

## Proverbs 24-11-13b

We're ready to resume our study. We are looking at the better thans and we have one more in our near periphery and then some additional ones in the book of Proverbs. Just a page over, Proverbs chapter 17, verse one is the next and watch for the common thread of the counterintuitive nature of our life in Christ, our life before God, our life with divine power, even in the Old Testament, the fear of the Lord is the key relationship with God through covenant in the Old Testament, through the new covenant in Christ in our day changes expectations and transforms what would otherwise be definitional.

Misery was associated with poverty and happiness was associated with wealth. Being well thought of by others was considered the path to success and achievement and being the object of contempt and derision was a path to failure and unhappiness. But in God, claiming his promises, living in his power and in the light of his word, these things are no longer definitive.

They are no longer determinative. In fact, many times it is counterintuitive. It is the opposite of what one would expect.

And as Paul says in the New Testament, he found joy in his afflictions and he gloried in his hardship because he had a perspective that comes from above, isn't human in its limitations. So as we come out of Proverbs 17, verse one, better is a dry morsel with quietness than a house full of feasting with strife. And this feasting, you have a text note there in your New King James that says sacrificial meals.

And that's pertinent because you can be going through the motions of offering sacrifices and conforming to the law in the outward man to the eye of others. But if there is strife, we've seen this with the grievous words that stir up anger. We've seen this in second Timothy with the contention and argumentation to no purpose and to no profit that divides, it lacks humility and so on.

All of that in second Timothy chapter two that we've seen is reflected here as well. What I have done in these verses, and if you want to go back quickly and do it, circle the positive. What is the tov? We are to eschew what is evil and pursue what is good.

This is the apostle Paul talking to us in the New Testament. And it is a biblical value throughout. First Peter says the same thing.

The Lord Jesus says the same thing. First Peter 3.11 is turn from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it.

This is in the context of whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. Turn from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it.

The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are inclined to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. That's first Peter 3.10 through 12.

And that is representative of a double handful of passages that basically communicate the same thing. So if you go back to Proverbs 12.9, working for ourselves, having work that we can do for ourselves, the God-given opportunity to make our own way, to be self-sustaining and self-supporting, this I have circled. I have the note, works for himself out in the margin, and I have it circled.

In Proverbs 15, our passage, verses 16 and 17, what is the tov? What is the better thing? It's the fear of the Lord. So if I'm going to depart from what is evil and pursue what is good, I'm going to pursue opportunities to do for myself to whatever extent I can. We're not always able.

Sometimes we're sick. Sometimes we're limited in various ways, physically or circumstantially, but we look around. What can I do for myself? How can I lighten the burden on society or on those around me or whatever else? What can I do for myself? I will do that because that is the better way.

What has God given me by way of ability? I'm not going to kill myself trying to do something I don't have the ability to do. We don't have to be heroic or gymnastic or silly about this, but there are always small things. Ideally, especially when we're in our prime, we will be self-sustaining.

We will work for ourselves. We try not to be a problem for others. So that is tov, that is good.

Work is good. When we're able, when we have opportunity, we should seize it. If work is offered, we should do it.

Proverbs 15, 16, the fear of the Lord. This is a good thing, regardless of how it affects my material circumstances. If I lose my job because I am righteously and properly exercising my fear of the Lord, I'm not going to be party to evil.

I'm not going to take part in deceit or cheating or defrauding clientele. Some of us have had jobs where the company was doing illicit and immoral and unethical things, and we quit that job. If you don't walk in the counsel of the ungodly or stand in the way of sinners, there is a time to separate.

And if it is the fear of the Lord that says, I am not going to be party to perpetrating evil, I'm not going to be part of a company that has these nefarious practices and is cheating and defrauding and deceiving its clients, get out of there. Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure, but there's trouble. If you countenance unethical, immoral, ungodly behavior, and you become a part of it, there's going to be trouble.

Then the 17th verse, what is the tov? Even if it means your meals are limited, it's better for there to be love. So we've seen three good things right now. Legitimate work for ourselves is good.

Fear of the Lord is good. Love in a community that gathers at a table is good. In Proverbs 16, eight, even if you only have a little, regardless if your circumstances are minimal, if your possessions are few, but you have righteousness, righteousness is tov.

This is what we're after. Vast revenues where there is no justice is the contrast. In verse 19 of that chapter, the one we just saw, a humble spirit is tov.

