

Proverbs 24-11-06a

Greetings, Grace and Truth Bible Church. It is Wednesday evening, the 6th of November 2024. We continue our study in the book of Proverbs.

We're in chapter 15 and we have seen some simple yet beautiful symmetry here that helps us group some of these proverbial sayings together so that they illuminate and inform each other in a helpful way. So we're going to pick up here at verse 13, 14, and 15, and take a quick review of the heart triplet we saw last time. Proverbs has a lot to say about the heart.

We're going to review what we've seen in these first 15 chapters about the heart just very quickly. Then we're going to move forward into some of the doublets that are ahead of us beginning in verse 16 this evening. It is so helpful because it is so practical.

Our heart is at the heart of our life as well as being the seat of our thinking, our memory, our decisions, our teachability is all centered biblically in the heart. To understand our heart, to see this central group of aphoristic truth about the heart is so practical as we move forward in our lives, as we try to redeem the time, invest our efforts and our thoughts in the plan and purpose of God, prepare ourselves for service and function now and in the future. It all begins and is founded in our hearts.

It's so important to understand how our heart works and what control we have over it. So we'll pick up there this evening. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study and we'll get started.

Father, we are so grateful for another time of fellowship, another opportunity to be encouraged and strengthened by the truth that is in your word. We know that it is manna for our souls. It is the water of life from the river of living water that flows from your throne.

It is central to our appreciation of and love for the Lord Jesus Christ and through him understand you and be drawn closer to you as our heavenly father. We pray that as we look at these portions of your word together this evening, that the Holy Spirit will impress them on our hearts in a meaningful and effective way. Help us to see clearly what it means and how we should then live so that we can reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus and be a means by which that reflected glory draws others to you.

We pray it in Jesus name. Amen. Let's read our passage beginning in verse 12.

This is the heart triplet verse 12, 13 and 14. Each of these in three verses we have four mentions of the heart. So a scoffer, I missed my mark here because I didn't get my glasses on in We'll start in verse 13 and it's verse 13, 14 and 15.

13, 14 and 15. This is our heart triplet. A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but

by sorrow of the heart, the spirit is broken.

We saw last time this is a choice. Whether to have a cheerful heart or a sorrowful heart is up to us. Circumstances cannot control your heart.

Ebullience, elation, and satisfaction at the outcome of any particular circumstance is ephemeral. It is fleeting. It lasts for a moment.

We want our heart's attitude and approach to life to be founded on solid rock, not on the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Even when it is good, even when we want to celebrate. Think of celebrations in the past.

Think of weddings you've been a part of or attended. Think of victories of various kinds across our lives. Think of happy reunions, happy get-togethers, family activities, accomplishments by those that we love and we go and we celebrate.

Remember those. Now think of recent times when there was hardship, maybe in the past, maybe in the present. There is disappointment.

There is regret. There is suffering. There is difficulty.

There's friction. There's pushback. There's loss of opportunity, loss of relationship, loss of things that we were hoping for, wishing for, believing in.

Now try to juxtapose those two. I am in a time of sorrow. I grieve for a close friend or a loved one.

I grieve over the loss of something. I am sobered. I am downcast.

My countenance has fallen. Does going back to the birthday party or the family reunion somehow lift us out of that valley of the shadow? Past hilarious experiences don't typically do much for us when we are trudging through difficulty and tragedy and bereavement and sorrow. Fun times don't have us walk out of the valley of the shadow smiling and chuckling and laughing and, well, yes, I'm bereaved, but, you know, we had such a good time when we went to Six Flags.

It does not build something into our heart. What does stabilize us? What does put a solid foundation under us so that we don't sink too low? There is nothing wrong with weeping. There is nothing wrong with sorrow.

We saw this last time. The Lord Jesus wept. The Lord Jesus was a man of sorrows.

He experienced grief. Jesus wept in John 11, 35. Jesus wept over Jerusalem.

Jesus was disappointed when he cried out, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? But it's like the words of David in the Psalms. You will not leave my soul in Sheol. I will

not spend my indefinite future among shades and in the shadows and in the grip of sorrow.

There is a dawn. There is the rising of the sun with healing in his wings. And while we experience these, there is a threshold below which we do not sink.

There is a hope that cannot be taken from us. There is an expectation that steadies us. And we can sing songs at midnight.

We can sing songs like Paul and his companions did in the Philippian jail. And we can turn our hearts in a positive direction by the grace of God, because of the grace of God, because of the hope that doesn't depend on us. And it doesn't depend on circumstances.

It depends on our heavenly Father, who will never let us down. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved. We may be shaken.

