

Proverbs 24-10-30b

We're ready now to resume our study here in Proverbs chapter 15. And if you have your trusty number two pencil, I have my pencil from marines.com here. Sometimes I have my Navy pencil.

This is my marines.com pencil. But just for purposes, if you come back to Proverbs at some future point and you want to have a clue on how to helpfully connect this beautiful interwoven tapestry of biblical teaching and sound divine viewpoint, one thing you can do is notice where things link together. We've seen chiasms, we've seen symmetries, we've seen concepts at the center that are surrounded by corresponding shells.

In chapter 15, we tend to have doublets and triplets, is what I would call them. A doublet is simply two verses that in the same way that you have these two line Proverbs and one can fill out the other, one can contrast with the other, one can make an advance on another. They have names for all of these, which I don't want to go into.

I don't like description so much as understanding a thing. So we saw, for example, just picking up in verse eight and nine, this is what I have marked as a doublet. I've just got a pencil bracket in the margin that links verse eight and verse nine together.

And in the margin, I have written the abomination doublet because these two verses are linked and you can see it very clearly. But it's helpful when you return to this page sometime in the future, you say, oh, I remember when we were going through Proverbs, there were so many fascinating insights and comparisons by looking at this in its larger context. Remember in verse eight, the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.

And then in verse nine, the way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. So the sacrifice, this is what someone does attempting to please God. They're bringing a sacrifice, but it's like Cain bringing his tossed salad instead of the blood sacrifice that Abel offers.

And so these are designed to be looked at together. They are linked by the word abomination, the phrase abomination to the Lord. So it's pretty straightforward.

This isn't really rocket science, but it's so helpful if you come back to this, just put a little bracket out to the side and say, here is a doublet. This is a two verse chunk that is designed to be looked at together. Compare, contrast.

What's the difference in the sacrifice, which is someone trying to approach God on their own terms. And there are many examples of this in scripture. Remember the king that decided he would go in and be his own priest, then he was struck with leprosy in his forehead for doing so because he violated God's way and God's command and God's

rules.

Same thing here. So eight and nine are what I call the abomination doublet. We have just seen this triplet, which is verse 10, 11, and 12.

And I would call this the Lord's correction triplet. The Lord is mentioned in the center. There is discipline and there's correction in view.

What is your reaction or your response to this harsh discipline? A scoffer does not love the one who corrects him. The one who corrects him is the Lord. This triplet informs all of its parts when it is taken together.

So verse 10, 11, and 12, just put a little bracket out to the side. This is what I call the Lord's correction triplet. What are we gonna do with the Lord's correction? Will we love him even if it's harsh or will we scoff and depart and move away? So now we pick up in verse 13 and this is another triplet.

This is another three verse section that goes together. Let's read it and you watch for the things that connect it. Beginning at verse 13, a merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart, the spirit is broken.

The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness. All the days of the afflicted are evil, but he who is of a merry heart has a continual feast. Now, without a seminary education, without a great amount of investigation of commentaries, do you see anything that links these three verses together? What do you find in all three verses? What do you think? Pop quiz, what do you find in verse 13, verse 14 and verse 15? To give you a clue, look at the first line in 13, the first line in 14 and the last line in 15.

Do you see a common element? Starts with an H and ends with art. It's the heart. I call this the heart triplet.

Above, we had the Lord's correction triplet. This is looking at things from God's perspective. What is your interaction with the Lord in a day of correction, in a time of discipline? Now we're looking at our heart, the human heart.

What kind of heart do I have? So a merry heart makes a cheerful countenance in verse 13, but by sorrow of the heart, the spirit is broken. You remember, we linked this back to verse four. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in the tongue breaks the spirit.

That which emanates from the mouth originates in the heart, doesn't it? This has been a recent accusation for both of our presidential candidates or people closely associated with them. Well, somebody has said a thing, someone closely, neither one of them was the candidate. It's somebody associated with the candidate said a thing that insulted a

group of people.