It is tov to have humility, the opposite of pride and association with the proud. A humble spirit and association with others who are lowly. We don't make much of ourselves.

We don't put on airs. We're not trying to impress. We're not trying to compete.

We're not trying to advance for some humanly devised reason. Well, if I get status, if I can get followers, if I can impress people on social media, then they'll listen to me and I can tell them important things. Better to be of a humble spirit and to associate with the lowly than to have a lot, but you're associating with the proud and you're getting your division of the spoil from them.

So a humble spirit and association with the lowly is circled there. Now we come to Proverbs 17, verse one. Better is a dry morsel with quietness than a house full of feasting with strife.

This is an echo. It's a slight turning of the truth in the light, a slightly different perspective on it. Even a dry morsel.

We've gone from a dinner of vegetables or simple bread. Now it's a dry morsel. This is almost inedible, unpalatable food, right? But that's still better if there is quietness.

There's not rancor, strife, anger, quarreling, useless debates, wrangling about words to no purpose, to the ruin of the hearers. There's quietness. There is calm.

There is peace. And a dry morsel in those circumstances turns out to be a better meal than a house full of feasting. But there is no peace.

There is strife. There is undercutting. There is backbiting.

There is betrayal. There is a sword that has divided the household. And to put on a sumptuous Thanksgiving and try to unite a family that is deeply divided, either socially, politically, most of all spiritually, most of these others are symptoms of a spiritual division.

It's better to open some canned turkey and a package of crackers than to put on a

sumptuous feast. And by assembling people there, it leads to strife. Don't do it.

Don't hope for better things when you know good and well that putting these people in the same room, it doesn't matter how good the food is, people are going to leave angry, disappointed, frustrated, wishing they hadn't come. The food cannot overcome the strife. Quietness will make even a dry morsel a feast.

So I've got quietness circled in Proverbs 17.1. That is the tov. This is God's goodness. This is the equivalent of agathos in Greek in the New Testament.

That which is intrinsically good. Flip over a page to Proverbs 19.1. Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one who is perverse in his lips and is a fool. This one is interesting and we'll see it when we get to chapter 19 in more detail.

All I want to do right now, because you know from our studies up to this point, how important context is. And I don't want to isolate these better than Proverbs and give them an interpretation that rips them out of their context. But all we're doing is noting, what does God say is tov? What is good? What should we pursue? What should we cultivate? What should we look for? Pursue, seek, lay hold of, try to promote.

In this case, walking in integrity. Even if we end up being poor, that's the goal. And this is a choice we make day by day.

Is what I'm saying a reflection of Christian integrity? Am I being true to God and true to his word in what I say and what I do? That's our walk, our conduct, our speech, our behavior, our decisions, how we implement our priorities, how we pursue our goals, how we express our values, whether in conversation or as we live our lives in the sight of others, that is a walk. Are we walking in love, Ephesians chapter four? Are we walking in integrity? Even if integrity means I'm going to miss out, I'm not going to cheat, I'm not going to lay claim to something that is not mine, I'm not going to file a false insurance claim, I'm not going to be party to something that I haven't earned, I don't deserve, I don't qualify for, somebody made a mistake, you know, bank error in your favor. If it doesn't belong to me, I'm not going to take it, I'm not going to keep it.

Better is the poor who walks in his integrity, that's what we're looking for. Go down to the 22nd verse in Proverbs 19. What is desired in a man is kindness, and a poor man is better than a liar.

You think, well, if you just look at the second line, tove a poor man from a liar. What is this really saying, this second line? Kindness is to be desired. We want to pursue that which is kind to others, even if it is sacrificial to me.

If my kindness costs me to the point that I am a poor man, that is better than being deceitful, living a life of deceit. And this is sacrificial love. Kindness at one's own expense is in view, and that is what we circle.

Kindness that makes us poor or leaves us poor is better than deceit with some other goal. We then come to Proverbs 21 for our next tove men pattern. This is in verse nine.

Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop than in a house shared with a contentious woman. This is the section of Proverbs here in 21, and again in 25, angry women are in view, contentious women are in view because the house is in view, the home is in view. This isn't the workplace, this isn't social occasions, this isn't a feast being given, this isn't a sacrifice being offered, this is in the home.

And you have a choice. If you end up sharing a house with a contentious woman, you are better off, it is good to go dwell in the corner of the housetop. Now, this takes a little bit of context even when we're just looking at our tove men pattern.

