

Proverbs 24-12-11b

We pick up our study here in Proverbs chapter 15, looking at verse 23, where we left off. It says in your English here, a man has joy by the answer of his mouth and a word in its time, a word spoken in due season, how good it is. And the word that is translated answer here is a reply, but it is not just a reply that doesn't succeed.

This is a true and right response to a circumstance. And an answer to a circumstance, this is basically counsel. And so the one who receives godly counsel, receives good counsel, eventually becomes someone who can provide good counsel.

And the blessing that we have received from the great counsel of the Holy Spirit is something that we can share and be a blessing to others. So this word, and in Hebrew, it's ma'aneh, it's M-A-A-N-E-H, if you're interested. But this noun is used six times for a wise response that answers a situation.

It's the response to a circumstance. It is the response to what should I do as a question. And you find in chapter 29, verse 19, Proverbs 29, 19, a servant will not be corrected by mere words, for though he understands, he will not answer.

He will not ma'aneh, he will not respond. And this is what do you do with the counsel. You can hear it and not follow it.

Remember in the early days after Solomon's death, when Rehoboam comes to the throne and he is given counsel to follow his father's policy, but he's also given bad counsel by young men around him. And he ends up saying, well, my little finger is bigger around than my father's waist. That's how great I am.

And he ends up dividing the kingdom immediately. He can't hold on to it at all. And so what is our, how do we address circumstances? How do we respond in a situation? But this is spoken out loud.

This is something that is expressed verbally. It is an answer of the mouth. And so there is cooperation involved in a family.

We decide together or after consultation or after prayer and meditation and reflection on the scriptures, someone articulates, this is what we will do. And the plan is made clear. It is shared.

It is a response to a circumstance from the mouth. It's communicated. And this avoids misunderstanding.

It avoids disunity and disharmony because not everyone knew the plan. So there is so much in these hithy condensed phrases. A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, by the response that is a reflection of good counsel, godly counsel.

And it is spoken in the right time and in the right way and produces divine good. This ought to be the aspiration, the hope, the goal and purpose for all of us. To know what is that good and acceptable will of God, Romans 12 to be able to articulate it and express it to those around us and together carry it out, implement it, be unified in it.

That brings us now to verse 24. And this is a hinge that looks back on what precedes in verses 20 through 23 and looks forward to what follows in verse 25 and following. And it says, the way of life is upward for the wise that he may turn away from Sheol below.

And the wisdom here reflected in the word wise, this is wisdom in the sense of insight. This is the word we've seen elsewhere, masculine, M-A-S-K-I-L. And so the walking uprightly back in verse 21, this harks back to that.

What is the way in which you walk straight, you walk uprightly? And the word life that you have here, the way of life, goes back to verse, or is going to look forward to verse 27. He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, but he who hates bribes will live. And so this verse 24 is at the center of this double section, if you will, this unit 25 through 27.

And in between verse 24 and 27, as we move forward here, is this pair of Proverbs that reference the Lord. And this area of Proverbs has been talking about the rewards of righteousness, its joy in the present, and its everlasting life in relationship to the Lord. And so the path of life is going to bring about everlasting fellowship with the living God.

So this way leads upward. Upward is toward God. That's why you always go up to Jerusalem, because that's where the temple is.

That's where the throne of God was metaphorically placed, the Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant. And so the way, or the path of life, is upward. This word for way can be used for any pattern of life.

We saw it back in Proverbs 1.15 and 1.19, where in 1.15, My son, do not walk in the way with evil ones. Keep your foot from their path. Or in verse 19, So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain.

It takes away the life of its owners. So way here is manner of life, pattern of life, goals and values and priorities that are established. So this is a way of life that moves us upward toward the living God.

And the antithesis is downward toward the grave, toward Sheol. And the prudent or the insightful here that are referred to by the wise in turning away from that which leads to the grave, the way that seems right, but the ends thereof are the ways of death. You have a lot of terms that contrast the wise and the foolish, the righteous and the wicked.

And so the prudence or the wisdom here leads to closeness with God. This is an expression of love for God. If we're going to love the Lord our God with all our heart, we want to be moving

toward Him, not away from Him.

So more than just a physical untimely death or going to an early grave here, this is deliverance in the eternal sense. And those who miss the fact that Old Testament believers understood that there was resurrection and life beyond the grave ought to come to passages like this because that is exactly what this is saying. You turn away from Sheol and your wisdom moves you upward toward eternal life.

That brings us now to verse 25 and following, this pair of Proverbs that reference the Lord. And there is a symmetry here. We like to call it a chiasm.

