

WISDOM UNIVERSITY

PROVERBS 3

# THE HEALTH, WEALTH, AND PROSPERITY GOSPEL



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**FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH**

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# INTRODUCTION

## Problem

Many reject Christ and Christianity because they are afraid of what they will lose and the pains they will suffer if they follow Christ.

The devil and many in the world have been very successful in maximizing the losses and minimizing the gains involved in following Christ. Let's call them "the suffering, poverty, and misery" alarmists.

Some influential and popular Christian leaders have responded by maximizing the gains and minimizing the losses in following Christ. They are often known as "health, wealth, and prosperity" teachers.

## Effects

But both of these extremes are based on bad information and result in bad decisions.

Many hear the "suffering, poverty, and misery" alarmists and decide not to follow Christ. Others hear the "health, wealth, and prosperity" salespeople and follow Christ for all the wrong reasons (and usually end up disappointed and disillusioned).

## Solution?

Is there a way to measure the gains and the losses of following Christ more accurately so that we can make better decisions? Yes, there is. We're going to look at Proverbs 3:1-12 for a balanced biblical perspective that will give us the information we need to make the most important decision of our life.

## CONTEXT

But first a reminder of context. Proverbs not only tells us what is right and wrong but why we should do the right and reject the wrong. In other words, it gives us not only biblical morals but biblical motivations, with chapters 2-3 appealing to us with four benefits of Christianity.

- The **moral** benefits of Wisdom (2:5-21)
- The **material** benefits of Wisdom (3:1-12)
- The **emotional** benefits of Wisdom (3:13-20)
- The **social** benefits of Wisdom (3:21-35)

It's not only the Old Testament that persuades us with benefits, the New Testament does it too (e.g. Matt. 6: 33; 1 Tim. 4:8; 6:6). Having looked at the moral benefits of Christianity in the last sermon, we now ask, what are the material benefits of being a Christian?



**What's are the material benefits of Wisdom?**  
Let's examine the first insight our text gives us.



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# 1. WISDOM WILL USUALLY MAKE YOUR LIFE BETTER IN THE LONG TERM (1-10)

There are three important words in this summary of verses 1-10: “usually,” “better,” and “long-term”

By saying “**usually,**” we’re saying that this is a general rule, but there are exceptions. The proverbs are not cast-iron guarantees, but general principles that are generally (though not always) true.

In the context of Proverbs, “**better**” means “more blessed.” In the Old Testament “blessing” was most commonly associated with material and social improvement. God’s blessings were more physical and external. In the New Testament, God’s blessings are more spiritual and inward. However, that does not exclude spiritual blessings in the Old Testament or physical and social blessings in the New Testament. It’s more a matter of emphasis.

The third important word here is “**long-term.**” Proverbs does not guarantee one long sustained life of getting better and better in every way and every day. Its principles are more about the long-run and that may involve shorter-term dips and losses along the way. And of course, the ultimate long-term is eternity, which will result in perfectly blessed living forever.

With these qualifications in mind, let’s turn to five areas in which Proverbs points towards a better life. Each of these five sections follow the same pattern. They call to a certain action with an incentive that follows that action. So, it’s basically a “rule-reward” pattern.

But remember, this rule-reward structure is already in the context of a loving relationship. The chapter begins with “my son” (3:1). It’s not “here are the rules to become my son” but here are the rules to keep our Father-child relationship healthy.

## Better life (1-2)

*(1) My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; (2) for length of days and long life and peace (“shalom” = wholeness) they will add to you.*

- **Rule:** Remember and obey my commands from the heart.
- **Reward:** Increased quantity and quality of life (Ex. 20:12; Jn 6:35; 68; 10:10; 11:25; 14:6; 27)

## Better relationships (3-4)

*(3) Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, (4) and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man.*

- **Rule:** Tattoo kindness and truth on your heart and wear them as a necklace.
- **Reward:** You will enjoy love and respect from God and people (Luke 2:52).



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## Better choices (5-6)

*(5) Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; (6) In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths.*

- **Rule:** In every situation, wholeheartedly submit to God's providence, seek his guidance, and depend on his word instead of your own intelligence.
- **Reward:** God will guide you along a straight path to better decisions.

