

Practising the Whys

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[0 : 0 0] as we think about a new Lord's Day and coming into a new year. And so I'd like to pray for us, and then I'd like to have a look at this verse 6 together. So let me pray.

Father, I thank you for Jesus, and I thank you for your Word, and your Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us. We know, Father God, that when we listen to your Word, we're listening to Jesus, and that when we follow your Word, we're following Jesus. And there is no other way to follow Jesus than the way that your Word speaks about. And so, Father, may we enjoy your Word as a sign that we enjoy Jesus. And Father, may you be with us not only today, but in all the days that we have coming our way. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, I have a title to this morning's message, and it is, in fairness, a fairly short message. And the title is Practicing the Wise. Practicing the Wise. Now, you may think, what on earth is practicing the wise? I've never done it before. It seems impossible. Normally, if you're going to practice something, you're going to practice something tangible. Well, practicing the wise is probably the most important thing that you can do today as we head into a new year. Now, I'm not one for turning over a new leaf, because I find that it gets turned over several times throughout the year. So, just keep it the way that it was and hope for the best. But I want us this morning to practice the wise. And what this proverb sets out, especially verse 6, is that it lays out for us a clear principle of what life with God is like, but it does need explaining. And I'm going to give you a quote from one of my favorite Christian authors, a guy by the name of Cotton Mather. He was a

Christian Puritan in America a long time ago. And he said this, which I've never forgotten, not that I heard it from him. I sort of heard it read about him. But he said, faithfulness beget prosperity, and the daughter devoured the mother. And he's speaking of all the people in the Old Testament that were God's people. And he said of them that faithfulness beget prosperity, but the daughter devoured the mother. In other words, that faithfulness led to God blessing them, but they ended up enjoying the blessing so much that they forgot God. Okay? Faithfulness gave birth to prosperity, treasure, blessing, but they enjoyed the gifts more than the giver, and so they ended up forgetting the giver altogether. Well, this proverb kind of lays that out, that in the house of the righteous, there is much treasure. But we cannot allow the treasure to overtake our view of God or even get in the way of God. Because when it does, it devours our faithfulness. We think we can handle the treasure that God gives us. We think we can handle the blessings that God gives us. And yet, when we have the blessings, it ends up destroying our faithfulness towards God. And so, the way God keeps us faithful so many times is by actually not blessing us. You think, well, how can that be? Well, if blessing leads, and God knows this, leads to people becoming unfaithful, then why would God want to bless people if it's the temptation that brings them down? And so, we must be able to handle all the blessing that's going to come our way. And so, we have to practice the wise. We have to do something before we can handle the blessing. I've always said, and I said this to people who used to, you know, thinking about changing a job, and they would say to me, what do you think? What do you think? You know, do you think it matters? Do you think God cares what job that I do? I do. You know, and I often say, well, why are you asking me? I've not, you know, I've spent a good 15 years or more in the working life before I came into ministry, where it's just a walk in the park. No, not at all. Give me a roof and a brick and a trowel any day, you know, and new knees, and then I'd go back in and do it. But the point is, is that, you know, why are you asking me? And I'd always say, remember the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer clearly points out that we pray, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. And I always used to say that if you're wondering why you haven't got the promotion that you've longed for, it could be because God is answering your prayer not to lead you into temptation. What if that, that promotion is the very temptation that will lead you away from God? Well, if you're praying, Lord, lead me not into temptation, okay, and you're praying, Lord, give me the promotion, and he doesn't give you the promotion, it could be that he doesn't bless you because the blessing that you see as a blessing could actually be the very thing that destroys your faithfulness. It could be the very thing that takes your faithfulness away. And so Codd Mather was right that faithfulness gives birth to prosperity, it gives birth to blessing, but the blessing has a way sometimes, when it's put before God, of absolutely corrupting our faithfulness. And this is how I look at it, that there's a big difference between having money in the bank and showing someone your bank account. Now, if you have money in the bank, the natural

assumption is you have a bank account. But showing someone that you have a bank account doesn't tell them that you have money in the bank. It just tells them that you have an account with the bank. And in the same way, this is what this proverb is saying, that because once upon a time you made a profession, that's a bit like me showing you my bank account number, but you having no idea whether or not it's full. Having once made a profession of faith doesn't lead, you can't assume at that point that there's now money in the account. And what this proverb is saying is that if you first take care of the inside, the outside will take care of itself. And so I have three headings this morning, and the first one is that. That if you take care of the inside, the outside will take care of itself. The second is that everything, or almost everything in the Christian life, is a form of seed. Okay, money is seed. Time is seed.

