

Wisdoms Faithfulness

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[0 : 00] 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.

Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you. Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablets of your heart, so you will find favour and good success 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.

Be not wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

Honour the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce. Then your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will be bursting with wine.

[1 : 17] 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. Good morning everyone. Question to get us started this morning.

How well do you know yourself? Now studies show that most people find it hard to be honest about themselves.

We're even capable, they tell us, of quite enormous self-deception at key points in life. So for example, studies show that generally speaking, when men look in a mirror, they see themselves as much thinner than they really are.

And conversely, when women look in a mirror, they generally see themselves as much fatter than they really are. I avoid that by never looking in a mirror.

[2 : 22] It's much easier. We have a capacity, a large capacity, for self-deception. And I think it's the same in the matter of being wise, the subject that we're looking at through the school holiday period in Proverbs.

Most are convinced quite naturally that they are wise. Even if the dysfunction and mess of their life might suggest otherwise, people will still say, yeah, I think, generally speaking, I'm wise.

And typical of our instant culture, we have instant friends on social media, instant food. Then we also assume that not only are we wise, but we are wise automatically and wise instantly.

That is, we've sort of arrived at a state of wisdom and in a state of wisdom. And we see evidence of that. Children from a young age believe they're wiser than their parents.

And they're prepared to back that in their actions. Folk of all ages enter into relationships convinced that they will do relationships wisely.

[3 : 48] And the evidence would suggest that's not true either. We don't actually go and seek the advice of others very often because, well, because we don't need advice.

Because we back ourselves to make wise decisions. But the book of Proverbs challenges this natural sort of default understanding of wisdom.

That is, it challenges what we understand wisdom to be and how we understand we get wisdom. Wisdom in the Bible is about living well in God's world. It's about, as I said two weeks ago, it's about living life without regrets because it's a life lived under God's rule.

Wisdom, according to the Bible, is not something we're born with. It's not something that happens automatically to us. Proverbs tells us we learn wisdom from God's word.

But ultimately, as Don was saying this morning when the children talked, ultimately, wisdom is God's gift. God's gift to us. And we need that gift because we need something to crash through our inclination to be foolish.

[5 : 05] That is, to be wise in our own eyes is the terminology the Bible uses. The Bible also defines that as autonomy. So we are naturally wired to dismiss God and live by our own authority and at the same time think that is wisdom.

Wisdom. We need God to crash through. And because this is so hard for us to accept and grasp, when we read the book of Proverbs, we find something quite interesting that's maybe off-putting to start with, but it's really, really important.

That is, Proverbs goes over the same thing over and over again. There's two or three or four or five themes that are repeated time after time after time. Proverbs is a book for slow learners like me and possibly you.

It restates the essence of wisdom. Each time turned a little bit differently, applied slightly different ways so there's a development. It's not just a sort of bland, mindless restatement.

But we have to hear it over and over and over again because we find it hard to grasp. We find it even harder to accept. We find it hard to be honest about ourselves.

[6 : 28] Proverbs 3, the passage we're looking at this morning, tells us that wisdom requires faithfulness. In other words, hopefully you see as I open the passage, wisdom requires consistent application of attitude, desire, and disciplined action if we're going to grow in wisdom and become the wise person that God wants us to be.

Wisdom is hard won and also easily lost. But it's always desirable. It's always worth the cost that's required to grow in wisdom because wisdom delivers her promise of the good life.

The good life, God's life. The first point I want to pick up then is from these passages as we jump into it, is attitude. Determined to be shaped and defined by God's word.

Look at the first four verses and notice again, this is the third time this sort of passage starts with this sort of appeal. 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.

Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you. Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart so you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.

[8 : 10] Again, the opening appeal third time in as many chapters is listen, learn, value, take to heart. Why?

Because the word for teaching there is the word for Torah. The teaching is God's word, is God's voice, is God's command, God's law which is wisdom.

wisdom is being taught by a father to his son. The son in turn needs to learn wisdom. There are two pictures here built into one.

There's the picture as we see immediate face value of a father urging their child, a parent urging their child to be defined and shaped by God's word in all of life. But there's a picture behind the picture and that is there's also the covenant God, Yahweh, urging his son which is national Israel to have the same defining attitude to be shaped and defined by his word.

And we pick up covenant language in verse 3 that idea of steadfast love and faithfulness. That's the language of Deuteronomy 6 and 7. So if you're going to read Proverbs 3 you should go home and actually read it with Deuteronomy 6 and 7 open before you, beside you because the language is incredibly similar.

