

# Proverbs 3:1-8 "Promises, Promises"

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Fearing God, the fear of the Lord, and it's about wisdom. And we're going to go through the definitions of both of those at different points today. But as we get in and read this text right now, I want you to think of this definition that I got from a professor in seminary for wisdom. Wisdom is skill in the art of godly living. That's what wisdom is. It's not an abstract thing. It's actually something that's very tangible. It is skill in the art of godly living.

So think of that as we read in chapter 3. I'll start in verse 1. 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.

[ 1 : 06 ] Write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor 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 straight your paths. 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.

That's the word of the Lord. Let's pray. Father, we enter your house today as expectant people. Sinful people. Those who are in desperate need of you. We're in need of the things that you give, but we're more in need of you. And I pray that as we work our way through this text this morning that we would see you in who you are.

We would see the trustworthiness of your long suffering and your grace shown to us through your son and through the giving of your spirit. I pray that you would bless the words that come out of my mouth.

[ 2 : 21 ] That they would be edifying to your church. Please be with all of us. May our minds be invigorated by your spirit. And may you begin to work something true in our hearts.

Even today. In the name of King Jesus and for his sake. Amen. So, it's funny to think about graduating high school students because I was a certain kind of knucklehead when I graduated from high school.

I don't think I was ever smarter in my life than I was on my 18th birthday. At the time, I didn't know that. But I really wasn't. And that was proven about five years later when I got to my super senior year of college.

And moved in with some buddies of mine on the top of a mountain not so far from here. And we began to have a friend come over who never really left.

He was one of those permanent house guests. He said, oh, it's cool. I'll crash on the couch. That's fine. Sure, you can crash on the couch. Well, about six months later we found out for the previous year he had been crashing on other people's couches.

[ 3 : 31 ] And then for the rest of that year he actually crashed on our couch as well. Which was really an interesting thing to see because he came from a pretty wealthy family. And his father, thinking he was in his own place or in a place with other guys, had been putting a monthly stipend into his account that would take care of his rent and for his food for the month.

In addition to his father paying for his college education. So it was kind of odd that this guy would choose to crash on our couch and other people's couches. As we talked more about it, I can be kind of confrontational, not in a negative way, but in a, hey, tell me what's going on kind of way.

He disclosed that his dad had never really been around growing up. And he wasn't really sure how much he could trust him now. And so he was taking all that money and just kind of bankrolling it.

And keeping it in case the bottom fell out from his father helping him. He said, also, I know where the money needs to go more than my dad does.

Because I'm just smarter than he is. And I'll never forget someone saying that. I'm smarter than my dad. I've never once thought I was smarter than my dad. But Chris really believed this. He saw this function and this utility to his relationship with his father that was, it was really kind of sad.

[ 4 : 54 ] And things didn't go well for them after that either. Which you could probably imagine from a story like that. I was thinking about that as I was going through this text and studying. I read through all the wisdom books, just trying to reorient myself to what we think about when you're reading wisdom literature, like what we just read there in the first eight verses.

And I couldn't examine Chris's relationship without examining my relationship with God. I saw so many similarities to what was going on there. Rather than viewing him in awe with reverence and honor and love.

And most importantly, necessity and need. I found myself in a relationship with God, viewing him more as a means to an end. Rather than having that love and relationship that I would have with a savior.

We live as though we need him to give us everything. But we forget that we simply just need him. And that's pretty much what the text of scripture is about.

Much of what we've been examining in Luke over the past few months has been pushing us to consider eternal things. The gravity of life and death and what happens after life.

[ 6 : 14 ] More than the things that are around us now. More than the temporary things. And as we look in this chapter, the father who's writing to his son in Proverbs is saying a lot of the same things to him about eternal thinking.

About setting your mind on things eternal rather than on things that are temporary. And we can look at this and not only is he saying it to his son, he's saying it to you and me as well. He's not offering, as you can see in these verses, he's not offering some live your best life now scheme.

