

Proverbs: Live Well

Sermon 1: Proverbs 3.1-26 – Gearing up for the Path of Life

Hey thank you again for celebrating with us last weekend. If you were here online I want you to know we celebrated 9 baptisms this past Sunday. Your participation in our ministry makes life change possible.

Today as we embark on this next stage of life as a church we are beginning a sermon series in the Old Testament Book of Proverbs that we are calling “Live Well.”

Proverbs is going to teach us about how to understand and harness God’s wisdom for our lives. Wisdom...that’s what we are after. But listen I gotta tell you that word has such a rich meaning in this book.

It’s going to have imagery and metaphor in abundance. But down at the core it isn’t some secret spiritual knowledge like the fortune cookie from God or something. Nor is it a catalog of life hacks. Proverbs is going to present wisdom as the **skills of living well in God’s creation.**

How do we navigate difficult situations & difficult people with dignity and honor. How do we express emotions & how do we care for others. How do we manage our money, our friendships, our families, and our time. How do we pursue justice in our world. And how does all of this tie together in a way that actually gives life to us as we pursue it.

It’s going to lay out 2 paths - the path of life and the path of death. Wisdom helps you discern the path of life and helps you take steps on it. We will keep coming back to that.

Because what will help you is being forced to identify which path you are on. We like to think of ourselves as too complex to be labeled on one path or the other. But, Proverbs is going to keep it simple. And force us to some hard but very healthy self-assessment as a result. Life or Death. You are always choosing one of those paths.

We will not go through all of the proverbs in this particular series. My goal is to equip YOU to go through the proverbs and help you understand and apply them to your life. I want to offer a little exercise for you here. We will have 5 weeks in the Proverbs. That’s 35 days starting today. There are 31 chapters in Proverbs. Read one chapter of Proverbs every day for the next 31 days. Won’t take long. But it will familiarize you with God’s wisdom.

So, the first 9 chapters pretty much lay out this path idea. I want to spend 2 weeks introducing you to wisdom and the paths of life and death, then the next 3 we’ll move into what God says it looks like to apply wisdom to specific areas of our lives. We’ll talk about Anxiety, Money, & Friends.

But we start with wisdom itself today. What are the skills of living well in God’s creation? Let’s go to chapter 3 because it serves as this awesome summary I think of the first 3 chapters.

**My son, don’t forget my teaching,
but let your heart keep my commands;**

Audience – A dad to a son. King Solomon. And what you need to see is this is a letter. Not a series of random sayings. A

letter that instructs his son how to live well. How to find, and walk on, the path of life. He's teaching him the skills for living well.

And the reason this letter is given to us is because its more than just a message from Solomon to his son. This is God's letter to his children. To you and I. When you see "my son" I really want you to see yourself there. Whether son or daughter...this is **God's** letter to you.

I can't stress enough how valuable these words are. Ya'll I love to journal. But the way I journal is not writing to myself, I write to my kids. So basically my journals...shelves of them...are letters to my kids. You may think "aww that's sweet." Well I hope it does mean something to them but you know the problem? There are a lot of things in there...that just aren't inspiring. Like I have a 10 pager going on how to grow grass in your lawn. And if you come to my yard right now you'll understand that most of these pages are like a general documenting a losing battle.

Most likely scenario is I die and my kids are like...who is going to read all this to sift out the 3 tiny nuggets of wisdom? But the Proverbs...THIS IS AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT THING. THIS IS FROM GOD! He doesn't waste words. There is no sifting here. It's a solid gold bar. And this father has said here, from the one who created the world and sustains it and gives it meaning and purpose...here I want you to know how to live well in this world I've made for you. So, here.

2 for they will bring you many days, a full life, and well-being.

Listen, Especially if you are young PLEASE grip these words. They will save you so much heartache and pain. They will lead to your flourishing. Don't you want many days, a full life, and well-being? These words are the path that leads to LIFE. And while this isn't exclusively to young people I beg you listen if you are young. God is speaking life to you in these words.

The next few verses. Verses 3-12 lay out the things you are going to need if you are going to walk with wisdom. These are the tools of wisdom that you have to take down the path of life with you.

Kind of like before you go on a long hike you need to have a gear check. Make sure you got everything and its working properly. Cause that gear will save your life if it's there...and its working.

