

Proverbs 11:30 “Remember Who You Are”

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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.

If you would please turn with me to one verse. Proverbs chapter 11:30. It's also before you there. And the page number. Before I read, I'd like to pray. For it is more of a privilege to have God's Word than any of us fully grasp.

So let's pray that Spirit of God might heighten our sensibility. Let's pray. Lord, I remember my first conversation with my now bride.

God, she spoke to me. The first phone call when she said my name.

[1 : 13] Each of us can remember the moments when it felt so privileged that someone would know us and speak to us.

Our children, our parents, our siblings. Picking up someone at the airport who's so famous and they say, Are you Joe?

And I couldn't believe my name was on their lips. And our hearts are in your hands and you are speaking to us by your Word.

So thank you. Before we read, we ask now for each one of ourselves.

What we need. So we tell you in quiet. And with expectancy.

[2 : 31] We look forward to see how you'll answer these prayers. In the matchless name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. One verse.

Brief. But ever so glorious. Proverbs 11:30. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life.

And whoever captures souls is wise. As I'm about to open this, I want you to know that this is a passage that's addressed to followers of the living God already.

And if that's not you, I hope you'll begin to understand who he wants us to be to you. This may make far more clear how far we've got to improve in following him to serve you correctly.

And if you're going to be to you. And if you're going to be to you. And if you're going to be to you.

And if you are his, I hope you'll begin to remember who you really are. One of the greatest privileges of my entire ministry, maybe my life, I'd say my life, it is, was to be the pastor of a man named Albert McMenkin.

[3 : 59] We had a class in the church where I was serving, where new attendees who were interested in the church would come. And I would always ask them to introduce themselves briefly by something unique about themselves, whether it was their favorite football team or pizza topping or anything they chose.

And I came to this older gentleman. It was Albert. And he said, I'm the man who took Billy Graham to the Mordecai Ham Crusade where he became a Christian.

And I have to confess, when he said that inside myself, I was thinking, no, you're not. So when the class was over, I made a beeline for his daughter and granddaughter and said, is your father and grandfather the Fuller brush salesman that I've read about in church history all these years with Billy Graham?

He's the guy. I had the privilege of spending time with a man who mentored and disciplined the man who has arguably spoken to more human beings about Jesus than anyone in history.

The things I saw in him and learned from him were absolutely priceless. And then there came a day when he got dementia.

[5 : 36] And if any of you are facing this right now, I just do not want in any way to appear to be minimizing. But it was so difficult when he forgot who I was when I would visit him.

It was even harder when he didn't know who his own family was. It just broke my heart. But in all honesty, my heart was most broken when he forgot who he was.

Because now he was in the room, but he was gone. Arguably one of the most influential men in the history of our planet was gone.

But he was right there. I begin with that Christian follower of the Most High God because that could be you. I'm going to argue it's likely it's you when you see the content of this text.

I fear we've forgotten who we are, who we're supposed to be to one another and to those who just aren't sure God's there.

[6 : 58] That's what this passage talks about. I want you to see your stunning identity. I want you to see what causes that identity and I want you to see the kind of behavior that should emanate from us.

So, let's dig in. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life. There's the identity.

Tree of life. Solomon, the author of the majority, not all, the Proverbs, is apparently playing with words. The fruit is the tree.

He wants you to see something when he goes even further and says, the tree of life. Okay, now he's not just playing with words.

He's blowing them up. Because this is the tree to end all trees. This is the ultimate tree. This is the tree in downtown Eden.

[8 : 04] This is the tree that arguably, though no one had, if eaten, you would eternally have been who we would have been before sin ever hit.

Always alive. No more death. Perfectly loving. Well, what's that like? Absolutely noble.

Full of service. Joy that was not assailable. it would always be present. A desire for the good of everyone and everything that was around you.

The tree of life. And we say, well, you know, we know what this means, Joe, we think. And I gotta just say, we don't.

Because you can only know something to which you can compare it that you already know. It's called analogic thinking and it's a big idea in epistemology and I'm not gonna try and unpack it.

[9 : 20] But you don't know anything that's perfectly good. We would have been what God called good.

Not relatively good, better than you. Good. Through and through. When the Bible tries to get us to understand this and I say try because the authors who write about this goodness when it's brought back because it's coming back.

God's going to make a new heaven and a new earth. It's coming for all who trust him. When it comes, they break into poetry because to what do we compare it?

So they say things like in Isaiah, the trees will clap and the mountains will sing.

Isaiah 55, 12. Now look, I don't know what that exactly means but it at least means this. Outside of these windows, what you see is nothing compared to what's going to be here.