And if you look at verse 24, I'm sorry, verse 25, the Lord will destroy the house of the proud, but he will establish the boundary of the widow. And then 26, the thoughts of a wicked person are an abomination to the Lord, but the words of the pure are pleasant. The result of this is that you basically have a four-line idea, what's called a quatrain.

And there is a chiastic arrangement here of the righteous with the wicked and the wicked and the righteous. So first line of verse 25, the Lord will destroy the house of the proud. And that is obviously more than just the physical house.

The house is what is established in life. This is back to what was spoken in the earlier section there, where those who are destitute of discernment and who disregard wise counsel, their plans will go awry. Their plans will be thwarted.

Well, that's what they want to do in the future. But even what they have will be destroyed. When Jesus said to him who has, more will be given.

But to him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. Even what he has is the house. Not only will his future plans be thwarted, but even what he has, his house, is going to be destroyed.

The rich man who said, I'm going to build more towers of grain and this night your soul will be required of you. He had plans for more towers and more grain silos. But even what he had in terms of his current riches was taken away when his soul was required of him.

So this is a consistent theme in Scripture. What does it mean for you and for me? We like to think that because we've been doing Bible study for a while, we've been endeavoring to grow in grace and knowledge. We're trying to be prayerful.

We're trying to be obedient. We're trying to live a life that pleases God day by day. And we think, well, how can I progress? How can I move forward in circumstances? If we set our spiritual life aside when we start making plans about our job or our possessions or our projects or what we hope for, we want to go in this direction with education.

We want to go in this direction with employment. We want to go in this direction with

relationship. If we forget the godly counsel and the great counselor that travels with us everywhere we go, the indwelling Holy Spirit, if we somehow separate our human life and our circumstantial plans from our spiritual identity, even what we have can be lost.

We will not only have our plans thwarted, but we will regress spiritually. If we don't exercise our faith and our hope and our love, they will atrophy. If we don't involve them, if we don't include them, if we don't weave them into all of our thinking, all of our plans, we become Christians who sort of have their spiritual life on a box on the shelf.

And while I take it out when there's Bible class Wednesdays and Sundays, I go back and remember I'm a believer. But, you know, tomorrow's a work day or tomorrow's a school day or tomorrow's a day where I'm involved with people. And if we forget who we are and why we're here, and our plans are not intimately interwoven with our spiritual goals and values and priorities, not only will our plans not succeed, even if they look like they've succeeded from a human point of view, they haven't succeeded in the eyes of God.

It's not going to be blessed. It isn't going to have an eternal weight of glory. It doesn't lay a treasure in heaven.

It is a momentary, fleeting source of joy, but it doesn't have traction. It doesn't have long-lasting effect. It's transient.

It's ephemeral. It is Ecclesiastes. Life becomes a vapor that disappears.

We are spiritual people. We are children of God. And anything that we plan or anything we try to accomplish, apart from our spiritual identity, is not only doomed to fail.

The plans will be thwarted, but our house is going to start crumbling. And where we are spiritually is going to move in the wrong direction. It erodes us.

We don't just stay in place. So the difference between plans moving forward and a house where you think you're holding your ground is in view. The Lord will destroy the house of the proud.

What does it mean to be proud? I've got this figured out. I have my own counsel. I have my own plan.

I know what needs to be done. I am not humble. I am not prayerful.

I am not seeking the wise and great counsel of the great Counselor that God has given me to indwell me, to fill me, to guide me, to lead me into all truth. I have just not asked the question. Have you ever found out something and you say, well, why didn't you tell me this before? And the person replies, well, you didn't ask.

We should be asking. We should be seeking. We should be knocking.

This is a recognition of our inadequacy, of our human limitations to go to God and request

counsel, request guidance. So that day by day in the small things of life, how should I tackle this next task? What should I say? How should I speak? What should I talk about in relationships, in conversations with other people? To be prayerful, to be witting and conscious and have a plan when we speak with people and don't shoot from the hip and let our tongue get ahead of our soul and our mind and our godly counsel. And we end up with the words come back idea.

We should be founded and grounded on the counsel from God. And this takes a choice. This should be our plan.

Not the arrogant plan. The Lord will destroy the house of the proud, but he will establish the boundary of the widow. One thing about the widows that are mentioned in Scripture is they are intrinsically in a position of weakness.

They are a woman without a husband to speak up for them, to lead, to provide, to protect, to ensure that there is inheritance in Israel and so many other parts of the patriarchal society that God designed as a teaching tool and as an example that has spiritual implications. And so when you speak of the widow, the normal human provisions are lacking. The husband and father has passed away.

