

Proverbs 24-10-23a

Greetings, welcome to Wednesday night at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 23rd of October 2024. It's my alternate birthday.

This is a day where God could have taken me home and chose not to do so many years ago. And I do always remember with honor the 241 who did not live on that day in Beirut back in 1983. Some of them I knew personally and my thoughts and prayers are with their families on this day.

There are wounds that do not heal with time. And so I am grateful to be here to spend this time in fellowship, in sharing in the blessings that God bestows on us in our times of contact, in particular tonight as we resume our study in the book of Proverbs at chapter 15. The chapter break here is somewhat arbitrary and the passage reaches forward and backward.

There are so many unique and helpful connections in this. If you could see my Bible page, it's more pencil markings than it is ink, but it is very fruitful. We're going to see a bit of a connection to what we saw in the prologue section, the first nine chapters back in chapter one and chapter two in particular, as the attention turns here in this section to wisdom and knowledge and its role.

Does it come out in speech? What is its effect on the heart? What does God think when He reviews the evil and the good? Much to cover. It is very helpful in terms of moving forward in our situations, negotiating our circumstances and so on. So let's ask God's blessing on fellowship and study and we'll begin.

Father, it is truly an awe-inspiring privilege to come before you to address you directly, not only as the creator of the entire universe, the maker of all people, the King of glory, but also our Heavenly Father and the one who sent to us the Lord Jesus Christ to be our Savior, to place us inside in a way that makes us unique in history, gives us so many opportunities and potentials. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together, that the Holy Spirit will minister it to our hearts, help us to understand it and return it to our conscious mind as we travel through our day, as we speak, as we think, as we act, that we will be conditioned and defined by the truth of your word in a way that reflects integrity, that reflects wisdom, that reflects the fruit of the Spirit. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. I want to back up and read our section beginning in verse 33 of chapter 14. And we have a beautiful section here that is very tightly woven.

There are like a beautiful tapestry. There are themes that emerge and then disappear for a moment and then re-emerge and then disappear and re-emerge. And they draw this section of Proverbs together into a unit where every verse has its place.

Every concept connects and relates to similar and other expressions from a different perspective that make it three-dimensional for our understanding. So we begin in verse 33. Wisdom rests in the heart of him who has understanding, but what is in the heart of the fools is made known.

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. The king's favor is toward a wise servant, but his wrath is against him who causes shame. So beginning here, and as we move forward, you'll remember these other Proverbs, but rather than reading them, we'll take them as they come.

But this section is an introduction and it places what follows in a context that goes beyond just, well, I was talking to Bob the other day, I was talking to Joe the other day, my individual interactions, are they pleasing in God's sight or not? As important as that is, this sets the stage for what follows by talking about the impact on a nation. And as we're within two weeks of the national election, and there is so much hue and cry about what is the future of our democracy, et cetera, it is important to recognize that the Bible itself talks about being salt and light, and that our presence, like the 10 righteous who hypothetically could be in Sodom, are enough for God to decide the fate of an entire nation in a different way. Judgment can be withheld or staved off for a time for the sake of the righteous.

We've seen this in the New Testament, looking at Paul's epistles, talking about where, be not unequally yoked with unbelievers, but if someone comes to faith and they are intimately connected to someone who doesn't also come to faith and you're able to live in peace and move forward, if the unbeliever or the faithless does not want to depart and does not choose to depart, how do you move forward? God will bless the entire household for the sake of the one individual who is faithful, who is obedient, who has God's word. That is genuine blessing by association. God will bless those who are in the periphery of a faithful believer.

This is helpful to remember because there are times in all of our lives where we are more or less incapacitated when it comes to good works. I remember my grandmother, my dad's mother, was a wonderful blessing to so many people. She had lost her husband years earlier, but she was able to travel.

She was able to see needs and provide for them. She would endeavor to lift up and she had grandchildren in the area that were close to her and she provided a great example. As is the case with all of us, as she aged, those wonderful, really exceptional abilities and gifts that she had inevitably shrunk in their application to the point where she was the one that needed to be cared for.