[10 : 37] It will reanimate in ways that if you were to take the most beautiful sunrise, improve it by glory, stretch it out over eternity, you're starting to get in the ballpark.

That's the kind of good that was there. The most beautiful Appalachian spring, the most vital life, the most robust joy, the most melt-in-the-mouth goodness, refreshing, renewing reality would have been there.

Full stop. God is saying through Solomon to meet a true follower of the living God. One drawn by Jesus is to step back into Eden.

Just let it settle. I mean, that's just stunning. But it gets even more stunning.

Do you remember what happened after sin hit with the tree? Listen to this. Genesis 3, 23 to 24. The Lord God banished him, that's Adam, from the Garden of Eden.

[11 : 51] Verse 24. He drove him out, the man and the woman, to the east of the Garden of Eden. And he placed, listen, the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

Now, some scholars think there was one sword and it took multiple angels because cherubim is plural for angels. It doesn't mean little flying babies.

Others think every one of them had a flaming sword. In either case, what is happening here is God is preventing access now because of sin to this tree by virtue of angel war.

You don't want to fight with an angel. So, is Solomon saying that if someone can get near to a real follower of God, one of these righteous ones, listen to me, they reach the otherwise unreachable.

They find the otherwise unfindable. unobtainable. They can obtain the otherwise unobtainable.

[13:14] If they sit at your table, if they shoot around a golf with you, if they play pickleball with you, this is, this is stunning.

They can find what they could find nowhere else because God forbids that it be found anywhere else.

It reminds me of the line in the Peter Jackson take on the Lord of the Rings when Gandalf says of the hobbits, all our hopes now lie with two little hobbits somewhere in the wilderness.

God has rested that hope in measure would be with us. I doubt very much you think like this about you.

I don't. But it is what he's saying. But it gets even more stunning. if you go to the end of the Bible and look at the tree of life and I grant you Solomon wouldn't have known about the end of the Bible but the God who inspired Solomon to write this verse knew about the end of the Bible.

[14:42] And this is what the end of the Bible says. Revelation 22 verses 2 to 3. on each side of the river of life stood the tree of life bearing twelve crops of fruit yielding its fruit every month and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

No longer will there be any curse. is God saying that if people can get near us the curse will begin to reverse.

If they can get near us just the leaves of our lives a simple conversation a passing they will bump into life.

I think that's what he's saying. They will meet a fall pusher backer. A person who will prop themselves up against the ruin of the fallen world and the people we meet and say in our souls we're not going to let you go down not on my watch.

is that what he's saying? Is that who we remember that we are? You are God's life bringers.

[16:15] You don't relate to people as either a vehicle or an obstacle to your agenda as Paul Tripp says. They're not vehicles or obstacles to you.

They're miracles of his creation in his image whether they know him or not. And beyond this what you bring is life in every direction.

The book of Romans chapter 8 at verse 20 and 21 and 22 describes what happened when the fall hit because of the curse it says the created order was subjected to futility.

the creation waits to be set free from the bondage to decay. The whole creation is groaning. What that means is when sin hit the world it didn't just mean that we were going to die physically.

We died familiarly, relationally, ecologically, community-wise. Death went in every direction. You can feel it. Life feels like two steps forward, three steps back, everywhere.

[17:23] But finally there's supposed to be someone who says okay, four steps forward and three back.

Take my arm. We're going to push back on what's wrong in this business, on what's wrong in our neighborhood. We're going to run to the holes in the heart of our community and fill them with good. Can I give you an example? Because it doesn't matter your age. There was a dear lady that I deeply respected who was in a nursing facility.

She had a disease called polymyositis. If any of you had it, my profoundest sympathy. All the collagen and flexibility in her body was breaking down and rigidifying.

A young man had come to the office to see me as a pastor and he was suicidal because he had just had the woman he loved and hoped to marry, leave him and say, I'm not going to marry you.

[18:34] He wanted to hurt himself. I was not any help to him and when we bowed our heads to pray, I'm just saying, Jesus, please help him. And the thought came to my mind, the greatest praying Christian I know is this dear woman in the nursing home with polymyositis, Marion.

So when we said amen, I looked up at him and said, you know what, I want to introduce you to a woman. He went, I don't need another woman. And I said, you need this woman. And I put him in the car and we drove to the nursing facility and walked in and I said to him, now listen, this is my friend Marion.

She likes cheeseburgers from Armando's. So every Friday and night I want you to bring them because I now know your Friday and Saturday nights are free. And listen, Marion, you know Jesus better than anybody I know.

