

Proverbs 25-03-12a

Greetings, fellow members of Grace & Truth Bible Church. This is Wednesday, the 12th of March, 2025. We are journeying through Proverbs chapter 16.

We have come to a very fascinating section that I like to call the speech quatrains. It begins in verse 22 and continues to about verse 30, 22 through 30. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study, and we will dive in.

Father, it is a truly awe-inspiring realization that we are constantly held in your gracious hands. We are blessed, we are provided for, we are protected. You direct our circumstances.

You are intimately aware of our ups and downs, our strengths, our weaknesses, our successes, our failures, our opportunities and our challenges. We thank you for your superintending love on behalf of each one of us, and for our groups, our families, our marriages, our friendships, our church fellowship. We are grateful for your active and interested participation in the details of our lives.

There is such a large world, there is such an expansive universe, and yet you are large enough to be aware of even the tiniest details. We pray that as we look at this part of your Word tonight, that we will be able to understand it through the ministry of your Spirit. We can see where it pertains in our own particular set of circumstances, that we can find the Holy Spirit bringing it to our minds and enabling us and empowering us through it, so that in particular in the area of our conversation, our speech, which is our communication with one another, that these truths will illuminate our path, give us the opportunity to lay hold of righteousness by faith, to be a blessing to others, to be blessed by you as we endeavor to follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, who set a perfect example in this regard.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we find ourselves here in Proverbs 16, and if you have penciled your pages as I have, they have become dark with graphite, but we saw the heart chiasm, we saw the Lord chiasm, we saw the king quatrains, then we've seen the mind discussed in these quatrains that begin here in verse 16 through 21, and this establishes the importance of our thinking.

So we had a four-line section in verses 16 and 17 that talked about our priorities. What are we really trying to achieve when we embark on a day? What's our goal? What would be a satisfactory day? Sometimes just staying out of trouble seems to be a great thing. Nobody's mad at me, so it must have been an okay day.

But we find that the getting of wisdom, and this includes the experiential outworking of the truth of God's Word, it becomes wisdom when we see it in practice, when we're able to implement it and see the fruit of it. This is in Greek. We've noted in the past the difference between gnosis, which is knowledge, or epi-gnosis, which is knowledge that we have seen work out in experience.

I was reminded of this truth yesterday. There was a young man who was about to finish high school and college, and I tuned his family's piano a year ago. He contacted me in recent weeks and said, I'm interested in becoming a piano tuner.

Would I be able to pick your brain at some point? I said, well, your family's piano is due for a tuning. Why don't we schedule that and we'll schedule it when you're home from school and you can ask all the questions you like. So we did that yesterday.

It was a great time. He's a sharp guy. It is a task tuning a piano, knowing how to do basic repairs of a piano, that is the difference between knowledge, which he's been gaining on YouTube, watching videos, doing research, finding out different techniques and understandings and priorities in tuning a piano, and going beside someone like an apprentice and seeing it in practice.

So after doing a repair, taking the piano apart and showing him the way to do it and to do it safely without damaging the instrument and then putting the action back in this baby grand, I shared with him the wisdom like we get from the pages of scripture, but to change it from gnosis to epinosis or from knowledge to wisdom, he really has to put it into practice. So I didn't tune the family piano. I gave him one of my spare tuning levers and a couple of mutes, and we agreed that this would be a great time for him to learn by doing.

That's the difference between knowledge and wisdom. You can watch videos, you can talk to someone, you can ask questions and get answers, but until you do for yourself, it is a different kind of mental understanding and mental grasp than when you have the experience. So this first mind quatrain in verses 16 and 17, how much better to get wisdom than gold and to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.

This really has kind of a double meaning because these are of course precious metals that have intrinsic value, but if you have gold, it is just sitting in the bank, so to speak, or it's sitting in a bag on a shelf, or it is stored. It has potential. Not until you hand over the gold in exchange for an ox in the ancient world, or a cart, or some work, or a field, or a dwelling, or some other thing that you can put into use, gold doesn't do work.

Gold represents value. It is potential. And this is why wisdom and understanding are better than gold and silver because gold and silver are assets that have not yet been spent.

When you spend them, now you can do work, you can have a plow, you can have a flock, you can have a field, and so on. But the importance of this is the difference between potential and knowledge and the truths that we come to know from scripture are really potential until they are put into practice. So that was the first quatrain that we reviewed last time.

