

Proverbs 3:1-12

My son, do not forget my teaching,
But let your heart keep my commandments;
For length of days and years of life
And peace they will add to you.
Do not let kindness and truth leave you;
Bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart.
So you will find favor and good repute
In the sight of God and man.
Trust in the Lord with all your heart
And do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He will make your paths straight.
Do not be wise in your own eyes;
Fear the Lord and turn away from evil.
It will be healing to your body
And refreshment to your bones.
Honor the Lord from your wealth
And from the first of all your produce;
So your barns will be filled with plenty
And your vats will overflow with new wine.
My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord
Or loathe His reproof,
For whom the Lord loves He reproves,
Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.

As I did last month, I want to briefly cover the principles for reading Proverbs and the Philosophy of the Book of Proverbs, as I understand it.

Our principles for reading proverbs have to do with the nature of the book itself, and how it was intended to be read. Regarding this, there are three principles we must keep in our minds:

1. The book of Proverbs is wisdom, not law. It expects you to read between the lines and pick up what is being placed before you. While most books of scripture expect you to sit and be educated, Proverbs invites you to sit and ponder with it to search the depths of Wisdom and her sisters.
2. Secondly, keeping with the theme of conversation, proverbs is a book of indicatives, not imperatives. It is not giving you didactic teaching or even sermons, rather it gives indications on how things work. Proverbs cares much more about “what is” than anything else.
3. As with all of scripture, Christ is the point of Proverbs. All of scripture speaks about Christ, and when we read and study this book, we are learning about the ways of Christ just as much as when we read Romans or Exodus. This book is meant to direct us to Christ as the source, sustainer, and end of all wisdom.

As Christ is our Lord, this leads us to the Philosophy of Proverbs:

1. Fear the Lord, for this is where all wisdom and knowledge come from. Fear is recognition of and thankfulness to God for what He does and Who He is, followed by diligent obedience to His commands and instructions.
2. Seek wisdom in all that we do. Wisdom here is a practical knowledge, which was given to the builders of the temple in the Old Covenant. This Wisdom is not a law or set of laws but is a practiced habit of action toward the Fear and Love of God in all that we do. We should understand God’s law and be practical and prudent on how we exercise it. In other words, we are called to be craftsmen in the trade of Righteousness.

3. Honor your parents. Embedded in the very structure of the book is the idea of heeding your father and mother in their advice and obeying that advice, often comparing your usage of their wisdom to jewelry and ornaments. This mirrors the first element of this philosophy in that honoring your parents is a form of honoring God, and the kind of relationship you have with your father is similar to that which you have with God.
4. Teach your children. Finally, corresponding to the second element of this philosophy, you are to pass on what you learn to your children, to teach them to love the Lord your God and seek wisdom. Entailed in this element is the expectation that you will be wise enough to pass wisdom on and be honorable enough to cause your children to listen.

Lastly, we have to understand the context of the passage we are reading. In the first 9 chapters of the book of Proverbs, we are reading a series of treatises, or formal teachings, given from a father to his son. Importantly, we are not the ones being spoken to, rather, we are being invited to sit in on a series of teaching lessons and learn both how the father teaches his son and what the father is teaching his son.

The first thing to note here is that the father is following God's commandments given to Moses and the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 5 and 6. Moses recounts God's words: "The Lord heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the Lord said to me, 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They have done well in all that they have spoken. Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever! Go, say to them, "Return to your tents." But as for you, stand here by Me, that I may speak to you all the commandments and the statutes and the judgments which you shall teach them, that they may observe them in the land which I give them to possess.' So you shall observe to do just as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left. You shall walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you will possess. "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the Lord your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it, so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the

Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deut 5:28b - 6:9)”

God is Moses’ teacher, who is Israel’s teacher, who is the teacher of the fathers who are to teach their sons. Each are to teach their students to “Love the Lord Your God” and are to teach this lesson throughout the day, as they are doing their normal tasks. This chain of custody from God to the sons travels through the father, such that the father is God’s primary means of transmitting this lesson to the sons. This transmission of the Fear and Love of the Lord is so integral and necessary, that Malachi prophesied that the New Covenant would be a curse to Israel instead of a blessing unless a prophet came to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children. We find out in the account given by Luke that this prophet was John, the son of Zacharias, of whom the angel says “You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. (Luke 1:14-17)”