[7 : 04] Prayer is seed. Service is seed. And you know what a seed is? You sow it, and you get a harvest from it. And so much of the Christian life is made up of seed. And so what you sow today, and what you sow tomorrow, and the next day, and the next day, next year you will be harvesting those seeds. And so what are you sowing? What are you sowing right now? Because what will come your way in the future is what you're sowing now in the present. And then the third point, or the principle, is you need to practice the wise. Practice the wise. Now, we're all together this morning, and so this gives me an opportunity to speak to the parents on behalf of their children. I don't have the right, even though, you know, you give the Sunday school teachers the right to teach your children, and we thank you for that.

But naturally speaking, Sunday school teachers don't have the right to teach your children. It has to be given by permission, you know. And we're assuming that if you send your children off to Sunday school, you're giving the teachers the right to teach your children, and that's a good thing.

I don't have the right, even this morning, to teach your children. They're your children. But I'm assuming by the fact that you're allowing your children to be in here as I proclaim God's word, then you're allowing me a certain right for them to hear the same thing that you're going to hear. And so that is really important that I want to point out and say thank you for, because I never take it for granted. I'm not going to take it for granted that I, that you've automatically given me the right, or any of the Sunday school teachers the right to teach your children. And so, but here we are. A school teacher used to say to me, Daniel, start as you mean to go on. And then she would also qualify it, but let's make sure you start right.

Start as you mean to go on, but let's get you started right. And I can remember the teachers, you know, with the barrel pens. Do you remember those handwriting pens? I don't know if they still have them, but, you know, if they do, can, in fact, there's a few teachers here. If you've got a few left over, I wouldn't mind some, because I always kind of like them. But these barrel handwriting pens, and the teacher used to sit down beside of me, and this, you know, cursive handwriting and all of that, and keep it on the line, not in between the lines or near the top line, and you used to start right. And I don't know if any of you have ever had lines as children.

Or the adults are going, yeah, we've had lines. Children, pay attention to your parents, because they're nodding their heads. And if you ever notice it, the teacher writes out the first line, and then says, go away and do 200 copies of that line. Now, your first copy is okay.

[10 : 05] Your third copy is not bad. Your fourth copy is just about readable. But almost every line after that is just a scribble. And what happens is, is the further and further we get away from the original, the less and less we become like the original. And so this is what this proverb is pointing to. I mean, it, you have to go elsewhere in the proverbs, but it's all bound together. That the further you move away from the original, the less like you become like the original. So here's the first heading.

Begin from the inside out. The proverb says that in the house of the righteous, there is much treasure. And by house, the writer is assuming that he knows that you understand that means the people in the house, not the house as in bricks and mortar and roof and what have you, but the people in the house. And so this is the environment of the home. This is a righteous home. So these are people in the house. What type of people are they? Well, it says the house of the righteous. So these are moral people.

These are godly people. These are people who keep their thoughts, words, and deeds in check. Do you remember how it begins? A soft answer turns away wrath. Okay. What is said in the home matters.

What is said in the home matters. You can strike people down with your tongue in the home, and it's the last place where you expect the home to be a battleground. But that's the warning.

And so in the house of the righteous, there is treasure. Okay. Not there is in the house of the unrighteous, there isn't any treasure. It's only in the house of the righteous, there is much treasure.

