

# Proverbs 3:1-25

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[ 0 : 00 ] Alexi rejoices, right? They're freed, they're liberated. Now, you probably didn't realize it, but that scene sums up about 200 plus years of intellectual and cultural history in the West.

You didn't know that when you were watching Star Wars. Here's what I mean. What is the message in that sort of critical moment when the freedom and the happiness of the universe hang in the balance?

When it's all on the line, what's the decisive thing you have to do to find and win happiness and real and lasting peace?

Well, here's what you have to do, right? You have to trust your feelings. You have to look inside of yourself, and in the right moment, you just have to do what you feel is right.

Now, here's the thing. That belief is so woven into the very fabric of our thinking and our living today that we almost never even notice it. We take it for granted at such a deep level that we rarely consider whether or not it might be a belief worth having in the first place.

[ 1 : 21 ] In fact, we have a hard time thinking of what the alternative might actually be. We're sort of like fish in the ocean, breathing the water, not really able to imagine what it might be like to do anything else.

Of course trusting my feelings will lead to my happiness and flourishing. What else is there? Of course we breathe the water. What else is there?

Well, our passage in Proverbs this morning shows us that there is actually a different air to breathe. And it's an air that leads to a flourishing so comprehensive that it makes our natural desires seem not too big but too small.

So let's come to Proverbs chapter 3. And our focus this morning is going to be on verses 1 through 12. Later in our Proverbs series, we're going to come back to some of the themes that we find in the second half of chapter 3 in verses 13 and following.

But this morning, we're just going to concentrate on verses 1 through 12. Let me read this for us. My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments.

[ 2 : 38 ] 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. 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. Honor 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. 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.

Let's pray together. Father, we do ask that you would help our hearts now to be receptive and open.

[ 3 : 38 ] Help them to be soft soil, we pray, to the seed of your word. And Lord, we ask that by your spirit you would speak powerfully to us as we consider and meditate on this text together. And Jesus, that you would be seen with the eyes of faith this morning in a fresh and beautiful way.

Capture us and our affections, we pray, Lord Jesus. In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. So quite simply, I think, as we look at this passage, it shows us two big things.

First, it shows us a greater flourishing. And second, it shows us a better trust. A greater flourishing, a better trust. Now notice briefly how this passage is put together.

Another, the 12 verses actually form six pairs. Six pairs of four lines each. So verses 1 and 2 go together, then verses 3 and 4 go together, and so on.

And you'll notice that in each of these pairs, the odd verse gives an exhortation, an admonition, a bit of fatherly counsel. And then the even verse, the second verse, gives an incentive, a sort of motivation for taking it.

[ 4 : 49 ] So look at the structure in verses 1 and 2. You see it there. Here's the admonition. Here's the counsel. Verse 1. My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments. Then comes the motivation, the incentive to do that. For length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.

So these 12 verses are all working together. All the counsels, all the incentives to try to lift our heads out of the water. So that we can catch a breath of a greater flourishing.

The flourishing that only God can give. And so that we might see that there's a better trust. A trust aimed not inside ourselves, but outside ourselves.

So let's look at the greater flourishing. You know, if you run down, if you just sort of read down the passage and just read the even verses, you sort of catch the sweep of how comprehensive this is. It's a bit breathtaking, is it not?

First, we see that it's not just personal, but it's also social. In verse 2, we're told about length of days and peace. There's a personal element.

[ 5 : 52 ] But in verse 4, we're told about favor and good success. And good success there could also mean a good name, a good reputation in the sight of God and man. So it's personal. We live a long life.

It's also social. We enjoy a good name. Then it goes on. There's more to it. In verses 6 and 8, we see that it's not just a flourishing that's ethically sharpening, but it's also deeply rejuvenating.

He will make straight your paths, we're told in verse 6. Now, in Hebrew thought, your life was pictured as a walk, as a journey. Your life was headed somewhere.

And the word straight there means correct or right or even upright. Not just smooth as in sort of the right way, but actually ethically, the upright, the correct thing to be doing.

So this is an image of one's life, one's path, one's journey becoming more and more upright. In other words, that you reach the goal of becoming a person of character, of integrity.