Are you insulting the people that support the candidate? Are you insulting a group of people that shouldn't be insulted? People throwing out words like garbage or this was at the heart of both of these on each side. Somebody felt like somebody referred to a sensitive group as garbage. And so this is a slip of the tongue or an unfortunate attempt at insult comedy that didn't go well.

I've never been a fan of insult comedy. It isn't very clever. But to take the words of the mouth and say, this is a reflection of what is in the heart of the candidate.

This person who says this is actually expressing a truth about the heart of the person you should or should not vote for. And so everyone recognizes that what escapes the lips and what is spoken verbally, especially if it's caught on a hot mic or it is said by someone who isn't being disciplined and careful, well, this is what they really think of you. They really think you're garbage people group of whatever description.

So you see this link from verse four to verse 13. So should we be cautious? Should we bridle the tongue as James puts it so that we can bring our whole body into subjection? The tongue, the speech, what emanates from the lips and the mouth is the hardest thing. By the way, we're going to see a body part triplet coming up where one verse references the mouth, the next one references the eyes and the next one references the ear.

And that is the link. And it's so clever and it's so memorable the way these are tied together for our benefit, for our memory, for our contemplation, our meditation, our reflection. So here it is the heart and the heart is mentioned four times in three verses, four times.

So it isn't difficult to say, I believe the link here must be the heart. So what does it say? A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart, the spirit is broken. So you say, well, how much control do I have over the level of merriment in my heart? We can't always control whether or not someone persecutes us.

We can't control whether or not someone oppresses us. We can't control what others may say about us or may do with regard to us. I can't control what policies and laws government may pass that have an effect on me that may endeavor to limit me or silence me or prevent me from assembling myself.

When the Bible says forsake not the assembly and the government says, there's a germ forsake the assembly. Are we going to comply? Because the government says something that is in opposition to the word of God. I have to find a way to assemble because that is God's exhortation.

That is God's plan and purpose is that believers associate and spend time together by

whatever means we can. And if I can't assemble in one way, then we'll assemble in another way. We are privileged to be able to assemble in our church without regard to what room are we in? What a day in which we live.

What a wonderful blessing from technology. Technology can be a blessing or a curse. Artificial intelligence can be a blessing or a curse.

Anything, if it is devoted to God, if it is employed skillfully and prayerfully, if it is pursued with a willingness and a desire to please God, can be blessed by God. There are other things that are proscribed that are prohibited by the word of God and there's no way to make those good. There's no way to sanctify them.

There is no way to convert them and to transform them into righteousness when they are intrinsically sinful, they are intrinsically evil. So here, a merry heart has benefits. Here's your question, second pop quiz of the night.

Do you have control over the cheerfulness of your heart? The answer is yes, you do. We choose that upon which we dwell. We can divert our thoughts, our focus.

This is volition. This is will. This is freedom of choice.

We choose what to think about. We choose what we prioritize. We choose what we value.

We choose what we pursue as a goal. Goals, values, and priorities are established by choice. Nobody can tell me what to think about.

There is no such thing as legitimate thought police. You're not allowed to think about that. You must think about this.

The devil himself cannot force me to think about something when God says, think on these things. If God says, think on these things and the peace of God that passes understanding will keep your hearts and minds. If God says, think on these things, whatsoever things are true, honest, noble, lovely, of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things.

It is a command. God doesn't give us commands that we cannot fulfill. So if I have a choice of that which is negative, that which is untrue, that which is dishonorable, that which is ugly, that which is un-virtuous and un-praiseworthy, if I fill my mind with those concepts and those issues and I dwell on them, my heart is not going to be merry.

My heart is not going to be blanketed in God's peace that passes understanding, transcends any peace the world can create or confer. Jesus said, peace, I leave with you. My peace, I give to you, not as the world gives.

How does that peace that passes understanding guard our hearts? We choose what to think about. So when scripture says, a merry heart doeth good like a medicine, when it

says a merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, notice you have control over your mood. You have control over your peace.

You have control over whether your heart is built up or whether your spirit is broken. It is based on your own choices. So if I find that my countenance is fallen, if I find that my spirit is broken, whose fault is that? Don't shift the blame.