I'm about to lay out you the gear you need to walk the path of life. And then for the rest of this series we are going to take these things and apply them into various arenas in our lives. These ____ things not only make up a wise, godly life...but they help you become more wise and godly as you give yourself to them. Ok here we go. The gear of Godly wisdom

3 Never let loyalty and faithfulness leave you.

Tie them around your neck;

write them on the tablet of your heart.

4 Then you will find favor and high regard with God and people.

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart,

Tools of wisdom: trust

To write loyalty and faithfulness on the tablet of your heart...that's deeper than just a code of conduct. That's etched into who you are. That's what he gets at in verse 5.

Trust in the lord with **all your heart**.

What God wants from you is your heart. In a series that will be filled with practical steps for living what I hope you hear every week is that God wants more than your outward conformity to his ways. And outward conformity without inward transformation will be so empty. Don't just give your religious habits to him, give your ENTIRE heart to him.

- Bear Trap

And the motivation for giving your whole heart to him is that he's already given his whole heart to you. This is what Jesus did. He brought God's unconditional covenantal love to you in full. He literally gave his heart, his life, so that you could receive forgiveness of your sin and you could now be a receiver of God's love. A father's love.

This is huge because listen...the proverbs lay out A LOT of wisdom. And you should live by all of it. But that's intimidating if you only see it as God's standard to measure up to. Proverbs 31 is a great example. It lays out this picture of what a godly woman is. And ladies...if you are looking at her to see if you measure up...She is exhausting. Raise a family, run a home, run a business.. Where is the proverbs 32 man? Down at the city gate?

BUT, if a woman approaches Proverbs 31 with the peace of knowing God her father will not change his love for her based on how well she does following all these things...then these

sayings become a path of life to her. In the tools of wisdom, God's grace in Christ is like your food supply on the path of life. Nourish your soul on it every day. Or you will starve. And when you starve, the toxic waste on the path of the fool starts to look appetizing. Feast on God's grace.

and do not rely on your own understanding;

6 in all your ways know him,

and he will make your paths straight.

7 Don't be wise in your own eyes;

Tools of wisdom – Humility

Hey let me add in a little further down in this chapter because it helps reinforce this idea.

19 The Lord founded the earth by wisdom

and established the heavens by understanding.

20 By his knowledge the watery depths broke open,

and the clouds dripped with dew. -- Proverbs 3:19-20

God is saying he created the earth with a plan. And wisdom is bringing our lives into conformity with his plan. See Solomon is very much calling out the one thing that will keep that from happening. Our pride. Don't rely on our own understanding & don't be wise in your own eyes. When you are wise in your own eyes...you make decisions based on what you think is best. And I believe this is going to be, for many of you, the hardest part of this series.

Real Wisdom...that leads to living well...starts with the humility to conform your life to the ways of God laid out in the word of God.

And man our pride doesn't like that. We don't like conformity. We like autonomy. In fact I can see the objection now. "Don't tell me what to do!" "The path of life is me being free to find myself and Be me! Not conform to someone else."

Well, this is false. In actuality the FREEST way to live is in conformity with your design. Give you an example from my life right now. I'm trying to eat healthier because the nutritionist says that I am DESIGNED to run on leafy greens and not 49 oz tomahawk ribeyes slathered in butter & blue cheese crumbles. But if I have a menu in front of me with both options...and you tell me to follow my heart...I'm eating the ribeye. EVERY TIME. I NEVER want a salad. I know some of ya'll are like I just need a salad. I do not. Ever. In fact in heaven...ribeyes and salad are swapping roles. Ribeyes will give you ripped abs. & salad will give you heart attacks. Calling it.

But here's my point – my body is not designed to eat the unhealthy food I want. So if I follow my desires I will feel miserable, get fat, and die. If I want to feel great & live well, I humble myself to follow my design and not my desires.

Knowing God's design and following it is actually the most freeing way to live!! In fact, people who constantly follow their sin usually end up in pretty predictable cycles of temporary satisfaction followed by pain and sorrow.

God has designed you as an individual with a unique gifting. You will be freest when you live submitted to him and his design for your life!

And listen I gotta say this – if you possess humility you will demonstrate it by paying careful attention to God's word. Humility is shown in how much you consult, and submit to, God's word in the decisions of your life. The wise man says "you know what...my own understanding of things might deceive me here. It wants ribeyes. Maybe I have a blind spot or a bad motive."

The wise man has an insatiable hunger for God's word. Because he recognizes the only truth he can rest his life on is here! SO HE DEVOURS IT.