[9 : 35] The pictures are incredibly similar. Deuteronomy 6 and 7 describes wisdom or fear of the Lord and actually uses those terms as the right response to God's covenant commitment.

Wisdom is the pathway which realises God's promise of the good life as we were created to experience and enjoy it. So the command here, the urge here, the plea here is don't be careless of God's word.

Make it an inseparable part of your person. That's the binding around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart. Make them an inseparable part of your person. The thing that actually defines your attitude and shapes you as a personality and shapes your actions from the inside out.

And the promise of verse 2 and 4 again restated from chapters 1 and 2. Actions have consequence.

That's one of the key tenets of wisdom. Actions have consequence. The person who chooses wisdom will experience God's promised blessing.

[10 : 59] Which in the covenant language of Deuteronomy 6 and 7 is the good life. The good life defined by acceptance by God, protection from God, deep satisfaction of heart in God.

And in verse 4 that actually extends to relationships generally. because in our world, even in our world today, people will recognize integrity. People recognize right conduct and respect it even though they may not accept God's word as the foundation for that integrity and conduct.

God's word and respect it and there's desire, longing for nothing else than total connection with God, verses 5 and 6.

I'm going to read these two verses out and then as I read them out, just note this. I'm going to look at how Christians tend to take these verses really wrong. Probably the most, some of the most well-known verses in the Bible, but so badly misunderstood.

Verse 5 and 6, 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 straight your paths.

[12 : 18] Now, I think lots of Christians often take the word trust there to mean if I just screw up my eyes and really, really believe what I'm asking God for, then he'll give it to me.

In other words, they use the word trust there as a sort of equivalent to sincerity. If I ask with enough sincerity, then I'll get God's blessing.

But the Hebrew word for trust here is a very, very different word. It's actually the picture of a person lying face down in the dirt, hands beside their body, totally helpless in front of those who tire over them.

At the mercy of those standing over them. That is, the idea of trust here is an absolute confidence in the Lord to lead you into the good life.

Why? Because, the second half of the verse, you know your own resources will not deliver. And verse 6, the word acknowledge is not just an intellectual, oh yeah, I believe in God.

[13 : 40] The word acknowledge is far more, it's knowing, it's desiring to be in an intimate relationship with God. It's a desire to enjoy his presence through direct relationship and ongoing fellowship with him.

Now, those two verses combined to give us such a huge challenge is trust in the Lord with all your heart and it's not leaning on your own understanding at any point.

It's in all your ways, in every circumstance of life, acknowledging him. and man, that throws out the challenge to us because our default position is to have a divided heart.

That is, we trust ourselves to deliver certain things in life, good things in life. but I think most of us will realize we can't deliver everything we want and so then we trust God for the rest.

The things that we think we cannot provide for ourselves. But there's no room for that in these two verses if we're going to grow in wisdom. Wisdom is learning to trust God in everything for everything.

[15 : 12] God's promise in these verses is as big as his challenge. The challenge is give up all of self the promise you will get all that God offers.

The idea of making straight your path in verse 6 is also from Deuteronomy chapter 6. And what you read and see clearly in Deuteronomy chapter 6 it is not a promise of a hassle free life.

Which is what some Christians these days want to take it to mean. it is not the promise of hassle free life. It's the promise that God will put us on the pathway to his appointed goal of life with him forever.

That's the sense in which he'll make straight our path. He'll put us on the path and he'll keep us on the path. Nothing will run us off the road.

Nothing will keep us from getting to the end the road to be with the Lord forever. This desire genuine desire for connection with the Lord will deliver forever connection to God and enjoyment of him.

[16 : 49] Attitudes and desires combine and flow into actions. In verses 7 to 12 there's at least three actions there. Could be more depending how you want to divide them up.

I'm going to pick them up in three. And hear this growing in wisdom comes at a real cost.

There's nothing automatic about it. There's nothing particularly easy about it either. There's no shortcuts to wisdom. It comes at a real cost which again a person with the right attitude and desire for God will gladly absorb.

here's the cost here's the price getting God and suddenly the cost becomes very acceptable and easily absorbed.

