

Grace for living wisely

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[0 : 00] You can turn with me to Proverbs, Proverbs chapter 16, so if you turn to Psalm, you'll get to Proverbs.

Imagine if one Bible translator, and it wouldn't surprise you if they did, you know, a couple years down the lines, decides to bring out a brand new Bible but put all the books in a different order.

Should I recommend it? No, I won't recommend it. I won't. Sometimes feels like that when you get a new Bible, though, doesn't it, that the pages are not where they're meant to be.

But we're going to read sections from Proverbs 16. So now hear God's word.

Beginning at verse 1. The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit.

[1 : 17] Commit your work to the Lord and your plans will be established. The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble. Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord.

Be assured he will not go unpunished. But steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord, one turns away from evil.

When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. Better is a little righteousness than great revenues with injustice.

The heart of the man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps. If you'd like to go down to verse 23, and we'll read to the end now.

The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips. Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.

[2 : 27] There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. A worker's appetite works for him. His mouth urges him on.

A worthless man plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire. A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.

A man of violence entices his neighbor and leads him in the way that is not good. Whoever winks his eyes plans a dishonest thing. He who pursues his lips brings evil to pass.

Gray hair is the crown of glory. It is gained in a righteous life. Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty. And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord. Well, may God bless us.

[3 : 32] May God give us his grace to both, not only to read that word, but to truly sort of appreciate it and take it in. We're going to come back to...

If you'd like to turn again to Proverbs 16. Do you good? Proverbs is, by and large, not exactly one of the easiest books to read because of its bitty nature.

However, Proverbs has a lot to offer. Once it gets your attention, it's hard to put down. I remember going around to a friend's house once and they had one of these wooden objects where you had to get the ring off the bar.

And, you know, I picked it up thinking, well, I'll just have a look at it for a couple of minutes. But, of course, I then couldn't put it down because I wanted to be the person who got the ring off the bar.

I won't tell you if I did or not, but you can figure that one out for yourself. Proverbs, I guess, is a bit like that. You read it and you go, well, hang on a minute.

[4 : 38] If that's true, then I'm going to have to think about this, that, and the other really quite differently. I'm not one of these sort of people who believe that Proverbs is a collection of principles.

And the reason I don't believe that it is, is twofold. Number one is because God's worth is true and therefore always true.

And God expects us to keep his word. But is it right that God doesn't keep his own? In other words, if God wrote a series of sayings that were sometimes true and sometimes not, that's a bit like saying, well, God can sometimes keep his word and sometimes not keep his word.

I struggle to read Proverbs that way. And I realize that if I read them as clear truths, then I have another problem. And that is, well, if this is then true and not just a principle, how do I wrestle with that?

Well, as a dad, I like playing chess with my son. And when I first started playing chess with him, you know, you would sort of make it easy and see if he could win.

[6 : 02] And then there comes a time where you no longer need to make it easy because he can win all by himself. And this is not only deeply humbling, but, you know, you can't bring yourself to think that you are now being beaten.

And in the same way, God deals with us because God cannot be beaten. He allows certain things to, in your favor, so that you make the progress that you do.

And that's how you come to realize and wrestle with a God who's in control of everything. Everything. I'm going to try and convince you this morning, if I can, by using these Proverbs and by using something that you all know to be true, that none of us can actually live the Christian life or even begin to follow Jesus Christ or follow Jesus throughout the rest of our life without the grace of God.

I want to be able to convince you this morning that your need for God's gift of grace daily is the very thing that God will give you daily.

But I don't want you to treat it presumptuously. Okay, I want you to recognize that our prayer should be for God never to withhold his grace from us.

[7 : 18] And I think this proverb here is the best way of explaining what it means to walk with God in the grace that he gives us. In other words, there's absolutely no way that I can live the Christian life that I do unless I've been given grace to do so.

There's no way that I can pursue any Christian endeavor unless I've been given the grace. And it's the same for you. And I think this should stir up in us a deep sense of thankfulness to God.

Because if it doesn't, what we end up thinking is, I've made a mess of it again. I've made a total mess of it again. And I make a mess of a lot of things. And I realize that the only thing that can get me out of that mess is the grace of God.

So here in Proverbs 16, there is a couple of things we need to remember. Here's the first thing. In Ephesians 2, which you probably know, says that the grace of God is a free gift from God.

Okay? God's grace to you is a free gift. What does that mean? Well, it means, one, it's a free gift. Two, it means that God didn't owe you it. That's the thing to remember, isn't it?