The widow, from a human point of view, is in a position of weakness. But what does she have to fill that gap? Father in heaven. Spiritual provision.

The attention and the grace of God. And if I had a choice between my father or my spouse, if I was a woman, my husband establishing my boundary, or God in heaven establishing my boundary, in a way it turns a disadvantage into an advantage. Boundaries have to be established and defended and fenced and guarded and maintained by the husband when he's around.

If he's gone, the Lord takes over that job. But the widow is a picture for all of us because she, in her physical circumstances, represents humility and lack of the implementation of human strength. The widow isn't in a position to leverage human strength.

And she is much more visibly ready to rely upon God because many of the human sources of provision and protection aren't available to her. So she is a picture. And notice the contrast between pride, self-reliance, self-centeredness, self-gratification, and the widow who just wants protection and provision.

And that comes from God. So for all of us, you don't have to be a widow for this to be true. We avoid the deceptive allure of self-reliance, self-gratification.

I'd rather do it myself. We throw ourselves on the grace of God and look to him to establish our boundaries as if we were a widow. So the Lord actively destroys.

There are people who say God just refrains from dispensing grace and people wallow in self-induced misery and all of the bad consequences are just their own doing. They haven't read

their Bible. It doesn't say God allows the house of the proud to fall down.

God destroys it. God moves and will wreck it. God will send the storm that demolishes the house that is built on sand.

Who do you think controls the weather? Our house has to be built on a rock. And here, the Lord will destroy the house of the proud, not just remove maintenance so that it gradually destroys or comes apart on its own. He will establish.

God is active. He's not busy somewhere else. He is actively involved.

He is intimately aware of circumstances. Where there is pride, he will act to judge it, to discipline it. Hopefully, for a responsive believer, it will turn them around as it did the Apostle Paul.

When he was Saul and he was acting as an arrogant Pharisee and he was in the wrong path, the Lord Jesus confronted him and blinded him. And Saul repented and became the Apostle Paul. God will implement judgment, hoping to turn us.

Whom the Lord loves, he chastens. He scourges the sons that he receives. He doesn't just remove himself and let bad consequences happen.

This is the ridiculous notion of child training that has permeated the left-leaning public education sector for decades now. Well, don't inflict any consequences. Don't say anything negative.

If a child is acting badly, just remove yourself and wait until they wear themselves out. And once they do something good, reward that. That is the most unbiblical, godless, human insanity there is.

Bad behavior needs to be met with consequences. That's how God does it. If you are proud and you go your own way, God will destroy your house.

And that's the pattern. That's the model. He will establish the boundary of the widow, the humble, those who are looking to him for relief and for provision.

That brings you to the second part of the quatrain here. The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord. Notice, it is what is in the heart.

God knows the heart. He knows the thoughts. Before it ever comes to an expression on the face, a word from the lips, or an action performed, God knows the thoughts.

He knows the thoughts are wicked, and they are an abomination. It's the strongest rejection word you have. But, of the pure, pleasant.

Notice the words are in italics. It's the thoughts of the pure. There's no word here for words.

The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord, but the thoughts of the pure are a pleasure. God delights in seeing the thoughts that take place in a pure heart, that has a good conscience, expressing a genuine faith. This was in 1 Timothy chapter 1. This pleases the Lord.

It doesn't take a genius to figure out that it is better to please the Lord than to disgust Him, and to commit an abomination in His sight. And, it is our thinking that gets judged before it ever comes out in words or actions. So, what is the result? Verse 27, He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house.

You're back to verse 25. Greed, self-interest, which is an expression of pride. I deserve more than I have, and I'm going to get it by any means.

He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house. This is cursing by association. You are going to be a problem for those around you.

He who hates, it says bribes in verse 27 there. This is, better translated, gifts. You're not swayed by the idea of material benefit.

People try to buy votes. Well, vote for me and I'll make sure you get this government benefit. I will write checks and send them out to you.

If I'm elected, it will benefit you because you're going to get a gift from my administration. This actually happened in this most recent election where people running for office that said, Vote me in and we'll send you money. It's the most shameless, obvious appeal to the craven baser instincts that, Well, I'll do anything for money.

My vote can be bought. Those who are greedy for gain will trouble their own house. If you follow that path, it will lead to destruction.

