

What is it that matters to you?

As the stock market tumbles and the economy tanks –
are you getting nervous about money?

As the coronavirus spreads and people are dying right and left –
are you wondering how long you will live?

In moments like this, we find our what really matters to us!

At the heart of Proverbs 3 we hear the blessing upon the one who finds wisdom.

The father says to his son,

“My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline or be weary of his reproof,
for the LORD reproves him whom he loves,
as a father the son in whom he delights.”

Here the father plainly connects the relationship between God and the believer
as the relationship of father to son.

Reproof certainly assumes that you’ve done something wrong.

Discipline, though, has a broader sense.

It certainly assumes immaturity, but not necessarily sin.

Hebrews, after all, says that Jesus was “made perfect” through suffering—
he was brought to maturity through what he suffered,
enduring—dare we say—the discipline of his Father.

But for us, we need discipline *and reproof* because we have fallen short of wisdom.

But we must remember that God disciplines us and reproves us because *he loves us!*

If you object to God’s discipline,

what you are really saying is, “I don’t want God to love me!”

what you are saying is, “I don’t want to be conformed to the likeness of Christ!”

“I just want to live my life my way!”

Do not despise the LORD’s discipline.

Lamentations 3:25-27 says:

“The LORD is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul who seeks him.

It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.”

God is training you to look more and more like Jesus.

It isn’t pleasant at the time,
but it is for your good!

And God disciplines us corporately as well as individually.

The coronavirus is not a judgment upon a particular individual.

It is a judgment on fallen humanity –
a reminder to *all of us* that the wages of sin is death.
Some of us will die by one disease – some will die by another.
God's *common wrath* falls upon the whole human race!

But the common and the particular come together in Christ–
who is the true Son of God–the true Israel.
He bears the common wrath of God upon humanity –
but he also bears the *particular* wrath that was due to *us* for *our sin*.

He, then, is the blessed man who found wisdom (3:13).
And we are blessed in him as he has become for us wisdom from God,
and sanctification, righteousness, and redemption.

But if verses 1-12 made it sound like the pursuit of wisdom was motivated by health and wealth,
verses 13-20 show us the true meaning of life and peace!

Because this is why the Father says to his Son:

1. The Blessing of Wisdom Is Rooted in Creation (v13-20)

a. What Do You Desire? Wealth? Life? Honor? Peace?

- ¹³ *Blessed is the one who finds wisdom,
and the one who gets understanding,*
¹⁴ *for the gain from her is better than gain from silver
and her profit better than gold.*
¹⁵ *She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare with her.*
¹⁶ *Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honor.*
¹⁷ *Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her paths are peace.*

The one who finds wisdom will never fear again!
Wisdom helps you see that all this ruckus is but a tempest in a teapot.

Sure, it's important to love our neighbors!
We need to make sure that we do all in our power to preserve our own lives –
and the lives of others!
If we are careless – if we are reckless – and we endanger others –
that is attempted murder!

(The basketball player that joked about coronavirus –
and went around touching all the microphones in the room –
only to discover the next day that he was infected....

is a reminder to us all that we should not take these things lightly.)

But all this is one of wisdom's lessons!

Wisdom teaches us to fear God – to love him – and to love one another.

And if we fear God more than we fear coronavirus –

then we will find life – wealth – honor – and peace.

I'm not promising you that you will survive this epidemic!

But the Father promises to His Son that Wisdom is better than all that!

Think about this:

*¹⁴ for the gain from her is better than gain from silver
and her profit better than gold.*

I'm having my students watch a video about the “South Sea Bubble” –
a famous 18th century financial collapse

(300 years later, the British govt is *still* paying back its debts from that debacle!)

In every generation there has been some catastrophic financial collapse.

Someone had a “great idea” that was “too big to fail” – or “too good to be true” –
and the result was chaos and misery for thousands (or millions!).

But the gain from wisdom is *better*.

*¹⁵ She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare with her.*

In one sense, *nothing you desire can compare with her* –
and yet *everything you desire* can be obtained with her!

*¹⁶ Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honor.*

*¹⁷ Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her paths are peace.*

But if you *seek* long life, riches, and honor –
if you *seek* pleasantness and peace –
you will not find them without her!

Indeed, in verse 18, the Father says:

b. She Is a Tree of Life to Those Who Lay Hold of Her

¹⁸ She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;

those who hold her fast are called blessed.

In the Garden of Eden there were two trees.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil – and the tree of life.

And this reminds us that verse 13 said “Blessed is the one [literally, the man, *adam*] who finds wisdom,”

The first *adam* did not find wisdom.

And he did not partake of the tree of life.

But the *adam* who finds wisdom will discover the tree of life.

This is why you cannot see Proverbs 3 as talking only about “this-worldly” life & peace

The image of the tree of life plainly reminds us of the rebellion in the garden.

Israel was called to be a new humanity—a new *adam*—

who will partake of the tree of life.

You can have what Adam lost.