[8 : 34] That God's grace is given to you freely, but he doesn't owe you it. And this is what we need to remember. Here's the second thing you need to remember, and we know this already. That God is in need of nothing, and that is the best news in the world.

That God is in need of absolutely nothing. What does that mean? What it means is, is that God is non-competitive with human flourishing. God is non-competitive with us.

In other words, he wants us to flourish. Okay? Because God is in need of nothing. He doesn't want something from us, and therefore, if he's in need of nothing and not wanting something from us, then our relationship with him is one where we are totally benefiting and being blessed, rather than him.

Because God is in need of nothing. And God owes man nothing. Because grace is a free gift. Now, now that we try and hopefully lay that as a foundation, how does Proverbs 16 play out as a summary?

Well, you'll notice that it begins with a wonderful explanation of the will of God and the will of man. Now, it is possible for your will and God's will to collide.

[9 : 41] And there's plenty of Christians who live the Christian life, and they collide with the will of God often. That their lives are colliding with the will of God. And what that means is you can either walk God's ways, or you can collide with them in other ways.

Okay? When God doesn't let you have it your own way, well, that's a collision. In the same way a parent can start arguing or, you know, there's an argument brewing between them and their child.

Sometimes the child wants it their way, the parent wants it a different way, and you have a collision of wills. It's no different when it comes to God. That there is a collision of wills.

And God here in Proverbs 16 is clearly shown to us that his outcome will always be the outcome that happens. Now, that means that if that is going to be the outcome that happens, either we enter into it, you know, willingly, or we find ourselves in the situation sort of begrudgingly.

It's also a reminder here that it doesn't matter what thought or idea that we have, it cannot change the facts. Okay? It doesn't matter what theory you come up with.

[10 : 50] It doesn't really matter what ideas you have or opinions you have. It doesn't alter facts. And sometimes, you know, we read the Bible and we think that my opinion can trump the truth that I read, that my opinion can somehow overwrite what God actually says to be true, or we say, well, it doesn't apply to me.

And I think that that is the crucial one there, isn't it? That, you know, when a child grows up and they go, well, okay, it happened to you, but it won't happen to me. You know, that's not just a sign of overconfidence, you know.

But rather, it's a presumption on their part that actually, no, I'm different. The issue is, is that, no, we all live in a world operated by God.

So, verses 1, verse 3, and verse 9, you will see that though the plans of a heart belong to man, the answer is from the Lord. That the Lord is the one who establishes our plans.

The Lord is the one who establishes our steps. Okay. There is a comparison here then between those who pay attention to the wisdom of God and those who don't.

[12 : 01] Those who read the word of God and follow it, and those who don't read the word of God and therefore cannot follow it. And, of course, that shines the type of relationship on what you have with God.

Or that rather illuminates the kind of relationship you have with God. One where you listen and obey, to put it in terms of Jesus' uses. Or one where you say, okay, I'm going to go my own way.

It's either a relationship of love and faith or sin and rejection. There is no other type of relationship with God that you can have. Either you love him and walk by faith, or you don't love him and you don't walk by faith.

There doesn't seem to be any other option than that. The people have plans in their heart, verse 1. But they also have appetites, which we saw in verse 24, verse 25, sorry, and verse 26.

That there is a way that seems right to man, but his end is death. And a worker's appetite works for him. I find this probably the most convincing segment of all, in the sense that appetites, not thoughts, actually drive the human being from one thing to another thing.

[13 : 12] In other words, you know, Thomas Chalmers, when he preached that very famous sermon, a very famous sermon which has just slipped from my mind, which was all about the ultimate affections, he said that the only way one person gives up one thing is if they have a love for a new thing.

And so the new affection cancels out, nullifies the old affection. And I've told you the story about my brother who had several girlfriends growing up. And it's not because he was good looking, big or strong, though he is all of those things.

But it just seemed to attract. And I can remember saying to him, and he said, he has nothing like a new one to get you over the old one. Totally sinful, but totally right.

Totally sinful, but totally right. The new affection cancels out the old affections. In other words, men, without the grace of God, are driven by their appetites.

Same with women, driven by their appetites. And their appetite controls them rather than they control their appetite. You ever have a problem with not being able to stop eating?

[14 : 26] I have. Gets to 10 o'clock at night, and suddenly the cupboard is so appealing. You open it up and go, I didn't realize we had all of this. And by the morning, it's just not there.

