

Proverbs 25-02-19a

Greetings, welcome to Wednesday night Bible study at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 19th of February, 2025. We're in Proverbs chapter 16, looking at this beautifully constructed, elegantly communicated set of truths in verses one through nine.

It is so practical. We missed last Wednesday, but in any case, we're going to pick up here in this section, 16, one through nine. It is symmetrical.

It is designed to emphasize certain points, and it begins in verse one with the point that we're going to pick up with tonight. Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study, and we'll begin. Father, we are grateful for the fellowship that you have provided for us, the encouragement and the enthusiasm of fellow followers of the Lord of like mind who appreciate your truth and are anxious to incorporate it into daily life, to prepare ourselves for opportunities that you will have for us now and what is ahead.

We pray that as we look at this portion of your word, the Holy Spirit will help us to see where it applies in our own lives, how we can do a better job of implementing the things that we learn and know to be true. We pray that in all things, the Lord Jesus will be glorified. We ask it in his name.

Amen. Reading our passage here, just the first couple of verses, in the New King James, it says, the preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits.

And this opening of the section is mirrored in verses eight and nine. The inside bracket, better is a little with righteousness than vast revenues without justice. And that justice is the outcome of the Lord weighing the spirits.

You can see the symmetry here, how verse eight compliments verse two. And if we are judged by the Lord to be righteous, even small amounts of something, even something that the world would consider to not be great, but a little, is blessed to our hearts in ways that make it far better than vast possessions where we were not judged righteous. It is ephemeral.

It's temporary. It's going to slip through our grasp. It's going to go from stimulation to ashes in the mouth very quickly.

So we don't want to assume that we are doing well in our own eyes. We want to think to the Lord's evaluation. When he weighs our spirit, we hope that he will find us righteous and grant us blessings that are appropriate, that don't knock us off our feet, that don't overwhelm us and turn into temptations in and of themselves.

God will measure out to us exactly what is best for us, what fulfills our capacity for life. And the world can go after vast revenues, but they lack those things. And when the scales of justice

weigh the life, it is going to be a hard time for them.

But then the outside, what we're looking at here with verse one is the symmetry. A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. And you see what a beautiful *inclusio* they call it.

This is with verse one, the preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. And you notice that the heart and man and the plans are all repeated from verse one in verse nine. And then the Lord's superintending presence and grace are in the second line.

What is fascinating, and you can really get a lot of distance out of this section of Proverbs, spending time on it. And it's also a wonderful example of the way structure, symmetry, and design work in the book of Proverbs to take these individual elements and put them in a context that helps us understand their meaning, rather than just copying the two lines onto a card and sticking it on the refrigerator and looking at it and saying, well, that seems sort of self-evident. So for example, here in verse one, and we looked at this last time where it says the preparations of the heart belong to man.

The word for preparations is, this is where we are accountable. We're responsible for the state of our heart. God is not going to go in without any choice, prioritization, action, prayer on our part.

He's not going to go in and start changing things in our heart. Calvinists hate this because they think that, or they will oppose this concept would be a better way to put it, because they believe that God never waits to see what man is going to do, and then will either respond or react accordingly. That God should not be at the behest of man.

Our initiative shouldn't determine what God does. God is always in charge. He is sovereign, and you know the big emphasis on sovereignty.

So if my heart is good or my heart is bad, that's a result of God's activity. And as you can see from this verse and many others, verse nine included, there is a direct correlation between what is going on in our heart and what God does. But the cause and effect are backward in Reformed theology, that God is going to somehow send his *pervenient* grace in and change my heart, or that I can just go to God in prayer and say, oh God, change my heart.

You think about Psalm 51, where there is the prayer, create in me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a right spirit within me. But this is a result of repentance, of housekeeping, of confessing known sins, of coming to God in humility, and the initiation for this creation of a clean heart and the renewal of a right spirit, the purging with hyssop, and the washing to be whiter than snow. What is initiating this? God doesn't find David in a state of sin or the psalmist and say, well, I need to clean up this heart.

I need to create a right spirit and change this all around. The prayer precedes the cleansing and the renewal and the restoration. So there is our responsibility to tend our own house, mind our

own heart, judge ourselves, so that we would not be judged.