Who bought the house? Who built the house? Who provided the house for the woman? The husband did, right? And he could take the attitude, my house, my rules, you're not allowed to speak. He could rule with his authority, he could beat down the woman and stop her from being contentious by sort of brute force. What is the biblical answer to an unhappy woman in the house? It isn't beatings will continue until morale improves, right? I will out contend you, I will out dominate you.

What is the recourse for the young man to whom these Proverbs are being delivered? Go to the corner of the housetop. It's your house, you own it all. If her domain, if her area of contention and disagreement and disappointment and whatever else is causing strife, you don't leave the house.

It doesn't say better is a rainstorm in a dry ditch than a house with a contentious woman. The man stays in the house, but he's more like on the house. Go to the quietest place in the house, separate inside the house from the contentious woman.

She can't contend if you're not in the same room. So this is, you stay in the marriage, you stay in the house, you stay in the situation, but you create space. He doesn't shout, he doesn't beat, he doesn't demand authority and respect that isn't forthcoming for whatever reason.

Don't share the house with the contentious woman, go to the housetop and sit in the corner. That's the remedy, dwell in the corner. What is this? This is sacrificial.

This is giving the contentious woman her space. Hopefully she will come to her senses and cool off. Hopefully you chose well, but if you didn't, if there is a real hardship in the marriage, this is not a prescription to leave it, to write her a bill of divorcement or to claim she's a bad cook and separate.

This is find a way to coexist by creating space. I'm not making this up. I make no claims as a marriage counselor.

This is what the word of God says. The tove, the good in this situation with a woman stamping through the house being contentious is to find the quietest place in the house and shelter there. Let the storm blow over.

Don't continue, the contention can't continue if you're not there to do the tango. It takes two to tango, it takes two to contend. So create some space, go into a room and close the door.

If you don't have a housetop, you can get to. That's the idea. Now look at the 19th verse of the same chapter.

If that doesn't work, we have another proverb. Proverb, tove, it is better to dwell in the wilderness than with a contentious and angry woman. Notice we have an advance.

She's not just contentious, she's angry. And you going to the housetop didn't create the space and the separation where there could be healing and agreement and reunion and making up and so on. Going to the housetop didn't work.

So what do you do now? Create even more space. The tove, and remember what we started with tonight, looking at this tove men, this isn't, well, this is better than that. You have been in a situation and you're coming from it and moving to the good.

So you have been in the house with the contentious woman and you've come from that and gone to the housetop because that's good. Now you've been in a house with a contentious and angry woman. She's not having it.

She's not willing to reconcile. So coming from that, what do you do? The housetop thing didn't cure it. Tove, go to the wilderness.

The doghouse, get a separate space. You may need to create even more space. You may need to separate.

Notice this is not go to the wilderness. This is dwell in the wilderness. These decisions, by the way, to elevate and to move to a different course of action should be done prayerfully, in humility, without anger, without rancor, without a lot of criticism, rebuke, conversation, really.

Just go to the corner of the housetop if the woman is contentious. By the way, as we have seen throughout the Proverbs, as we have seen in the pastoral epistles especially, these are representative. This could be reversed.

It could be the husband who is contentious and the woman who is creating space and going to a quiet place in the house. If that doesn't work, if the man is contentious and angry and unwilling to reconcile, the biblical guidance is for the woman to move out. Go, even if it's the wilderness, it's not gonna be comfortable.

It's not gonna have your furniture and your drapes and your decorations and your knickknacks and your other comforts of home. It's by comparison gonna be the wilderness, but it is tov to dwell in the wilderness rather than with a contentious and angry person. The woman is just put here for convenience because this is the harder case for the man to leave the woman in the house.

It's an easier thing to understand that the woman would depart if the man is upset and irreconcilable. Now, if you think we're done, we're not. Look at Proverbs chapter 25.

Proverbs 25. We need a little bit of context for this one because we're looking at verse seven, but we need to start with verse six. Do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king and do not stand in the place of the great.

It is tov that he say to you, come up here from you should be put lower in the presence of the prince whom your eyes have seen. You tried to get up there and get face to face with power. You tried to sort of ingratiate yourself with the powerful.

You're trying to get ahead by smacking up to the authority and you are sent away because you're being obsequious. You're thinking more of yourself than you should. It isn't right to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.

That's the context. It is better to pursue humility. Think of this in the two spheres.