You wake up and you've got the Spanish Inquisition. Did you eat all the cheese puffs? That wasn't me. One of the children came down at 2 o'clock. I'm sure they did. There's just nowhere. And suddenly, the only thing that will stop you, the only thing that will stop you is either you lose your appetite, or you just don't feel like it now.

Or you have the sense to say, no, I shouldn't be eating that at this time, or I shouldn't be eating anymore. But when people struggle with appetites, that's what they're actually struggling with.

The fact that they're not in control of what is moving them to do what they're just about to do. They have an appetite. They have a desire. And so when it says here in verse 25, a worker's appetite works for him, what he's saying is that the appetite that I have for the things that I do causes me to do the things that I do, rather than me thinking them through.

So if I desire this, or if I desire that, or if I just desire that I can desire whatever I like, that is an appetite that I'm not actually in control of, but it's one that's actually in control of me.

[15 : 46] So when you, you know, if you've got a loaf of bread on the table, or a cake, or whatever it may be, you know, how many slices does it take before you don't eat anymore?

How many things does it take before you say, no, I've, I've had enough? Well, what I want to suggest, and what Proverbs is clearly pointing to, is that the grace of God provides you with the necessary grace that you need to be able to control your appetites that can lead you astray.

And without controlling your appetites, you're just a mercy, at the mercy of them. So you will either stop because you know that you need to stop, or you'll stop because you've ate too much, and you just cannot eat anymore.

Appetites. Then we have the reality here, in this proverb, that God always has the final decision, verse 1, verse 9, and verse 32 in particular, sorry, verse 33 in particular, that the lot is cast into the lap, but every decision is from the Lord.

Every decision is from the Lord. This is why we should pray for God never to withhold his grace from us. We don't want him to withhold his grace from us. You know, is it biblical for a Christian to make decisions on the flip of a coin?

[17 : 17] Well, someone might turn to Acts, and they did it then, or they did the equivalent of it then, and their reasoning would be very simple. Well, God determines whether it's going to be heads or tails.

You roll a dice, and God determines whether it's going to be a six or a four. God determines that the lot is cast into the lap, but every decision is from the Lord.

And what that means is is that we shouldn't we shouldn't try and force God to answer us by casting a lot, as though, right, God, I will do this if it's heads, and I will do this if it's tails, and because I know you control the outcome of the flip of the coin, then I'll know which one you want to do.

And God has to stop us and say, well, hang on a minute, they're not my conditions. Okay? My conditions is not that you do A on heads and B on tails.

You're bringing those conditions to the outcome that I'm going to create, but you want to interpret them in your own way, and we'll get back to that in a moment to see why it's not the best thing to do.

[18 : 32] So here's the first thing to consider in all of this, that all of life is an interaction between you and God. It doesn't matter where you go or what you do, you're always going to be interacting with God.

It's normally going to come in this fashion. You will make plans and God will make decisions. You will have desires and God will provide the outcome. You will ought to love God and follow in his ways and God will direct you in those ways.

But sometimes man's plans coincide with God's will and so there's no collision whatsoever. Doors are opened, ways are forward and suddenly you know that it's God because you have desire, ability and opportunity.

These three things come together and you recognize that if they've all come together at the same time, then it is God showing me the way to go. God's will is incredibly easy to interpret.

Do I desire to be a missionary? Do I have the opportunity to be a missionary? Do I have the ability to be a missionary? If those three things come together, then guess what? I'm going to be a missionary.

[19 : 34] But if one of those are missing, then God is indicating to me through real ways that I'm not going to be a missionary. Okay? Either because I don't have the desire to be, even though there's an opportunity and I might have the ability, or I have the ability and the desire, but the opportunity is not there.

And God, by bringing all three together or by leaving one out, directs us through life with these very real day-to-day realities.

And we often call them closed doors or open doors. Okay. They're desires, opportunities, and their abilities. They're gifts from God and they're how God directs us through.

So sometimes, our will will coincide with God's will and that's how we... But then other times, our will collides with God.

And that we try and pursue over and over and over again. We don't get anywhere. And we keep coming back to the same place that we began our pursuit of appetite, only to find the same answer again, which is, well, I'll just try a different way this time.

[20 : 46] And how many times does it take for somebody to say, right, I'm going to go God's way rather than say, I'm going to go a different way this time. How many different ways will you try until you eventually realize none of those actually end anywhere because the only place that they are ending is back in the same place where God wants you in order to get you in the direction that he will have you to go?

Why is that important? Well, it's important because God knows the beginning from the end. He is from everlasting to everlasting. He knows what is best for you and he knows that in your eyes you think that everything's fine.