One of the things that she and I talked about from time to time is remember the concept of blessing by association. Just the fact that you are here and because you are a faithful believer and you love God's word. She would listen to Jay Vernon McGee every day.

She had him on the radio. She had her Bible. I've got her Bible and the pages are as dark with notes as mine is and she wasn't a pastor.

But just her presence and God continuing to comfort and bless her in her final years. You don't know the kind of blessing that God is expanding and extending just by the presence of a faithful believer. So wisdom rests and this in verse 33 really means come to rest.

It is like a dove landing on a branch. Wisdom comes to rest and it rests there because it is a place where it feels comfortable, not threatened at home. And so the heart of him who has understanding is a place where wisdom likes to be.

Wisdom will alight. Wisdom will perch. Wisdom will grant its blessing by association because it finds itself at home in an understanding heart.

So this would make us think I want an understanding heart so that the dove of wisdom will come and alight there and shower me with blessing, benefit, guidance, and I'll be pleasing in God's sight. We want a heart that is pleasing before the Lord. Man looks on the outward appearance.

The Lord looks on the heart. The word of God is a judge of the thoughts and intents of the heart. So I want there to be wisdom.

I want it to be an understanding heart. So the question is, and this is my constant question. If I could only ask one question, you can carve it on my tombstone after I'm gone.

Okay, but how? That's my question. Here are these lofty goals, worthy aims, divine purposes. Okay, but how? How do I make this happen? I need the steps.

I need the guidance to make it happen. Well, hopefully we have already seen that in Proverbs. So if you will flip a few pages back to Proverbs chapter four.

Remember now, what's our goal? I want wisdom to come to rest in my heart. Everything is going to flow out of that. There's going to be wonderful blessing when this wisdom is operative and at home and speaks and I listen.

So I've got to have an understanding heart for it to come and rest there. So I want to know, how do I get an understanding heart? Is this just, you know, some people have a quick grasp of mathematics. Other people have an instinctive understanding of grammar and syntax.

They just speak beautifully without even having to think about it. They write. I know people, there are people in my family that when they write, it's just a work of art.

It would take me hours to create the kind of letters that I get from some. And I think,

what a gift. You just flow, you say the right thing with the right note.

It's just a beautiful thing. Well, this is not how understanding comes. It isn't a genetically bestowed or experientially manifested thing.

We have to get it. So how do we get it? Well, look at Proverbs chapter four, and I'm just going to give the original here in the new King James. We've modified a bit of this, but here are my children, the instruction of a father.

If you were going to pick a father to hear instruction from, you want the one that's capital F, right? You want our heavenly father. So this is instruction from our heavenly father. So pay attention.

This is the instruction of the father in heaven. Give attention if you want to know understanding. So if you look at this in the Berean study Bible, the BSB, it says, listen, my sons to a father's instruction, pay attention and gain understanding.

So it's not rocket science to realize that if you are paying attention to what the father says, you're going to gain understanding. Why should we pay attention? Verse two, I give you sound teaching. So the teaching is available.

It is now a matter of, am I going to pay attention and I am, am I going to listen? If I listen and pay attention and to do that, I have to be interested enough to set aside other things, to make it something of a priority. So as with so many worthy things, you have to want it. It isn't just going to fall like a rain.

The rain falls on the just and the unjust, but not wisdom, not good teaching. Good teaching has to be sought out. And when you find it, you listen.

These are the father's teachings. He says, I give you sound teaching. Do not abandon my directive.

The BSB says in the new King James, it says, do not forsake my law. This is what James talks about when he says, be doers of the word and not hearers only you hear it, but it, it doesn't change us in any way or looking into the perfect law of Liberty, like a mirror, but then walking away and straight way, forgetting what it revealed about us. We have to want it.

We have to be seeking. So in order to have an understanding heart, the first requirement is you have to seriously desire it. It doesn't happen accidentally.

It doesn't happen naturally. It happens because we consciously pursue understanding. It isn't automatic.

We pursue it. So we give attention. If we want to gain understanding and we do not forsake it, once we hear it, we want to review it.