The second thing to note here is the promise provided down this chain of transmission, from God to Moses to Israel to the father and then to the sons. At each stage of this chain, the promise is given that if the Fear and Love of the Lord is handed down, that those who obeyed would be given a long life in the land that the Lord gave them. God promises this to Moses, who handed this promise to Israel,

which was to teach the father of this promise, who is to hand down this promise to his son. This is the same promise given in the first law of the second table of the 10 Commandments that says “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you. (Exodus 20:12)” This is the first commandment given with a promise, and both the promise and the reward of this command mirror the promise and reward of the command to Love and Fear God. The father further confirms this by opening each treatise with a promise of life and health and peace if the son will wear his teachings like jewelry. In our passage today he says “My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you. (Proverbs 3:1-2)” This comparison creates a type of parallel between ones relationship with their father and their relationship with God. How they see one affects how they see the other and how they honor one affects how they honor the other. Knowing this, the father then goes to his son, mirroring the way Wisdom approaches all men. The father is not just bringing wisdom, however, he is embodying the way of wisdom by being a craftsman in Philosophy, the Love of Wisdom, bringing words of health and life to his son to teach his son to Love Wisdom and Fear the Lord.

As we sit in on these lessons, we see the first two treatises wherein the father spoke to the son about two patterns of living, one of wickedness and one of righteousness. Through this narrative, the father begins with a warning against evil ways of living and then provides a pattern of life by which the son is able to not only avoid the consequences of wicked behavior but can come to have real righteousness. In the first, the father outlines how the wicked are treacherous and seek to lay traps for others. One trap the wicked lay is the trap for the innocent, which will take wealth from the innocent to enrich the wicked. A second trap the wicked will lay is the trap for themselves. In seeking unjust gain, they entrap themselves in ways of living that are contrary to the legitimate ways of gain. Through their treachery, they also build a brotherhood made of traitors, who will then seek to gain from each others loss. The father contrasts this way of living to the wisdom of birds who, after seeing the trap laid, avoid the trap and are not caught. This is to say that these fools who love their wickedness see the trap they lay for themselves and still fall in it anyway. The last trap, which is implied, is the trap laid for the son. This is the trap they build in stages, first seeking the son to do work for them, then seeking his company, and finally seeking to bring him into their brotherhood of traitors.

The father then recounts how wisdom is actively looking for everyone. She runs out into the most conspicuous places, begging the simple and foolish to come to her and be made wise. The wicked mock Wisdom, however, and refuse to listen to her sayings. For every trap they see, they lay for their own selves, and that they fall into, they are actively engaged in rejecting the words of wisdom and the fear of the Lord. They saw Wisdom, heard her words of Righteousness and, like Cain, walked away. The father makes Wisdom herself and the fear of the Lord the same thing such that, by rejecting Wisdom, they chose not to fear the Lord, and in response, Wisdom laughs at them when the consequences of their actions bring suffering and death to them.

By way of contrast, the father then speaks of the proper way to interact with wisdom and the how Wisdom will respond in kind. After telling his son to not even walk in the way of the wicked in the first treatise, he then describes a kind of love the son must cultivate for Wisdom. This love mirrors that of a lover, desperately looking his bride. By crying out for Wisdom as she cries out for him, and by searching for her as she searches for him, the son is but returning the love that is being given to him already by Wisdom. By simply returning this love, Wisdom will enter his heart, bringing with her knowledge, discretion, and understanding. These four will then guard the ways, actions, and motivations of the son, keeping him from the company and ways of wicked men and strange and adulterous women. It is then that the son will be blessed with long life, health, and peace, for the son will be able to discern all righteousness, justice, equity, and every good course.

If we take the promises given in these verses, the promise of long life, health, and peace are not found in riches, land, or any other kind of temporal wealth. What we find is that God promises that we will be like Him. The blessing provided are not money or land, but righteousness. The son, if he diligently cultivates a habit of loving wisdom, will reap the reward of unity with God in being and in action. This was Christ High Priestly prayer as recounted by John, when He prayed “**I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have**

given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (John 17:15, 20-23)”

These two treatises set the framing for the third, which we are examining today. As we sit in on this lesson, the father again approaches the son asking the son to keep his commandments in his heart, for they will bring length of days and years of life and peace.