[ 6 : 55 ] But at the same time, in verse 8, this growth and moral character, this ethical sharpening is not ultimately something that wears us down or tires us out. Just the opposite.

It's healing to our flesh. It's refreshment to our bones. Imagine that. Where your character is actually being refined, and yet it's also bringing refreshment to you.

Like a cool drink on a hot summer day. Except this drink doesn't just cool your tongue, it brings refreshment down into your very bones. But then we see in verses 10 and 12 that this flourishing is not just material, it's also spiritual.

In verse 10 we're shown barns stacked high and wine vats just bursting at the seams. An image of prosperity.

But then in verse 12, we're shown the crown of them all. We're told that here, that God, the Lord, will delight in us the way a father delights in his son.

[ 8 : 09 ] And of course, that's worth all the barns and all the vats in the world, isn't it? To know that God delights in you. That he loves you. Worldly wealth fades, doesn't it?

But you see, friends, the fatherly love of the eternal God can never grow old. God's delight in his children, that's the true satisfaction of our souls.

Do you know that this morning? Have you been chasing barns full of grain? But it seems empty, no matter how high it gets stacked.

Perhaps you're missing the fact that it's really the love of God that is meant to satisfy you. Now, maybe as you take stock of these six verses that we sort of quickly have run through here, these six motivations, these six incentives, maybe this starts to make you feel a little uncomfortable.

I know it sort of does for me when I first read it. It sort of sounds a bit like some kind of prosperity gospel, doesn't it? Is Proverbs telling us that if we just play our cards right spiritually, or have enough faith, or act in the right ways, God will make us healthy and rich and comfortable.

[ 9 : 30 ] Is that what this passage is saying? Well, in a word, no. That's not what this passage, or the book of Proverbs as a whole, is saying.

You know, first off, nowhere in the Bible is a believer promised a life free of suffering or trouble, right? Read the Gospels. Jesus tells his disciples time and time again that you're going to experience trouble and conflict in this life.

Look at every single believer in the rest of the New Testament. And they didn't live a life just merely of health, wealth, and happiness, right? There was hardship.

There was trial. There was suffering. Now, the book of Proverbs does give us a pattern for how wisdom generally works in the world, right?

That if you're a person of integrity, your relationships tend to work out better than if you're a person who's deceptive, on the whole. But we also have to remember another wisdom book in the Old Testament, don't we?

[10:35] The book of Job. And the book of Job is sort of like a helpful counterbalance to the book of Proverbs, reminding us that sometimes life is more complicated than we understand, and sometimes unexpected afflictions come our way.

And in fact, Proverbs itself isn't even ignorant of that fact. Even in our passage here this morning, don't we see that tension? Look at verses 9 and 10. Everything's going great there. Barns are filled. Vats are bursting. But then in verses 11 and 12, everything's not so great. There's discipline. There's reproof. There's suffering. There's affliction. As if to say, sometimes your days will be cut short, and sometimes your good name will be trampled on, and sometimes your paths will seem crooked, and sometimes your bones will feel worn out, and sometimes your barns will be empty. But through it all, the Lord does not and has not and will not disown his children. We're still, as verse 1 and verse 11 say, kind of bracketing this whole passage, we are still his sons, his daughters.

And what that means is that even if we don't find all these patterns working themselves out in our lives here and now, we know that the comprehensive flourishing described here will still one day be ours.

[11:56] Because you see, it's not just for this life that we hope. Our hope and our goal isn't just for 70 or 80 years of relatively good health, a full bank account, and a comfortable lifestyle.

If that's all we're living for, then are we not most to be pitied? Now, friends, take a step back and catch a glimpse once more as we take it in its entirety of what's being held out for us here.

Are not all these incentives, are not all these motivations pointing us to something even more lasting? Don't they speak of a peace, as verse 2 says, a shalom that can only finally be realized when God comes and makes all things new?

You see, any favor we experience now is just a foretaste of the new creation, of the eternal life that Christ won for us in His death and resurrection. And one day, all who are in Christ will share in His resurrected life in the new heavens and the new earth.

And then the motivations of chapter 3 won't just be general patterns anymore, but they'll be certain realities. Then God's children will experience peace and favor and healing without measure.