What's the cost? The first one then verse seven what I'm calling subduing self and nurturing God's mind and will verses seven and eight be not wise in your own eyes who can do that for goodness sake we do that automatically we don't even have to think about that be not wise in your own eyes fear the Lord and turn away from evil it will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones growing in wisdom means a daily choice a choice to make my rebellious mind and will bow to God's mind and will and purpose it means a daily choice of moving into

[18 : 47] God's word asking the Lord that he through his word will expose my sinful autonomous thinking and attitudes my failing desires my wrong desires that he will expose them that he will correct them and that he will redirect me into new patterns and habits of obedience now I've been around long enough as a Christian to say that's a really dangerous prayer to pray Lord expose my sin and change me that brings stuff you just never would anticipate it's huge we find it hard to ask advice let alone be prepared to hear the answer it comes back to us lest our foolishness be exposed we actually search out people when we do want advice we actually tend to search out people we search out people that we think will give us the answer we want because it will be a convenient comfortable answer we actually shun people that we think might tell us the truth we even try and deceive ourselves before we even try to deceive the

Lord saying that you Lord are the one in whom I find my identity and my happiness and we can actually say that we can sometimes even convince ourselves that we believe that when all the while we're backing worldly wisdom which searches for identity and happiness in family marriage children career in work home wealth or health so the list goes on my friends as I understand these verses here there is no fear of the Lord if we are backing our own understanding or wisdom at any point in life if we're placing our confidence and identity in things other than God then there cannot be fear of the

Lord so to grow in wisdom then practically think of the implications for that as we live in our world to grow in wisdom is to be increasingly and radically different from those around about us that we rub shoulders with every day that's a huge cost given that our natural inclination is just to want to fit in and be one of the group be accepted subduing and honoring honoring God by reflecting his generosity in everything verses 9 and 10 it will be healing to your flesh oh hang a sec that's verse 8 verse 9 honour the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce then your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will be bursting with wine now all these verses are difficult this morning but I need to stop and look at a particular difficulty with these two verses

Christians tend to approach these two verses particularly in one of two main ways either Christians are quite critical when they come to this verse disappointment even angry at God because they've not experienced prosperity in spite of what they believe is honouring the Lord with their money and possessions in other words they think God's dropped his end of the bargain on the other hand the other group of Christians tend to come to these verses ever hopeful that ultimately if they keep on tithing their income then God will make them wealthy I want to say this morning that neither of those responses honours the Lord the first response doubts

God's promise which is doubting God's character the other sees God as nothing more than an investment portfolio the more I put in the more I get out and I can't see how that's honouring of the Lord either that's a transaction wisdom however honours the Lord and this is I think the import of these verses wisdom honours the Lord by being generous why be generous it's in response to God's generosity to us in the first place in the first instance and giving other first fruits is exactly that picture return the first fruits of the harvest as recognition a generous recognition that every moment of the growing season has been a gift from

[24 : 31] God from the first rain to the planting of the seed to the bringing in of the crop at the end the yield at the end so you return generously in recognition of God's generosity in the first instance generosity therefore is an outworking of heart attitudes and desires in response to what God has given us generosity honors the Lord not simply because it is right to do but because it is a joy to do and because it is a small reflection of God's character in us so when you think about it you say when you think about generosity we give the best gifts to those we love most we give the best gifts to those who have been most generous to us and we give gladly conversely we hoard our wealth because when we look at our wealth whether it's possessions or the bank account we hoard our wealth and when we look at it we believe that it is those things that give us security the actual amount of money the actual number of possessions we believe it's those things that gave us security more than the

Lord who gave us those things in the first instance as Tim Keller says we've made our wealth an idol and displaced God in the process and again as we come to look at what appears to be an absolutely outrageous promise of prosperity Deuteronomy chapter 6 and 7 helps us very easily understand the promise of plenty or prosperity because in Deuteronomy chapter 6 we have a context of generosity God in his generosity took a rebellious people to whom he owed nothing and rescued them from Egypt brought them back to himself and was in the process of bringing them into the land which would be described as the good life his place his people under his rule and what was the heart of prosperity in this good life not the things of the land itself but the relationship with

God that brought them into the land prosperity in Deuteronomy 6 is defined in terms of connection with God and therefore connection to the good life that God wants his people to have and that's prosperity they were prosperous Deuteronomy 6 not because they would have fat wallets nice houses and a hassle free life in this land but because they were in relationship with the Lord God now our problem is we think of reward as something separate from God we think it's evidence of we think God in his great generosity will give us things that are separate to him and separate to us things that we want and we'll take that as a mark that God plays with us and again conversely it's evidence of wisdom when we realize evidence of growing in wisdom when we realize that our barns are filled to overflowing when we realize that we cannot exhaust the rich wine of life when we are in relationship with God and that each of those things are totally satisfying to us that's when we realize we're wealthy beyond measure that's a wealth in the