We may be stricken, but we will not be moved. We may stumble and fall, but we will get back up because the strength that raises us is from God. It is in God.

It is always there. And it is always poised and ready to restore us, to renew us, to lift us up. The Lord Jesus Christ went to the grave, but the grave could not hold him.

Death could not entrap him. The power of sin could not limit him. And it doesn't limit us, because we are in him.

And in him, we have been delivered from the power of sin. So, because of that, now happiness is a choice. Again, a season, there is a time to weep, and there is a time to laugh.

But we are not defined by sorrow, just as we are not defined by hilarity and celebration. We should be steady. We can move up, we can move down, but there is an average that is a quiet and permanent joy, that is a confidence, that is an expectation, that is positive and upward looking, and is characterized by light and not darkness.

And that is a choice. By God's grace, it is a choice. We are not pushed and forced into a dark corner.

We choose. That's what this heart triplet is about. A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance.

It starts in the heart. You remember the memory verse, those things that are true and noble and just, that are pure, that are lovely, that are of good report. Think on these things.

Think on these things. That is what gives us a merry heart, because these are positive. God will prevail.

Whatever darkness seems to characterize the moment, we are on the winning side. We are on the side of victory. It's victory in Christ, victory in Jesus.

My uncle Norman, my dad's cousin, we went to church with in Tahlequah for a year and a half. That was his favorite hymn. Anytime he had a say in what we were going to sing on Sunday, I want to sing victory in Jesus.

And there's a reason for it. Believers are optimistic, even in the face of difficulty. So we choose it.

It's a merry heart and it makes a cheerful countenance. But by sorrow of the heart, the spirit is broken. If we let sorrow define us, if we let sorrow overcome us, if we don't choose the positive benefits that God has granted us in Christ, and we don't think on those things, it breaks our spirit.

Keep your finger here and turn over to Proverbs 17, 22. And my Bible is just two pages over. These same two things are mentioned, a merry heart or a broken spirit.

A merry heart does good like medicine. You notice the word like is in italics there. And if you've got your New King James and you look at your text note, it's a good one.

A merry heart makes medicine even better. A merry heart, whatever palliative, whatever is helping, a merry heart makes it better. A little encouragement becomes more encouragement.

A little assistance becomes more assistance. A little relief becomes more relief because a merry heart is ready to enjoy what is in the half full glass and doesn't sit there worrying about, why isn't my glass full? Why isn't my cup running over? I've got half in my glass. That is true and noble and just.

That is pure and lovely and of good report. That's virtuous and praiseworthy. I'm going to think on that.

And a merry heart makes that which is helping even more helpful. It magnifies it. It gives it an exponential benefit, but a broken spirit dries the bones.

A merry heart is key to not having a broken spirit. If we let sorrow dominate, sorrow of the heart breaks the spirit and a broken spirit dries the bones. So in the same way that your cheerful heart improves and multiplies what is positive in your life, the medicine, sorrow breaking the spirit amplifies what's wrong.

Now you've got a sorrowful heart and now your bones are starting to dry. And what do you know about dry bones? Them bones and bones and dry bones. Look at Israel with their lack of hope and lack of expectation as a nation or as a people.

They are given the promise of a Messiah. He is going to return. He is going to fulfill the

kingdom promises, but they are pictured in Ezekiel as a valley of dead, dry bones.

What is the fundamental defining characteristic of Ezekiel's valley of dry bones? There is no breath and no life, no flesh, no utility whatsoever. It's death valley days with a cow skull sticking out of the sand. It's completely without effect, without use, without benefit.

It requires the power of God to come in and cover these bones with sinew and with flesh. And it takes a further act of God to breathe life into that valley of inanimate bodies. Reminds you very much of the way God created Adam.

He formed his body out of the dust of the ground. Then he breathed into his nostrils the breath. Two-part process.

I would not want to club Ezekiel in the head after he prophesies and the bones are covered with flesh and sinew, but before he can pray for God to breathe the life into them. Would you want to interrupt that process? Would you want to interrupt God? He's made the body of Adam and he's bending over to breathe into his nostrils and you come and kick the dust apart and chop up the body before it can be brought alive. Believers need to give long, serious thought to any notion of support for interrupting the process by which God builds a body and then breathes into its nostrils, its breath.

I don't believe it is proper to interrupt that at any stage and there are reasons for it that are biblical. In particular, there seems to be a mental disconnect between what people are willing to do to a baby when it's inside the mother and a baby that is lying in the crib. If you think that rape, incest, and other things should be paid for with the life of a child, then why don't you do it in the crib? Why don't you run their stroller out in front of a bus? Because this child shouldn't be here, because it's a product of rape or incest.