And that's the idea here. This word for preparations is our initiative. We wake up and realize that the state of our heart is our responsibility.

So this word is ma-ar-keh. And you know enough Hebrew now, we've gone over this enough times, when you see an M at the beginning of a Hebrew word, ma-ar-keh, and so it's got like three syllables. The last part of that is the verb and the M in front of it is turning the verb into a noun.

So shafat is justice, mishpat, mishafat, put an M in front of it. So shafat is to judge and mishpat is justice. Justice is the result of doing the action of the verb.

Shafat, mishpat, mishfat. Same thing here. So ma-ar-keh, ar-keh is the verb part and M turns it into a noun.

So what does this verb mean? Or arak, it means to set in order, to arrange, put something in a meaningful, helpful, or effective state. So for example, when you look at the king of Sodom and the king of Gomorrah, the king of Adma and Zeboim and the king of Bilah, these are the five kings of the plain in Genesis 14, that Abraham is going to go up against. They go out and join together in battle in the valley of Sidin.

Remember Sodom and Gomorrah don't get destroyed until Genesis 19. But in Genesis 14, verse 8, these five kings went out and joined together in battle. And the word for join together, to set themselves in battle array, to attend to the disposition of their troops, cover their flanks, arrange for communication and for oversight.

Generals would try to get up on a hill so they could see if they were attacking or retreating or prevailing or being defeated. And so they arranged, they set themselves up, they coordinate. Will you take this valley? I'll take this pass.

King of Zeboim, you go over here and do this. King of Adma, you go over and do this. And so there is conscious planning and thought.

This is what we are to do with our heart. So many times we as human beings in general, and unfortunately as believers who ought to know better, we just kind of play it by ear. We wait for things to come up and we react.

Instead of starting out the day in prayer, in reviewing what is my goal today, what sort of values do I need to maintain? I have a notion of what I'm going to be up against at work or in relationships or tasks and responsibilities to accomplish. I know that some of this is traditionally an area I struggle with or a circumstance I have difficulty navigating and keeping my fruit of the spirit. We're coming up on tax time and it's not just tax in the money sense, it taxes the soul to go through.

And if you do it with your spouse and you're trying to tackle it together, Patty and I have learned over the years, we need to prepare in advance. I in particular have to prepare in advance to not get frustrated, to not get impatient, to not be frustrated and lose my peace over the ridiculous level of documentation that you sometimes have to do and the calculations you have to make and the resulting amount you have to pay. It's just a tough time.

It taxes me both financially and spiritually. Well, knowing that this is the day that we have chosen to go through taxes together, what can I do? I can, before we start, go to the Lord in prayer. Lord, I have failed in this area in the past.

I can set my heart in order. I can arrange my priorities. Is my goal to get a fully completed tax form or is my goal to nurture and develop and enjoy and appreciate my marriage and my fellowship and my peace of mind? What's my goal here? I can easily get deflected into, I've got to get this tax thing done.

I've got to get this task completed by a certain time. My goal is to get something done instead of to be what God would have me be as I get it done. There is a subtle but profound difference in the two.

I quoted this on Sunday. It's the verse in Philippians that my dad wrote in the front of my Bible, whatsoever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord, not unto men, not unto the IRS, it could say in a paraphrase. So this idea of Arak, which gives us our noun of plans or preparations, arrangements, it means to set carefully in order, not just line it up, you know, Hey, all of you kids, line up single file.

I don't care where you are. As long as you're in a line, this means carefully, there is an order. There is a reason there is thinking involved.

And so you see this in Genesis 14, eight, these five Kings of the plain, they've been in battle before. They know how to manage their troops. They have created this alliance and they know who's going to be best at what, who's got more cavalry, who's got more infantry, who's got more, uh, skilled archers.

Let's think about where we're going to put our assets and how we are going to dispose and emplace our troops for maximum effect. Of course, it was all for naught because Abraham kicked their, their atheistic rear ends all over the battlefield, but they arranged themselves. It was also used in Genesis chapter 22, verse nine, the very familiar story, Genesis 22, you should have a rough idea of, of Genesis.

And you know that you're coming to the place where Ishmael has been born and then Isaac has been born. And then God tells Abraham, take your son to the place. I will show you and offer him there as a sacrifice to me.