Teach him everything you know. Okay? I came back a month, and this is not preacher hyperbole, later. Coming down the hall, I could see nurses standing outside the room looking in.

When I got to the room, the room was filled with 80 and 90 year olds in wheelchairs and walkers and 20 and 18 and 19 year olds all with their Bibles open.

[20 : 01] You know what I saw in that room? Life. They were all vitally alive before the word of God.

And that dear boy asked Marion when he met another girl, would you please be in the wedding party in your wheelchair? And she couldn't do it, couldn't even manage the wheelchair by that time. I'm wanting you to see what it means in pushing back against every mark of the fall. So, let's go to the next point.

What's the cause of this identity? the fruit of the righteous, well there it is, is a tree of life. This thing righteous is what makes a human a tree of life.

What is righteousness? Well, it's important that we ask that question, what would Solomon have known righteousness to be? It's very important we don't take the whole New Testament here and dump it in because Solomon would not have known of it.

[21 : 06] we know explicitly what he would have thought righteousness was because as a king in Israel, Deuteronomy 17, 18 says that every king had to write a copy of the first five books of the Bible by hand and then read it every day.

That's Deuteronomy 17, 18. You can look at it later. So, he would have written these words in Deuteronomy 6. The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees so that we might always be kept alive as is the case today.

And if we are careful to obey all the law before the Lord our God that he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness. So, there it is.

Okay, let's break it down. If we are careful, the scripture says. In other words, nobody does this by mistake. You don't wake up one morning and go, look at that, I'm righteous.

to obey, not talk about, not speak sermons about, not discuss, not admire, obey.

[22 : 15] All the law. Let me just tell you, listen carefully. Inside of this book, there is social law, military law, sexual law, economic law, medical law, familial, ecological law, penal law, parental law, architectural law, horticultural law, agricultural law, hygienic law, city planning law, spiritual law, educational law, geriatric law.

I am just warming up. Are you kidding? Before the Lord our God, it says. In other words, not in front of each other and at least I'm doing better than you are.

No. It's before him. As the Lord commanded. So in other words, it's not a box check. You keep it all the way down to your heart. Now, if you're listening carefully, who can do that?

In fact, Solomon would even write in Ecclesiastes, assuming he's its author, at verse 20 of chapter 1, 3, forgive me, there is no one righteous.

No one who does only good in all the earth. And then his daddy, David, wrote in Psalm 14, Psalm 53, God looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there's anyone who understands, anyone who seeks God.

[23 : 43] Everyone's turned aside. They together have begun corrupt. So what is this, hyperbole? I mean, where is it possible to be righteous if this is true?

And in fact, Isaiah 64, 6 says that our most righteous deeds, our most righteous deeds are a toilet rag. How's that for graphic? I think they're starting to have trouble financially, but do you remember Kirkland gift shops in the malls?

Remember you walk in there and you get a headache in two seconds from the potpourri in the air? I promise you, this actually happened. I went into a Kirkland's and was just looking around and on the wall there was a shelf filled with what were called poepettes.

I went, no. And I picked them up and they were little turtles and little rabbits. And I looked at the list of what was in them.

Manure, cow manure, \$3.29. I pictured some guys in Iowa going, hey Mort, I got an idea.

[24 : 56] I'll bet you if we mold this stuff, send it back to the east, those folks will buy it. You'd put them in your garden, the rain would fall, you know, and they'd dissipate and fertilize.

What Isaiah says is the best sermon I've ever preached is a puppet. So how can you be righteous? Because Solomon would have also written this verse, Genesis 15.6. Abram believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

Listen, not cash. He wasn't humanly speaking fully righteous, but when Abram trusted God, believed, relied on him, God gave him credit of righteousness.

This is what it means in 2 Corinthians 5.21 when it says God made him, that's Jesus, who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of Adam.

[26 : 16] No. The righteousness of God. No illustration is adequate for that.

It's not actually me, but it's credited to me. I can only get in the suburbs of it, but when I was much younger, I played football in school.

And when I was in middle school, I was not very good, but we had this guy on our team named John Thomas. Now remember, I'm in middle school. John Thomas was 6'3 and weighed 230 pounds in middle school.

You know, we should have just said, give the ball to John. And little kids would be going all over the place. But in the 35 blast, which was my play where they'd give me the ball, John Thomas would go through the hole before me.

And I promise, if I just held the back of his pants and he fell forward, I got almost three, four, five yards. My stats were incredible. It had nothing to do with me.

[27 : 22] It was John. I was in John. I was behind John. You're in Jesus and you're behind Jesus.

That's what he's saying. When one human gets this gift of being accepted as if they'd never sinned, by God, they start to become this bringer of life that they've received to the other people around them.