If you wouldn't do it after birth, why would you do it before birth and justify saying, well, it's just too psychologically problematic for someone to bring this child into the world? There ought to be a better way, but biblically speaking, you never see God allowing someone to interrupt His creative process. It didn't happen in the garden. The serpent didn't come slithering through and God had to try three or four times before he could manage to get the breath in.

Something kept messing up the bodies. It doesn't happen in the require God's life. To avoid sorrow, breaking our spirit, resulting in dead, dry bones in our life, we have to choose the grace of God.

We have to choose the mercy of God so that there is breath and life and we neither have a broken spirit nor do we have a useless, lifeless body. So 1722, very important. I have it written in the margin next to 1513.

Merry heart, broken spirit. Then in the center of this triplet, you have the heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness.

We saw this.

Again, this is a choice. Get wisdom and with all you're getting, get understanding. That's a choice, or it wouldn't be an exhortation.

We're exhorted because we can. It's possible. It's doable.

Get wisdom. And when you get it, that means if there's a Bible class that makes the word of God understandable wherever it is, hopefully it's here, but anywhere. If you find someone that writes great books or has great videos or great materials of whatever kind that open up the word of truth and make it understandable and applicable, make it breathe and live, break the rocks in pieces in our souls, plow it deep and plant seed that bears fruit, wherever you can find it, get wisdom.

There are many, many wonderful sources. I avail myself of them all the time. We stand as beneficiaries of so much wonderful self-sacrificial work in digging into the word of God and making it understandable.

And all of us benefit from others who have gone before us and have done the work. And the spirit bears witness with our spirit. When we find that good teaching and that accurate understanding, digging the gems out of the word, washing them off, holding them up in the light so that their glory and their beauty is revealed.

That's what it seems like to me. When I find an insight, when I recognize a truth in scripture, it's like gems in the sunlight. It just is so gratifying.

And it just puts us down on our knees to praise our father in heaven and his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, for giving us access to these eternal truths and wherever you can get them, but with them, get understanding. The wisdom, you can see it, you can appreciate it, you can understand it and grasp it. You can assent to it and affirm it.

But understanding means, how should I then live? What am I going to do with this? Where can I change my priorities? Where can I invest my time better? How can I implement these truths in my life? I go to God and ask for insight, not just to understand the scripture, but to understand where it can change me, transform me by the renewing of my mind, be a critic of the thoughts and intents of my heart and make me different. If God can make me, he can make me different. And if I've got areas of weakness, if I have areas of failure, I am going to choose the merry heart.

I'm going to choose the upward way. I'm going to choose the narrow road. I'm going to choose the straight gate.

And I'm going to go to my father and say, Lord, God in heaven, mold me and make me after thy will. Remember, there's a hymn. It's always an invitational hymn in churches I grew up in.

Have thine own way, Lord. Thou art the potter. I am the clay.

Mold me and make me after thy will. While I am waiting, peaceful and still. I think we do more than watch and wait.

I think we seek. We do the Proverbs chapter two thing. We lift up our voice.

We cry out. We incline our ear. We apply our heart.

We seek it as silver and search for it as for hid treasures. That's when God can mold us and make us. That's when God can transform us and turn us into not just a human creation, but a spiritual creation.

If any man be in Christ, he's a new creation. But it starts in the heart. It starts in the spirit.

That's why this focus on the heart here in Proverbs 15 is so important because it challenges us. What are you going to do? You've heard the word. It is clear as crystal.

Choose. Choose you this day, Joshua said. Who are you going to serve? I'll tell you what me and my house are going to do.

We're going to serve the Lord. Merry heart, cheerful countenance, sorrow of the heart. If you get broken down by circumstances, you will be broken down in your spirit.

The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge. You get knowledge and you get understanding. If you have understanding, you go back and look for more knowledge, more wisdom.

And it is a cycle. This is one of the few real perpetual motion machines in the universe. Perpetual motion, you would like for something to just keep on turning without having to add energy from the outside.

Here, if you have understanding, you recognize how important it is to have knowledge of God's word. And knowledge of God's word drives us to get understanding of what we know. And it is cyclical.

Knowledge, wisdom, understanding. Understanding drives us to get more knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge and wisdom drives us for understanding.

Learn and apply. Learn and apply. Get it.

Use it. Acquire it. Implement it.

That's our lives. And it's right here in the heart of this chapter. What does the mouth of fools do? Notice it isn't about the heart and it isn't about the spirit.

It isn't about understanding. It's about talk. Talking a great fight.

We're going to continue to aspire. We're going to strive. We're going to do this and we're going to do that.

People can talk about idealistic goals. The proof is whether it happens. You can paint castles in the sky with your oratory.

