

Why should you walk in the path of wisdom?

Why should you trust God?

Why should you fear him?

Why should you honor him?

Look at the reasons given:

v2—for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you

v4—so you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man

v6—he will make straight your paths

v8—it will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones

v10—then your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will be bursting with wine

What kind of life and peace does wisdom bring?

At first blush it looks like “health, wealth, and prosperity”!

Trust in God and you’ll get a big fat bonus at the end of the month!

Fear God and you’ll be healthy, wealthy, and wise!

If you do what God says, then you’ll be making money hand over fist!

*Believe in God and you’ll never lack for anything!*

Is that what Proverbs is saying?

Yup!

Beyond question, that *is* what Proverbs is saying.

Wait a second, pastor, are you saying that the prosperity gospel is *true*?!!

Yes.

If you bind steadfast love and faithfulness around your neck,

if you trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding,

but in all your ways *know him*,

(most translations say “acknowledge” but literally, it’s “know”)

then he will most certainly make your paths straight

and give you success in the sight of God and man.

If you fear the LORD and turn away from evil,

honoring the LORD with your wealth and the firstfruits of all your produce,

then your barns will be filled with plenty,

and your vats will be bursting with wine.

This is *absolutely* the case.

What had God promised in Deuteronomy?

Listen to what Moses had said in Dt 28:1-14

*“And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. <sup>2</sup> And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. <sup>3</sup> Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. <sup>4</sup> Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. <sup>5</sup> Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. <sup>6</sup> Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.*

*<sup>7</sup> “The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you. They shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. <sup>8</sup> The LORD will command the blessing on you in your barns and in all that you undertake. And he will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. <sup>9</sup> The LORD will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. <sup>10</sup> And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. <sup>11</sup> And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, within the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. <sup>12</sup> The LORD will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. And you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. <sup>13</sup> And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you shall only go up and not down, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, being careful to do them, <sup>14</sup> and if you do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.*

God promised his son (Israel), that if they faithfully obeyed him,  
then he would pour out his blessings upon them.

But if they disobeyed (Dt 28:15-68),  
then he would pour out his curses upon them.

Did you listen to the blessings of Dt 28?

To paraphrase:

“your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.”

The father in Proverbs 3

is simply reminding his son of God’s covenant promises to Israel

If you live as the faithful son who walks in the way of wisdom,  
then this is what God has promised.

But, the son asks, how come I don’t see it?

How come the wicked prosper?

Why do the righteous suffer—and how come the wise are sometimes killed by fools?!

If there is no eschatology in Proverbs, then the author of Proverbs was an idiot!

If there is no future judgment where God rights the wrongs of this age,

then Proverbs is an idealistic utopian farce.

As we'll see next time, Proverbs 3 is a coherent chapter–

Yes, verses 1-12 set up the ideal: this is the way things should be;  
but as we go along we'll see that the way things should be is, in the end,  
the way things *will* be!

In short,

the father is teaching his son to walk by faith–  
to see how the world should be,  
and (what is harder) to *live* as the world should be,  
because some day, it will be the way it should be!

Because some day, there will be a Son who never forsakes his Father's teaching!

I brought in the blessings of Deuteronomy because Proverbs is dealing with the question,  
“how do I live in the everyday world, *given* the purposes of God in history?”

Proverbs doesn't mention Deuteronomy –

but Proverbs uses the blessings of Deuteronomy as the promised blessings  
that the Son will receive if he walks in the ways of Wisdom.

Our passage tonight, verses 1-12, consists of six quatrains

(a quatrain is a poetic term meaning four lines;  
a couplet is two lines; a quatrain is four lines).

Each quatrain consists of 2 or 3 admonitions to pursue wisdom,  
together with 1 or 2 reasons why pursuing wisdom is a good idea.

Verses 1-4 serve as an introduction.

Verses 5-10 give the body of the exhortation.

And verses 11-12 provide a conclusion.

### **1. Do Not Forget My Teaching (v1)**

#### **a. For they Give Life and Peace (v2)**

*My son, do not forget my teaching,  
but let your heart keep my commandments,  
<sup>2</sup>for length of days and years of life  
and peace they will add to you.*

The Father speaks here to the Son about the way of life – the way of wisdom.

Because the way of wisdom – the teaching of the Father –  
does bring life.

If you devote yourself to God's ways – if you learn wisdom from on high –  
then you will have peace.

I think of one of the families who have come to our Thursday bible study for the last four years.

When they came, they were a mess.

They had no peace – they were at each other’s throats *a lot*.

And they really didn’t know the way of wisdom.

They didn’t know the scriptures – they were pursuing their own ways –  
which is to say, they were running after folly.

A few weeks ago, the wife commented that they have had remarkable peace  
(for them!) over the last year.

*Not* that life has gotten easier!

(Actually, it would be easy to show  
that their lives are more difficult in many ways).

But as they have learned the way of wisdom, they have found life and peace.

Because wisdom – at its heart – is about living life in harmony with the way God made us.

And notice how the father says it:

“do not *forget* my teaching...

let your *heart* keep my commandments”

It’s not just about outward obedience.