So in Genesis chapter 22, verse nine, then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order. And he bound Isaac, his son,

and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

Notice the wood is mentioned twice. Isaac is mentioned once. What's the deal with the wood? When he built the altar, he placed the wood in order.

Why? If these are going to potentially be Isaac's last experiences, is he going to stack the wood with little pokey chopped branches there so that he's, he's uncomfortable and getting bruised or cut on this wood. If you've seen some of the wood in the middle East, it can be very brushy and you need an ax or a machete type implement to get the branches off so that you can lay it. But Abraham lays this wood in order because he is visualizing Isaac laying upon it.

So he carefully emplaces the wood. It is large enough. It is smooth enough.

He makes a bed out of wood, if you will, for his son, Isaac. Then he binds Isaac and lays him on the altar upon the wood. How carefully and meticulously do you think Abraham arranged this wood? And all the time he's thinking, I am doing this because God commanded me to be here.

This is what God asks of me. If I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it right. This is going to be the best altar I ever built.

This is going to be the most perfect arrangement of wood I have ever done. This is my son we're talking about. I'm not doing it haphazard.

It's not sloppy. That's our word, Arak, to arrange the wood. It also means to set things over against each other.

If you go to Psalm chapter 40, verse 5, it's verse 6 in the Hebrew. You know how the superscription is verse 1 and so they're offset in Hebrew. But in Psalm 40, remember, we well know the verse that follows.

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, my ears you have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering you did not require. Then I said, behold, I come in the scroll of the book it is written of me.

I delight to do your will, O God, and your law is in my heart. And that is quoted in Hebrews chapter 10, verse 7, and also in the Gospels in whole or in part. But it's the preceding verse.

Look at Psalm 40, verse 5. Many, O Lord my God, are your wonderful works, which you have done, and your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to you in order. If I tried to declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered. You have done so many wonderful things, the Psalmist says.

This is David. Remember the first 50 and I think perhaps 51 are all Davidic Psalms. When he starts thinking about everything that God has done, the wondrous works he has performed, and his thoughts, God's planning, and God's preparation, David says, these things, I can't repeat them back to you and arrange them by priority or arrange them by glory or find any way

to put them in order.

There's just too many. If I started listing them, I would leave something out that ought to be higher in the list. It's too much.

It's beyond what I can think for or imagine. And he uses the word *arach*. I cannot set in order or arrange in some fashion.

Every time I start to think of them, so many of them crowd into my mind. And this one is even more wondrous than that one. And oh, what about this one? And it reminds you of when he talks about looking up into the stars.

What is man that you are mindful of him or the son of man that you visit him? You have made him a little lower than the angels. You have crowned him with glory and honor. And it just starts blowing the mind.

So thinking of the mighty works of God can't wrap a human mind around it. If you could wrap your mind around it, you could dominate it. You could put it in order.

You could say, I've got forks, knives, and spoons, and I've got a holder in the silverware drawer. Spoons go here. Knives go here.

Forks go here. I can do that. But the works of the Lord, I can't create an arrangement that does them justice.

That's the idea of this word, this Hebrew word. It is used in Job 13, verse 18, when he's talking to his three friends. And he says, look, see now, I have prepared my case, and I know I shall be vindicated.

Job says, I'm representing myself. I am my own lawyer, and I've got my ducks lined up. I've got my arguments prepared.

I've got my logical case ready to present before the divine throne. And I know I'm going to win. I know I shall be vindicated.

I am just. I am righteous. I am in good shape here.

And if I can just present my case, if the court will just allow me in the door, I will be vindicated. I've got it lined up. Job 13, verse 18.

But go to Job chapter 32, and go ahead and turn there. Job chapter 32. 32, if you remember, is where Elihu begins to speak.

And he has listened to Job and his three friends. Right at the end of chapter 31, it says, the words of Job are ended. So in chapter 32, these three men ceased answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.

Job says, I've got a case. I'll present it. I'll be vindicated.

And nothing they say moves him off of that ground. Then the wrath of Elihu, the son of Barakel, the Buzite of the family of Ram, was aroused against Job. Why was his wrath aroused? Because Job justified himself rather than God.

This is so interesting. Also, against the three friends, Elihu's wrath was because they had found no answer and yet had condemned Job. Elihu is mad at everybody.