Don't look for some circumstance or some issue or some development or some hardship or some affliction or some person to blame. You are deflecting. The word of God corrects us from that.

The word of God is correcting us here if we want to blame someone else or something else for our unhappiness. We are being corrected right here. What are we going to do with that correction? Notice how correction precedes this very difficult truth.

God's correction. We have six lines, three verses, a triplet telling us you need to be prepared for God's correction and your reaction or response to it is gonna make all the difference. Having them prepped with that, we're now getting a piece of correction that applies to all of us.

We are all sloppy about what we choose to think about. We are uncareful about what we choose to dwell on. A merry heart, a cheerful heart, a peaceful heart, a positive heart, an enthusiastic heart makes a cheerful countenance.

It starts in the heart with my choice, my chooser dwells in my heart. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, Jeremiah 17, nine tells us. To fix the heart, I don't go elsewhere.

I've got to make different choices in my heart. So a merry heart makes a cheerful countenance. It will work its way out.

Remember Jesus talked about this from the heart issues that which is good or that which is ill. You are not defiled by what you take in. Even when that that you take in is not material food, it is conceptual, it is the news, it is the conversation, it is the issues and the trending material on social media.

If I take it in, that's not what defiles me. What defiles me is what my heart chooses to dwell on. From the heart issues, that which is good or that which is ill.

And we are judged on the thoughts and intents of our heart. Why? Because we control them and we are responsible for them. If we are excessively sorrowful, if we are trapped in sorrow, if we are controlled by sorrow, that is the result of a choice that we have made.

God has granted us sovereign control over our own heart. And the outcome, what my

countenance turns out to be is a result of my choices. What are we gonna do with this correction? A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart, if I choose to encourage and dwell in, sorrow, it's not going to give me a cheerful countenance, it is going to shatter my spirit.

It's going to break my spiritual life and health. You talk about someone whose health is broken because they were a prison of war or they were ravaged by disease or famine, and well, his health is broken. How much worse that by our own choices, we break our own spirit, we rob ourselves of spiritual strength in Christ.

Again, 2 Timothy 2.1, Timothy, my son, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. That's a heart choice. Be strengthened, it's available.

The power and the grace are waiting. If it doesn't happen, it is a result of a bad choice on my part or a series of bad choices. Cultivate a merry heart.

Whatsoever things are true, honest, noble, lovely, virtuous, praiseworthy, think on these things. This will give us a happy heart. Recognize God is in his heaven.

If God before us, who can be against us? There is nothing that overtakes us, but that which is common to man. God's seen it before. He provides for us.

He will sustain us through it or deliver us out of it. He is in his heaven. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved.

I've never seen the righteous go hungry or his seed beg bread. Do you want to concentrate on the promises of God, on the hope of the resurrection, the hope of the future, the hope of blessing and reward and opportunity in the life that is to come? Or do we want to wallow in what amounts to self-pity? Excessive sorrow. We can grieve with those who grieve.

There's nothing wrong with grief in its time and in its place. The Lord Jesus cried on at least three occasions that are recorded in scripture. But was he defined by grief? Was he trapped in his grief? Did he not look forward? You think about in Hebrews, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame.

He looked ahead to the joy that is coming. We're going to have references to joy coming up before this chapter is finished. We're going to see it in verse 21 and in verse 23, it's going to talk about joy because these concepts are so interwoven.

Joy is a choice. Sorrow, excessive sorrow is a choice. A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart, the spirit is broken.

So what kind of heart is capable of choosing rightly and choosing well and developing a

cheerful countenance? Look at verse 14. The heart of him who has understanding doesn't seek condescension, doesn't seek the pity and the sympathy of others. The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge.

What can I learn in this situation? There's a great gospel song that says, when things are hard, where could I go but to the Lord? Where could I go? I will go to the rock. I will go to the source. I will go avail myself for strength in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

The heart of him who has understanding is going to be a merry heart because he's seeking knowledge. And when we seek, we will find. It's a promise of God.