[11 : 54] So these are godly people who are trying to live a godly life in order to receive the blessings from God. And these blessings are not just spiritual, they are material. We tend to forget that God blesses God's people materially. You know, sometimes we get incredibly afraid to say that God, you know, will actually give people lots of money. That God will actually give people, you know, nice houses and nice cars and nice things. God does do that, but God does it for a very specific reason. Okay. The more you have, the more you are responsible for, and the more you have, the more you are then to give. And so this works in the same way as the bank account. Or let me take another illustration, the marriage and the marriage certificate. Okay. I've been in ministry long enough, and I grew up in a home, you know, where divorce and remarriage was a common thing, you know, with the same person. And I began to realize that there's a clear difference between a marriage certificate being a good thing, and that good marriage certificate binding someone to a bad person. Okay. So the marriage certificate is no indication whatsoever of what type of marriage you have. Okay. It's just like the account. The account is just an account. It doesn't tell you whether you're in the red or in the black. It just tells you you have an account. And so profession, I believe, yes, I follow Jesus, doesn't mean anything. It's like pointing to a bank account. It's like pointing to the number on the top of your checkbook to say, you see, you see, I've got an account. Or pointing to your wedding certificate and say, you see. The trouble is, is showing an evidence like that doesn't tell you anything about whether or not it's full or whether or not it's happy or whether or not it works. It's just a statement of fact. And so in the house of the righteous, there is much treasure.

Okay. People live in houses, but it doesn't tell you what those people are like in those houses. In this house, it does. In this house, the people are righteous. They're the type of people who watch what they say. They are concerned about what God thinks and the type of blessing that can come upon their life. And so because God created us with an inside and an outside, Jesus says things like this, that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks from the inside to the outside. Out of the good treasure of a heart, it produces good from the inside to the outside. In Proverbs, it says what a man thinks in his heart, so he is from the inside to the outside. And so you can't take care of these issues on the outside. Okay. The money has to be in the account. It has to be in, in order for it to come out. Okay.

We can only export what we have in the warehouse. We can only give out what we've got inside of us. And that applies in our own home. And it applies in Christian mission. It applies even in this church.

We can only give to others what we have stored in our own life. We can only give out what we have in. So it's the inside out approach. And so those who take care of the inside know that the outside gets taken care of. Jesus said, first wash the inside of the cup and the outside will take care of itself.

Okay. Forget about the outside. Okay. I'm tempted to say, don't practice coming to church. Don't practice praying. Don't practice reading your Bible. Don't practice singing. Don't practice getting up early in the morning and having your devotional time. Don't practice any of those things. Practice the inside. And all those things will take care of themselves. And guarantee it. They will all take care of themselves. Now, why is this important? Well, because God says here in his word that the righteous who live this kind of way get things. They're blessed by God. Absolutely blessed by God.

[16 : 18] It cannot be overestimated or overstated in any way whatsoever. That God does actually say that if you give, you get. That if you give, you get. And that if you give and you live this way, God blesses you tremendously. But notice the clause. And that is, it's righteous living. Now, God doesn't bless you on loyalty points. Okay. God doesn't bless you. God doesn't have one of these cards, a loyalty card.

It says, you know, every time you turn up at church, you get your card stamped. And if you get to eight points on your card, guess what? I'm going to send a blessing your way. It just doesn't work like that. The other thing is, is, is that we tend to trade with God, don't we? I've, listen, I've been around long enough now to see this, that what we do is we say, well, I do this and this and this in the church, or I've gone to this, that, and the other service. And therefore that buys me credit not to attend this, this, and this. Well, how does that work? Okay. What you're doing is you're trading the practicals. Your, your, your, your, your Christianity is purely external. You're not dealing with the inside. You're dealing with the outside in, not the inside out. And so what happens is your life your life has the account, but it has nothing in it. Okay. And that's, that's a big problem.

I mean, that's a huge problem to have an account with nothing in it. And as I said before, like with children, you've got to treat your children as each of their lives has their, their, their own accounts and they have a hundred points in. And every time you discipline them, you take away 20 of those credits. Okay. And let's say it's a really big discipline and it's a discipline of say 50 or 60 credits and you discipline them that much because, you know, uh, but they only have 20 credits in their account. What happens? Well, they in their own life go overdrawn. You take them into an area of damage because you're disciplining them beyond what you've actually filled them up with. And so you have to not only take care of your inside, but you have to take care of the inside of your children. You have to make sure that they're constantly full because there's going to come a point where you're going to have to say to them, no, you can't have that. Well, to a child, that's taking something out.