We want to think about it again, later, talk about it with a fellow believer, meditate and reflect on circumstances and how there might be an application. Could I be doing something different, something better? Should I refrain from doing something I'm currently engaged in, maybe in a, in a thoughtless way, I haven't really analyzed this habit or this action or this expenditure of time or resources. Maybe I need to give that a second look in the light of what I have learned.

So do not forsake my law. When I was my father's son, tender, and the only one in the sight of my mother, he also taught me and said to me, let your heart retain my words. I've noticed the older I get, the more I have to make an effort to a conscious effort to retain things used to be.

I could go up to a piano customer's house, their new customer, and their name is on my calendar. And I go up there and hello, Tom. Hello.

You know, fill in your name here. And then later on, when I finished tuning the piano, I could call that name and say, I'm ready. Let's settle up and see if you're happy with the piano.

But now when I am introduced to someone, especially if I don't have it in writing somewhere, I have to say it to myself. I have to review it. I have to revisit it and think about it.

And I use, sometimes I use little mnemonics to, to help me remember it. There's, there's a lady and her name is Betty Ann and it's spelled B-E-T-T-I-A-N-N. And that's kind of unique.

And I was trying to remember her husband's name. Well, it's, it's William. So it's Bill and Betty Ann, Bill and Betty Ann.

And it's, it alliterates, but you have to find little hooks and ways to remember things that are important to you that you need, or that you want to be able to recall without fumbling through and getting your phone out and, oh, hello there. Excuse me, just a second. Betty Ann.

It's the, the moment is lost and the wisdom and the understanding that we need from God, we can't say, excuse me, I know we're in the middle of a discussion, but I need to go look at my notes from Bible class a week ago, Sunday and review that. And I'll be right back. It needs to be circulating in our minds.

So when I was my father's son and he was teaching me, I was the only one in the sight of my mother. He taught me and said to me, let your heart retain my words, keep them, guard them, keep them at the forefront, revisit them. Think about them before you get started so that they're fresh and you don't have to run back and look them up, retain them, keep them and live, keep them and live.

This is life worth living when it is conditioned, flavored, seasoned with the word of God, get wisdom, get understanding. Isn't this the subject in our chapter 14, wisdom rests in the heart of him who has understanding wisdom is at home. The two go together.

So it's, did you ever think about a little sayings that you learned as a child or concepts in the pledge of allegiance or any other thing that you might've said by rote. And it wasn't until much later when you were adult and you kind of went through and thought, Oh, I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands. It wasn't until I was a lot older that I thought my way through what that actually means.

I am pledging loyalty to the Republic that the flag represents and stands for. And I understand that Republic to be one nation under God, that despite the fact that it's made of 50 States or 49 States, a Commonwealth and a couple of territories, that it's indivisible. We're not going to have another round of secession and a goal, the purpose, and the reason for being of that nation, that country, that Republic is to protect and provide liberty and justice, freedom and justice.

When you think your way through the pledge, it's a very well-written ideal. It's a good, healthy kind of patriotism. It's not nationalism.

It isn't, you know, let's scorch the rest of the earth so that we can be number one. It's the reason that God has made nations. Ideally, when you look at the New Testament, pray for those that have the rule over you, pray for Kings and all those in authority that we may lead a peaceable and quiet life, that it will give us an environment where we can pursue our life before God.

So here, get wisdom, get understanding, do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do you notice that there is a return over and over again? You need to listen to this. You need to apprehend it and you need to hang on to it.

You need to review it. You need to recycle it. You need to refresh it.

Don't stray from it. Don't abandon it. Don't turn away from it.

Do not forsake my law. Give attention to it. Do not forsake her, verse six, and she will preserve you.

This is this doctrine, this understanding, this wisdom personified. Do not forsake her. She will preserve you.

Love her and she will keep you. You keep my words, retain my words, and they will protect you. To the extent that you value God's wisdom, God's wisdom is going to guarantee profit, fruit, production, approval from God.

So verse seven, Proverbs 4.7, wisdom is the principal thing. Wisdom is the important thing. Therefore, get wisdom and in all you're getting, get understanding.