Now, without going back to our Job study and the beautiful symmetry, so many pictures of the Lord Jesus, of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, and Elihu is one of them, just like Joseph and several others. Without going down that road, let me just point out that there are different reasons Elihu is righteously angry with Job, because Job justifies himself. He is angry with the three friends because they are not able to correct Job.

Here's the thing. Job is not wrong. Job is not being judged, punished, or disciplined for personal sin.

And that's Job's case. Hear me now. This is a great point stemming from our Proverbs 16 study.

Elihu, who in my view, and I think I'm at the end of a set of tracks in the unbroken snow, which we had a lot of, I believe Elihu is a foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus. And when he speaks, we should pay attention. He is directing wrath against Job, who vindicates himself and judges himself to be righteous.

And Job's not wrong. Why is Elihu angry with Job when Job has arranged his case and says, I know I will be vindicated, and he has done so. He has rebuked and rebuffed all of the arguments that the other three friends have made.

But Elihu is angry at Job because he was righteous in his own eyes. Think about this now. Job is righteous in his own eyes.

So what is Job thinking as he sits on the ash heap, scraping himself with a potsherd? I don't deserve this. I have done nothing wrong. And he is right.

He doesn't deserve it. And he hasn't done anything wrong. What's the problem? What's the problem? Elihu is going to go on to contend, Job, you shouldn't be sitting there saying this situation is intolerable because I don't deserve it.

I haven't done anything wrong. It is because Job should be thinking not about himself. What is the definition of subjectivity? Eyes on self, eyes on people, eyes on circumstance.

What should Job be defending when he talks to his three friends? Not, I know you keep thinking I've sinned, but I haven't. I know you think that I deserve this in some fashion and that I'm deceiving myself. Job defends his situation on the basis that he is guiltless instead of proactively proclaiming the righteousness and justice and glory of God.

It is true that he can vindicate himself on the basis that he hasn't done anything wrong, but he says, I'm going to go to the Almighty and defend myself instead of God is in his heaven. Sure, I don't deserve this and I haven't done anything wrong, but God has brought it about, so it is okay. There is a difference in defending himself and justifying himself and being righteous in his own eyes instead of looking at God as ultimate righteousness, God as ultimate justice.

Job should say, and what he is going to say when the whirlwind appears is, I'm going to shut up. I spoke wrong. I messed up.

It isn't about me. It is about the Lord God in heaven. And instead of trying to say this situation is screwed up because I don't deserve it, this situation is not screwed up because my God is in charge.

Do you see the difference? We may not understand it. We may think this is unfair, unkind, unjust. I don't get it because we're looking at ourselves and saying, I don't see how in any way, shape or form I brought this on myself.

And the first 31 chapters of Job are an interaction, actually probably 29 of them if you want to accept one and two, but nearly 30 chapters of Job are all about Job arguing with his friends about whether or not he ought to be in this situation. Instead of extolling the righteousness and justice of God in this situation, the friends will talk about God, Job will talk about God, but they don't vindicate and justify God as knowing the end from the beginning, as creating the wicked for a purpose. As we've seen in Proverbs, even the wicked serve his purpose.

He endures with great patience, vessels of wrath fitted for destruction. We should endure with great patience, hardships, seeming injustices. We didn't bring it on ourselves.

It is out of our control. It is negative. It is hard to endure.

But if we make the Job mistake and look at ourselves instead of focusing on God, and Elihu as a foreshadow, an adumbration of the Lord Jesus says, Job, you're out of line. Not because you actually did do something wrong. Your case is sound, but you shouldn't even be bringing your case to defend yourself.

You should be looking to God in faith, in obedience, in endurance, the way the Lord Jesus is going to do when he goes to the cross. The Lord Jesus didn't deserve the accusations, the treatment that he received, the shameful death that was inflicted upon him as a lamb to the slaughter. He opened not his mouth because he had the mind, not my will, but thine be done.

I don't need to go to my father and say, well, you know, I haven't done anything to deserve this fate. Let this mind be in you, which also was in Christ Jesus, Philippians chapter 2. That's Job's mistake. But notice when Elihu speaks up here in chapter 32, verse 14, he says, he switches audiences.