[13:16] So do you see how this is a greater flourishing than we often imagine for ourselves? C.S. Lewis famously said, we're busy making mud pies in the puddles when God is there beckoning us to come to a holiday at the sea.

But now here's where our passage becomes very countercultural. Surely the path to that sort of holistic flourishing, that kind of happiness, must be, we think, through some sort of self-discovery, through some sort of just self-expression.

Surely it's got to come through some sort of trust of our feelings to lead us on the right path. If we look inside of ourselves, then we'll get the key, right? But that's not what the writer of Proverbs says, not at all.

In order to truly know wisdom, as Proverbs speaks of, in order to embark on this life, we must not, and we cannot look inside ourselves, but outside of ourselves.

We need a better trust. Our trust must not be in our own feelings or our own desires, but in the Lord. Look at verse 5. Have trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.

[14:40] Now notice first that this is an intensely personal trust, right? Our trust here isn't in some kind of moral code. It's not in a set of timeless principles.

It's not in a pervasive energy or force that flows through the cosmos. No, our trust is in the Lord. And when our English Bible spell Lord with all capital letters, you know what that means, right?

That means it's a translation of the name that God revealed to Moses at the burning bush. When God showed himself to be the redeeming God, when God showed himself to be the God who takes a people to himself, an everlasting covenant, that's what this name Lord speaks of, signifies. This is the Lord or Yahweh, as sometimes we pronounce it. And it's the same Lord who in the fullness of time took on flesh and lived among us. That same Lord who redeemed Israel out of slavery in Egypt was the same God who came in flesh full of grace and truth in the person of Jesus Christ, fully God and fully human.

It's the same Lord who came and lived an utterly sinless life on behalf of sinful people, fulfilling the demands of that covenant. It's the same Lord who on the cross as our substitute bore all the penalties that we deserve for breaking God's covenant.

[16:10] And who three days later was raised from the dead, demonstrating that his sacrifice and his work was complete for us and that forgiveness and new life had been won for all who would turn and trust in him.

This is the Lord we're told to trust in Proverbs, this personal God who revealed himself to Israel, who became fully human in the person of the Son and who even now is being poured out into our hearts in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Trust in the Lord. Not in a principle, not in a cause, not in a set of rules, but in this very personal God. You know, it's very interesting when Jesus was interacting with the Pharisees once.

The Pharisees were very good at knowing their Bibles. You know, they had it down to a T. And Jesus says, you know, you spend all of your time reading and memorizing and trying to live what the Torah says.

And yet you've missed the point because it's about me. Friends, could it be that even us who love the Bible, and rightfully so, and want to live the Bible rightfully so, can sometimes miss the point that it's about engaging with the very personal God.

[17:36] And the sort of trust that this God deserves and demands is a wholehearted trust. Trust Him with all your heart. Put your whole weight into it. Hold nothing back. Throw yourself upon it.

And the opposite of that is to lean on your own understanding, as verse 5 says. Now picture a person with sort of a broken crutch about to lean their full weight into it. That's the image here. And to lean on our own understanding is to do just that.

To put our weight onto something that just can't hold. One commentator wrote, one is a fool to rely on his thimble of knowledge before its vast ocean.

Friends, why is it that we think, why do we think that trusting in ourselves, ourselves, with our ever conflicting desires, not really knowing what we want one day to the next, with our limited perspective, with our finite amount of knowledge, why do we think that trusting in ourselves is a better course of action than trusting in the eternal, infinitely wise, infinitely good God?

Unless you're here and you never have conflicting desires and you don't have limited perspective and you have an infinite amount of knowledge. If that's you, then this sermon's not for you. You can listen to something else. But if you're with the rest of us who experience conflicting desires and know that we're limited, why do we think that trusting in ourselves is a better idea than trusting in the God of the universe?

[19:07] Verse seven goes a little further. Be not wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and turn away from evil. So you see, it's not just about refusing to lean on our own understanding in light of God's perfect knowledge. It's also about refusing to entertain our own pride and our own self-will and things that are evil in light of God's perfect holiness.

So we're to trust in the Lord with all our heart. But what does that practically look like on the ground? What does this wholehearted trust look like?