You know, he's actually offering something more along the lines of the beauty of what we would know as the full gospel. It was neat to see Emily's video.

Because that's... I see her live the gospel out around students all the time. And it was really pointed to me. The quote that Will pulled out was also the quote that I pulled out when I saw the video.

I thought, man, it seems like we don't do much, but we really like it. And Emily just pours herself into people. To show them, hey, this God that I worship, this God that I love, this is real.

[ 7 : 24 ] And it's a part of the gospel you don't get with just some kind of cognitive assent. It's the gospel lived out in front of people. And it's really powerful to see. And that's what the father in this passage is writing to his son.

And, hey, there's something trustworthy here. We need to turn aside from looking at our own belly buttons and try to capture the view of what God is doing more and more and how beautiful and good that news really is.

So this morning we're going to walk through this passage looking at three different things. The first thing, you can look on the back of your bulletin and you'll see it there. The first thing is that we have a trustworthy father. The second, that we have a trust-earning son.

And the third, that we have a trust-keeping Holy Spirit. So let's start. We're going to read over the verses one more time.

We'll start with verses one through four. We have a trustworthy father. My son, do not forget my teaching. But let your heart keep my commands.

[ 8 : 28 ] For length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. What a promise. 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. This is a father coming to his son right there in verse one. And he's not coming to him and saying, hey, you better do this because I said so.

That's not what he's doing at all. He's coming to him and saying, hey, I have some gems of wisdom you need to know. Don't forget my teaching. But let your heart keep my commands. In your house, in everybody's house, there's kind of this meta rule set that really dominates your house, right?

It doesn't necessarily apply to everybody else. And that's what this father is saying to his son.

Remember everything I've taught you, not just all the laws that you had to learn, because that's what good Jewish people do.

But even the way that we approach the world, the way that you've lived life in my house. I didn't do this randomly. These are good things. And oh, by the way, if you do that, you're going to add years to your life.

[ 9 : 35 ] And you're going to add peace. And let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you. Bind them around your neck. Psalm 139, 23 and 24 is what's in reference there.

And he's pointing to him and saying, look, don't let the reality of who God is pass you by. This God pursues us with steadfast love.

And he's faithful when we're not. He's worthy of a trust that we could never muster in ourselves, but we would never find on earth either.

Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart. Keep them close inside of you. So you'll find favor and good success.

It's another promise in the sight of God and of man. How beautiful is this picture? For those of you who were lucky enough to attend the Parents Cafe last month with Derek and I, you might catch a glimpse here of a father offering his son that acronym HOPE.

[ 10 : 39 ] This isn't a picture of do this because I said so. Rather, this is a picture of a father honestly, openly, and purposefully sharing the key to life with his son in this moment.

He's saying, you're going to pay attention to something, so why don't you pay attention to me right now? He's not saying do this because I said so.

Rather, he's saying to him, do this because it works. And it works because there's a heavenly father who really loves you. I know where you are because I've been where you are. Look to the one who's above everything else.

He has love and he has faithfulness that's been proven over the course of time. He brought our people out of Egypt. He called a nation to himself and he kept them.

He gave us a land to prosper in. This is the God we serve. Certainly, he will do it for you too. And what does that kind of love get us?

[ 11 : 40 ] What does that love and faithfulness get us? It gets us a good reputation with God. That's important, right? But it gives you a horizontal reputation with men as well. You'll find favor and good success in the sight of God and of man.

I'm the first one to put down any notion of prosperity gospel teaching. And this can certainly come off that way because, hey, if you do this, then this will happen for you. For a length of days and years of life.

You're going to live longer and you're going to live at peace. Trust me. Just send me \$10 and I'll send you this prayer cloth and it's going to be true for you. I'm the first one who puts that down. Because it's a predatory thing.

It's predatory to people here in the United States. It's predatory to people in other countries as well. But don't allow the ugliness of that to cast some shadow over this amazing and trustworthy thing that was said to us.

There's something so true about the reality of trusting in God. These promises aren't non-existent. They're not going to not come true. They're absolutely going to come true.