Earthly riches pale in comparison to what Adam lost.

What did Adam lose?

Life.

Peace.

The inheritance of eternal blessedness.

All of this is yours, if you lay hold of wisdom!

What good is silver and gold if you don’t have wisdom?

What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? (Mt 16:26)

What are you looking for?

What do you seek?

What do you desire?

Nothing you desire compares with Wisdom!

Following up on the “tree of life” image,

the father instructs his son that

c. Wisdom Is How God Made the World

¹⁹ *The LORD by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding he established the heavens;*

²⁰ *by his knowledge the deeps broke open,
and the clouds drop down the dew.*

Note the threefold description of the world:

the earth, the heavens, and the deeps.
The image is of God building his house—a dwelling place where he lives with his people.
And God built this house by wisdom, understanding and knowledge.
This is echoed in Proverbs 24:3-4
 “By *wisdom* a house is built,
 and by *understanding* it is established;
 by *knowledge* the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.”
Even as God has built this creation, the heavens, the earth and the deeps,
 so also we build as imitators of God,
 using his wisdom, his understanding, and his knowledge.

The reason why Wisdom is so valuable is because it is *God's* wisdom.
 Wisdom is not just some abstract principles.
 Knowledge is not just random, brute facts.
All wisdom and knowledge comes from the LORD.
 Before an idea has ever been conceived in the mind of man,
 it was conceived in the mind of God.
 We never truly “invent” anything.
 God has all knowledge and all wisdom in himself.
 Therefore our knowledge and wisdom is derivative from his.

We also need to be careful to recognize that the *current state* of human knowledge
 does not equal the mind of God!

After Sir Isaac Newton's great discoveries
 it was common to say that Newton had *discovered* some of God's laws.

But, of course, Einstein and others have demonstrated that Newtonian physics
 was not quite accurate.
Newton had not discovered God's laws.
 He had articulated an approximation of God's laws!!
Even Einstein could do no better!
 God's own knowledge of the universe
 will never be comprehended by the creature!
 We are, after all, creatures!
 He is the Creator!
 We can know what he has revealed –
 but we will never fully comprehend the mind of God!

The central part of our text then provides several applications from this.
 The Father speaks to his Son and gives him seven warnings –
 seven things *not* to do –
 along with two reasons for not doing them!
You see it strikingly in the way most of the verses start: “Do not.”

Verses 21-32 provide seven warnings –
but these seven warnings are structured *very much* like the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments start with our duties toward God,
then turn to our duties toward our neighbor,
and conclude with a focus on the heart (Do Not Covet).

In the same way, these Seven Warnings start with a focus on our relationship to God,
then turn to our duties toward our neighbor,
and conclude with a focus on the heart (Do Not Envy).

2. Seven Warnings and Two Reasons (v21-32)

a. Do Not Lose Sight of Wisdom – and You Will Walk Securely (v21-24)

²¹ *My son, do not lose sight of these—
keep sound wisdom and discretion,*

²² *and they will be life for your soul
and adornment for your neck.*

²³ *Then you will walk on your way securely,
and your foot will not stumble.*

²⁴ *If you lie down, you will not be afraid;
when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.*

Here the father makes his application explicit:

He has just said “blessed is the man who finds wisdom,”
and that “those who hold her fast are called blessed.”
Now the father says, *this means you*, son!

“My son, do not lose sight of these—
keep sound wisdom and discretion,
and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck.”
Wisdom will make you look good—both on the inside and the outside.

“Then you will walk on your way securely, and your foot will not stumble.
If you lie down, you will not be afraid;
when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.”
Wisdom gives confidence, because you need not fear.

b. Do Not Be Afraid of Terror or Ruin (v25)

²⁵ *Do not be afraid of sudden terror
or of the ruin^d of the wicked, when it comes,*

The second admonition says “Do not be afraid of sudden terror.”
When sudden terror comes, you can have confidence.
When covid-19 strikes, you need not fear,

because you know the One who orders and directs all things!

A friend of mine lost his daughter to a car accident.

Someone tried to comfort him by saying, “that was the devil who did it –
God had nothing to do with it!”

He was horrified by that thought!

If God had nothing to do with it,
then my daughter’s death was meaningless!

No, my heavenly Father is also *her heavenly Father* –
and *he* wanted her with him!

And as much as I loved her, he loves her more –
and he will care for her far better than I ever could!

Notice that it doesn’t say that bad things never happen to the wise.

Rather, that you do not need to fear in the midst of bad things,
for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught.

i. For the LORD Will be Your Confidence (v26)

²⁶*for the LORD will be your confidence
and will keep your foot from being caught.*

This is the first of our two “kiys” – the two reasons given for these admonitions.

Don’t be afraid –

because the LORD will be your confidence.

This is the fundamental reason why we do not fear.

The LORD will protect me – therefore I will do what is right and good.