He says in verse 12, I paid close attention to you three friends. Surely not one of you convinced

Job or answered his words. Lest you say we have found wisdom, God will vanquish him, not man.

Now he has not directed his words against me, so I will not answer him with your words. And this idea of bringing forth words, I'm not going to bring an orderly case. I'm not going to arrange a defense.

Job says, I've arranged a defense of myself before God. Elihu says, I'm not going to make an orderly case with your words. Then he turns in verse 15 to Job and he's talking about the three friends to Job.

He says, they are dismayed and answer no more. Words escape them. I have waited because they did not speak because they stood still and answered no more.

I also will answer my part. I too will declare my opinion. I am full of words.

The spirit within me compels me. It is such a beautiful thing. If you read Elihu and just keep in mind a reflection of the Lord Jesus, you can't unsee it once you see it.

Indeed, my belly is like wine that has no vent. It is ready to burst like new wine skins. I will speak that I may find relief.

I must open my lips and answer. Let me not, I pray, so partiality to anyone, not subjectivity, not eyes on people, nor let me flatter any man. I do not know how to flatter or my maker would soon take me away.

But please, Job, hear my speech. Listen to all my words. I open my mouth.

My tongue speaks in my mouth. My words come from my upright heart. See that in 33.3? My words come from my upright heart.

This is what we have in Proverbs 16. The orderly prepared heart is going to have an answer prompted by the spirit that is going to be a godly response. That's what our verse says in Proverbs.

The heart, man, it is man's responsibility to order or prepare his heart, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. And that word but, it's just the wow, it is equally well translated and. The preparation of the heart belongs to man and the answer of the tongue will be from the Lord.

A prepared heart will produce responses that are of the Lord. So important to recognize that whatever our circumstance, instead of trying to assign blame or vindicate ourselves as being blameless, it's not my fault. It's not my responsibility.

I can show you any number of reasons. I don't know why God let this happen to me. What should we be doing? God is in his heaven.

Whatever he is doing is righteous and just. I am in his hands. He is the potter.

I am the clay. I have a beautiful hymn to that effect. Thou art the potter.

I am the clay. This is have thine own way, Lord, by the way. Have thine own way.

I am the potter. Thou art the clay. Mold me and make me after thy will while I am waiting, patient and still.

I will trust God to make of me. I want to be compliant. I want to hold the shape that he creates with me as the clay.

I want to be faithful clay. I don't want to mar. I don't want to fade.

I don't want to fold. I don't want to fall. I don't want to collapse.

I can tell you from first-hand observation, watching a skillful potter, a lot depends on the clay. And there's nothing that delights the heart of a potter more than great clay. They can do wonderful things.

A potter can exceed himself when he's got great clay. That's what we need to be. Not worrying about justifying ourselves to others, especially as Job does.

Celebrate God who is at work to will and to do for his good pleasure. And whatever comes our way, as long as we are careful to arrange our hearts, set our heart in order, ensure that we are flaw-free, confess our sins, pray 1 John 1.9, pray Psalm 51. Then the answer, the result will be of and from the Lord.

There is so much theology in this single verse. And when you compare with verse 9, a man's heart orders his way. We start by ordering our heart.

With an ordered heart, we can now order our way. When we have an ordered heart, the answer of the tongue will be of the Lord. When an orderly heart orders our way, our practice, our implementation, our application, the Lord will direct our steps.

You can see the progress from verse 1 to verse 9. Put those together and we decide, we choose, we prioritize, we implement our goals, values, and priorities in the light of God's word, on the basis of God's word, in the power of God's spirit. God will ensure that the answer of our tongue is appropriate, and God will direct our steps. Our forward progress through life will be in God's hands.

It doesn't get any better than that. I love portions of scripture that say, there is a desirable outcome, here's how to do it, here's how to make it happen. Wonderful blessings, rewards, opportunities, advances.

How do you get there? Crystal clear. Set in order our heart. Use that orderly heart to set in

order our way.

Prioritize, strategize, think our way to the objective, and God will help us get there under his direction, with his gracious provision and support. That's a complete life plan in two verses, Proverbs 16.1 and 16.9. Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to look at what is inside this beautiful outer container and finish our look at Proverbs 16.1 through 9.