Exalt her, she will exalt you. She will bring you honor when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace, a crown of glory she will deliver to you.

So back to Proverbs chapter 14, wisdom comes to rest in the heart of the one who has understanding. The one who takes Proverbs chapter four, verses one through nine, seriously. And you can continue on in chapter four.

My son, I've taught you in the way of wisdom. I've led you in right paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hindered and so on.

That whole chapter is a beautiful, poetic summary of the benefits and the blessings that come with wisdom and with the wisdom understanding. It's one thing to know an aphorism, a stitch in time saves nine, one in the hand is worth two in the bush. But do you know what that means? Can you put it into application? If I will do preventative maintenance now that seems relatively small, it will save me a big repair bill later.

That's a stitch in time saves nine. When a seam is starting to come undone, it only takes one stitch and you're back to full integrity. If you don't put that stitch in in time, nine of them are going to unravel.

Now you've got a much bigger project. So it's one thing to rattle off. Well, tell me an aphorism, stitch in time saves nine.

You know it, but do you have understanding? Can you turn the corner into application with it and not just conceptually, but practically say, you know, that little task, if I don't take care of that, it's going to get worse. If I don't change my air filter, if I don't change my oil, my car is going to seriously decline much better to do a little thing now than have to repair a big thing later. So that's wisdom is the content.

Understanding is how to wind it up and make it go. That's how this section really begins in verse 33. And then it widens out to say the blessing by association.

This is not just beneficial for us in our individual life, but we will have an effect. This is the salt and light effect. You put a little salt in a pot, everything gets salty.

You put a little leaven in a lump, the whole lump will get leavened. You shine a light in a dark place and pretty soon it's bouncing around and you can see objects in the entire room. Can you imagine if the beam of a flashlight only revealed what's the end of the beam and everything else was pitch black? If you've noticed when you turn on a flashlight in a dark room, the light that initially hits bounces off and reflects off of other things.

And especially if your eyes are adjusted, a single beam lights up far more of the room than just the direction of those little photons. And it has an effect, it spreads, it illuminates far beyond where it is aimed. And the same thing is true of our wisdom.

So righteousness exalts a nation, a nation that is friendly to righteousness, that provides the freedom for people to practice righteousness and to pursue righteousness. And righteousness is defined by wisdom. And the practical application of wisdom is this understanding, this knowledge.

This is the practice of good principles. So when righteousness is free to be expressed in a nation, that nation is exalted. We saw in chapter four of Proverbs, if you exalt wisdom, she will promote you.

She will bring you honor when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace, a crown of glory she will give you in verse eight and nine of that chapter. And not just you, but the presence of a sufficient number of people who are of that kind in that category exalts and lifts up an entire nation.

God will bless the nation for the sake of his own who reside there. Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. And whether a nation chooses to embrace and be a home for righteousness depends on its leadership.

So in verse 35, the King's favor is toward a wise servant, but his wrath is against him who causes shame. This is an earthly King who is reflecting the values and the policies of the heavenly King, our heavenly father, and good government will favor a wise servant. The wise servant goes back to 33, the wisdom that rests in the heart of one who has understanding.

Even if he's a servant, he's going to be honored by the King because he's practicing that wisdom. And whatever our assignment in life, seemingly great, seemingly small, significant, or apparently insignificant, God is the one who figures out what is important. And many times we are unaware that what he is doing is very important.

We're not in a position to understand his purposes. His ways are higher than our ways. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

And for us to look at a situation and say, well, you know, this just really isn't important. I'm not in a position to do much, to be much, to affect much, um, is to greatly underestimate what our heavenly father is up to and what the King decides is wise service. And if we are wise in whatever capacity, the King is going to favor and the King who favors wise servants is a part of the process by which an entire nation, blessing by association, it is all lifted up because God honors those who honor him.

But just as sin is a reproach to any people, the wrath of the King will be against him who engages in that, which is shameful, causes shame, detracts. Remember when Paul tells

the Galatians, you're an enemy of the cross. You've, you've departed from the way you've fallen from grace.

