two elements of starting a successful fire. One is you need tinder. You need something that will easily conflagrate, easily catch fire, easily combust in the presence of a spark.

It will take that spark and grow a fire from it. That's its nature. It's fine shavings of bark or whatever.

It's tinder. You can use certain things. Secondly, it has to be dry.

It can't be wet. So it has nature and it has qualities. And from that, a very small spark can turn into a wonderful, comfortable fire by careful management.

In the same way, in a relationship, you may think, well, this is hopeless. I'm in a sack race and I got to get out of this sack. Not necessarily.

Focus on the things that will turn a spark of wisdom into more wisdom. Encourage the good that is there and don't focus on what is bad. Find what is good and grow that.

That's your spark. Put some nice dry tinder in that. Don't be superficial.

Don't be fake. But it is a principle of the word of God to focus on that which is good. Cherish it.

Respect it. Appreciate it. Encourage it.

Throw in with it. Cooperate with it. Support it.

And you say, I've got a whole pile of wet wood here. Well, look, start with a spark. Get the tinder going.

Nurture. Blow on that. Get that going.

Dry out your wood with your small fire. And the more time you spend encouraging that fire, the warmer and drier everything will get. And first thing you know, you've got a raging blaze.

All of us that start fires understand this principle. But if there is a lack of something in a relationship, you have two ways to go. You can, if it's an expendable relationship, then expend it.

Separate. The company of fools, if you can avoid it, that's great. We can't always do that because sometimes these are relationships not of our own making.

God puts the solitary in families. God is involved in our marriages and in our relationships that are not of our own choosing. So in that case, what do you do? Well, look at what scripture says.

The wise woman builds, builds her house. Doesn't say the wise woman enjoys and appreciates her house. She builds.

Take the good stuff and build on that. Build on it. If you're the shepherd and your sheep are foolish, that's why you've got the shepherd's crook and the shepherd's staff.

You teach them, you tap them, you guide them, you are patient with them. Whichever side of this we're on. But you can see the beauty of this symmetry working together to flesh out the application of these principles.

And verse two goes along with it. He who walks in his uprightness fears the Lord. He who is perverse in his ways despises him.

Remembering that these horizontal relationships, walking with the wise, eschewing the company of fools when it is possible. And if not, trying to build on whatever wisdom is there and trying to drive out the darkness with light and replace foolishness with wisdom takes building. It takes nurturing.

It takes time. But these are reflections of the vertical, right? We don't have any strength, any power, any real wisdom or any peace in our horizontal relationships if we don't remember that they depend upon the vertical. So he who walks in his uprightness fears the Lord.

Remember the walking? To walk the wise is wise. But what kind of a walk is it? Well, if we're upright, we walk in that uprightness in fear of the Lord. This is what keeps us walking.

This is what helps us understand that uprightness. But he who is perverse in his ways despises God. And we can say, well, you know, perversity in ways means you're not predictable.

You're not reliable. You're moody. You're fickle.

You're this way one day and that way the next. It's like a box of chocolates. You open the lid and take off the wrapper.

You never know what's going to be in there. Perversity. To be perverse is not to be predictable and reliable.

And the same. You ever had a perverse automobile? Go out there, drives perfectly one day. Next day you go out there, it won't start.

It starts, you roll down the driveway and it quits. You can't count on it. You can't depend on it.

So these two ideas go back to verse 20. Look at the inside bracket there. When you get to verse 21, evil pursues sinners, but to the righteous good shall be repaid.

This corresponds to the preceding verse, which is the last verse of chapter 13, verse 25. So evil pursues sinners, but to the righteous good shall be repaid. So we've got the righteous and we've got sinners.

And what do we have in verse 25? The very same thing. The righteous eats to the satisfying of his soul. The righteous good shall be repaid.

So good repaid, this speaks more of circumstances and externalities and getting along in the habitual demands of life, right? But the satisfying of the soul, this is the internal. And so we have this symbiosis of good being repaid in the circumstantial world and deep satisfaction on the inside. So cultivating righteousness is devoutly to be wished because it's like it talks about the Lord Jesus growing in favor with God and man.

Favor with God is sort of an internal soul quality. Growing in favor with man, this is circumstantial, relational, and so on. And the same thing here.

Look how these proverbial sayings complement and condition each other so that we understand what it means. And here's an idea to use these standards and these observations to evaluate ourselves. If I find that my circumstantial life is kind of a shambles, and I can't seem to get any momentum and any consistency, and I don't seem to be having blessing in my work, blessing in my effort, blessing in my endeavors, and I find that I don't have peace in my soul, what could the problem be? Well, what do these two verses taken together tell us? What does verse 21 and verse 25 taken together tell me if I'm not having peace and a reasonable amount of success? All of us will undergo periods of trial, but there ought to be a synchronicity.

There ought to be satisfaction that, you know, this may be hard, but I know I'm where God wants me to be doing what God wants me to do. My circumstantial life has meaning

and purpose and definition. Doesn't mean it's going to be easy in a bed of roses, but I can see the traction here.

I can see that I am fulfilling a place in God's machinery, the fabric of God's plan here. I occupy a place, and it makes a difference that I'm here being faithful. God is blessing that, and I have that sense of centered peace and satisfaction in my own soul.

I'm not raging against the machine. I'm not shaking my fist at God, and if those things are not the case, if I don't have peace, and if my circumstances seem to keep unraveling, and I don't find a sense of purpose and meaning in my physical life, what could the problem be? Well, what do these verses tell us? Verse 21 says, evil pursues sinners. So here's a helpful clue.

