

Actively remember, so you don't forget

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 May 2016

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 0 0] most famous of all the Proverbs, at least for a couple of verses, that is. Proverbs chapter 3, and we're going to begin at verse 1. Now hear God's Word.

My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments. For the length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.

Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you. Bind them round 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 from evil, turn away from evil. It'll 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. 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. Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding. For the gain from her is better than the gain from silver, and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand, and in her left hand are riches and honour.

[1 : 5 0] Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is the tree of life to those who lay old of her. Those who hold her fast are called blessed. The Lord by wisdom founded the earth by understanding. He established the heavens. By his knowledge the deets broke open, and the clouds dropped down to down the dew. My son, do not lose sight of these. Keep sound wisdom and discretion, and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck. Then you will walk on your way securely, and your foot will not stumble. If you lie down, you will not be afraid. When you lie down, you sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden terror, or of the ruin of the wicked when it comes, for the Lord will be your confidence, and he will keep your foot from being caught. Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbour, go and come again. Tomorrow I will give it, when you have it with you. Do not plan evil against your neighbour who dwells trustingly beside you. Do not contend with a man for no reason, when he has done you no harm. Do not envy a man of violence, and do not choose any of his ways. For the devious person is an abomination to the Lord, but the upright are in his confidence. The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked. But he blesses the dwelling of the righteous. Towards the scorners he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favour. The wise will inherit honour, but fools get disgrace.

Well, may God bless the reading of his word, and have your Bibles with you. Please open them again to Proverbs chapter 3. As I said, if a believer has any familiarity with Proverbs, it is Proverbs chapter 3. And if you have any remembrance of its teaching, it's normally verses 5 and 6.

Most people, I would argue, that if they haven't read all of Proverbs, or at least read a great deal of Proverbs, probably know these couple of verses. To trust in the Lord with all your heart, it's one thing. To lean not on your own understanding, that's another thing. And all your ways acknowledge him, that's the third thing. And then finally, he will make straight your paths. And in fairness, those couple of verses are a pretty good summary of the whole book of Proverbs, but they're also a pretty good summary of what it means to follow Jesus, to trust Jesus with all your heart. Repent and believe, turn to him, lean not on your own understanding, but acknowledge him in everything, and you will follow the leader.

That's effectively what these two verses lead to in the New Testament. Jesus is the wisdom of God. I mean, this is why in Corinthians it says, the world doesn't understand the wisdom of the cross,

because the cross speaks of our helplessness. And it takes a certain amount of wisdom to understand that before God we are helpless, and we need Christ. Christ is the wisdom of God that brings us to him. So, this is pretty simple stuff. It's sort of Sunday school material, but nevertheless, it is the material that you need to repeat over and over again, because it is foundational. I said on Wednesday evening that David Watson's book, *Discipleship*, I probably read every couple of years, simply because it is the absolute basics and fundamentals, you know, just the foundational kind of stuff. The issue is not that you need instructing again, it's just that we all need reminding again and again and again. So, Proverbs is written on that basis. It gives instruction, and then you'll notice as you read the Proverbs from beginning to end, it repeats a lot.

And the reason it repeats a lot is because Solomon knew, as do you know, that you only need telling once, but you need reminding all the time. The reason why you need to hear God's Word all the time is not because, I don't need to listen to this, I've heard it before, but actually you need to be reminded of it again and again. And so, this lesson this morning from Proverbs 3 is about the importance of remembering and not forgetting. And there's a close relationship between remembering and not forgetting, not only found in Proverbs, but found throughout the whole of the Bible.

[6 : 54] God speaks on several occasions in the Old Testament telling his people to remember. Remember. Now, why would you tell anybody to remember? He tells them to remember his commandments.

He tells them to remember how things were. He tells them to remember how they were and what things were like for them. He tells them to remember a lot. And then straight after, quite often, that he has told them to remember. He says, and don't forget. Remember and don't forget. It's another instruction.

Now, it sounds like the same thing. If I say to you, remember, or if I said to you, don't forget, it sounds, on the surface at least, that you're getting the same instruction. But of course, biblically, it's not the same instruction because the way God lays it out is that the way not to forget is to remember. Pretty simple, right? Remember so that you don't forget. Actively put yourself in the position where you are consciously causing yourself to remember so that you don't forget. Forgetting is sort of the byproduct of not remembering. So, we remember to not forget. In the same way Jesus, as we will take notice this morning, gave us the Lord's Supper in which we participate in the bread and the wine. And what is his reason for that? Do this in remembrance of him. In other words, he's saying that you need to actively remember my life, my death, my resurrection, and that I'm coming again.