Okay, we got to close. So let's look at the behavior that it produces. This identity produces and motivates, jumpstarts, propels stunning behavior.

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life and he who captures souls is wise. Some of you, if you have a different translation, the King James, I think the old NIV says, wins souls.

Some translations say get. What does it mean? Well, the word technically is a word that is learned or defined more by its context.

[28 : 42] Literally, the word means to take intentionally to oneself. to take deliberately, to get by effort. When it's used in marriage, the same Hebrew word is used to take a mate intentionally, deliberately.

But, when it's used in a negative context like a battle or conflict or difficulty or opposition, it's used for rescue, deliver, like a Navy SEAL.

or special forces. And if you look at the context of 11, 30, 29, and 31, it's difficulty. It's not a positive one.

So, what it's saying here is that this person who is righteous and now is a tree of life, finally, will be willing to fight for the well-being of what's deeper than people's DNA, their souls.

Someone who would care enough about you for the things that they can't even perceive matter to them. and they'd be willing to take enemy fire.

[30 : 10] They'd be willing to take friendly fire. They'd be willing to lose. In my neighborhood where I'm living now, this man has become famous because he lived near us, wasn't born there, but his name was Desmond Doss and he became famous in the movie Hacksaw Ridge.

Everybody mocked Desmond during his time of service, getting ready for going to battle in World War II because he was a conscientious objector to holding a gun or killing because he felt that was right as a follower of Jesus.

And they mocked him. The movie shows some of what he went through, but his own testimony was the movie wasn't even in the ballpark for how badly he was beaten and treated until.

May 6, 1945, the United States Army on Iwo Jima went after what was called the Medea Escarpment or Hacksaw Ridge.

The Americans called it a 400-foot-high cliff. They had to scale by hanging cargo ropes on the side of it. And when they got to the top, the network of caves which hid the enemy were unknown to them and they were assailed in huge numbers.

[31 : 29] And a man without a gun named Desmond Doss ran right into enemy fire grabbing soldier after soldier. And before that first battle was done, he single-handedly dragged, carried, tied on ropes and lowered 400 feet 75 men.

they didn't beat him up anymore because they finally met somebody who said, I'm willing to lose for you what we studied as officers.

I'm willing to be disadvantaged for your advantage. That's what it produces. If you're not a follower of Jesus, do you see how far we gotta go to be a help to you?

And if you are, you see who you should be. I close. One of my favorite books ever read is a little book called Small Miracles that eventually became a series.

Small Miracles 1, 2, 3, 4, they were started in 1997. These are books written by the children of Holocaust victims and survivors from World War II.

[32 : 50] And they're little stories. They're one or two pages long. And in them are really celebrations of what they often call coincidences. But they're not coincidences.

Someone has said a coincidence is a miracle of God about which he chooses to remain anonymous. Since God's over everything, what they're writing about is called providence when God works through everyday life.

Here's my favorite story and I close with this. A man is in his 50s. He's coming home from working as he did for years in a factory carrying a lunch pail.

Remember those? It's at night. It's in the winter. He's walking through the park that he would cut through for shortcuts in the winter in order to get home. more quickly. It's pitch black.

He's making his way through the park and the bushes on either side of him all of a sudden catches attention when he hears the sound of a woman being accosted. He can just hear and he stops and this all happened in seconds.

[33 : 59] But the story he writes says, I thought, okay, I got to help her. I'm out of shape. I could get killed. I can call the cops.

I can get a cop. By the time I do, she could be dead. I got to help. He parts the bushes in the dark and jumps on the back of a man who's obviously accosting a woman.

To the woman in the dark, all she knows is that there are now two attackers. And the man who is doing the attacking is so terrified he throws this factory worker off his back, runs away, and the woman backs against the tree screaming, get away from me!

Get away from me! And he says, lady, lady, lady! It's all right. You're okay. I'm here to help. And then he hears this.

Daddy? Is that you? He rescued his daughter. Here's why I tell you that.

[35 : 07] What will it take to get you, follower of Jesus, to jump in the bush? You're here to be the tree of life for everything outside this building, the people sitting next to you.

Remember who you are. Remember who made you this and what he was willing to lose to make you like this.

And let's pray for the grace to jump in the bush. Let's pray. Now, Holy Spirit, give us the grace to jump and run toward the hole in the heart of our community, our neighborhood, our friend, our brother, our sister, our member of this church.

We can't do this unless you who lost so much to give us so much. Help us by your grace to remember who we are, whose we are.

Thank you, Holy Spirit, for your word and for the way you talk. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.

[36 : 29] you