The second one is in verses 18 and 19, and it is about our attitude. Are we proud or are we humble? Are we approaching things from a standpoint that it is necessary to look at the interests of others, to be objective and not subjective, to not be unconsciously worshiping the

unholy trinity of me, myself, and I. And humility is objectivity. It has been defined as strength under control.

Self-control is the flip side of humility. I don't let my self-interest get away from me. I don't get my self-opinion and my desire to be recognized or to be gratified or to be in some way served by the society in general.

We have a lot of entitlement mentality in our society today. People feel like they are entitled. They even feel that people that aren't citizens of the country have entitlement.

And it is not objective. It is often rooted in emotion or in idealistic thinking, utopian visions of grandeur that have no practical benefit. So the first quatrain, 16 and 17, this is our priorities.

What is the foundation upon which we think? And the priority is to gain experiential wisdom, to have practical understanding. Without that, everything else is going to fall to the ground. Secondly, once we have that, are we going to become arrogant and self-absorbed or are we going to be humble and look at the ways that this wisdom and understanding can be used in the furtherance of God's plan and purpose? So this is the progress in the first and second quatrain.

And then we come to the third, which is leading us into the practical outworking, the response. When we have good priorities and a good attitude, how do we then proceed? What is visible to the outside world? So he who heeds the word wisely will find good. This is often invisible to the world.

It doesn't have a visible component to people who don't know how to view an understanding. This is another word, something we see with spiritual eyes. So when we heed the word and find good, this is good of a spiritual nature.

The world might think, well, that was a bad decision. You lost money. You lost opportunity.

You missed a promotion. And that is not what is in view. The good is the good that comes from God, the good that God works together from all things.

And often something that looks like a setback is good in God's plan and in God's eyes and by God's standards. And so this gives us a vision of the world that is more realistic because it is God's perspective. No discipline seems good at the time that it is administered.

Whom the Lord loves, he chastens. And that chastening, that discipline yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness. This is what we are after with our faith.

And someone might look and say, wow, that was certainly a setback. What did you do wrong that God has withdrawn his favor and withdrawn his provision? And you look like you're up against it there. And yet this is something that God is using to benefit us.

I've heard the illustration in the past that when the leaves fall and the sap runs down into the

root system and there are trees surviving a winter and the storms come, dead branches are broken out. And that which is unfruitful is inflexible and snapped off. When spring comes, you could say, boy, that tree had a hard winter.

Look at the way the ice snapped off branches and it has lost something through the winter. But when spring comes, that which remains is better able to use the resources that come from the ground and the water and the soil. And it is a more healthy, fruitful and productive tree.

So can we see that? Can we recognize it? Can we have faith that that is what God is doing in our lives? We can expect it and we can identify it. We can see it if we meet the conditions for the fulfillment of that promise, that God is working all things together for good. There's not a period at the end of that phrase in the scriptures.

When you go to Romans 8, 28 and 29, there is an if, there is a condition. God works all things together for good to those who are ones who love Him and who are the called according to His purpose. And that's the truth.

Do we see that we are the called, that God is working in our lives? Do we see that there is hard time, difficulty that strengthens our faith? We see this with spiritual eyes. And that's what it's talking about here. He who heeds the word wisely will find good.

This is God's good, not necessarily good the way the world measures it, but it is eternal good. It is good that benefits us and glorifies God. Whoever trusts in the Lord, He is the happy one.

It doesn't say whoever succeeds, whoever gets gold and silver, whoever prospers, whoever finds himself safe from enemies roundabout, whoever trusts in the Lord, that's the happy guy. That's where your peace and joy are to be found. Therefore in verse 21, the wise in heart are going to be called prudent.

You had the right priorities. You had the right attitude and this is the result. These three quatrains fit together with condition and result.

We need to prioritize our attitude, cultivate a positive attitude. We need to ensure that we are setting the right priorities and as a result, we will have genuine happiness and genuine goodness. Well, that brings us to our section tonight, which begins in verse 22.

And I am calling these the speech quatrains. Different areas of our life are being addressed here in these proverbs. What is our response to authority, whether it is the king or it is the Lord? What is the preparation of our heart? And we pick up the theme of the heart in these recent quatrains, dealing with priorities, with attitudes and with outcomes.

And trust takes place in the heart. We gain wisdom and prudence and carry it in our heart. So now, how does this affect what we say? In these next verses, really 22 through 30 are going to give us the positive and the negative sides of our communication.