[ 12 : 48 ] Now, certainly we're sinners and we're so corrupted by the world and the flesh and the devil that we can't even imagine what it would be like to perfectly follow every command. I sometimes wonder what it would be like to perfectly follow any command.

We've complicated our situation to such an extent that we know that we deserve nothing more than eternal separation from God. I felt that last night pretty strongly.

I don't know where it came from. It was just an overwhelming sense of guilt. Even as I'm preparing to preach about God's love and his steadfast love and his faithfulness to his people. I was telling myself a lie of that caliber, of that depth.

The challenge here comes in the assumed actions that lead to positive results, right? What does it mean to follow commandments? If peace is promised, am I headed toward peace apart from this? How do we examine the way we view life and look at life? That's the negative of what he's saying here. Don't forget my teaching. If you let your heart keep my commandments, you're going to live long and you're going to live at peace.

[ 13 : 58 ] What are you pursuing right now? What dominates your life? Where is that leading? Is that leading to peace? Graduates, children, parents, singles, pastors, elders, deacons, we're all being confronted with this reality that any way, any way at all but this way, will not lead to these

promises.

Who are the main influences in your life? This is a good question for elementary kids too. Kids, if you're in here, who are the main influences in your life? I love that what we do as a church is we spend a lot of time embracing non-believers, and that's something that we want to do.

Jesus spent his time on earth not only with non-believers, but even with the outcasts, the scandalous ones, and then the littlest, the lost, the loneliest, the least, and the left out.

And we should do that. But what is your heart behind the people that you choose to spend time with in friend groups, in work groups, whatever?

How do you see God work in your life when you pray that he gives you the heart to put to death blatant sin? Have you ever prayed that? Have you ever prayed Psalm 139?

[15:22] 23 and 24, you could look that up. It's an ideal manner of prayer for those of us who want these Proverbs 3 promises to come true and to take them seriously. These verses invite us to examine our lives in the light of the promises that are issued here.

But these verses also invite all of us, believers and non-believers in this room, these things are true to all of us as they're offered, to trust in the simplicity of the gospel.

Strive hard after your heavenly Father. Remember the things that he's commanded because he's not provided us with a burden.

He's provided us with exercises to help us grow our skills in the art of godly living. We can turn from our own way because we've been given the perfect way.

We simply need God. We simply need him. God ought not to revolve around us, and that's the place I got to last night.

[16:36] Somehow God was revolving around me, and my attitudes and my heart were inclined to myself, not to the glorious truth of who God is, of what he's done.

And so I was able to come in this morning preaching from a pretty famous passage of Scripture and have a renewed joy in who God is and in who Jesus is. And this is a beautiful passage because I found myself desperate to live in the love and the beauty of my heavenly Father.

And the beauty of this passage doesn't end here. We're shown how wonderful our trustworthy Father is. And in the next few verses, we're going to get a glimpse of his trust-earning Son.

These are some of the most famous platitudinal, made that word up, verses in Scripture, verses 5 and 6. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.

In all of your ways, acknowledge him, and he'll make your path straight. When we say trust, I say trust like I trust that 10 of the 12 players on my Coach Bitch Baseball team are going to show up hopefully a half an hour before the game starts.

[18:01] That's a real tangible trust to me. I trust that James will have my slides in the ProPresenter program on the computer this morning before I got here.

That's what trust is. That's the way I think about it. Trust here in verse 5, trust in the Lord with all your heart. That has nothing to do with some kind of hopeful trust or wishful trust.

That is more, if my neck wasn't hurting, I would have physically done something this morning. It is a laying down fully supported only by this. That's the meaning of this word trust in this passage.

It's not keeping one foot balanced on your own and one foot balanced on Jesus. It is a fully reliant, radical giving yourself over to God.

Giving yourself over to the realities of the gospel. The interesting thing is, if you read it in English, you say, well, trust and lean, those things are kind of similar, except for when I say trust, that's a little bit more heavy of a word than lean, and they're not.