That in your eyes everything seems right to you as it says in verse 2. All the ways of man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs his spirit.

In other words, by your own analysis it all seems good to you but God knows better. Why is that comforting? Well, it's comforting because however discomfoting the moment is, it's comforting to know that God knows best.

Okay, however discomfoting it is in the moment, God knows what's best for us. You think, well, this doesn't look like God's best for me.

[22 : 06] Well, okay. Okay, but it's better than what you think it is in the short run or even in the long run.

Back in the 1500s, there's a man by the name of William Perkins who was a Puritan and he believed strongly in the grace of God and our need for the grace of God in terms of God's overall control of all things and he says, you know, the Lord is cast into the lap but every decision is from the Lord.

Okay, the person, as I said, who flips the coin and says, well, if it's heads, I'll do this or if it's tails, I'll do that needs to recognizing that they're doing one thing before they're doing anything else, that they're handing control over to something else.

it's not that the person who flips the coin is saying, well, I'll be happy with either. I'll be happy if we do this or I'll be happy if I do that.

We'll just flip the coin. I'll be happy with either. What they're actually doing is they're wanting someone to have the decision or for someone else to make the decision for them. Now, why do they want that?

[23 : 18] Well, because some people like for decisions to be made for them so that they can say, well, I'm here but it's not my decision. I'm enjoying everything but it's, okay, it's not my decision.

Very shrewd but I see through it and so does everyone else see through it. Okay, it's a glass window. It's not a wall. It's easy to see. So you flip the coin and then suddenly your heart starts speaking because the moment the coin lands and it's not what you truly desired, you go, let's flip it again.

Two out of three ain't bad. Okay, okay, three out of five. Let's, okay. And why do you do that? Because what's happening is that even though you kind of don't mind, you really do when you get the answer and then you try and change the answer by flipping it again, by trying to do something again.

and remember, God will let you flip it a thousand times but it's his way that will be established and it will either be established through you constantly confused in being thrown around or it will be established through you just committing it to the Lord.

Why do we need God's grace then? Why do we need God's grace? Well, I think we need God's grace very simply to recognize that if we want other people, if we want something else to make the decision for us like the flip of a coin then nobody's got a problem with Proverbs 16 where it says that God's in control of everything.

[25 : 02] Okay, that's really helpful for people who go I can't make this decision. I don't want to make this decision. I would like something else to make this decision. A flip of a coin, a roll of a dice.

Well, when you read then that God is in control of everything that should be deeply comforting but it isn't, right? Because your desire is still that appetite which is pursuing you and you're beginning to realize that actually I'm not in control of my desire.

My desire is in control of me. Why do we need the grace of God? Well, we need the grace of God to enlighten our minds with a way of renewing our hearts. Why? Because we need to know when to stop eating.

we need to be able to keep that appetite under control. It's not just about pursuing our desires, pursuing our appetites, pursuing our laws.

It's also about knowing whether or not that that is actually a wise decision to make in the first place. when people are not in control of their appetites, their appetites are in control of them.

[26 : 19] And we need God's grace to steady the ship. We need God's grace to allow us to make the right decision even against what we're feeling.

So how many of us, how often, have we felt one thing but have known another thing to be the better option? In other words, we know with our head that that is a better option but our heart is saying, no, just give it a go.

You know, have I ever seen a person marry the wrong person? Yeah, absolutely. Why did it happen? Well, the head ruled the heart.

Now, is that a reason for saying, well, you can start all over again? No, it's not. You have to learn different things as you go along. But there's many, many people that have found themselves into situations by their appetite which they're only then brought to their senses at a later date.

In the same way the prodigal son, well, the younger brother, two prodigal sons, isn't there? One was lost at home, the other was lost away from home, indicated by the sheep that was lost away from home and the coin that was lost at home.

[27 : 32] Remember in Luke 15? It's one parable told in three different ways. The sheep represents the younger brother who's lost away at home who comes to his senses when he's run out of money.

Okay? He's been able to feed his appetite for a while but then as soon as bankruptcy hits then suddenly he comes to his senses. Why? Because he's got nothing to cover it up with anymore.

He's got nothing to cover that appetite up with anymore. He's got nothing to feed it with because he's run out of money. So he comes to his senses and actually says that and he decides to go back to his father, back to the place of grace where he will be treated as a son.

Perkins then, let me explain to you Perkins. Why is grace so important? Well Perkins says think about this in terms of Adam and his sin and Satan's temptation and he explains this that though brilliantly I think he explains this, this is why you should read these people who wrote back in the 1500s.

