

OpenTheo

Proverbs: Matters of Heart (Part 3)



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

In this segment, Steve Gregg explores the themes of jealousy and envy in the book of Proverbs. While envy is generally considered a negative emotion, Gregg argues that a certain type of jealousy can be appropriate in the context of a spousal relationship. He also discusses the importance of maintaining a right heart and avoiding oppression, even in the face of apparent injustice. Ultimately, he encourages listeners to prioritize fellowship with God and to find contentment in the essentials of life rather than in material possessions.

Transcript

Let's turn again to the book of Proverbs and look at some of the other themes that are treated here. I guess we could say that the topics we've been considering the last couple of sessions and in this one as well, could be summarized as matters of the heart, if that were not such a cliché term. I try to avoid cliché terms and be more original, but sometimes clichés are clichés because they're used so frequently and they're used so frequently because they're so fitting.

So they become clichés, but matters of the heart would be certainly a good overarching term for what we're looking at right here. We looked at what Solomon said about the heart and the centrality of the heart. We're now looking at certain moods and attitudes that are part of the inner life, part of the life of the heart.

Of course, when we talk about the metaphorical heart, we're not talking about the blood pump under the fifth rib. We're talking about the heart as a metaphor for the inner being, the soul, the spirit, whatever. And of course, in saying that, it raises people's questions.

Is the soul and the spirit the same thing or are they different things? And that is a dispute, a theological dispute that cannot be resolved easily and will not be attempted here. All I can say is the Bible does speak of there being an inner man and an outer man. And the outer man is what we all see.

The outer man is that which behaves and communicates and speaks with the world

outside. But inside, there's an inner man, which is sometimes called the heart and sometimes very possibly referred to as the soul or the spirit, although those terms may have nuances that make them not exactly identical. Anyway, last time we were talking about depression, there's a number of scriptures that I thought are relevant to that.

And in the book of Proverbs, we're done with that topic now and want to move along. And in your notes, you'll see that another matter of the inner life of the management of moods is the matter of envy and jealousy. And these things are not exactly the same thing, although when it's used negatively, jealousy probably means something very much like envy.

I say when it's used negatively because it's not necessarily used negatively most of the time. We think of jealousy as a bad thing, partly because we're thinking of it in terms of envy. And envy is a bad thing.

Envy is probably something very similar to, if not identical to, what is forbidden in the 10th commandment. Thou shalt not covet. Coveting is more specifically desiring to own something that is not yours and that is someone else's.

But coveting seems to be an outgrowth of envy. You wish you had what somebody else had. You resent the fact that they have it and wish you had it instead of them.

That envy is what no doubt is the root of covetousness, I would think. I don't know what the exact range of meaning of all these words is because words do have a range of meaning. But certainly we're in the same ballpark when we're talking about envy, covetousness, resentment towards somebody.

In fact, one could say envy is kind of the simultaneous experience of admiration and resentment towards somebody. You envy someone because you admire them and wish you were in their position and resent them for being there instead of you. That's kind of what envy is.

Now, jealousy can be that too. On those occasions when jealousy is spoken of in the negative sense, it probably is a species of envy. Although we have to be aware that we'll find the word jealousy in Scripture in a not a negative sense at all.

In fact, there's no one in the Bible said to be jealous of so much as God. God often speaks of himself as a jealous God. And he means he's jealous over his people.

He has a covenant with Israel and he doesn't like for them to flirt with other gods. He's jealous like a husband is jealous. Is it wrong for a husband to be jealous? It must not be if God is a jealous husband.

It seems rather appropriate, in fact, if we understand what jealousy means in that sense. Jealousy is not necessarily a bad thing in every case. We saw in Proverbs chapter 6 and

verse 34 in an earlier lecture when Solomon is warning his son against committing adultery with his neighbor's wife.

He says in verse 34 of chapter 6, for jealousy is a husband's fury. Therefore, he will not spare in the day of vengeance. Now, this is not this verse is not an indictment of the husband.

It's an indictment of the adulterer. And he's saying the adulterer is going to suffer wounds and dishonor for his sin because a husband is jealous. Now, it may be that Solomon thinks that a husband should not be jealous.

He doesn't say so. He just says that's the way it is. Husbands are jealous over their wives.

And it seems to me they ought to be just as wives ought to be jealous over their husbands. Because jealousy in this sense means protective. It means that you value that person uniquely in such a way that you can hardly bear the thought of them being, you know, shared with somebody else.

Now, of course, if you're jealous of your friends. Let's say you've got a group of friends and one of them's, you know, your most of your friends are more attracted to this one friend of yours than to you. And you're jealous of that.

That's that's wrong. That's envy because you have no particular right to have everybody be your friend more than somebody else's friend. If you're jealous because someone has good looks that you don't have or that someone has more money than you have or who has more talent than you have or who has some more, you know, of a position of recognition than you have or whatever.

That's just envy. We call that jealousy, but it's just envy really. Jealousy is usually in the Bible a good thing.