We’ve all seen the child who “does the right thing” –  
but plainly their heart is not in it!

In Hebrew, the word “heart” refers to thinking/knowing/loving.

The kidneys are the seat of the emotions.

You see how that works here in the connection between the heart and the memory.

If your heart is set on keeping God’s commands,  
then you will not forget them.

And that sets you up for the second stanza:

## **2. Write *Hesed* and *Emeth* on the Tablet of Your Heart (v3)**

### **a. And You Will Find Grace in the Eyes of God and Man (v4)**

<sup>3</sup> *Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you;*

*bind them around your neck;*

*write them on the tablet of your heart.*

Steadfast love and faithfulness.

We just saw last week how John seems to translate “*hesed* and *emeth*”  
into “full of grace and truth.”

John sees Jesus as the one who wrote *hesed* and *emeth* on the tablet of his heart.

Loyalty – faithfulness – being steadfast in your commitments –  
this is what should characterize you!

When you say you will do something – do it.

And not just outwardly – but be the sort of person who is inwardly committed to God and to others!

<sup>4</sup> *So you will find favor and good success<sup>[a]</sup>  
in the sight of God and man.*

The one who is characterized by *hesed* and *emeth* will find favor (will find grace) in the sight of God and man.

It's worth noting that Luke says that the boy Jesus grew in favor with God and man (using the same word “grace” that is the common translation of “*chen*”) here.

If you are faithful to your commitments – if you are loyal to your word – then you will find favor and a good reputation (that seems to be the idea behind “good success”).

Why is steadfast love and faithfulness so important?

Because God himself is characterized by *hesed* and *emeth*.

When God promised Abraham that he would give the land to Abraham's seed, God will be faithful to his covenant – no matter what the cost to himself!

(And there's a way in which the Father's exhortation to the Son reminds us that the cost to God would be his only begotten Son!)

Sections 3, 4, and 5 focus on three ways in which we exhibit steadfast love and faithfulness:

Trust in the LORD.

Fear the LORD.

Honor the LORD.

### **3. Trust in the LORD with All Your Heart (v5)**

#### **a. And He Will Make Straight Your Paths (v6)**

<sup>5</sup> *Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
and do not lean on your own understanding.*

<sup>6</sup> *In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make straight your paths.*

This was one of my father's favorite verses.

He often reminded us of it.

Where do you put your trust?

Where is your confidence? Your security?

What happens if you lean on your own understanding – your own wisdom?  
Isaiah spoke of what happens when you lean on a broken reed –  
when the reed breaks, it pierces your hand!

My wisdom – my understanding – is flimsy.  
It cannot hold my weight.  
Therefore, I must trust in the LORD with all my heart –  
the heart keeps coming back!

The heart is the center of the understanding.  
Do I trust my own understanding?  
Or do I submit my understanding – my heart – to the LORD?

Do you trust him?  
When things don't go your way – do you rest content,  
knowing that *he is God* – and *you are not*?  
If you remember your Father's teaching –  
and if you engrave steadfast love and faithfulness on your heart,  
then you will trust in the LORD in all situations!

Okay – so what does it *mean* to “trust in the LORD”?  
It's all good and fine to say “lean not on your own understanding” –  
but how do I lean on *God's* understanding?

Well – that's the point in verse 6:  
<sup>6</sup>*In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make straight your paths.*

It might be better to translate this,  
“in all your ways, *know him*”!

In English, when you “acknowledge” someone,  
you might simply be giving them credit for something.

But the Father is not simply saying “give God credit” in all your ways!  
No, the Father is saying *know God* in all your ways!  
Knowing God is at the heart of the Christian life!  
Knowing God as your faithful and devoted Father.  
Knowing God as the one who loved you and gave himself for you.  
Knowing God as the one who is *with you* and will be with you forever!

In all your ways *know him*!  
*and he will make straight your paths.*

This echoes Isaiah 40 –

“make straight in the desert a highway for our God”!

Knowing God will make your paths straight –

because when you know God you are walking with him!

And that’s why Trusting God and Fearing God are so closely connected:

#### **4. Be Not Wise in Your Own Eyes (v7)**

##### **a. And It Will Bring Healing and Refreshment (v8)**

<sup>7</sup> *Be not wise in your own eyes;*

*fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.*

When you acknowledge the LORD and trust him –

then you are more concerned with what he thinks – and what he says –

than you are with anyone else.

In other words, then you *fear the LORD*.

And if you fear the LORD, you will turn away from evil.

This is called repentance.

Repentance is where we turn away from evil.

Very often our *wants* – our *desires* – run contrary to what God says.

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.

Do we allow *God* to say what is good and what is evil?

Or do we insist on defining good and evil for ourselves?

Let me ask you:

since you started insisting on defining good and evil for yourself –

how have you been doing?

Have you found healing for your flesh – have you found refreshment for your bones?

<sup>8</sup> *It will be healing to your flesh<sup>[b]</sup>*

*and refreshment<sup>[c]</sup> to your bones.*

Every time I have tried to walk contrary to God’s ways,

I have found rottenness and decay!

There is something about the fear of the LORD that is *clean* and *pure*.