In the ancient world, this was speech. Now this can include what we text, what we email, what we post in blogs or under other people's comments. We've got all kinds of social media and it is communication.

It is speech. The Bible talks about the tongue, the lips, the mouth. Now we would have to include fingertips to bring it up to date.

But look at what it says here, beginning in verse 22. Understanding is a wellspring of life to him who has it, but the correction of fools is folly. And you can see the neat transition.

We used to look for this in the radio. How do you segue from one program to another, from one subject to another, from one part of the programming day to another? It's a segue, it's a transition. You do this in writing, in literature.

Speaking of apples, let me tell you about my friends up north in Duluth. But what is the transition here? The idea of understanding is the transition from what goes on in the mind and heart to what comes out in our communication with others. So understanding is a wellspring of life to one who has it.

We can benefit from that understanding. It conditions our decisions, the way we get through the day. But what if we try to share that understanding with someone else? Well, it depends on who that someone else is.

And part of that understanding is knowing when to speak and when to remain silent. The Lord Jesus is the classic example. During his trials before the crucifixion, there were times when he was asked questions, such as his dialogue with Pilate, where he responds, Are you a king? Thou sayest.

For this reason came I into the world, to bear witness to the truth, and so on. He is conversing and speaking to Pilate. Other times, he didn't say a word.

Agrippa can be very disappointed, and others, he said nothing. Or they couldn't even hear what he was saying, speaking from the cross. They thought he was calling for Elijah, when he said, Eli, Eli, lama, sabachthani.

They thought he was saying, calling out to the prophet Elijah. So understanding is a wellspring of life to him who has it. This is the internal wellspring of living water.

And we've just seen how to acquire it, and how to maintain it, and how to exploit it, so that we find the good, and we are happy. Happy in the Lord. Happy knowing that we are here for a purpose, and God, by his grace, is enabling us to fulfill it.

That's a wellspring of life. It has benefits in time and in eternity. But if you try to just put that in a bottle, pour it into a cup, and hand it to a fool, tragic consequences.

The correction of fools, that's foolish. When you have the understanding, don't leave the

understanding, and try to foolishly push your wisdom and your understanding towards someone else, and try to get them to imbibe it, and to benefit from it. Each of us has to go after this in our relationship with God, and our pursuit of understanding of scripture individually.

We have fellow travelers who are walking the narrow road there. Other people doing the same thing. But nobody can walk our road for us.

And you know how difficult it is to take even good, sound advice, when we feel like someone is correcting us, someone is talking to us, because they perceive that we're not totally in the right. They perceive us as in a bad way, or lacking something, and we get our backup. There's a defense.

And it is only in the sphere of the one another's. This is why speaking the truth to one another in love is a carefully worded phrase in the New Testament. It doesn't say speaking the truth to everyone outside in love, because you will find misunderstanding, and pushback, and our good will be spoken of as evil.

And there will be resentment, and there will be bitterness, and there will be pushback from people who are themselves foolish. They are not the wise. Wisdom is currency.

Wisdom is shared among the wise. This is why earlier in Proverbs we saw the opportunity to walk with the wise, to sit at table with others who are wise. And they benefit from our observations.

We benefit from their observations, because we have an attitude of humility. We have a priority of gaining wisdom, and not defending our ego. And that ends up with goodness, and with happiness.

But we have a transition here in verse 22, because now we're going to talk about communication. Where is the wisdom when we communicate? And so understanding is a wellspring of life to him who already has it. Where did that understanding come from? We just saw it in the earlier quatrains.

Where it comes from, and the priority that we place on it. Get wisdom, and with all you're getting, get understanding. That's been one of the themes of Proverbs up to this point.

But you can't give it to someone else. We can see so clearly. We want them so badly to see it from our perspective.

But when we try to share it, and there is this rejection, and there's this pushback, and there's no foundation for it. Even if they understand what we're saying, they can't parse it. They can't apply it.

They can't use it, because they're ill-equipped. It's built on a foundation. And if that foundation doesn't exist, you might as well drop a beautiful mansion onto quicksand.

Our house is built on a rock. If someone doesn't have that rock, which is Christ, then anything you give them, even if it's wonderful, and valuable, and well-communicated, and delivered in love, and in concern, and in a well-meaning wish that they be happy, and extricate themselves from problems. If all they've got is sand for that to land on, it will fail.

And if anything, it can make matters worse. So Proverbs emphasizes, you get wisdom, you get your understanding. It is a wellspring of life for you.