Indeed, that is the heartbeat of the five commands that follow!

c. Do Not Withhold Good (v27)

²⁷*Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due,^[e]
when it is in your power to do it.*

Verses 27-31 then give a series of five commands that illustrate the life of wisdom,
the life of one who does not fear the vicissitudes of life.

These things are more than just “good advice;”

they are your covenantal obligations.

This is what it means to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.

We ought to delight in doing good to others–

so when you have opportunity, take advantage of it!

Look for ways that you can do good to those to whom it is due.

You might then ask, but to whom is it due?
You may recognize the question!
Who is my neighbor?!
Start with your wife—your children—your family.
But then also consider your brothers and sisters in the family of God.
Indeed, Paul says in Galatians 6:10,
“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone,
and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

But Paul – like Jesus – refuses to let us *stop* with those who are most comfortable!

With the coronavirus ravaging the world, we are called to *do good to our neighbor*.

What does that look like?

Well, when the plague was ravaging Germany in 1527, Martin Luther gave good advice:

You ought to think this way:

“Very well, by God’s decree the enemy has sent us poison and deadly offal.

Therefore I shall ask God mercifully to protect us.

Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it.

I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed
in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others,
and so cause their death as a result of my negligence.

If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me

and I have done what he has expected of me

and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others.

If my neighbor needs me, however,

I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely, as stated above.

See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy
and does not tempt God.”

So in this time when so many are fearful, lonely, and anxious –
make sure that you are doing good to your neighbor!

If you have elderly neighbors, offer to go shopping for them!

Look for the little ways to love those around you!

d. Do Not Postpone Payment (v28)

²⁸ *Do not say to your neighbor, “Go, and come again,
tomorrow I will give it”—when you have it with you.*

Be ready to do good, and do not put someone off
when you have the power to give what they ask!

Likewise:

e. Do Not Scheme Against Your Neighbor (v29)

²⁹ *Do not plan evil against your neighbor,
who dwells trustingly beside you.*

And

f. Do Not Contend Against One Who Has Done You No Harm (v30)

³⁰ *Do not contend with a man for no reason,
when he has done you no harm.*

In other words, be a good neighbor.

Don't be greedy; don't be selfish.

But love your neighbor—this is the path of wisdom

While these four central commands focused on being a good neighbor,
the last command, like the 10th Commandment,
turns to the heart—Thou shalt not covet!

g. Do Not Envy the Ways of the Violent (v31)

³¹ *Do not envy a man of violence
and do not choose any of his ways*

You will be tempted to take the easy way out!

You will be tempted to take the way of selfishness and pride.

But, the Father says to his Son – that is the way of violence!

Do not envy that path!

Do not envy those who follow that path!

And that brings us to the second reason – the second “kiy”:

i. For the Devious Are an Abomination to the LORD (v32)

³² *for the devious person is an abomination to the LORD,
but the upright are in his confidence.*

The devious is a twisted person – a “bent” person.

They are morally twisted.

They are crooked.

And thus they are an abomination to Yahweh.

They have twisted his image into a distortion of what humanity was supposed to be!

But the upright “are in his confidence.”

This is actually a different word from the word “confidence” in v26.

In verse 26, “the LORD will be your confidence”
means that the LORD will be at your *side*.
He will protect you.

Here in verse 32, the “upright are in his confidence”
means that the upright are in the council of the LORD –
God *confides* in the upright.
He entrusts his council – his word – his purposes – to the upright.

Proverbs 3 then concludes with the blessing and the curse.

3. The Blessing and the Curse (v33-35)

³³ *The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked,
but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous.*

³⁴ *Toward the scornful he is scornful,
but to the humble he gives favor.*^[1]

³⁵ *The wise will inherit honor,
but fools get*^[g] *disgrace.*

In verses 33-35 we hear the rationale for the whole pursuit of wisdom –
and its practical outworkings in our neighborhoods.

The righteous,
the humble,
the wise.

Those who seek after wisdom will receive a glorious inheritance:
Honor, favor, blessing.

But the wicked,
the scornful,
the fools.

These will receive only the disgrace and scorn of God’s curse.

If it is only for this life that we have hope, we are the most miserable of men.

But as Paul says in Romans 2:7-11,

“To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality,
he will give eternal life;

but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness,
there will be wrath and fury.

There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil,
the Jew first and also the Greek,
but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good,

the Jew first and also the Greek.
For God shows no partiality.”

Paul is simply drawing on the wisdom tradition of Proverbs.

The righteous,
the humble,
the wise—these will inherit honor.

How can you be wise?

By trusting in Jesus.

How can you be righteous?

By trusting in Jesus.

How can you be humble?

By trusting in Jesus.

He has become for us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

All that Proverbs promises is found in Jesus.

He is the Son who sought wisdom,

held fast to wisdom,

lived by wisdom,

and indeed, died by wisdom.

Therefore he is greatly blessed by God,

and all who take refuge in his dwelling find life and peace.

Amen!