The mouth of fools will rapturously describe a nirvana and an idealistic anticipation of wonderful things. But talking doesn't make it happen. Aspirational speeches do nothing.

Descriptions of wouldn't it be nice don't make it happen. The mouth of fools feeds on foolishness. So instead of being inculcated with knowledge and wisdom and cycling it into understanding and making things happen, they talk foolishness and they eat foolishness.

They graze in the field of foolishness. And instead of a cycle of increasing knowledge and wisdom and understanding, you have a cycle of foolishness. You say foolish things, you feed on foolish things.

Foolishness leads to more foolishness. And it's just this shallow moronic cycle that doesn't get anywhere. That brings you to the third verse in the triplet here.

All the days of the afflicted are evil, but he who is of a merry heart has a continual feast. And we close with this last time. This is a choice.

If you don't choose a merry heart, you are choosing to be the afflicted, to be the sorrowful, to be defined by loss and shortcoming and negativity. I wished for it, it didn't happen. I wanted it, it didn't come to pass.

I wanted gratification in this area and it did not arrive. And what happens? It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you view yourself as a victim, if you view yourself as oppressed, if you view yourself as downtrodden and the man has kept me from getting what I deserve and the rest of it, all of your days are going to be evil because you've decided they're evil.

You're looking at them as evil. You're not looking at true and noble and just. You're not looking at pure and lovely and of good report.

You're not looking for virtue and you're not looking for praise. What are you doing? Well, I'm just afflicted. I'm the afflicted.

We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. We're not afflicted. We are tested.

We're challenged. But these are opportunities. This is where God's grace and God's

power, we can watch it flow to us and through us and turn darkness to light.

We have been transferred out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the son of his love, the Lord of light, the Lord of glory, the Lord of the transfiguration, the Lord of the second coming. That's our status. Why would we view ourselves as afflicted? It's a choice.

What are we going to look at? What are we going to choose? The days of the afflicted are evil, but he who is of a merry heart has a continual feast. Notice it doesn't say money is going to come and servants are going to bear great platters of food. This is what we like to say in the Marine Corps.

Every day is a holiday and every meal is a feast. You're opening up a can of C-rations back in my early days. You're getting an MRE.

Some of those MREs, you don't want to open them in the dark like I did. You want to talk about a box of chocolates and you don't know what you get to try opening those things in the dark. I wound up getting a spoonful of cocoa powder when I was trying to find something to eat in the pitch blackness in Beirut.

But listen, when you're a Marine and you're on mission, you're trained, you have skill, you're in the right place at the right time with the right stuff. You are going to prosecute the mission. You are going to make things happen.

That's a good day. Every day is a holiday and every meal is a feast because what a privilege, what an opportunity. Is it raining? Are you in a hole half full of water? Is it cold? Are you wet? Is there no chow? Hey, there's people who would go to great lengths to be where you are doing what you're doing because what an opportunity.

Time to show you're tough. Time to show you can endure. Time to show that you have need of endurance so that after you have suffered a while, you receive the promise.

And gracious sakes, look at the substance and the content of God's promise to those who love Him. It is incredible. So we choose our point of view.

We choose our perspective. By God's grace, we have a choice. If our gospel be hid, it is hid to those who are lost in whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of those who are faithless.

Otherwise, the light of the glory of God would shine to them. The glorious gospel of Christ would shine to them. But their choices to reject, to dismiss, to concentrate on other things, to be self-interested, self-satisfied, self-gratifying, it hides the good news.

And the God of this world will blind their minds and now they don't have a choice. They're going to be in the valley of dry bones and there is no wake-up call. Tragic.

That's not us. He who is of a merry heart has a continual feast. Marines like to encourage each other when it is terrible weather, when it is cold, bone-chillingly cold, when it is dark, when there is no hot chow, when there's no fresh water, when it's just dismal ravaging.

And this isn't even talking about combat conditions. This is just in a training environment. And there is a sarcastic sense of humor and a pride in being tough enough to outdo and outlast whatever happens, whatever the situation calls for.

That's esprit de corps. We are Marines. We are not somebody else.

And we are going to improvise, adapt, and overcome. You can't keep us down. We are going to win.

We are going to prevail. And you'd better watch out. The more difficult you make it, the more likely it is that we are going to stomp on it, step on it, climb on top of it, and plant a flag.

That is the attitude of the healthy believer. Choose a cheerful heart. Is this the best you can do? Is this all you can throw at me? They tried to kill the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.

Satan and his followers did their worst. And the Lord Jesus rose. He ascended.

He has taken captivity captive. He has given gifts to men. He has a people that God the Father has granted to him.