Why? Because believe it or not, as a believer, you are tempted to forget it. Have you ever forgotten that Jesus Christ died on the cross for you? You're going to go, no, I haven't. I think there are moments in which we all forget it because it's not part of our active daily remembrance. In other words, the thing that convicts our sin is remembering that Christ died for it.

If we remember that more often, we may not be led into some of the sins that we are led into. And so, the instruction is remember so that you don't forget. Remember, consciously make a great effort to remember the Lord. And don't be led into the danger of what forgetting leads you into.

[9 : 31] Now, that's the other thing that Proverbs points out, that remembering keeps you safe, and forgetting leads you into dangers. Forgetfulness will not take any care of you. It'll lead you down a road that you better not go down. And once you're down there, forgetfulness will not care one bit what kind of trouble you get in down there. It won't worry one bit about your welfare or how it can get you back out. It'll just leave you to your own forgetfulness. And forgetfulness, I think, happens really subtly. In other words, we don't remember one minute and then forget the next. I think the way forgetfulness happens is a bit like Paul says in Corinthians, where he says that while all things are permissible, not all things are profitable. Okay? He says it twice in the same book.

While all things are permissible, not all things are profitable. Well, what does that mean? That means it is permissible for me to go surfing every day of the week.

But it's not profitable for my Christian life or marriage. I used to have a t-shirt, which I now have got rid of it because of the sheer conviction that said on the back of it. My wife said to me, if you go surfing, I'll leave you. And then the bottom line was, I'll miss her.

Now, I came under such conviction that that was so terribly wrong that I had to get rid of the t-shirt. All things are permissible, but not all things are profitable. Things have a knock-on effect in the same way that if I did go surfing, and not that I've ever been surfing since I've been married, unless

we've been on holiday, because, you know, the Lord put me once in the middle of the northwest where there's only Blackpool, where the water's brown. And so people are not... Don't ever think... Don't ever think for a moment that people in Blackpool are brown because of the sun. They're brown because of the water. They come out, and they... It's lovely. You can even see the drip marks down their legs. It's... I'm not a great advert for Blackpool, am I? But there we have it. [11 : 48] Not all things that are permissible are profitable because they can have mastery over us. They can take us away from our husband. They can take us away from our wife. They can take us away from the church.

They can even take us away from our children, or our children can be taken away from us. Not because the things that we're involved in are wrong. They're permissible. Go ahead and do them. But they're not necessarily profitable. They have a knock-on effect. And I think what happens is that we go from remembering the Lord to forgetting the Lord in the things that are not profitable but permissible. So we do all the things that are not... that are permissible, but they end up having mastery over us instead of the Lord being our master. And so we are led astray by the things that are good, not by the things that are bad. In fact, I don't know if you've ever noticed the particular sin in Romans 6. It's called epithemeo, which basically means that the most dangerous sin is the sin of all the good things. It's not the bad things, but it's the good things that have mastery over you. That's the one that really that you just... it's so hard to break. We tend to think of sin as purely as bad things, but anything that gains mastery over your life, that starts dictating your life, that you just... those things are good, but they're not good when they do that.

When they become your master, you become a servant of your greatest pleasure, or you become a servant of your greatest desire, you know. And that's the temptation that forgetfulness leads us into. So we are to remember to not forget, because we will go into forgetfulness by doing the things that are permissible, but are not profitable. So firstly, here's the first lesson. Remember so that you don't forget. There are three lessons. We're going to begin here. Remember so that you don't forget, because forgetfulness will lead you to a place that you really don't want to be. So the chapter begins with the Father. Remember, we can relate this to God speaking to us, and so we should, telling us not to forget. But he's telling us not to forget, and then he says, by remembering. Okay, keep my commandments. Keep to faithfulness. Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart. In other words, I'm telling you not to forget, but I'm now going to tell you how not to forget. There's nothing worse than being given an instruction, and then not being given the information of how to carry out that instruction. So if I said to you this morning, don't forget, you'd have every right to go, well, how do I do that?

[14 : 43] Have you ever sat down and thought at least for two minutes of how to not forget?

Well, the writer of Proverbs understands that if you're going to tell somebody not to do something, you're going to have to teach them how not to do it. And so the way not to forget is by actively remembering and binding the Word of God in your heart and your mind and in every activity that you do. It's no good for me to stand here and say, remember, and then not tell you how to remember, or to say, don't forget, and then not tell you how not to forget. Do not forget is not an instruction. It's simply a statement that needs an instruction to go with it. So the Father says, do not forget, and then he instructs his Son of how not to forget.