This is putting your house on the sand. But if you reject those who make an appeal to you based on your personal material benefit, and you base your decisions on godly counsel, on that which advances us on the upward way, that which pleases God because it comes from a pure heart, a pure heart is not greedy for gain. This is why we can be generous.

Someone asks us for a coat, we can give them the cloak also because we're not trying to hang onto material goods. We trust that God will meet our needs according to his riches in glory. We take no thought for what we eat or what we drink or what we wear in the sense that if it gets depleted, it's okay.

My father in heaven knows what I need. I count on him to provide. I'm not trying to feather my own nest or line my own pockets.

He who hates the gifts of those who want to co-opt you, pervert you, deflect you, drag you in the way of sinners to sit in the seat of the scornful by appealing to your greed. You hate those gifts. You will live.

And once again, you have this appeal to life that we saw in verse 24. We turn away from Sheol below by hating that which drags us in that direction. Now in verse 28, the heart of the righteous studies how to answer.

Studies how to answer. Once again, you remember that the heart that foregoes evil and seeks the good is at issue. The heart can either cultivate evil thoughts or pure words.

That's what we saw in verse 26. The thoughts of the wicked that are abominable in the Lord's sight or purity that pleases the Lord. This happens in the heart.

We can either be greedy or generous as in verse 27. We are either enamored with material possessions or we are free of that, in other words. So, the good and effective answer that we saw earlier, the answer of the mouth that is joy in verse 23, the heart of the righteous takes time to figure out how to answer.

The heart of a righteous person ponders its response. We're not impulsive. We don't rush in without thought, without prayer.

We take time to consider, to ponder. This word means to ponder its answer. You find this in Psalm 63, verse 5-7, to meditate.

When David says in Psalm 63, My soul will be satisfied with marrow and fatness. My mouth shall praise you with joyful lips. This is the joy that we're seeing in this passage.

When I remember you on my bed, I meditate, I ponder on you in the night watches. I think my way through my life. I'm not just reacting.

I'm pondering a response. Careful, thoughtful. So, you remember back in verse 2 of this chapter, The tongue of the wise uses knowledge brightly.

The mouth of fools pours forth foolishness. When we get ready to articulate our answer, our response, it is going to be the result of reflection, meditation. The inner heart is often reflected in the outward mouth.

You see this in verse 7. The lips of the wise disperse knowledge. The heart of the fool doesn't get it. Verse 14 of this same chapter.

The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge. The mouth of fools feeds on foolishness. This is constantly linked in Proverbs.

It's the mouth and the heart. And if our mouth is malfunctioning, the way to fix it is address the heart. Spend more time in reflection, in pondering, in prayer.

We want to discipline our tongue. If we can bridle the tongue, as James says, we can bring our whole body under subjection. If you want to bridle your tongue, you have to start in the heart because they are inextricably linked.

Then in verse 29. The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous. Pretty self-evident.

And this summarizes much of what we've seen in the preceding 8 or 9 verses. The Lord is going to be far from the wicked. You're not going to be traveling upward.

You're going to be headed for Sheol. You're not going to have permanent possession. You're not going to have plans that are blessed.

Your plans will be thwarted and what you have will be lost. You will lose ground. You will descend.

Foolishness will be joy to you. And how tragic is that? But he hears the prayer of the righteous. If we seek righteousness, if we seek the positive will of our Father in heaven, he will hear our prayer.

He will hear and he will answer. And we will live in his strength and by his power. Well, this brings us to verse 30 through 33.

That's what we'll look at next time, which will conclude our study of chapter 15. And that will bring us to chapter 16. You can look quickly at verse 1 of chapter 16.

The preparations of the heart belong to a man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. You can see where this is going. It's a continuation in chapter 16 of the answer that we give.

What is going on in the heart and what is the Lord's role in our life? We can ask ourselves this question day by day, prayer by prayer. What's going on in my heart? That determines what comes out of my mouth. That determines the kind of plans I make, whether they will be blessed by the Lord or thwarted.

Whether what I have will be established and transferred into eternal treasure by the Lord, or if that will be destroyed. If God will take even what I have away. We belong to God.

We are not our own. We have been bought with a price. And we are here to glorify God in our bodies.

Father, thank you for this powerful reminder of the opportunities that we have. And the potentials, both positive and negative, depending on what we choose, what we pursue, what we elevate to first place in our lives. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, as our great counselor, will bring these concepts to our remembrance.

Help us to navigate our circumstances, to make our plans, and to implement our possessions, both material and spiritual, in a way that is pleasing in your sight. That glorifies the Lord Jesus, prepares us for service and function now and in the ages to come. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.