Lord, why am I in this circumstance? It is pushing me toward the sorrow end of the spectrum. I want to be merry in my heart. I want to be confident and positive and optimistic.

I want others to look at me and say, how can Paul and Silas be singing in the Philippian jail? These guys are singing at the top of their lungs and they've been beaten and they're locked up in chains. How can these guys be joyful? That converted the Philippian jailer and his entire household. What is the source of that joy? How can you possibly be happy and optimistic after the beating and the injustice that you have just endured and are continued to be imprisoned by? There was an earthquake.

God sees, God knows, God presides over hell and destruction, over Sheol and Abaddon. God is near, God is at hand. I don't have to be even depressed by what man can do unto me, much less fear it.

And God honors those who honor him. And God used Paul and his companions in the Philippian jail, their choice to be joyful, to be an encouragement to each other, to sing. They say, later church fathers say that Paul had a squeaky voice.

I can only imagine what it sounded like when he sang. It would be hard for it to be possible, but it could even be worse than my own singing voice. But he doesn't care.

He's making a joyful noise in the midst of hardship and injustice. And because of that joy, he is asked a reason for the hope that is in him. What must I do to be saved? How can I enter into this life of supernatural joy that you obviously have entered into? The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge.

The mouth of fools feeds on foolishness, pastures, grazes, and foolishness will only lead to more foolishness. And I'm going to talk about blame. I'm going to talk about injustice.

I'm going to talk about victimhood. I'm going to talk about, nobody knows the trouble I've seen. I'm going to talk about what I can't escape and what I can't control and what I can't overcome instead of my God and father in heaven who controls all things and has given me the privilege of negotiating this particular difficulty for his glory and my

benefit.

We choose. The mouth of fools isn't going to talk about the positive, uplifting, joyful songs in the night that we can sing. It's going to feed on foolishness.

So that the third part of this triplet, all the days of the afflicted are evil. If you define yourself as afflicted, if you view yourself as a victim of hardship, everybody is afflicted. But if you identify as afflicted, if that's what you wave as a flag and what you wear as a crown, if this is your identity and this is what you feed on and what you talk about, all your days are going to be evil.

You're making them evil. You're defaulting to evil. You're not redeeming the time and investing in eternity and laying up treasure in heaven.

You're not reflecting the glory of God in hardship. You are not Paul and his companions in the prison, singing praises to God in the midst of hardship, and nobody is going to be converted. Nobody is going to be drawn to life and a future in Christ.

By our example, when all we do is focus on affliction and hardship, I'm down and all I want is sympathy. All I want is somebody to be, come down here with me and dwell in the gloom. All the days of the afflicted are evil.

This doesn't really make sense. If you pull verse 15 out and stick it on a card and look at it all by itself, it's just a tautology. All the days of the afflicted are evil.

Well, duh, if you're afflicted, that's an evil day. It doesn't resonate. It doesn't impart divine truth.

It's not helpful, but look at it in its context. This is part of the heart triplet. Why are the days of the afflicted evil? Because your heart choices have broken your spirit and you're cultivating sorrow of heart instead of a merry heart.

He who is of a merry heart, verse 15, you're coming back out. We started in verse 13 with the merry heart. You've got that outside bracket here.

That's why it's the second line and not the first. Remember verse 13 starts with a heart. Verse 14 starts with the heart.

Verse 15 ends with the heart. And it's identical to how verse 13 starts. A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance.

The days of the afflicted are evil, but he who is of a merry heart, it's a continual feast. It doesn't matter what the circumstances are. Am I a fool grazing in a pasture of foolishness or am I having the continual feast of God's favor and God's blessing and God's promises, God's future, hope in Christ, resurrection, God working this together for good, not just for me, but for the family of the Philippian jailer, Romans dedicated to

oppressing prisoners.

Here's this jailer who is evidently good at his job because he's got the job and look at the potential, look at the blessing by association and what happens to the affliction. Paul and his companions are brought out of the prison. They've already been freed by God's power.