In the vertical sphere, what does scripture say? Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time. If we cultivate that attitude, we humble ourselves before God. We acknowledge that we are made of clay.

We are sinful. We are fallen. We are short-sighted.

We are quick to fail. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. He will exalt you at the right time, when you're ready, when you can handle it.

It's not gonna be the Peter principle where you rise one level above your level of competence. You see this in all kinds of spheres of life. People are elevated too high and they can't handle it.

They don't have the skills. And they seized it when they should not have. They thought themselves ready and they weren't.

We don't wanna be those people. We should be humble first and foremost before God. And having cultivated that humility before God in the same way that we cultivate love for God first and foremost, now we are ready for love in the horizontal and humility in the horizontal.

If I don't think much of myself before God, it's easier to not think much of myself before people. So in verse seven, it is tov, it is better to wait in the wings and be invited up, be

invited into prominence or into opportunity than to try to brag yourself into it, shove yourself into it, insinuate yourself, ambiguate yourself into favor and you're sort of asked to leave. So what do you circle here? This is do not stand in the place of the great.

Don't walk up and occupy. We see this in the New Testament. Don't try to take the chair close to the head of the table and be asked to vacate it for someone better than you.

Stand in the wings and wait until you are invited to a chair that is appropriate to your station, your level of achievement and so on. This is the Old Testament equivalent of that. Don't stand in the place of the great.

We don't promote ourselves. Let God promote us. We saw this in some of the earlier better thans.

Look down at verse 24. This is a echo of Proverbs 21.9. Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop than in a house shared with a contentious woman. Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop.

Notice dwelling in the corner. You may have to spend time there. This isn't just a momentary technique to try to resolve a conflict.

You may have to have some distance over time. You dwell in the corner, but it is repeated. The context is slightly different, and we'll see this when we do chapter 21 and when we do chapter 25, but it is significant that we will sacrifice, as with all of these other tov passages, these tov things, to sacrifice to ourself, to have a little, to have a dry morsel, to have a dinner of vegetables in lieu of a feast, to have a corner of the house instead of run of the entire house is better.

Let others claim what they think is great, what they think they deserve. Let them divide the spoil. Let them have the run of things.

If you can maintain a relationship, if you can maintain a situation or a circumstance by self-denial, do that. That is good. Let somebody else lay claim.

You see this in families that inherit estates. Some of the worst, most bitter, hateful arguments you can imagine happen when someone well off dies and the family starts carving up the empire or the possessions. If you ever find yourself in a situation where there is loot in the offing, there is spoil available, the attitude of a believer should be, look, I don't want anything that somebody else wants.

If you think that's yours, it doesn't matter if promises were made. It doesn't matter if lists exist. It doesn't matter if the will has been probated.

Look, I refuse to divide the spoil with the proud. If you're being selfish, be selfish. I will take the corner of the housetop.

I will take the dry morsel. I don't want anything that is going to create strife, even if it is rightly and justly mine. Remember, the man bought the house.

The man may have built the house and he is abandoning the bulk of it to this contentious woman. We say, well, but am I giving in to evil? Am I party to sin by allowing this person to run rampant? No, the tove is to put distance, touch not the unclean thing, hate the garment spotted by the flesh. If someone is intent on sinfully, greedily, inquisitively trying to lay hold of stuff, even if you have a legitimate claim.

Did the Lord Jesus have a legitimate claim to glory in heaven with his father when he emptied himself and took on the form of a servant and came in the likeness of men? And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and was obedient to an undeserved death, even the shameful death of the cross. He did not think all of that possession and glory and power was a thing to be held on to. He let it go.

For this reason, God has highly exalted him. And now he's like Job after the first 39 chapters, the first 40 chapters of Job. The end of Job was greater than the beginning.

He's blessed with twice as much, seven new sons, three new daughters, three daughters of Job and three daughters of Job. And I thought, well, why isn't it the six daughters of Job? But anyway, I digress. So that's Proverbs 25, seven.

And 25, 24 is going to be a turning of that beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful truth in the light of self-sacrifice. Listen, if somebody wants to romp and stomp and flail and throw dishes and be contentious and angry, just go to the corner. If that doesn't work, you may have to go to the wilderness, but either one is better than sharing the house.

Then you come to Proverbs 27, flip the page. Proverbs 27, verse five. Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed.

Tove, open rebuke from love that is concealed. What do you have to know? And again, taking these out of their context limits us a little bit. We'll see this when we get to chapter 25 or we'll see it when we get to chapter 27.