That's making a withdrawal. And so you've also, you've always got to make sure that in your life and in the life of children, that their accounts are full and that your accounts are full because life, the Christian life, unfortunately, even being with Christians is people withdrawing constantly.

And what happens when you spiritually get overdrawn? Okay. You just can't do it anymore. And so in the house of the righteous, those who take care of the inside, the outside takes care of itself. And so this leads to the second point, seed.

[19 : 28] Jesus says in Luke 6, that as you give, it'll be given to you. Okay. As you give, it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over. And this will be put into your lap. Jesus is actually saying, and listen, listen, I'm probably going to be the last person on earth to be a health, wealth, and prosperity preacher. Not that they are genuine in any way, shape, or form. You know, those sort of name it, claim it, blame it, and if it doesn't work, you know, blame it on your granny or something like that.

You know, it's just, I'm not into that. But what I am going to say is, is that Jesus does say that if you give, you get. That what you give, you will get. But notice the reason why he says it.

That you are to give to get to what? To give again. You are to give to get to give again. Because money and time and service is seed. It's the type of thing that you can't store up. If you store it up, you just fill up the warehouse, but it doesn't do anything. Okay. So money, time, and seed, money, time, and service is seed. It's meant to be planted. It's meant to be given out and given away. And so you give to get to then give again. That's the way the Christian life works.

That's the way it is to live a righteous life. And so if you have money and you give money, don't be surprised if you have more money. But you have more money to give more money.

And so if you have time and you give time, don't be surprised if you get more time back as a blessing, but you are to give that time to God as well. So Jesus does say that if you give, you get.

[21 : 24] But Jesus says it in the context that you are to give to get to give again. Now for those people who give to get to keep, okay, to give to get to keep. So, you know, some people are sat in the congregation this morning and go, hey, that sounds great. I will give to get. I will give to get, give to get, give to get, give to get, give to get, give to get. And when I get to a point where I can keep it all, then I'll go and live my merry way. And what they say is, is when I get to a certain stage where I've got a lot, then I'll give a lot. But Jesus has already clocked this one and says, God knows how you're going to handle one million pounds because he knows how you handle 10 pounds.

And if you can't handle 10 pounds, he knows you're never going to be able to handle a million pounds. So God is already way ahead of you and that he's not going to give you that blessing. Okay. Everything is about seed. What you do with a little seed before it multiplies is all dependent on how you sow it. So you give to get to give again. And those who give to get to keep need to read the second half of Proverbs 15, 6. But whoever, sorry, but trouble befalls the income of the wicked.

Okay. So not all income is righteous income. Okay. To, for instance, to play the lottery and for you to benefit off somebody else's loss is immoral. It's wicked income. And so if you're, if you know, if you put a pound, it's only a pound. Okay. What am I going to know? The principle is, you know, I've got a, you know, I haven't got a mortgage, but if I had a mortgage, you know, it's the same principle, isn't it? That, you know, I've got 25 years to pay this off on whether or not I can actually keep my job for 25 years. Right. Well, that sounds like a pretty gamble. Yeah. But in that gamble, no one's losing, but to put a pound on the lottery to get, okay, means that a lot of people out there have to lose.

And so when you get on somebody else losing, that's immoral. That's a wicked income. And so that type of thing has to be shunned entirely. And so this is why we need to practice the whys. Okay. Inside out. If you look after the inside, the outside will take care of itself.

The seed, everything that we do produces a harvest. Everything that we sow produces a harvest. Time, money, service, your life produces something in the future. So where are you sowing and what are you doing? So this is the point where we have to get down and do the biggest amount of practice in the whys. Now, I don't know if you've ever done this. I don't know if you've ever practiced the whys. But I want to tell you something about how your Christian life works before you practice the whys. Jesus and the Holy Spirit, while they're God, they do something different in your life.