But your wisdom and your understanding are a wellspring for you alone, and for others who are one another's, who are also on a quest for God's wisdom and understanding. If they are a fool, meaning they are not doing that, they don't have a priority, they don't have the attitude of humility, then correcting fools, you are now joining them in foolishness. You are abandoning wisdom.

You're walking away from the wellspring of life. And a well-meaning, but misplaced effort to bring someone to the place where we are cannot succeed. It's a spiritual truth that you cannot move a fool with any amount of concern, wisdom, communication, and so on.

Correction of fools is folly. And you can see that we're moving from what do I understand in my heart to what do I try to communicate to others. And that's the first two lines of this first quatrain here.

The second one says, the heart of the wise teaches his mouth. The heart of the wise informs him on how to speak, what to say, and when to say nothing. The heart of the wise teaches his mouth and adds learning to his lips.

It's the word fitly spoken that is mentioned elsewhere here in Proverbs. Knowing when to speak, knowing how to speak, knowing how much to say. We can speak in a way that leaves a door open for someone who is currently in a foolish state.

If they have a change of heart, they know where to come. We have not alienated them. We have not belittled them.

We haven't given them the impression that we feel holier than thou or that they are a hopeless case. There are so many ways that even in silence, we can leave someone a bad impression. How can we speak in a way that doesn't violate the correction of fools injunction here, the exhortation.

We want to speak in a way that indicates that we are available. If someone is asking, if they are seeking, if they are knocking, please come to me. I would love to share what I know when you have a heart of humility, you are now on your own quest for wisdom, and if I have some that I can share, what a wonderful, blessed opportunity that is for both of us.

So how can you speak in a way that will enclose and invite someone without correcting them? This is what this verse is addressing. The heart of the wise will teach us. We've got to stick with

the attitudes of humility.

We've got to have the priority that wisdom is most important, and I don't want to compromise wisdom, and I don't want to walk away from wisdom out of love or concern for someone else. Love and concern are a wonderful thing, but you often see that parents who love their children too much or love them in a wrong way refuse to discipline them and give them the structure and the guidance that they need, and to do the hard things, to deny them something that they want because it's best for them, because the parent has the wisdom and the child does not. And in the same way, we need our wise heart and we need to consult the wisdom in our heart to know how much to say, when to say it, with what emphasis, with what level of illustration, and when to be quiet.

The heart of the wise will teach his mouth and add learning to his lips. If we hope for someone to learn what we have learned, in many cases the hard way, we have to go to the Lord and prayerfully, humbly ask for that wisdom. This is what the Lord Jesus told his disciples.

We've quoted it almost every Bible class now, that when you stand before kings, when you stand before those who are confronting you and there is communication going on, it will be given to you in that hour what to say. Don't worry about it. Don't fret about it.

We can pray, ask God for wisdom. Ensure that anytime we are in a conversation with others, we have a humble heart, we have a willing spirit, but we also have the self-control and the discipline to not say too much, to not push too hard, to not try to correct someone who is not sharing wisdom, who is not in a wise place. And it's hard.

It's really hard. And it's easy to mess up. But this is the guidance from Scripture.

So we're moving now into these verses that deal with having gotten our own heart under control, having been in the process of loading our heart with wisdom and understanding. How does that work out in our dealings with others? So we recognize what a wellspring it is for us, but you can talk too much about that. Oh, this is such a joy and such a blessing and such a this and such that and such the other.

If you're talking to others who are also on the road of humility and prioritization of wisdom, this is great fellowship. It is a wonderful encouragement. If you're talking to someone who's not there, doesn't have the rock, isn't building, they've got sand, then it can have the opposite effect.

Correction of fools is folly. We want to have our mouths taught and have learning added to our lips. That's the first quatrain here.

And it is a contrast and it is a reminder that we have to discern. This is not judging. It is discerning.

In the same way when Jesus said, do not cast your pearls before swine. Well, is it judging to

determine that someone is in the swine category in the sense that they are walking away from the pearls of wisdom? Do not cast your pearls of wisdom before the departing swine because they will turn and tear you to pieces. Well, in order to follow that exhortation from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have to know when someone is in that category.

And they will not, they don't have any more capacity to appreciate the pearls than a pig would. And to cast them, it's just an annoyance. And it can be an aggravation to the point that they will turn and attack and seek to harm the person who's trying to present them.