[19:14] They're similar words. So the writer of this proverb is creating a dichotomy, creating a binary that you either are trusting in the Lord with all your heart, or you're not.

There's no such thing as a middle ground here. You're either trusting in the Lord with all your heart, or you're leaning on your own understanding. It's a challenging thing for me to get through.

Trust is not some simple ascent. Trust is throwing ourselves onto God because he will do it, because of his steadfast love, because of his faithfulness to us.

That acknowledgement piece is just as all-encompassing. All your ways, you acknowledge him. Which ones? All of your ways.

How do we handle our money? Why? How do we handle our time? Why? How do we handle our interactions with other people? Why? What is driving us?

[ 20 : 21 ] What is motivating our hearts? Are we being conformed and transformed into Christ-likeness, or are we not? Chapter two of this is all about wisdom and earning wisdom.

And chapter three is the practical application of what it looks like to develop and to hone skill in the art of godly living. And the primary thing is a simple one.

Just in every way, you rely on God. Another pastor tells a funny story about what trust really might look like. I'm not sure if you're familiar with the Susquehanna River. I'm from the north to some of you, even though I'm below the Mason-Dixon line.

There is a giant river that runs out of a lake in New York and comes all the way down and dumps out into the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland. That's the Susquehanna. And in the northern parts of it, it freezes over every year.

So he tells a story about one of his seminary professors was crossing the river on a winter's day, and his dad didn't know how thick the ice was. When you're in places like this, you can save a lot of time just by driving over the iced-over rivers.

[ 21 : 25 ] So his dad is down on all fours, and he's crawling along, you know, just kind of touching and seeing the ice. And gradually, he begins to hear this rumble coming up behind him.

And what it is, is four horses and a coach flying across the ice, not testing it at all, totally sure of how the ice was going to do, was going to hold them.

That guy actually lived there. He wasn't just trusting that the ice was going to be frozen over. He was a local who'd experienced the ice frozen over and that it was safe to travel on. Which of those two people are you?

When it comes to relying on King Jesus, are you on the river of King Jesus at full throttle, knowing that if he can't save you, nothing can?

Are you eking away your way along with little trust or no trust at all?

[ 22 : 28 ] I like reading A.W. Tozer. He has a great quote out of his book, *The Root of Righteousness*. It says this, pseudo-faith always arranges a way out to serve in case God failed it.

Real faith knows only one way and gladly allows itself to be stripped of any second way or any makeshift substitute. For true faith, it's either God or it's total collapse.

And not since Adam stood up on the earth has God failed a single man or a single woman who trusted him. Man, that's the stuff that revival is made up of, Southwood.

Does that invigorate your heart? As a church, we need to be taking our individual pulses and falling to the ground before our Savior in this type of way.

We need to experience that level of trust so that there's no secondary option for us. Will's talked about experiencing it when he was in India, being around the people who have nothing.

[ 23 : 36 ] And yet, even if they had everything, they would still be there fully leaning and laying on Christ. There are no idols that we hold higher than our reckless abandon to the scandalous love our Father showed us in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

He has earned our trust by earning our Father's trust on our behalf, yours and mine, and he secured our seat with the Father in the heavenly places even today.

If you're a believer in this room, that's true of you right now. It's a great thing. God doesn't want to burden us.

God wants us to live easy under his yoke because we know and can identify what it means to fully trust in the Father because the Son has made it so.

It makes sense to us to look to our trustworthy Father and to see ways in which we worship his trustworthy Son. Now let's take a look at the trust-earning Holy Spirit.

[ 24 : 48 ] Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding and all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths. That's the positive. Here's the negative. Verse 7, Be not wise in your own eyes.

Fear the Lord. Turn away from evil. And then a great promise. It'll be healing to your flesh and it'll be refreshment to your bones.

This illustrates what I was saying before about the binary reality of our relationship with our Father. Either we are fully trusting in him or we're fully trusting ourselves. I could give illustration after illustration of being wise in my own eyes but I decided to refrain from that this morning.