## Better health (7-8)

*(7) Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. (8) It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones.*

- **Rule:** Don't be in awe of your own mind but of God's in order to stop sinning
- **Reward:** You will flourish and thrive in every way, spiritually and physically (see also Prov. 12:4; 14:30; 15:30; 16:24; 17:22; 3 John 2).

## Better finances (9-10)

*(9) Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; (10) so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.*

- **Rule:** Recognize that all you have is from God and for God (1 Cor. 16:2; Mark 12:44).
- **Reward:** You will have all you need and more (Mark 10:29-30, Matt. 6:33).

## APPLICATION

♥ How does that sound to you? A better life, better relationships, better choices, better health, better finances! Does that not attract you to Wisdom?

**"The prudence, temperance, and sobriety, the calmness and composure of mind, and the good government of the appetites and passions, which religion teaches, tend very much not only to the health of the soul, but to a good habit of body, which is very desirable, and without which our other enjoyments in this world are insipid." (Matthew Henry)**

♥ Remember that the order is not Rules > Relationship > Reward. You cannot start with rules. You must start with relationship, and that Father-child relationship is only possible through Jesus Christ the personification and fulfillment of Wisdom. The Son of God is the only way for you to become a child of God. Once you have that relationship, then you can start on the rules he gives to keep that relationship holy, happy, and healthy.

**RULES CANNOT START A RELATIONSHIP,  
BUT THEY DO KEEP IT HAPPY AND HEALTHY.**



**How can this be true? It doesn't fit life or history.  
Let's try to reconcile this seeming contradiction between life and Scripture.**



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# WISDOM MAY MAKE YOUR LIFE WORSE IN THE SHORT TERM (11-12)

*(11) My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest his correction; (12) for whom the Lord loves he corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights.*

Here are the verses that the “health, wealth, and prosperity” advocates hate. These verses speak of God’s chastisement, his fatherly discipline of his children. They tell us that we must balance verses 1-10 with verses 11-12. Long-term life-improvement is still consistent with short-term life-pain. Both are demonstrations of God’s love. That’s the first truth we want to highlight here.

## The Lord disciplines out of love (12)

*(5) Then you will understand the fear of the Lord...*

Let’s ask and answer some questions with the help of these verses. We’ll put together a short catechism on divine discipline.

**Q:** Who does the Lord discipline?

**A:** His sons and daughters

**Q:** Why does the Lord discipline?

**A:** Because he loves his children.

**Q:** How does the Lord discipline?

**A:** As a loving father, not as a legalistic judge?

**Q:** What’s constant in the Lord’s discipline?

**A:** Delight in his child.

**Q:** What’s the aim of the Lord’s discipline?

**A:** Correction resulting in a better life.

## We submit out of faith (11)

Given that catechism on divine discipline, how should we respond? There are three common ways that children react to discipline. There are two wrong responses and one right response. Let’s look at them together.

**(1) Fight:** To “despise the chastening of the Lord” is to fight against it. It’s to respond as if God were an enemy to be fought and opposed. It’s to resist and react with anger and resentment. It’s to feel his chastening hand and shake our fist in his face or push him away. It is to become bitter and hard. It is to ignore it or attribute it to bad luck. It is to over-react.

**(2) Faint:** Some Bible versions translate this as “detest” (NKJV), “resent” (NIV), “be weary” (KJV and ESV). The latter is the most accurate here, otherwise, it’s simply repeating the first idea of fighting and resisting. The latter is also repeated in Hebrews’ quotation of this verse (Heb. 12:5-6), where the apostle introduces the words as an encouragement. To faint or grow weary is to give up in a fatalistic spirit of passivity. “God do what you have to do and let me know when you’re done.” We wallow in despair and misery. It is to under-react.



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**(3) Faith:** Faith is believing the catechism on divine discipline. Every time the divine hand corrects us, we go through the catechism of correction and say:

- I believe you correct your children.
- I believe you are doing this in love.
- I believe you are acting as a loving father.
- I believe you still delight in me.
- I believe this will make me better.

Do you see how this is still consistent with our first insight?

- **Wisdom will usually make your life better in the long term (1-10)**
- **Wisdom may make your life worse in the short term (11-12)**

But even when wisdom makes our life worse in the short-term, the overall aim of God is far better than a better life. It's a better you! So we can add a third insight.