New Testament says rust and moths rust rust and moths and you know the verse anyway hey apply it suddenly I'm sweating here for some reason and thieves that's the bit I couldn't they can't be taken away from me that wealth okay moving on quickly valuing God's pursuit in discipline even when that discipline is really painful verses 11 and 12 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 another huge cost growing in wisdom will actually mean personal pain and suffering and adversity why must it mean that because the Lord has to literally prize us free from our foolishness and push us into his way of wisdom and again you see our attitudes and desires will determine whether the challenges of life what's called here the discipline of

God whether the challenges of life will draw us towards God in greater love and trust or drive us away from the Lord in resentment and anger and you sometimes I'm speaking from my own experience sometimes that can be such a lineball case when the Lord brings stuff to his left field because you see typically we resent discipline typically even stronger we resent the one who brings discipline to us why very simple we don't like to be exposed and we certainly don't like to be corrected loving discipline from the Lord makes us confront our foolish behavior and it redirects us into new obedience or wisdom but man it's so easy to react badly to God's discipline so easy throw up our hands and be angry it's not fair so easy to throw up our hands and withdraw because the pathway to wisdom is not instant it's not easy and it's not what

[31 : 42] I wanted to be and it's not what I will tolerate it being my friends growing in wisdom is learning to value God's discipline as the most loving expression of commitment to us growing in wisdom is being thankful even in the midst of tough times being thankful that God does not allow us to stumble into foolishness and continue to ultimate destruction but pursues us doing what he needs to do like a loving father to redirect us to correct us to renew our confidence trust and fear of him my friends do not despise the

Lord's discipline it will take you perhaps into places you would never ever have gone in a million years but with the right attitudes and the right desires it will grow you into a new dependence of the Lord but friends I need to end where I started and I'll do so quickly wisdom is not something we get automatically it requires faithfulness that's all I've said so far it requires a level of faithfulness that is so extreme in this passage that we actually have to say at the end of it all well we can see all that but who can do it it's beyond us so ultimately my friends God's faithfulness is required if we are to be people of wisdom who can deliver the attitudes and desires and disciplined action who can give up all of self who can actually for a moment really seriously believe they're not wise in their own eyes who can live obediently under

God's rule well none of us can so I finish with this there's yet another perspective in Proverbs that is repeated chapter after chapter another perspective on wisdom's faithfulness God is wisdom and demands as people faithfully pursue wisdom that's real that's the challenge we've just looked at but God also knowing our inability gives wisdom as a gift because of his faithfulness so there's another take on wisdom's faithfulness God is wisdom and wisdom's faithfulness gives us that which he knows we cannot properly develop for ourselves it's a paradox it's highlighted in each of chapter one and two and it becomes here in chapter three again and it's every chapter in Proverbs and it becomes a paradox that becomes a reality in the gospel remember I said three weeks ago the gospel is a call to wisdom because

Jesus is the wisdom of God 1 Corinthians 1 24 Jesus is God's wisdom and righteousness his whole life modelled Proverbs 3 1 to 12 God's word defined and shaped Jesus desire for relationship with his father meant he gladly accepted the cost of being God's wisdom and displaying God's wisdom to an unbelieving foolish world a cost that actually took him all the way into unimaginable suffering and ultimately his death so Jesus is both a model of wisdom and my friends our source of wisdom we get wisdom when we come to Jesus giving up all of self we grow in wisdom as we develop the mind of Christ and struggle to express it in every circumstance of life all the while counting him as our plenty as our healing as our satisfaction so my friends when it comes to the challenge of growing in wisdom we need not despair we are called to put in every effort that we can to grow in wisdom but alongside this is

God's faithfulness promising to give us wisdom in Jesus what a beautiful wise thing the Lord has crafted here if growing in wisdom was all up to us we would crash and burn in despair if God worked apart from us then we would be so ho hum and casual that we would dismiss God the paradox of wisdom from Proverbs is that we have both assurance that wisdom is ours and therefore incentive in Christ to struggle to grow in wisdom to be more and more like Christ to be more satisfied with God to enjoy more the good life we have in and through Jesus so friends pray with me this week that we will struggle with the help of the

[37 : 43] Holy Spirit to trust in the Lord with all our heart and not our own understanding and at the same time be deeply thankful that in Christ we have the wisdom and righteousness of God let's pray now Lord who can who can do what's asked of us here in Proverbs and ultimately Lord we need to say who needs to do it for in Christ we have wisdom and righteousness and from that then Lord our renewed desires pushes gladly and wholeheartedly into the struggle to more and more reflect your character as you modeled this passage to us in the Lord Jesus Christ to reflect it in our own lives back to you help us Lord to do that we pray in Jesus name Amen Thank you very much