How can you were running? Well, who tripped you? Just keep running. Just keep doing what you've been doing. And they failed.

And the wrath of the King will be against him who causes shame. So this is sort of the threshold. This is the momentum that leads us into chapter 15.

A soft answer turns away wrath. A harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness.

There are symmetries inside symmetries here. I'm, I have diagrammed them out in my Bible. And rather than overload you, I'm just going to point out where these threads emerge.

The reason I know where they emerge is there are actually intervals and there are chiasms and, and so on, but rather than, than bogged down in trying to enumerate those, let me just give you the fruit of observing them. I think it will be easier. So notice, and you can't help, but see this.

And I will just say that, that this is the encapsulation verse one is symmetrical with verse 18 and everything in those first 18 verses is woven together and interrelates. There's, there are no isolated verses in here. They all tie to one another, but just take a look at this one.

This is easy. Look at verse one, soft answer turns away, wrath, grievous word stir up anger. And now look at verse 18, a wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention, suppresses.

If you allay fears, you put them to rest, right? You, you turn away. We most often see the word allay in the modern day talking about fears. The president's spokesperson got up and, and assured us all that there's plenty of security and they, he was allaying their fears, diminishing them, putting them to rest.

So look at one and 18 together, a soft answer turns away, wrath, harsh words, grievous words, stir up anger. A wrathful man stirs up strife. Notice that these are complimentary ideas.

It's not just a restatement of the same thing. How can you have a soft answer? If you're a wrathful man, grievous words, stir up anger, a wrathful man stirs up strife. So where do these grievous words come from? If I constantly find myself saying words come back, I spoke in haste.

I, I, I was impulsive. I got momentarily angry. I had a flash of, uh, impatience or

whatever.

And I've said a thing. Well, we say, I've got to do better with my words. That's not what Proverbs says.

Look at verse 18. It's a wrathful man that stirs up strife. So if grievous words are stirring up anger, do you see the stir up and stir up verse 18 and verse one, both of them use the same verb stir up and strife is usually verbal.

People don't just typically walk up and smack somebody. Although you've got some people on video in big cities that are doing that now. And they're crazy people.

Normally we converse, we get angry. Then we hit each other. These people just walking out, see a complete stranger, decide that they're in some category they don't like, and they'll just punch them.

It's, it's bizarre. It's a sign of the end, but a wrathful man stirs up strife. A harsh word stirs up anger in verse one.

So these harsh words come from a wrathful man. And he's like that tongue that is set on fire by the flames of hell that James talks about. And wrath is contagious.

Wrath is like the gangrene we've seen in second Timothy, where striving to no purpose, arguing to no profit to the ruin of the hearers. This addresses that same idea. So if I'm having difficulty with some of my conversations, not ending well and leaving bitterness and so on, rather than say, I've got to find a way to speak more smoothly, I have to find a more expressive way to denote my disagreement.

We need to look at the heart. To be a wrathful man, there is an abiding anger and it's just looking for an exit. It's looking for a way to come out and it will find a way out when we least expect it.

So in order to be able to deliver a soft answer and diminish wrath and allay contention, I've got to get the anger problem out of me. And we can be angry about all kinds of things. We can be angry with ourselves.

We can be angry with circumstances, angry with people. We can be shaking our fist at the machine or politics or whatever it may be. But those things that feed dissatisfaction, that stoke fears, that breed insecurities that result in anger, when any time we feel insecure or unsure, the human antidote, the natural instinctive reaction is anger.

It brings up the fight or flight thing. And when we're tempted to want to flee, many times we'll just have a flash of anger to just push everything out of the way. I don't like feeling this way, so I'm going to lash out.

So the things in this passage tie together. And it's so helpful to put the ones that address

a similar concept together. And we get this in by looking at the words, that which is stirred up, that which allays or turns away wrath.

And actually verse one and verse two of chapter 15 are a set. We've often noted that these two line proverbial expressions are set alone in many cases. A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold and pictures of silver.