Maybe I need to examine my life and see if I am unwittingly leaving sin in the camp. Remember when Israel couldn't get a victory because there was sin in the camp? Achan had taken of the Korban things and buried them in his tent. He was concealing evil.

There was sin in the camp, and so if I don't seem to be experiencing blessing and a sense of contentment, one thing I can do is maybe I haven't taken a good close look at myself, and there's some sin I've got to purge out. Purge out the old leaven. Touch not the unclean thing.

Hate the garments spotted by the flesh. Maybe I've become inured, and I'm tolerating sin in my life. Evil pursues sinners.

If I feel like evil is pursuing me, I need to make sure I'm not a sinner. This is a pretty helpful clue. Once you see it, it's kind of an obviosity, but this is what the Word of God does.

It points out what we need to hear, and if I have humility, if I am seeking to walk in wisdom, I will listen to the testimony of Scripture and say, if evil is nipping at my heels, I need to be sure that this verse doesn't apply to me, that evil is pursuing me because there's sin in the camp, my camp, my heart, my practice, and if I will go before the Lord and say, search me, O Lord, and try my heart. Try me and see if there's any wicked way in me. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.

Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Do the Psalm 51 thing. I like Psalm 51 way better than 1 John 1 9. There's a tradition for a long time.

Everybody said, well, 1 John 1 9, confess your sins. Now, go read Psalm 51. There's your proper heart of contrition and confession and the proper attitude to receive grace and cleansing and forgiveness from God.

Psalm 51 is your rebound verse. That's your rebound chapter. That's your fix it and let's get back on the productive side.

Let's walk in wisdom with those who are wise and not be tearing down our own house by glibly forgetting to check. To the righteous, good shall be repaid. It's a promise of God.

I will find good in the land. I will find my efforts being rewarded. I will find satisfaction and contentment at the end of the day.

Those good things and those wise things that I am pursuing, the time I spend thinking about the Word of God, the time I spend in conversation with fellow believers who are also pursuing wisdom and righteousness by faith, there's going to be blessing there. There's going to be feedback there. There's going to be positive upbuilding.

The woman who builds her house, I'm going to find that I've got building materials, and when I stick them together, they stay. It's cause and effect. It's the way the divine economy works.

So the righteous will eat to the satisfying of his soul. You will study your Bible. You'll go over your notes.

You'll think about the content that we find in the Word of God in Bible class or in conversation or wherever it may come from. This is by no means the only source, but that spiritual meal will satisfy. You'll say, ah, that's it.

That's what I needed. I am comforted. I am encouraged.

The fruit of the Spirit is starting to grow in my soul garden. That seed planted in the soil is bearing fruit, and I feel the 30-fold. I'm getting the 60-fold.

The 100-fold is coming up. The righteous eats to the satisfying of his soul, but the stomach of the wicked shall be in want. If we lack contentment as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, as body of Christ, as his representatives on this earth, if we find our stomach is full of wind instead of full of the satisfaction of being in the center of God's will and plan and purpose, fix it.

And this is where to look. This is how to know. It doesn't get any more practical than this.

And look at how the symmetry in Proverbs brings these ideas together and makes them flame and live. This is the hammer that breaks the rocks in pieces. This right here.

You can visit this every day and then move into analysis and after action, you know, what kind of a day did I have yesterday? I don't think I really pulled this off. How can I do better next time? Same thing as you move toward the center here. When you get to verse 22, a good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children.

The ongoing blessing of your life will surpass your lifetime. The influence, the example, the words, the light that is reflected, the glory of God that is reflected off our light will benefit those who come after even when we're gone. And all of us know people have lost

people, but their example and their influence matches this verse exactly.

A good, notice man is in italics, a good person. Whoever you are, if you imbibe this wisdom, if you pursue this righteousness, you will leave an inheritance to your children's children, even after you're gone. But the wealth of the center is stored up for the righteous.

Those who are self-seeking, self-centered, those who don't identify and purge out sin. Your stuff is going to be consumed by others. It won't be yours and it won't benefit you.

Your heirs and the signs it's to him who has more will be given to him who has not even what he has will be taken away and given to those bearing the fruit of it. Remember Jesus said this to the Israelites when he, when he brought them the kingdom, the kingdom is going to be taken from you and given to those who will bear its fruit, which turns out to be us. That parallels verse 24.

He who spares his rod hates his son. To try to operate in love and enfold in arms of tolerance and forgiveness and not training, not correcting, not imparting self-discipline and self-control. Spare the rod, you hate your son.

You say, oh no, I love them. That's why I don't, I don't want to be harsh. I don't want to be negative.

If you don't correct him, you hate him. He who loves him disciplines him promptly. This is a part of the heritage, part of the example, self-control, perseverance, sticking with it.

Keeping on, keeping on in the way of wisdom, keeping on, keeping on in identifying and purging out leaven, purging out the old lump, getting rid of sin, touching not the garment and so on. That takes discipline and that example and that personal practice transmits. It becomes an example to others and right at the center, much food in the fallow ground of the poor, but for lack of justice, there is waste.

It isn't about the earth's evaluation of who's wealthy and who's poor. The genuine wealth is in wisdom. It's in recognizing the genuine treasure, the genuine opportunities in this life.

It isn't about material accumulations, material accomplishments. It is all about what happens in our soul. Get wisdom and with all you're getting, get understanding.

Well, that's the kind of structure that we have in this passage. When we come back from the break, we're going to begin in chapter 14, verse 3. And instead of a chiasm, as we had in this previous one, we're going to see the double V. It's quick, it's succinct, it's a perfect symmetry, and it has similar wonderful elements of wisdom for us that we can take with us and think about even when the Bible is not before us. We'll see that when we come back.