Why would you cast pearls away? You care about this person. Nobody parts with valuable pearls without some motivation to do so. But the Lord Jesus in his words and in his way gave us this very same guidance, this very same caution.

So we want to constantly be aware in interactions with others, especially those who are not on the same road that we are at this present point. We're praying for them. We're hoping they will, but the delivering of wisdom has to be preceded by a change in heart, change in attitude, change in priorities, so that it will be appreciated and not trampled underfoot.

Verse 24 begins our next quatrain. Verses 24 and 25 are the next. And they say, pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones.

Pleasant words like a honeycomb. The soul appreciates them. The heart appreciates them.

The heart appreciates them. They are a wonderful blessing in that regard. And it is not just like a Twinkie that tastes good in the mouth, but it is also healthy.

It will improve us structurally. It will give us strength. Everyone has known from ancient times that the bones are your strength.

Great muscles are useless if you don't have good bones. If your bones are broken, if they are frail, if they are creaky, all the muscle in the world won't help. The bones are our structure.

It is the foundation for our strength. So they are both. When we are believers who love God and love His truth, we enjoy hearing it.

We appreciate coming to a fresh understanding and learning new things. To me, it is one of the highest, heavenliest privileges of human life to dive into the Word of God and see the beauty of His character and His plan and His purpose and His Son, the Lord Jesus, and the wonderful opportunities we have because of the Holy Spirit. We learn about the past.

We learn about the present. We anticipate genuine realities in the future. It is pleasant.

It is like honeycomb. But it also strengthens us and helps us and enables God to uphold us with the right hand of His righteousness. We can build treasure in heaven.

So it is a win-win. It is pleasant to receive it and it benefits us, giving us spiritual strength. But

look at verse 25.

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. This concept is repeated at least three times in Proverbs. This is one of them.

And it is a reminder that our truth detector, our ability to identify what is right in its natural state is broken. How many people think that they are wrong, but they pursue an agenda anyway? Think about someone that is on the opposite side of the fence politically or socially or morally. Are they sitting there in a stew of guilt and shame and agony, wanting to leave, but I just can't? They think they are right.

They justify it. They vindicate it. They defend it.

It seems right to them. And in many cases, they build their self-esteem and they will find others who also build esteem for themselves and others on embracing these faulty, flawed and often dangerous ideas. It seems right, but its end is the way of death.

It yields no fruit of long-term value because it doesn't pass muster in God's eyes. It will not survive the judgment. And however right we think it is, have you ever had somebody try to convince you of something that you knew in your heart was utterly and totally wrong? They marshal every argument.

They throw everything but the kitchen sink at you. Here's history. Here's experience.

Here's the opinion of famous people. Here are reasons. Here's why I am convinced that this is a wonderful thing.

And no argument has any traction, but it seems so right to them. And you think, how can I be so utterly convinced that this is wrong and dangerous? And they are so utterly convinced that it is wholesome, righteous and good. At least one person is not right.

There are cases where neither one is right. There's a third way that is better, but there's at least one person that is wrong in that conversation. And yet they're equally convinced and equally sure that they're right.

There is a way that seems right and we have to be suspicious of our heart telling us a thing and that it is right. Our heart may be right, but we need to question it and ensure that it's right by going to wisdom and understanding. Is this the path of wisdom? Is this the path of understanding? I take it before the Lord and say, Lord, create in me a clean heart.

Renew a right spirit within me so that I can identify and follow what is true and what is right. Show me my secret faults where I think something is right and it's not. That's hidden from me.

I want to know it. Try me and see if there be any wicked way in me. These are verses from Psalm 51, as you know.

We have to constantly have this attitude of humility and a desire to be right because it is God's way and it is God's wisdom. That's where we're headed now in this second quatrain. There are pleasant words that are sweet to the soul and health to the bones.

I want to be sure that's what I'm listening to because there are other things that seem right and they may even tickle the ears. We've seen this in 2 Timothy. There will come a time when people have itching ears and they will not tolerate truth.

We are in such a time now. I suspect it has been true in various ways all across the centuries since Paul wrote that, but certainly we don't want to be on the wrong side of it. So how do we know whether a way is right or not? Well, we can't go by how it seems to us.

We have to hold it up to the light of wisdom and understanding that is being talked about in this passage. We're going to pause here and take our break. That brings us to the last of these speech quatrains that are on the good side.

Then we're going to see the negative side. What happens when speech is coming from a bad place? Quite a bit of useful and practical information there. We'll pause here and take our break.