What we see here is a direct command for us to think less of ourselves in the face of God. But what does it mean to fear the Lord? You see that a lot.

What does it mean to fear the Lord? I think a great illustration of this is found in the book *The Wind in the Willows*. Charlie and I listened to it a couple years ago on a cross country trip and then my mom reminded me when she was here that we read it 30 times.

[26:06] So I should say that. Rat and mole who are characters in the book go looking for the baby otter when, and this is a quote from the book, Suddenly the mole felt a great awe fall upon him and awe that turned his muscles to water.

bowed his head and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror. Indeed he felt wonderfully at peace and happy. Rat! He found the breath to whisper shaking.

Are you afraid? Afraid? Of him? Oh never, never. And yet, and yet, oh mole, I am afraid. Then the two animals crouching to the earth bowed their heads and did worship.

Have you ever experienced your heavenly father like this? Do you remember the moment of your conversion? For so many of us it was, we were brought to our knees.

Maybe we were brought into a fetal position with an overwhelming sense of guilt in the face of holiness and simultaneous hope in the face of the creator God.

[27:16] God, this didn't happen because of your great abilities to reason. It happened because the Holy Spirit gave you an experience.

That Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son and allowed you to experience the reality of saving grace. To see the truth in one moment of who God is and who you are.

And yet everyone, believers and non-believers, were implored here to fear the Lord and turn away from evil. This isn't issued as some simple good rule of thumb or some moral standing.

The promise here is that we will be revitalized. It actually heals us to fear the Lord. It's the way we were meant to live in total awe and wonder of our God.

And so we're left to examine this free gift of grace even as it's illustrated here in Proverbs. Emily and I are a little over six weeks into being new parents again.

[28:34] And this has been a very unique baby for us not only because it's a girl but the way that the daughter has behaved too. I mean she's peaceful most of the time. And really all that she wants is to be with Emily.

It's not about feeding although it is sometimes. It's not about getting her diaper changed although it is sometimes. she could be in Emily's arms leaning and resting wholeheartedly on her all day and all night.

Emily gets weary. She gets tired of that, right? Actually she's amazing. I get tired of it for 20 minutes. She does it endless hours. But think of that image of this baby in total need of her mom and the mom just sitting there and holding her.

She doesn't know what Emily can give her. All she knows is she needs her mother. All she knows is that she needs to be with her. That nothing else will satisfy her.

Our Heavenly Father wants us to be with Him in that same way. My college friend was living out of pragmatism and utility. Taking his dad's money. God doesn't call us to a pragmatic relationship.

[29:58] God calls us into His love to eternally rest on Him. He wants us to trust Him and He's proven Himself to us over and over so that we can completely rely upon Him.

I pray that our sins become less and less and less and our character becomes more and more conformed because of the beauty of the reality of His love for us.

So as you read through Proverbs or Song of Solomon or Job or Ecclesiastes, these books, hopefully you do some kind of chronological Bible reading. I would encourage you to do that.

There's more to it than just this nugget of truth that you can throw out there or put in a fortune cookie. this is really the keys to a God who loves you and how He wants you to conform to Him, how He's secured a way for you to conform to Him and how He continues to live in us and amongst us as a community of believers to conform to Him.

Let me pray for us. Father, we're grateful for times of need. We're grateful for times of lacking, for times of want because it points us to the reality of Your love for us.

[31:26] You disclose to us our idols. You chasten us. Even if we kept reading in chapter 3, we would see that You discipline Your children and You reprove us not because You don't love us but because You love us so much.

I pray that we would put down our idols and that we would follow You with all of our hearts and that we would trust on You and that we would lean not on ourselves.

Thank You for all of this. Thank You for the reality of these gifts and I pray for us as we go out of here today even that we would know and live according to this big picture view of who You are and who You've made us to be.  
For the sake of Christ, I pray. Amen. For more information, visit us online at [southwood.org](https://southwood.org).