But in a nutshell, what does God do to those he loves? Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and he scourges every son whom he receives. Love expresses itself in correction where necessary, in rebuke where needed. The word of God is profitable for what? This is the word of God.

This is what God says. We think the word of God is kind of an object or an abstraction. What God says is inspired.

It is divinely empowered and profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction. Why does God speak these things to us? Because he loves us. Whom the Lord loves, he corrects.

Parents who don't correct their children are not really loving them. Their love is actually being concealed because love will correct. Love will create structure.

Love will set limits. Love will enforce boundaries. Love will enforce borders.

If you love the people of your country, you're going to defend its borders. If you don't care about the people of the country, the biggest clue to what a government thinks of its people is how well does it protect and defend them? And if it's savages them and ravages them and costs them money and endangers them by letting foreigners swarm across the border, that is not a government that cares about you. I don't care what they say.

That's 27 five. Look at verse 10 to the same chapter. Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend.

Do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity. Better is a neighbor nearby than a brother far away. Again, this will make more sense in context, but there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother, both philosophically or in the realm of relationship and geographically.

If your brother has moved far away, if your brother doesn't stay nearby, and this is more in the relationship realm, we obviously have to take jobs and we're halfway across the country from each other, but are we still in the same family? Do we check in on each other? Do we talk to each other? Are we in fellowship and camaraderie and praying for one another and actively interested in each other? There are friends, neighbors, acquaintances, especially in the New Testament day in the church and our brothers and sisters in Christ can be closer to us than blood relations who are far from the Lord or not interested in us because they have different values, different priorities, different ideas about what success in life is and what ought to be pursued, what stewardship of time and resources actually means. So when people say blood is thicker than water, there is friendship that is thicker than blood. There are friendships that are closer than family relationships.

And Proverbs 27 10 says, don't forsake your own friend. You think of David and Jonathan, they're from different tribes. Jonathan is tribe of Benjamin, David is tribe of Judah, but the friendship they had was closer than David had with his own brothers and closer than what Jonathan had with his own father.

Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend. If there is a friend of the family, keep that close. Remember when David wrote to the son of a king that he had had alliance with and had had friendly relationships with and David sent messengers and said, I'm sorry for the death of your father.

I hope that we can continue the same affinity and alliance that we've had in the past.

And the son was arrogant and cut off the beards and the skirts of the messengers and sent them back. And they had to wait in a distant town until their beards grew back.

That is evil, to not honor alliances and relationships that were established by fathers. And of course, we're talking in the realm of good fathers, spiritually competent fathers. Do not forsake your friend, your father's friend.

Do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity, sort of on principle. If you've got neighbors and friends that you can go to them and they can go to you. And those are not to be forsaken.

A neighbor nearby is better than a brother far away. And even in times of distress, in times of sorrow, in times of stress, look to those that you are genuinely spiritually connected to and don't stand on human expectation that, well, he's my brother. He ought to do this or ought to do that.

Better is a neighbor nearby than a brother far away. Well, those are the better thans. We've covered them all in Proverbs.

And if you circle the neighbor nearby, that even open rebuke, it may be hard to take, but it is better than concealing love and failing to enforce, failing to train, failing to correct. Humility is better than claiming a seat that doesn't really belong to us. Self-sacrifice in a household relationship.

Go to the corner of the rooftop. If necessary, go to the wilderness. Kindness, even if it results in poverty, is better than deceit.

What is desired in a man is kindness, back in 19. It is to walk in integrity. That is the love in Proverbs 19.1. Quietness in Proverbs 17.1. A humble spirit, confederating with these friends and father's friends that we maintain and keep close, consorting with and maintaining friendships and relationships with the lowly is better in 16.19. 16.8, righteousness, even if we only have a little.

Righteousness is good. Love in Proverbs 15.17 is better than the fatted calf where there's hatred. Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, our passage, than great treasure with trouble.

Those are the better thans. And it helps us understand the context here in chapter 15. And we will pick up in verse 18 of chapter 15 next time.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the clear guidance it gives us, the light it shines on our path. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit will help us to see the purpose for these instructions in our current circumstances.

Give us strength, help us to prayerfully and mindfully implement these truths in a way

that reflects your glory, in a way that reflects humility and love and self-sacrifice so that others will see Christ in us and be drawn to the light and be drawn to relationship with you through the Lord Jesus. We ask it in his name, amen.