Well, I think our passage gives us three snapshots of what that looks like. Here's one thing that that looks like.

First, do you let the teaching of God's word in Scripture challenge, change, and even overrule your thinking? You know, it's easy to say that we trust God when there's no friction between our thoughts and what we think of God's thoughts.

But what about when what we want to do and what God says we ought to do are at odds. In verses one and three, we get a picture of the Father admonishing his son not to forget his teaching, to keep guard and to keep his commandments.

[20:22] To not let steadfast love and faithfulness, which are the embodiment of God's teaching and commands because they're the embodiment of God's own character. To not let steadfast love

and faithfulness forsake you.

This admonition to listen to the word, to shape your life around the word. But what happens when your will and God's will are written in Scripture at odds? When God commands you to forgive, for example.

Or when he commands you to be generous to those who have less than you. Or when he tells you not to have sex outside of marriage. When his word runs counter to our desires, what do we do?

Again, this is what it looks like to trust the Lord wholeheartedly. Be not wise in your own eyes.

Fear the Lord. Turn away from evil. And do you see the reward in verse 8? Not misery, but healing.

[ 21 : 28 ] Not anguish, but refreshment. Ray Ortlund, in his commentary on Proverbs, puts it this way. He says, you know, here's the irony. The more you fear the Lord, the less you will fear man.

The more you depend on the Lord, the more independent you will be. The more you resemble Christ, the more of an individual you will be. The more you obey him, the freer you will be. Life will work for you with healing and refreshment.

So there's one way wholehearted trust takes shape practically. We obey his word even when it crosses our desires.

We see another way in verse 9. Verse 9 says, honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce. When times are going well, when you're in a season of prosperity, of plenty, wholehearted trust looks like honoring the Lord with your wealth.

Now you have to see that some of the most spiritually challenging times that we will face aren't when things are really difficult. It's actually when things are going really well.

[ 22 : 39 ] It's in those moments when our less than wholehearted trust in the Lord can sometimes be revealed. When we don't honor the Lord or even think of the Lord.

But how should we honor the Lord when things are going well? When we're in a season of plenty or prosperity? The second half of verse 9 tells us, we honor the Lord with or literally from the first fruits of all our produce, from our wealth.

Giving the first fruits in the Old Testament meant giving to God literally the first part of your harvest. You were growing things, the first thing that came up, that's what you gave to the Lord. And that act of giving the very first of your crops, whatever the initial thing was, the best of it, the first of it, that act of giving the very first of your crop was a symbolic way of saying that ultimately it all belonged to God.

That it was all His. And that we are simply stewards of what He's given us. So friends, do you give of what the Lord has given you?

Of your money, of your time, of your energy? Proverbs is going to have a lot more to say about our money and we're going to come back to it. But are you giving Him your first fruits?

[ 24 : 05 ] Notice again the motivation in verse 10, barns full of grain, vats full of wine. Matthew Henry said this about that verse. He said, God will bless you with an increase of that which is for use, not for show, for giving away, not for hoarding.

Those who do good with what they have shall have more to do good with. To do more good with. Again, a principle. Not a hard and fast promise, but a principle.

It's not about, verse 10 isn't simply about giving so we can get more. It's about God giving to the generous so they can be generous all the more. So what does it look like to trust the Lord with all of our heart?

First, in verse 7, we're shown that it's fearing the Lord and living in reverence of Him and His word. And then next, in verse 9, we're shown that it's honoring the Lord in times of prosperity with our wealth. And then in verse 11, last, we're shown that it's not despising the Lord in times of affliction and discipline.

That we don't just trust Him wholeheartedly in plenty, but we actually trust Him wholeheartedly in pain. And the deep reality here, friends, in verses 11 and 12 is that God loves us too much to let us alone in our lives.

[ 25 : 29 ] In all the trouble and suffering of our life, God is working out His loving, fatherly purposes for our good. As verse 12 says, it's the Father's delight in us that leads Him to discipline us, to correct us, to train us.

Again, I think C.S. Lewis captured this so well. He gives the illustration of an artist and he says, you know, an artist might not take much trouble over a picture that he or she just sort of scribbles down to amuse a child.