- **Wisdom will make YOU better in the long-term**

Clemson football coach Dabo Swinney says that his main aim is not to win games or a championship but to develop "players into well-rounded men—not just physically, but mentally, spiritually." That's what Wisdom does supremely well.

## APPLICATION

♥ Does that make better sense of your life and of life in general? Does that help you to make a better decision about whether Christianity is worth it? It gives you a better life, a better you, and a better eternity.

♥ Don't listen to the "suffering, poverty, and misery" alarmists and decide not to follow Christ because of what you will lose. Don't listen to the "health, wealth, and prosperity" salespeople and decide to follow Christ for the wrong reasons that will ultimately lead to disillusionment. Listen to the health, wealth, prosperity, **and discipline** gospel.

♥ Don't pursue the benefits but pursue wisdom and the benefits will follow (Matt. 6:33).

♥ How are you responding to the Lord's correction? Lashing out, going limp, or loving your Father? Fight, faint, or faith? Do you thank God for correcting you when you err rather than casting you off?

♥ Do you see how this is fulfilled in Christ? It was Christ who bought us all the blessings and benefits of salvation.

- He came that we might have life and have it to the full (John 10:10). He came to give peace (John 14:27; Col. 3:15-16).
- He grew in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52) that we might enjoy the closest relationships with God and his people.
- He trusted God perfectly and followed God as he led him on a straight path to the cross. He did not lash out or go limp but loved God and his people to the end.
- He gave up his comfort, his health and even his life so that we might have eternal comfort, health, and life, that even begins on earth.
- He sacrificed heaven's riches and gave away all that he had in order to enrich his people

HE ALLOWS PAINFUL THINGS  
NOT BECAUSE HE DELIGHTS IN PAIN,  
BUT BECAUSE HE DELIGHTS IN US.



# CONCLUSION



## FURTHER STUDY

### Online Articles

- [uffering, Chastisement, and the Fatherly Love of God](#) by Nick Batzig.
- [9 Marks Journal: The Prosperity Gospel](#)
- [Why I abominate the prosperity gospel](#) by John Piper

### Books

- [Health, Wealth, and Happiness](#) by David W. Jones and Russell S. Woodbridge
- [Prosperity: Seeking the True Gospel](#) by Piper, Grudem, etc.
- [The Discipline of Grace](#) by Jerry Bridges

### Discussion Questions

- What are the differences between "blessing" in the Old Testament and the New Testament?
- Put these in order: Reward, Rules, Relationship. What happens when you get that confused?
- In what ways has Christianity improved your life? How would you tell others about that?
- Why does God give us rules?
- How would you answer those who say if you believe enough, you will be rich and happy?
- How would you answer those who say Christianity is only a life of suffering and trial.
- How has the Lord disciplined you? What were the reasons, what was your response, and what was the result?
- How would you help a Christian who is responding to God's discipline by fainting or fighting?

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PROVERBS 3:1-12

# THE HEALTH, WEALTH, AND PROSPERITY GOSPEL



Many reject Christ and Christianity because they are afraid of what they will lose and the pains they will suffer if they follow Christ.

**Biblical answer?**



**Wisdom will usually make your life better in the long-term**

- Longer life
- Better relationships
- Better choices
- Better health
- Better finances

**RULES CANNOT START A RELATIONSHIP. BUT THEY DO KEEP IT HAPPY AND HEALTHY**

**Reconcile life and Bible?**



**Study Wisdom because it is the health, wealth, prosperity, and discipline Gospel**

**WISDOM IS WORTH MORE THAN WEALTH**



**Wisdom may make your life worse in the short-term**

- The Lord disciplines out of love
- We respond: fight, faint, faith
- Always better YOU in long-term

**GOD ALLOWS PAINFUL THINGS NOT BECAUSE HE DELIGHTS IN PAIN BUT BECAUSE HE DELIGHTS IN US.**

**Action?**

WHEN WE SUFFER, IT ISN'T GOD ANGRILY TAKING FROM US; IT IS GOD LOVINGLY RE-INVESTING IN US  
**RAY ORTLUND JR.**



BEHIND A FROWNING PROVIDENCE HE HIDES A SMILING FACE  
**WILLIAM COWPER**