And the jailer who inflicted those wounds is now dressing those wounds and asking questions and learning. Can you imagine? How would you like to have the apostle Paul with stripes and wounds and bruises and shackle marks on him and he's here and you have the privilege of comforting and soothing and dressing the wounds of God's faithful apostle who understood so much of the word of God. You can ask him questions.

You can learn from the man who has information from the third heaven, who the Lord Jesus himself has shared great truths with and you can talk to him. You're in the same room with him. You're providing comfort and encouragement and blessing regardless of what happened in the past.

This is the opportunity. This is what cultivating a merry heart lines us up for. Sing in the night, choose to dwell on the positive, on the promises, the principles and the power of God.

It's a choice. If we choose to be the afflicted, our days are gonna be evil and it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. I told you it was a bad day and look how it's turning out.

You're feeding on foolishness. He who is of a merry heart has a continual feast. I don't know about you, I'm ready for the continual feast.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup runneth over. In the presence of my enemies, I've got a feast.

They are designing harm, they're planning oppression. They're looking for victory and conquest and turning me into a victim. They want to afflict me, but God sets the table right in front of them.

He anoints my head with oil. He fills my cup so that it overflows and that which overflows the table blesses even the little dogs, the crumbs that fall from the table. The Gentile woman says, can't we be blessed by those? Jesus says, woman, great faith.

How many times did Jesus say, be it to you according to your faith. Your faith has saved you. Come to the Lord Jesus, look for blessing, look for relief, look for opportunity.

That prayer is never answered with a no. When we go to our father and ask for food, we don't get a rock, we don't get a snake and we don't get a scorpion. We get manna from heaven.

What more could you hope for? So this is the heart triplet, I call it. A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance. And in verse 15, he who is of a merry heart has a continual feast.

Why do I have a merry heart? It wasn't an accident, it was a choice. Something to think about. We're going to pick up now next time in verse 16 and we're going to have two doublets.

Look at it real quickly. You can be looking at this, see how much you can figure out as you look at verse 16 and 17. Do you see that these are linked together? Look at verse 16, better is, and then you have stuff.

Verse 17, better is, and then you have stuff. Do you think these two verses are designed to be taken together? It's pretty straightforward. We're going to have the angry lazy doublet coming up after that.

Look at verse 18, a wrathful man in verse 18. Verse 19, the lazy man. You got the angry man and the lazy man.

And how often do laziness and anger go hand in hand? This is a subtle but effective observation that the lazy are often angry. And so you have the way of the lazy and you have the way of the wrathful man. What does the wrathful man, what is the consequence? He's going to stir up strife.

The way of lazy is like a hedge of thorns, but the way of the upright. See how there's a way in verse 19, and there's a way, the way of the lazy man, the way of the upright. You have the one who stirs up strife and the one who allays contention.

These are patterns of life. The way is a pattern of life. Being wrathful, this is not a momentary flash of anger.

This is wrath as a condition. Being slow to anger or wrathful. Do you let anger dominate? Do you get mad when things don't go right? These two go together.

So we'll see this. We're going to have these two triplets that we've just looked at. We're going to see some doublets.

We're going to have a wise and foolish doublet that follow that. Then we're going to have another triplet. We'll see all these as we go forward.

But just look ahead and look at the connections and the interactions between these verses. It is so helpful in understanding. But we're at a good stopping place for tonight.

Let's close here in order of prayer. Father, thank you for granting us as your children instruction, correction, wisdom, insight. And in the hands of your Holy Spirit, these words of truth can transform us, can renew us in our minds and in our hearts.

And we pray that as it says in Romans chapter 12, that we can be transformed by the renewing of our minds. And we can understand your good and acceptable and perfect will for us. We pray for insight and understanding individually.

We pray that our lives can not only be blessed, but be a blessing to those in our periphery. We can be an influence and a factor for good and for drawing others to the light of your glory and relationship with you through our hope, through our confidence, through our positive attitude and our joy. We ask it in Jesus name, amen.