They can't change their mind because they're dead and that's always an encouraging thing but they were brilliant because they didn't have a TV and could able to think a lot easier and harder than we ever can without the distractions that we have.

[28 : 47] Maybe, I don't know. He says this brilliantly that though God is in control of everything he doesn't coerce or compower Adam in any way to sin. He just wouldn't do that.

But God does shape our wills not through pre-programming them as though everything that we do is programmed by God. But God chooses for us some things and he chooses for us other things.

It's not that we don't have no choice. He says this that when the devil and Adam were having this conversation or rather through Eve but Adam is responsible for the fall that Adam and the devil are responsible for the fall not God.

It was the devil who tempted Adam but Adam's will he says did not desire God's assistance. That Adam's will did not desire God's assistance but voluntarily bent itself to fall away.

God did not compower Adam to sin but God's grace was not extended to Adam to stop him from sinning. Let me say that again.

[30 : 03] God did not compel Adam to sin but God's grace was not extended to Adam to stop him from sinning to stop him from falling away.

God's grace did not give him the perseverance to come through temptation. Now he says God cannot be blamed for withholding that grace from Adam because God owes no man anything.

God doesn't owe any man anything. And the reason God withheld it was for the good purposes that he had and you're going to say what good purposes could come from the fall?

Well, again, we see some. We don't see everything that God sees. Perkins says that in the same way that a house unsupported by a foundation can blow down in a strong wind, then so does man fall constantly without the grace of God against the temptations of the world.

The reason we need God's grace is because we need the structural support to stop us from falling with our own sinful inclinations and desires and appetites.

[31 : 21] The reason we need God's grace is to help us think clearly and to live wisely. And without God's grace and because God owes no man nothing, without that grace, none of us would be able to stand or follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we are completely dependent on the grace of God. Notice when you read Romans 1. What do you read when people are committing the sins that they do?

Well, one of the first things that you read is this, that God handed them over to themselves. One of the most terrible sentences in the whole of scripture is the sentence that says, and I'm paraphrasing, that God allows a man to do whatever he wants.

Why is that so terrible? Well, because of the inclinations, because of the appetites that a man or woman has, that can lead them to fall against any kind of temptation, against any path that's wrong.

We need the grace of God. Would people sin less if they received the grace? Yeah, they're called Christians. We sin less. We don't stop sinning. Okay.

[32 : 35] Here's the conclusion. in all of life, there is this interaction between ourselves and God and this can never be avoided.

In short, people will either collide with God or they'll keep in step with his will. We pray to God that he does not remove his grace from us and we pray that his grace would always be extended to us because we recognize that God owes none of us anything.

but we know God well enough that he's such a loving God and a caring God that he gives us that grace to us but we don't want to treat him with huge amounts of presumption.

Rather, we recognize God as the God who is in control of all things and we also recognize that because he's in control of all things he must know what is best or else we end up saying that God is an indifferent God that sometimes he cares, sometimes he doesn't like people who believe proverbs or principles that sometimes God can keep his word and sometimes he doesn't have to.

No, that's not the God that we read of. We may not understand God completely but the things that we do understand about God can't draw us to that conclusion ever.

[33 : 49] Well, the response in all of us should be this, we should have a deep sense of gratitude that we have received the grace of God in Christ Jesus. That we should have a deep sense of thankfulness that we have received the grace of God in salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And be thankful for that grace every day. That's why we stand. That's why our families are kept together. Okay? That's why we're able to handle the things that we do at work.

That's why we're able to handle the difficulties of life. That's why we're able to handle the problems throughout the generations within our family. Okay? Why? Because without it, everything falls down.

Eventually. Everything falls down eventually. Everything comes to its natural end eventually without the grace of God. And we need the grace of God because that's the only thing that can keep things standing. The only way that your life can be kept clean and pure and right with God, to walk wisely with him, is for it to be filled with his grace completely.

And God gives it to you. All I'm asking, or I guess all that Proverbs is, don't presume on it, recognize that God doesn't owe you it, but he graciously gives you all things in his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[35 : 06] I'll finish with this, a final thought. Someone might ask, well how do I live dependently on God? It's very, very simple. By recognizing that you are dependent on God for everything.

That's the first step. the first step to living dependently, walking wisely in grace with God, is to recognize that you can't do it without God.

And the only reason you're able to do it today is because God's grace extended to you. You may not accept that, you may not be thankful for it, you may not even recognize it, but it's true.

You're not subject to your own appetites and desires as much as you could be, because God's grace is extended to each and every one of you. Amen.