When I turn my eyes to him –

when I trust him – when I am more concerned with what he says,

than with what others say,

then I find healing for my flesh and refreshment for my bones!

No, that's not saying that I never have any afflictions!

But even in the midst of my afflictions, I have peace and refreshment!

In this world you *will have trouble* –

but take heart, because the Son of God has overcome the world!

And this brings us to the *third* central point:

## **5. Honor the LORD with Your Wealth (v9)**

### **a. And Your Storehouses Will Be Full (v10)**

<sup>9</sup> *Honor the LORD with your wealth*

*and with the firstfruits of all your produce;*

<sup>10</sup> *then your barns will be filled with plenty,*

*and your vats will be bursting with wine.*

Trust in the LORD.

Put your confidence in him – *know* him.

Fear the LORD.

Repent – turn away from evil.

And *Honor* the LORD.

Here's where I stop preaching and start meddling!

“Preacher, you were doing fine until you started talking about money!!”

But don't worry –

I'm not going to tell you that you need to give a certain percentage to the church!

That's not the point in Proverbs 3 (or any other passage, for that matter!).

No, the Father isn't concerned with 10% of your wealth.

He is concerned with what you do with *all of it!*

When he says to honor the LORD with your wealth,

he is saying that *everything you have* should be used to honor God!

When you go to the grocery store, you should honor God with your wealth!

When you buy a car, when you pay your electric bill –  
you should honor God with your wealth!

And yes, the Father highlights the “firstfruits” –

which in the OT, referred to the firstfruits of your crops – your herds –

even your firstborn child (which was to be redeemed with an animal sacrifice).

You might say, ‘but I have nothing – I can't afford to give anything!’

Then give a dollar.

A dollar is very much like the widow's mite that Jesus spoke of.



It might seem to be utterly worthless in the grand scheme of things!  
But it signifies your commitment to honor the LORD with the *first* of your wealth

When Rolf Caylor died,

I had the opportunity to look through his old account books from the 1960s – 1980s.  
He kept track of every penny he ever spent!

And every Sunday for many years, he faithfully recorded his giving:  
\$1

Honoring God with the firstfruits of your wealth means that your giving to God  
is not an afterthought.

It's not that you live your life as you please – and then give to God what is left over –  
but you decide, “here is what I will how I will live my life before God” –  
which includes what you will give to further the preaching of the gospel!

And when you live a life that is organized around knowing God,  
trusting God, fearing God, honoring God –  
then it is not surprising when  
“your barns [are] filled with plenty,  
and your vats [are] bursting with wine.”

After all, a life that is organized around living the way God made us to live –  
is generally a successful life!

Some late 19<sup>th</sup>-century sociologists came up with the phrase, “the Calvinist work ethic”  
to describe the economic patterns that characterized the Reformed areas of Europe –  
the Netherlands, England, Scotland, and parts of Switzerland.

What's interesting is that it seems increasingly difficult to reproduce that work ethic  
without the doctrine behind it.

## **6. Do Not Despise the LORD's Discipline (v11)**

Our passage concludes with an exhortation to patiently bear the LORD's discipline:

### **a. For the LORD Reproves the One He Loves (v12)**

<sup>11</sup> *My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline  
or be weary of his reproof,*

<sup>12</sup> *for the LORD reproves him whom he loves,  
as a father the son in whom he delights.*

Notice the assumption:  
the Father assumes that his Son will need the LORD's discipline!

In our case, it is because of our sin!

We have fallen short.

We have not trusted in the LORD.

We have not feared him.

We have not honored him.

We have leaned on our own understanding.

We have been wise in our own eyes.

We have been dishonored God with our belongings.

But even Jesus – even the Father's *only-begotten Son* needed the LORD's discipline!

Not because he sinned – for our Savior was perfect in his obedience!

He trusted – he feared – he honored his Heavenly Father in all things!

And therefore he took our guilt – our shame.

He bore our sin – and therefore, he bore our punishment.

The chastisement that was due to us fell upon him.

So when the LORD's discipline comes on you –

do not despise the LORD's discipline!

The afflictions that God sends are *for your good!*

He loves you!

So often we just don't think that our sin is that bad!

Sure, it's wrong – but it's no big deal – everyone does it!!

And your heavenly Father looks at you and says,

“NOOO!!!”

I sent my Son to the cross for that sin!

And so I want you to *hate your sin* as much as I do!

Do you want to know God?

Do you want to know his heart?

Then prepare to suffer.

When I preached through Jeremiah and Lamentations

I remember so many passages

where I couldn't tell whether it was God or the prophet speaking!

God's heart for his people –

expressed through a prophet who was called to share in God's grief!

I like C. S. Lewis' point –

“when we complain of our sufferings we are not asking for more love, but for less.  
We are asking God not to take us so seriously.” (in Waltke, 250)

God loves you!

And he cannot bear that you should find your sin so attractive!

Your Father delights in you!

He wants to be near you!

He wants *you* to be *with him!*

Once again, we see that the whole of the Christian life can be summed up:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength –  
and love your neighbor as yourself –  
and when you fail, repent and believe the gospel!”