And the way you don't forget is by letting steadfast love and faithfulness not forsake you. Bind them around your neck. There's the active part. Write them on the tablet of your heart.

And that is a clear reference to the Ten Commandments written on tablets of stone. In other words, in the same way that God originally wrote the commandments on stone, and then it then happened a second time. You understand that Moses came down the mountain. I don't know if you've ever seen these picture books. You assume that the tablets are going to be massive, don't you? And yet if you read the Bible, he came down the hill carrying them under his arm. So we're not talking about massive gravestones that he's carrying. He's just talking about the stone, no bigger than this.

Okay, but coloring in book. Don't get your theology from a coloring in book. But, you know, although I love coloring in books, you know, not all coloring books are bad, as I said on Wednesday night.

There are some really good ones. But the point is, is that Moses comes down, he's got the Ten Commandments written on tablets of stone. And the instruction here is, you need to write the commandments of God, the Word of God, right into your heart. You need to internalize them. You need to get them on the inside of you. And that takes a huge amount of effort. And the reason you're to do that is because by doing that, you won't forget. By actively remembering, you will not

forget. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Just every day, trust, trust, trust in the Lord, and lean not on your own understanding, and in all your ways acknowledge Him. In other words, remembering is hard work, but it's also practical. It means receiving God's Word, actively writing God's Word down, cultivating faithfulness, practicing what the Word of God says. And as you do that, that's what's called remembering.

[17 : 34] That's what's called believing. That's what's called following. You're consciously involved and engaged in the Word of God. You're not just affirming it. You're not just one of those believers who are just a believer.

You know, it's like I was talking this through with Barry with YP, and I said, you know, one of the key distinctions we have to make with these is that there's a big distinction between believing and following. And I said, especially for children who grow up in Christian homes, they grow up believing all this stuff. They grow up through creche. They grow up through Sunday school, and they've not believed anything else. But are they a follower? Okay, following is repenting and turning and going with Jesus. Okay, it's, I'm a believer. So what? I know, I know, I know a bunch of devils that are, according to James. The issue is, are you following? Are you, are you actively following? So again, any, any idea that Christianity can be kept in the mind or in the heart and it doesn't have an outward overflow is sort of, we're, we're, we're confusing ourselves. We're sort of misguiding ourselves. Remembering is practical.

It is being fully invested in God all the time. Now, this does come with a warning and an understanding, and that is that as we trust in the Lord with all our heart, we are not to lean on our own understanding. I don't want to ask you to raise your hands this morning and say, do any of you think you're smarter than God? Please put your hand up. But the danger is, is that the scripture tells us that it's quite common for a believer to come, to get into that motion where they think, at least on some kind of, some kind of basis, that they're smarter than God. And what the proverb is teaching us here is, look, never ever think, just never ever think that you've got a better understanding than God. Never ever think that you understand yourself better than God. Never think that you understand this world better than God. Never ever think that you understand the future better than God.

Never think that your way is better than God. Never just, just don't go there. And yet the way most people follow God, or the way most people can follow God, is that they follow God by trying to avoid the dangers of the world rather than actually following Jesus. And I made this point a couple of weeks ago. There's a big difference between doing what everybody else does in the world, but just drawing the line in a different place, to actually being on a different path altogether. As I said last week, faithfulness is hard. It's just not easy. Unfaithfulness is incredibly easy. It's just, you know, you can do it as easy as falling over. I mean, it's just not difficult. But faithfulness, it's just such hard work.

And so the way to be faithful is to keep in mind that you don't understand things better than God, your way's not better than God, that you're not as smart as God. God understands this world and life better than we do. The other thing it does is point out to us that trust has to be put somewhere.

[21 : 17] Imagine trust as an investment that you're about to make. And what the proverb is teaching us is, where are you going to put that investment? Are you going to trust in the Lord with all your heart?

Is that where you're going to put your investment of trust? Are you going to invest your trust in God, or are you going to invest your trust in yourself? That's what's going on in Proverbs 3 to 5 here.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In other words, trust is something that you invest. And like in any other type of relationship, you invest in the things that you think are going to profit and not go south on you at some point.

And so what the proverb is teaching us here is trust in the Lord, invest in God, and do not lean on your own understanding. Do not invest in yourself because even you will turn against yourself.

We've all done things that we never thought we were capable of or thought things that we never thought we were capable of. And we're thinking, where did that come from?

There are points in our life where things go south on us. And if we trust in ourself, it goes right along with it. So if you're going to invest your trust in anything, you're to trust in the Lord with everything, all your heart, and to not put that investment anywhere else but in Him.