It's just two lines and we call it a dish stick, a two line thing. But sometimes they are four lines. Sometimes they're even eight lines in various places in Proverbs.

And I'm not a big one for formal criticism. Here's the form. This is an antithetical.

This is a synthetic. We don't need to know all that. I'm more interested in understanding because of that form, what does it say? But part of that is not only is there a correspondence with verse 18, but verse one and verse two are tied together.

They have the same structure. So the tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness. And these verses are a four line section.

So the soft answer that turns away wrath, this is being delivered by the tongue of the wise. So we're back to wisdom resting in our hearts because we have understanding. Understanding is seeing the difference between a cause and effect, between a symptom and a root problem.

So understanding tells us if I'm having trouble in conversations, conversations don't end well, they go badly. And I think I've got to find a better way to converse. This section in Proverbs says that the tongue of the wise is the one that can deliver this soft answer.

So it isn't I'm going to curate my vocabulary. I'm going to cultivate a wise heart. I want wisdom to come to rest in my heart.

That is going to fix my conversation problem. That is going to fix me hurting people's feelings or getting my own feelings hurt in conversation because my wise heart guided by understanding will automatically fix my speech. The tongue is operated by the heart.

So if we want improvement, we have to know not to simply address symptoms. This is when we get sick and you have a sniffle, you have a fever, we go, we take something to bring our fever down and we take an antihistamine or decongestant to fix the sniffle. The cold is still there.

The virus is multiplying all over the place. We haven't done anything to suppress the virus. If anything, we've created an environment where it can be even more prolific.

And sometimes in our efforts to address symptoms, we make the root problem worse. And ideally, we will find something that will slow down or stop the replication of the virus. That will fix the sniffle and the fever because the virus is causing it.

And sometimes our colds and our flus last a lot longer than they should because we muffle the symptoms and then we don't rest. We don't do the things that will actually get us over the problem. So this is so helpful.

And it is structured in this way to tell us if you want to fix problems with the tongue, if you want to have the tongue of the wise that uses knowledge rightly, you have to have wisdom resting in your heart. And that happens by gaining understanding. And then I go back to Proverbs chapter four to understand understanding and to be wise about wisdom.

And I go to the source. Why? God's word is alive and powerful. The wisdom that we gain has power.

This is a fully charged battery. And accessing that power, having it reside in our hearts, we're no longer making flesh our strength, which is a curse. If I try to curb my tongue, if I try to be patient when I'm really simmering inside, then I'm trying to hide my disappointment or my disgust or my dissatisfaction with things.

I know about this because of personal experience. It never works. All you do is keep the pressure gets a little bit higher.

And then when it blows off, it's even worse. We need the power of God to defuse things on the inside. God's power changes hearts, not our willpower, not our desire, not our wishful thinking, only the power of God.

So to soak our hearts in the word of wisdom, the words from the father, this puts divine power in us and God's power does the work. I find that I have a heart that is peaceful. I find that I have a tongue that delivers a soft answer that defuses wrath and anger and bitterness and division because it is God who is doing it.

And it is God's glory that is reflected. We don't say, boy, that's Sam. He's just the most patient man in the world.

That will never be said. But to the extent that there is patience and there is wisdom and there is blessing in contact and in conversation, we know it's God's power. It is God's work, and therefore it is God's glory that is reflected.

This is why human solutions, counseling and different kinds of therapies, at best, even if they achieve a result, well, glory be to the therapy. Hooray for the counselor. That has no eternal value, even when it seems to be effective.

The only things that count, the only thing that matters is what partakes of God and reflects his glory. That's what goes into the future. So these correspondences make a difference.

So put verse one with verse two, that soft answer turning away wrath is coming from the tongue of the wise that knows how to use knowledge correctly. The mouth of fools pours forth foolishness and harsh words are foolish. You're not going to get anywhere with harsh words apart from God's wisdom.

Then you have the eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good. We'll pick up here when we come back from the break, but we're about to see in the second session that there are echoes and threads that string these beads together in an orderly and a beautiful fashion that is very practical, just as we've seen in this first set of five verses. So we'll pick that up when we come back from the break.