Verse 3 requires us to stop and consider. First, the english words used in our NASB95 are “kindness and truth.” The Hebrew words used were “hesed” and “met”.

“Hesed” is translated kindness in the NASB, but another valid word could be loyalty. Hesed is covenantal goodwill and kindness, which implies a form of obligation on the part of the giver. God’s Hesed, for instance, is a giving born not of obligation from our works, as if we earned His giving, but of an obligation given in His own Promises. He gives, in part, because He has promised. To not give when He has promised to give would make Him a liar. This truth is why the Psalmist can so readily throw himself on God’s commandments, despite any hardship or pain that he faces. He knows that God will be Faithful to His own Word. Also, “Met” is translated in the NASB95 as Truth, but another valid word could be constancy or faithfulness. These words were used again in Proverbs 20:28, that says, “**Loyalty and truth preserve the king, And he upholds his throne by righteousness.**”

Additionally, there is an alternate reading here that should cause us to consider whether verse 3 is a command, as shown in our translation here, or if it is the consequence of hearing the fathers instruction and obeying. That is to say, this verse could read as an instruction for the son to not allow kindness or loyalty and truth or faithfulness to leave him and to bind them around his neck, or it could read that kindness or loyalty and truth or faithfulness will not leave him if he obeys his fathers instructions, followed by a command to bind them around his neck. If we take the first reading, this is a command just like the rest that the son is supposed to follow. If we take the second reading, it follows the theme we find in chapter 2 where Wisdom and her sisters will remain with the son in response to his love for them.

In either case, the son is to search for covenantal love and truth and we know that loyalty and faithfulness, which mirror God's Holy Character, are results of the pursuit of Wisdom and the Fear of the Lord. Both of these readings reiterate lessons we find in the two previous treatises. To close his introduction, the Father instructs his son to bind his commandments around his neck and write them on his heart, so that he will find favor with God and man, in keeping with the promises to those children who honor their parents.

In the commandments that follow, we find a clear methodology for fearing the Lord: Trust in the Lord, Acknowledge Him in all your ways, Do not be wise in your own eyes, Fear God and turn from evil, give Him your first fruits, and to not reject His discipline. Intermixed with these commands are the promises that God will make the son's paths straight, that the son will have healing to his body and refreshment to his bones, that God will reciprocate the son's generosity, and that God will discipline him when he errs.

These trained habits of action start with a total faith in God and His Faithfulness and Character. Here, leaning on your own understanding can cloud your mind, causing doubt in God's Providence and Care for you. The word *betah*, which is translated "trust", means a total confidence and security, a freedom from anxiety or fear. This total trust in God is then followed by acknowledgment of God. This first line of verse 6 is literally translated as "In all your ways know Him." We see this is one of the things that the wicked men of Romans 1 did not do, and that refusal is why God turned their hearts over to wickedness. In contrast, and as Wisdom is shown to do in the last two treatises, by knowing God in all his ways, the son will be kept from with wicked ways of the violent man and harlot. Or, as this couplet says, "He will make your paths straight." The son is then told to humble himself. "Do not be wise in your own eyes," instead, "Fear the Lord and turn away from evil." As we saw in the last treatise, this will bring many benefits, just as the son will be benefited by obeying his father and keeping his father's commands. His body will be healed and his bones refreshed. This mirrors the sayings of Agur, who says, "**Surely I am more stupid than any man, And I do not have the understanding of a man. Neither have I learned wisdom, Nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One.** (Proverbs 30:2-3)"

Lastly, the father speaks to two conditions that the son could be in. First, the father deals with the easier of the two conditions. In this condition, the son has been successful and has wealth to spare. If the son does have wealth, he is told to Honor God with it and give of his first fruits. These are not literally the first fruit to come off the tree, but rather this is an indicative to mean the “best” that the son has to offer. So, of whatever he can offer to God, he is to honor God with the best that he has. The promise here is that God will reciprocate that offering and bless the son in return.