[22 : 47] Do not lean on your own understanding. To actually lean on your own understanding understanding is to effectively say to God, I have more confidence in myself than I do in you.

Okay, I have more confidence in myself than I do in you. I'm trusting in myself is just another way of saying, or I'm leaning on my own understanding is just another way of saying, I have more confidence in myself than I do you, God. Well, that is quite a foolish thing to say. So all of our life needs to be a life where we are actively remembering. And the way that we remember, the way that we don't forget, is by trusting, by investing in God, being mindful of God, doing these things, reading the Word, practicing the Word over and over and over again. Why? Because faithfulness is hard and unfaithfulness is easy. So secondly, what about forgetfulness? Well, forgetfulness has unfortunately not, is not as famous now as it is in the time of the Bible. Faithfulness is sort of a real, you know, he's up there.

But forgetfulness, sorry, today is just not a big deal. Forgetfulness just doesn't seem to be a big deal. Even worse, that Christians have even come to believe that forgetfulness is not a sin, which is just staggering. Forgetfulness is actually a serious thing. In fact, to put it in a simple English way, you know how serious forgetfulness is depending on what you're forgetting.

All right? Have you ever forgotten anything that's sort of, sort of like pretty serious? I was telling this point the other day about someone who didn't pass something on to me.

I had the opportunity to take a funeral of someone, this is several years ago, and bury them in a graveyard. And as I was doing this, I didn't know the lady because she had moved from the northwest to Dumfries. And she had passed away and she wanted to be buried in the same grave which her husband had died years earlier. And her husband just so happened to be buried in the very graveyard and church area that I was minister of. And so everything had to be done via letters and emails. And I got this through.

[25 : 32] And all the information was put down. And I was looking at it, think, right, I know who I'm burying. I know what to say. And they took the coffin out the hearse and were wheeling it down to the gray side. And I just so happened, as I do on all the occasions, to look at the top of the, to look at the top of the coffin. And the name on the top of the coffin was not the same as the name that I had given to me. So depending on what you forget, okay, some forgetfulness, right, no big deal.

But you forget other things, well, it's a big, big deal. If you forget to pick up the shopping, it's not a big deal. If you get someone's phone number or you forget to do something or that, it's just not a big deal. Forgetfulness can be quite forgiving in those areas, but that's not the type of forgetfulness I'm talking about. The type of forgetfulness that I'm talking about, or rather Proverbs is speaking about, is the forgetfulness that you think is a pretty good defense.

I forgot. It's like a child who believes that if he or she says, I forgot, that somehow all the discipline goes away. As though it's a really good defense for not being told off, or it's a really good defense for not being disciplined or put right, or at least to say, I forgot, is a really, really good reason for at least lightening the discipline. Like one child hitting another child when both children have been told have been told not to hit. And so you say to the one, look, what did I tell you?

Did I not tell you not to hit? Yeah, but I forgot. Yeah, but forgetfulness doesn't take the red mark off your sister's arm. Okay. Forgetfulness doesn't care. But look what your forgetfulness led you to. And then you put them in, not a naughty step, but you put them in a place where they can just think about what they've done, like contemplate, so that they can, you know, say sorry rather than being forced to say sorry. And when it happens, however it happens. But if they, for a moment, sat there and thought about, why am I here? You know, I can remember sitting on the bottom step when I was growing up thinking, why am I here? Why am I here? I just couldn't work it out. So I'm going to, now that I'm older, I can work it out. And it goes something like this. You're there because you hit your brother.

[28 : 16] Right? But, but you're also there because I told you not to hit your brother. And so the real reason I'm there is because forgetting that I was told not to hit my brother is what led me to being there.

See, if children only stopped and thought a little bit more, as adults would stop and think, they would realize that the real reason why the Lord is taking hold of their life and disciplining them is not purely because of the thing that they've done that they should not have done, but it is actually because they have forgot. And by their forgetfulness, they have been led into a position where they are now being disciplined by the Lord. In other words, the ultimate reason why you are there is because you have not remembered. And by not remembering, you have forgotten. And by forgetting, forgetfulness has led you down the path. And this is where it's left you.

So this idea that we can somehow say to God, I forgot, as though it's a good defense for the Lord not dealing with us, just doesn't cut it. Because forgetfulness is instructed by the Lord, and that type of forgetfulness is a sin. Because we are going against God, we're going against the instruction, we're going against the very commandment of God. I'm not talking about forgetting phone numbers. I'm not talking about forgetting a dress. I'm not forgetting, talking about forgetting to pick up the shop. I'm not talking about that kind of forgetfulness. And neither am I talking about the kind of forgetfulness that comes with an age that progresses to the point where you just can't remember things anymore. That, that, where you have that, I'm not, that's not what scripture is addressing here. What scripture is addressing here is the type of forgetfulness that comes by not remembering to commit yourself to the way to the Lord. And then how that forgetfulness leads you into, down a path or into a position that you would not have been if only you remembered.