Have you done that? If you had a little kid you were watching maybe, maybe you're babysitting your, I don't know, your brother's kids or something and you're like, what do I do with these kids? They're driving me crazy. Here, here's a tic-tac-toe board.

Quick, fill it out. You don't take much time to scribble down a drawing just to amuse a child, but an artist will take endless effort over a great work of art that he loves.

Now, imagine, Lewis says, imagine this artist has a magnum opus and this great work of art. Imagine this great work of art actually was conscious, was sentient, was alive. And you can imagine such a piece of art, he says, after being rubbed and scraped and recommended for the tenth time wishing that it were only a thumbnail sketch whose making was over in a minute.

[ 26 : 53 ] In the same way, he says, it's natural for us to wish that God had designed us for a less glorious and less arduous destiny, but then we are wishing not for more love but for less.

Do you see what Lewis is saying? God has a destiny for you, his children, that is more glorious than you can imagine, and he is exercising all of his fatherly care and power and discipline to bring you there.

Like an artist painstakingly chipping away at a beautiful piece of art. And wholehearted trust in the Lord's discipline looks like neither despising it nor being weary of it.

You see, one is an active response of anger the other is a passive response of despair. Aren't those both ways that we can respond when we're in seasons of trouble and trial?

Anger or despondency. But rather, wholehearted trust says and believes, no, the Lord reproves those whom he loves.

[ 28 : 14 ] And of course, that may be the hardest test of all, isn't it? Yes, when our desires are crossed by God's word, that can be tough. And yes, when we're in a season of, you know, things are going well, it can be hard to honor the Lord and bring our hearts back to him, but suffering, trial, affliction, that may be the hardest of all, isn't it?

But friends, here's the good news. if you are in Christ, then you can look to one who knows exactly what it's like to be tested and to suffer.

Look to Jesus, the book of Hebrews says in chapter 12, the founder and the perfecter of our faith, our trust, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of God.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted. And then Hebrews quotes Proverbs chapter 3, verses 11 and 12.

Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him, for the Lord disciplines the one he loves.

[ 29 : 46 ] Christian, you have a high priest in the Lord Jesus who knows every trial and every struggle that you face. He knows exactly what it's like to be perfected for his task through suffering.

Just as you are being perfected for your task through suffering. And he blazed that trail before you. He is the founder and the perfecter of your faith.

In fact, he went to the cross for you so that any affliction that you face can now only do you good and never do you harm. He took the sting and the poison out of every bite, every thorn that you will face.

And that's what God promises, your ultimate good, the joy set before you, as Hebrews 12 says. Or as Proverbs 3 says, the delight of a father for his son, for his daughter, healing to your flesh, refreshment to your bones.

Do you long for that this morning? life deep down in your bones that nothing in this world can harm or take away.

[ 31 : 07 ] Don't you see that's the picture where we end? Whether things are great or whether things are not so great. You have something. You have a flourishing that circumstances cannot shake.

And if you sense in your heart a desire for that, a longing for that sort of flourishing, a greater flourishing than this world offers, the flourishing that only can be found in Christ, friends, if your heart is longing for that, then know that God is calling you, even now, to a better trust, to take your trust off of yourself, to stop looking and trusting your desires that you think will lead you to happiness because that hasn't ever worked, has it?

and instead to place your trust in the risen Lord Jesus, to go to him in prayer, to cast yourself before him, to trust in the Lord with all your heart and to know that he will in no way cast you out.

Come to me, Jesus told the crowds. You're weary. You're heavy laden. Come to me and I will give you rest.

I will give you peace. I will make sure that you flourish. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we acknowledge and we know that we need your Holy Spirit to do what this text tells us we need to do, to trust in you with all our heart.

[ 32 : 38 ] So, Lord, help us by your Spirit to see the fact that you have died and risen, that you, Lord Jesus, are an utterly trustworthy Savior. and a trustworthy Lord, that your goodness and your power know no limit and that we can throw ourselves wholeheartedly upon you.

Lord, help us to do that in the thick and the thin and the extremities of life. And Lord, as we experience that deep joy and peace that you bring, would it roll back, would it redound forth, would it ring out to your glory?

Would our neighbors and our friends see in us a resilience and a trust that makes them say, what a great God they must serve. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.