You get the paradox? If you think you are wise...and listen to yourself...you are a fool. But if you think you are a fool...and humble yourself to listen to God...you are wise.

And here's the thing guys. And I don't want to sound harsh ok. I think a lot of people here agree with me but only in theory. When it comes to real life, you don't consult scripture. You probably can't tell me what it says about marriage, family, work, friendship, etc. So when decision time comes, you follow what seems like the best wisdom you have at your disposal...and often end up doing whatever your easily deceived heart tells you to do.

Is Your primary Bible intake only a sermon once a week? Which man I'm super honored to do. I love it. But is this all the

bible you are getting!? Humble yourself & get to know God's design for you. Next tool

fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

8 This will be healing for your body and strengthening for your bones.

Tools of wisdom: Fear the Lord

Ok this one is actually the most foundational to the book of proverbs. In fact Proverbs 1.7 says "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." It's the starting point. So what is the fear of the Lord?

This isn't walking around being scared of God. I used to have this t-shirt the year after I became a Christian that said "fear God" on it. And it kind of communicated a "God is going to get you" message. I think that was a shallow understanding of fear.

To fear something means you recognize how important it is and you give it priority in your life. To fear God means you see him as most valuable and so you lift him up to the top of the priority list. To use 2020 language...the one essential service you have...is GOD.

- The engine on a 747 – Man am I afraid its going to jump out and get me? NO. But I fear it. Because I recognize my livelihood is based on it working properly. And if it isn't working properly, I die. If it is lost, I am lost. Now obviously God is not an engine, he's a father, but you get the point.
- IS GOD the ONE thing you cannot do without? That if you didn't have HIM...everything would be lost?

- Real talk: Everybody fears something. Something you have and if you lost it...life would crumble. Wisdom is saying I'm going to make God that one thing...and I'm going to turn away from anything that would jeopardize my relationship with God.

9 Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first produce of your entire harvest;
10 then your barns will be completely filled, and your vats will overflow with new wine.

Tools of Wisdom: Generosity

The paradox of proverbs continue. Want abundance? Give away the best of what you have. Honor the Lord with the assets you have and with the income you get. If we are humbled before God and fear him, we will see that everything we have belongs to him anyway. And the most driving question about our time, talents, and treasures becomes "what does he want me to do with it?"

Do you treat your money like its his? Or do you ultimately serve your money? Who gets top billing?

Straight up question – What does God say you are supposed to do with his money? Look we are going to talk about money later in the series but for real – do you PRAY about your monthly budget? Do you have one? Do you ask God...ok God here is my projected income...I'm about to put some plans in place for October 2020...so I want to know what you call me to do with this.

What about the gifts he's given you? Are you putting them to use? They are his! "I don't know what they are" well, great we'll help you figure it out through God's word together. Get in a community group!

11 Do not despise the Lord's instruction, my son,
and do not loathe his discipline;
12 for the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
just as a father disciplines the son in whom he delights. --
Proverbs 3:1-12

Tools of wisdom: suffering

Do not loathe the discipline of the lord...Any discipline I've ever received...has not been comfortable. It's been painful. And so we should expect when the Lord disciplines us, it will be painful. But we shouldn't run from it. And wisdom will teach us to see suffering not as God punishing us, but as God refining us. The gospel reminds us we are beloved children...who the father disciplines for their good. Not all suffering is discipline from God. And I'm not in the habit of trying to figure out when I am suffering whether it is discipline or just the effect of someone else's sin or just a broken world. Wisdom says instead of looking for who to blame, use the suffering to turn back to God. Allow God to carry you in his strength and you will become more like Christ. Allow bitterness to take root and you will drift further from him.

Now here's the really cool thing. As you consider these things that make up wisdom...what you start to see is Jesus. See

Matthew 11 is going to say Jesus himself actually is the wisdom of God. And you look at these things...

He showed ultimate trust and faithfulness to God in going to the cross. He constantly humbled himself. Washing the disciples feet and then going to a criminals death. He was meek and lowly. He was generous – though he was rich, for our sake he became poor. He bore his suffering without complaint, instead seeking to abide by the father's will. Wisdom is Jesus.

Your only hope picking up these tools and deploying them on the journey is if you are confident you are saved by grace alone in Christ. Jesus is wisdom and believing the gospel brings these tools to life in your life. So start with Jesus.