[24 : 38] Jesus' work is vicarious, which means Jesus does it for you. Okay. He dies for you. He forgives you. He saves you. He redeems you. He purchases you. He does it for you. It's vicarious. But the Holy Spirit doesn't do anything for you. He does everything with you. So you're to keep in step with the Spirit. You're to walk with the Spirit. You're to pray in the Spirit. You're to minister in the Spirit. Okay. Everything with the Spirit is cooperation. And the reason why this matters is because the Spirit wants us to practice the whys. Okay. The why is the inside. It's the motive.

It's the reasons. And so, why do you come to church? Why do you pray? Why do you worship? Why do you give?

Why do you get up and do devotions? Why do you bring your children up in the knowledge and admonition of the Lord? Why do you do it? In fact, if I ask you the question this morning, why are you here?

Why have you prayed this morning? Why have you studied God's Word this morning? If you're to ask your children, why are you here? Because Dad says, I've got to come. You know, I don't want to go.

Put your coat on. You're going. Okay. There has to be a little bit of that at the beginning. Okay. The trouble is, though, if you don't practice the whys, they go to church, but they don't know why they go. They read their Bible, but they don't know why they read their Bible. They worship God, but they don't know why they worship God. They just do it. And so, the question is the same for us here.

[26 : 26] Why do you do it? Well, I worship God. Yeah, but why do you worship God? No, we just do. Why do you go to church? Well, we just go to church. Yeah, but why do you go to church?

Why do you pray this morning? I don't know. That's just what we do in church. Yeah, but why do you do it? You need to practice the whys. Don't practice praying. Don't practice worship. Don't practice reading your Bible. Don't practice coming to church. Don't practice any of those things. Don't practice fellowship. Practice the whys. And here's the reason. Because if you don't know why you do it, and children don't know why they do it, when they ask the question, why am I doing it, and they can't come up with a reason, guess what they do? They stop.

And it's the same thing for you in your Christian life. When you don't know the reason why you're living the Christian life the way God wants you to live it, and you sit down and you have that difficult morning or that difficult night, and it will happen to you. If it hasn't come yet, it'll come.

I can guarantee it. And you ask that question, why? And you don't know why you will not live for Jesus tomorrow. You just can't do it. It's just too difficult. It's just so difficult to live for Jesus. And so we really have to practice the whys. Not just praying, not just reading our Bible, not just coming to church, but we have to practice why we do those things. Because if we don't teach ourselves why, and we don't teach children in Sunday school why we do it, they get to a stage where they ask that question themselves, and they can't come up with any good reason, and they stop.

It's a bit like saying no to your children, right? You've always got to give no with a why. And the reason why this is important, to always give no with a why, is because you don't want children to grow up and learning to say no for no reason. Or yes, for no reason. Yes, here's the reason why. No, here's the reason why. Right? As adults, we need this. So it's great to see you here this morning. It's great to hear you sing. It's great to see you pray. It's great to see you come to the Bible studies. But why do you do it? Because if you don't practice the whys, it's not going to get you through the tough days. And those days will come. And when they come, listen, they can even take down the strongest of us. You just, listen, you can't cope with it unless you know why.

[29 : 15] The Christian life is just far too difficult and far too hard and yet incredibly precious that we have to spend a huge amount of time practicing the whys. Because when a person doesn't know why they do what they do, they often don't know why they should continue.

When you can't find the reason why you live the Christian life, you won't be able to find the reason why you should continue to live the Christian life. And when as children growing up, we're constantly looking for whys to everything else, but we need to provide the whys to why following Christ is important. So let me finish with this. Practicing the whys are seed.

whys are seed. They will produce a harvest. They will definitely produce a harvest in your life, in my life, and in the lives of children. You see, practical Christianity, praying, reading, going to church, serving others, has reasons.

So don't just say what needs to be done. Understand why it needs to be done. Practice the whys, because the whys are very, very, very important for us to live this Christian life and to keep living it.

I want you to keep living it. I want you to be full. I don't just want you to have an account. I want your account to be full. I just, I don't want you just to have a certificate. I want you to have a great spiritual marriage with God.

[31 : 01] So the proverb states, and with this I close, in the house of the righteous, there is much treasure. So take care of the inside by sowing the right kind of seed, and the outside will take care of itself.

Amen.