The second condition is one of deprivation. Here, the son is suffering. This could be from his own doing or it could be not of his doing. Because the promise of God is that you will be like Him, material wealth is not an indicator of God’s favor or blessing, righteousness is. However, the deprivation, and indeed pain, that we see spoken of throughout scripture is not because God hates or is even angry with you. Pain, per the scriptures, is a tool for growth. We see this in the Psalms that we have been studying on Sunday mornings, most explicitly in the Tenth stanza of Psalm 119. “You have dealt well with Your servant, O Lord, according to Your word. Teach me good discernment and knowledge, For I believe in Your commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word. You are good and do good; Teach me Your statutes. The arrogant have forged a lie against me; With all my heart I will observe Your precepts. Their heart is covered with fat, But I delight in Your law. It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes. The law of Your mouth is better to me Than thousands of gold and silver pieces. (Psalm 119:65-72)”

Notice in this stanza that, whether it be his own failure in going astray or if it is his enemies unjustly attacking him, the Psalmist is concerned with two things:

- 1) God is good and does good, and because this true, He was just and had dealt well with him for allowing him to suffer.
- 2) The psalmist knows that he has need of good discernment and knowledge, and actively seeks after God as the source and God’s word as the means by which He has given it, knowing that the suffering given by God is a means toward that end.

The Psalmist sees his pain as God teaching him something, and pressing him to search after God's word. We see this idea is echoed in the last treatise, where the father instructs the son that "the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, Guarding the paths of justice, And He preserves the way of His godly ones. (Proverbs 2:6-8)" For both the Psalmist in 119 and the father in this treatise, the suffering given by God is discipline, which the son is to not reject or loathe. Instead, the son is to know that God has brought his suffering as an act of Love.

The author of Hebrews, after quoting this passage, expounds on this by saying, "It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (Hebrews 12:7-11)"

As the father had already shown us in the first treatise, the wicked begin by not having faith in God. They reject God, His word and His statutes. Because of this, they do not acknowledge him, they are wise in their own eyes, they do not fear the lord and they love evil. Instead of honoring God with their wealth, they scorn Him with it, and oppress His people. Most frightening of all, God does not chasten them. We see in Proverbs 1 that wisdom runs and hides from them, laughing at them with mockery. We see in Romans 1 that God gives them over to the lusts of their own flesh so that they will dishonor themselves with their own wickedness. Like Cain, "even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks (Romans 1:21a)"

But this truth, given by the father here in Proverbs 3 is a source of great hope for us. While God will abandon the wicked to their wickedness, even when we fail to truly fear and Love God, He will discipline us. Even if our suffering is a result of our own

sin, we can say “You have dealt well with Your servant, O Lord, according to Your word Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.” because “God deals with [us] as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?...All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

The father here is showing his craftsmanship. He knows that the son will ask “How do I fear the Lord”, and so he provides a template for action to demonstrate to the son how he may live out that fear, just as a carpenter may show his son how to cut a board properly or a blacksmith may show his son the proper techniques for hammering metal. The father began by contrasting the way of the wicked and the way of the righteous, and now he gives insight to the core distinction between the two internally: The wicked hate God and the Righteous love God. All the rest of these modes of being and the outcomes that we see in the first two treatises flows from this distinction. As God says, “Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever! (Deuteronomy 5:21)”

For the father here, after teaching his son of all the blessings that God will give him, resulting in him becoming more like God, he refocuses on this core principle. As the opening of this book says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.” In keeping with the themes of proverbs, which is concerned with “what is,” the father’s instruction to his son is to be consistent and faithful in his Fear, Honor, and Thankfulness to God in good times or bad. As shown with the last two commands given, if things are great, give to God of your best. If you have nothing to give, know that God disciplines you as a son and loves you. In either case, whether you are in good times or bad, Trust in God, Know God in all your ways, Do not be wise in your own eyes, Fear God, and turn from Evil. It is the everyday diligent action, practicing this trained habit, that acknowledges God and obeys Him that God wants, regardless of your circumstances. If you do these things, God will be with you, will discipline you, will rescue you from evil, and will make you like Him.

Amen