So that type of forgetfulness is not defensible against the Lord. That type of forgetfulness doesn't care about you. It doesn't care about your welfare. It doesn't care about the consequences that it leads you to. It just doesn't care. The reason why the Lord tells us to remember, and then tells us how to remember, is because remembering protects us from what forgetfulness leads us to. Okay? Remembering protects us from what forgetfulness leads us into, into the dangers, into the temptations. Remembering keeps us from that. Everything's a path, and every path leads to a place, as we've seen in Proverbs so far. So the type of forgetfulness we mean here is forgetting to trust in the Lord with all your heart, forgetting to invest in God completely, forgetting to do it God's way and not your own. That's the type of forgetfulness. So we've been instructed to remember, to not forget. We've been warned at least of the dangers of forgetting and how this type of forgetting is not a defense but actually a sin. And now we come to the conclusion. And the conclusion is here in Proverbs 3 that we are to remember that in wisdom and understanding, God founded the earth and he established the heavens. And do you or do I or do we have that type of understanding? And the answer is no. No, we don't. All the more reason then to trust in the God who does. All the more reason to take your trust and invest it in God. We are also reminded, verse 21, that we are not to lose sight of these things in which we have been instructed. We're reminded again in verse 22 to keep hold of sound wisdom. For verse 23, the sound wisdom, that is listening to God and remembering it and practicing it, is what will keep you secure. I'll go back to the illustration because it is a simple one, but I think it bears the truth that when a mother says to a child who's walking to school, make sure when you get to the edge of the pavement to stop, look and listen, that instruction is given to protect the child. And by the child listening to that instruction, the child has a far better level of security when crossing the road as if they didn't listen to it and just walked across the road aimlessly. So instruction, listening, receiving, is what protects the believer. So God gives us wisdom so that we may understand, so that our life may be governed by him. So that verse 11 and 12, which it says this, 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 in the son whom he delights. If you feel, if you somehow feel that you have remembered for a long time but now have been drifted down the path of forgetfulness and have left with the consequences and you feel that, hey,

[33 : 54] God, you've just been a little bit heavy-handed with me here, remember that all discipline when you're going through it is uncomfortable, but the Lord only disciplines those whom he loves.

I've never told off the next-door neighbor's kids because they're not mine. God doesn't tell off the next-door neighbor's kids because they're not his. He disciplines his own children, as Hebrew says, like this, and 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. Verses 8 and 9, if you do not experience discipline like everyone else, then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Furthermore, we have all earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them, should we not much more submit to the father of our spirits and live? In other words, both Proverbs and Hebrews is teaching exactly the same thing, that when the Lord takes hold of your life and says, look, we need to go for a correction period here, we need to get you back on track, there needs to be a little bit of discipline. The ultimate reason that he is doing it is because you are a son of his, you are a child of God.

Okay, in other words, discipline is an assurance of sonship. The danger is, however, when Christians do things, or so-called believers do things, and don't feel the discipline of the Lord, that somehow that's the assurance of the Lord's approval, when actually, biblically, it's the very opposite. The Lord doesn't discipline those who don't belong to him.

It is not a sign of approval. It is actually a big arrow to the fact that you may be an illegitimate child, that you're not actually a true son or a true child of God. The Lord disciplines and corrects those he loves.

[36 : 07] I remember being brought up disciplined, and my mum would say to me, you'll thank me later. And I was sat there thinking, there's just no way. There's just no way, and God's green earth. I'm never going to get to the point where I'm going to thank you later. And years go by, and I can hear the words just a bit of come out my mouth.

Not that they ever have. I don't, well, if they have, it was a slip, mum, you know. But you'll thank me later. Well, God, God knows best, remember? Never think we understand better than him.

Never think we know better than him. And so the reason why the Lord puts us through a corrective period, though it's hard, is because we're a son. He loves us. So we're to remember, and we're to remember so not to forget. Remembering protects us from forgetting. Remembering means that we commit ourselves to the ways of God and to invest our trust in him and not in ourselves. And when we remember this way, we are protected from all the potential dangers that come with forgetting. The trouble with consequences is a consequence doesn't take any notice of, I forgot. I forgot.

Consequences don't care. So remember to remember. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. And in all your ways, acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths. Amen.

Amen. Amen.