And those people are us. It's the winning side. If God be for us, who can be against us? But we have to fill our minds with these biblical truths that I have been belaboring now for about 10 minutes.

You need to have these at your mental fingertips. This is where scripture reading is great. Get a book of promises.

Get a devotional that gets us in the scripture and reminds us of who we are and why we're here. You can't go running to your Bible and try to read them and understand them when you're in the ditch and it's dark. You can't read in the dark.

You have to remember in the dark. And you should be able to rattle off promise after promise after promise as I am seeking to demonstrate. Get them in your mind.

Get them in your heart. We've got our memory verses are still on the website. Run down through those.

There is promise after promise after promise. I've not seen the righteous go hungry or a seed begging bread. If God be for us, who can be against us? He will never suffer the

righteous to be moved.

Those who wait on the Lord will mount up with wings as eagles. They will run and not be weary. They will walk and not faint.

Why? Not because they're just exceptionally strong people. It's because they are waiting on the Lord and they renew their strength. Remember 2 Timothy 2.1? Be strengthened because the strength comes from the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Now by looking to the Lord, waiting on the Lord, converse with the Lord freely, talk to him all the time in a difficult place. Choose a cheerful heart. Lord, grant me the joy that is a part of the fruit of the Spirit.

Love, joy, peace. I'm asking for it. I'm seeking it.

I'm knocking on the door. When that door creaks open, I want love, joy, and peace and the rest of the fruit of the Spirit to come flooding through. I know the source.

I'm asking you for it. You've promised to grant it to me. Bring it on.

I'm ready. It's time. Enough of this darkness.

Enough of this sorrow. I don't want a broken spirit. I don't want dry bones.

Lord, you have the power. You raised the Lord Jesus and you have promised that you can raise us. I need that resurrection power now.

I need to be resurrected out of the pit, out of this depression, out of this low expectation mode. It is just like salvation. When we turn to the Lord and ask him for his grace, he has the strength.

Salvation is all of God. And listen, a cheerful heart is all of God. The strength to overcome is all of God.

All we have to do is ask and then confidently expect it. That's our hope. That's what motivates us.

It's coming. I'm ready. My Father is on my side.

I am in Christ Jesus. He's my Savior. He's interceding for me at the Father's right hand as we speak.

It's our privilege to pray for ourselves and then to pray for each other. Look outside ourselves. There's no testing that befalls you, but such as is common to man.

Well, if it's common, who else do I know? How can I pray for them? And sometimes the objectivity that comes from looking at someone else that is also enduring hardship as we

endeavor to pray intelligently and lovingly and investing ourselves in intercession for fellow believers without knowing it as we get our eyes off ourselves. When we return to ourselves, we say, wait a minute, I thought I was down. I thought I was depressed.

I thought I was in the grip of sorrow. I'm feeling pretty good now. Why? Objectivity, not subjectivity.

We're looking at others and looking what God can do in their lives. And we're thinking creatively. We're applying scripture.

We're not just spiraling in our own little whirlpool. We look outward. And as we look at others, and as we express love for one another, love for neighbor, love, even for the outside world, pray for people that are depressed over the outcomes of recent events.

Pray for them. Pray that God can use this to open their eyes, help them to see that there's more to life than, you know, momentary outcomes and political and social developments. Look outside ourselves and pray.

And we find when we return to examine ourselves, the Holy Spirit has quietly built a fortress in our soul. And we're up on the battlements, looking out over the battlefield and seeing God's victory over here and over here and over here. And there is love, there is joy, there is peace, there is deliverance, and there is salvation, even in the midst of this present evil age.

All of that is in this heart triplet. Do you believe it? Look at the connections in scripture. Look at the wisdom and the knowledge and the understanding that this triplet encourages us to marshal and to think about.

But thinking about it's a choice. I can suggest it. I can exhort it.

I can do my job, like Paul tells Timothy, remind them of these things, rebuke, correct, exhort. But it's in your hands. It's in your hearts.

All of us have to decide, what am I going to do? Because our choice determines if we have a cheerful countenance, if we have a merry heart, if we have an upward way, if we have a confident expectation, or if we have sorrow, a broken spirit, and dry bones. Totally a choice. God can do everything He has promised if we meet the condition of faith and obedience.

Well, that's my summary of the heart triplet. I like it. It's one of my favorite pieces of scripture after our recent study.

We'll pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll pick up at these doublets that are going to follow this triplet. We had two triplets right in the middle of the chapter.

Now we're going to be back to doublets and they are so helpful, so informative on cleaning up our act and qualifying for the fulfilling of these promises. We'll see it when we come back.