I don't say always, but usually because it's usually a description of God's attitude toward his own people. He's like a husband. He's protective.

That a husband is jealous over his wife means he values the marriage. He values the wife. It doesn't mean he's small minded and thin skinned and touchy and just can't stand competition or whatever.

It means that to him, the marriage is of extreme value. And he has every right to expect it to be unviolated by outsiders and for his wife to honor the covenant that was made as the sacred thing. To be jealous over something like that is good.

Paul said he was jealous over the Corinthians because he had espoused them to God as a chaste virgin. He said to the Corinthian churches, I'm jealous over you. That means for

God's sake, you know, you are Christ's bride.

And it looks to me like you might be led astray away from your husband. And I feel the jealousy for you that he feels. So we have to be careful.

I remember there was a couple I knew well. He was actually in the ministry, but he was a little flirtatious. He was a handsome guy that all the women liked.

And he had a very beautiful wife too. And I think he cared for her as well. But he was very friendly and touchy and huggy with a lot of women.

Usually he wouldn't initiate it. They'd come up to him in fellowship and give him a hug and stuff. But he enjoyed it.

And his wife did not enjoy that. Did not enjoy that happening. And she often expressed that to him.

Because it was obvious that some of the women were not necessarily having a pure kind of affection toward him. That was truly obvious. That would not be a, I saw it myself.

He was a very handsome guy. And not all of the ladies who wanted to give him a hug were just spiritual. And his wife could see that.

And she was jealous. And he used to blame her for being jealous. He used to think, well that's a sin to be jealous.

Well I don't know if that kind of jealousy is a sin. There is a sense to which some kind of jealousy is a sin. But for a wife to be jealous over her husband's faithfulness is, I think, appropriate.

Not a sin. In fact, if a man is not jealous over his wife, or wife's not jealous over her husband. That is, if a person can see their spouse flirting with other people.

And not feel, you know, offended or outraged about that. It simply means they don't put proper value on the marriage. It's like they don't care.

And people do come to that place. People have open relationships. Maybe not so open that they expect their spouse to sleep with other people.

People just get placed where they don't care that much about the marriage. You know, their husband or their wife may be flirting with other people at parties. It doesn't matter to them.

Because they really don't have much. They don't place much sanctity in the marriage. But what is truly of supreme value is something that a person will want to protect.

And keep inviolable from outside corruption. And that is a type of jealousy over

something that is god-like. Not sinful.

Now, there is a reference to jealousy in Proverbs. I'm not quite sure whether it's speaking of a positive or negative. It sounds kind of negative.

But I'm not sure. In Proverbs 27.4, he says, Now, anger and wrath are bad things. And since jealousy is kind of mentioned in the same sentence, it makes it sound like jealousy might be listed among the things that are bad things like anger and wrath.

Of course, on the other hand, not all anger is sinful and not all wrath is sinful. God is a god of wrath as well. I wouldn't describe him as a wrathful god as some people do.

He's actually slow to wrath. He's not full of wrath. But he does get angry.

And legitimately so. As well as jealous. So, these emotions are things that we are most familiar with in their negative form.

And so when we read them, we think of negatives. But when it says, Who is able to stand before jealousy? What does that mean? Does that mean who is able to stand against a jealous person? Whose jealousy is directed like wrath and anger towards you. Again, the idea of the jealous husband that he mentioned in chapter 6. That if you make the husband jealous, you may not be able to stand before that.

A man's anger towards you or wrath, you might be able to endure. Even a soft word might turn away anger. You might be able to appease anger.

But you can't appease jealousy necessarily. I think what he may be saying is, A person may experience great harm from somebody who is angry at them. Or cruel to them.

Or wrathful toward them. But, it's even worse to have someone whose jealousy is directed against you. I think he's saying that jealousy is a stronger, deeper emotion.

A deeper instinct almost. Of humanity. To be jealous over their mate, over their children, over their legitimate things.

That are valuable and precious to them. As God is also. So, in other words, jealousy, which is mentioned twice in Proverbs.

It's not clear whether jealousy is being condemned as a bad thing. Or just observed as a strong thing. As a strong motivator.

That you don't want to get on the wrong side of it. You don't want to make somebody jealous of you. But envy now.

Envy is never treated as a positive thing. Or even potentially positive. And there's a number of scriptures in Proverbs about the subject of envy.

In chapter 3. And verse 31. It says, Do not envy the oppressor. And choose none of his ways.

Why? For the perverse person is an abomination to the Lord. But his secret counsels will be upright. The oppressor is not enviable.

But many people would envy him. Especially if you're the oppressed person. If you're being oppressed by someone who's an oppressor.

Usually that would mean you're a poor person. You're a peasant or a pauper. You're a widow or an orphan.

You're somebody who's disenfranchised and powerless in society. But somebody else is taking advantage of you. Because they can.

Because they're in a more advantaged position. Economically. Or in terms of social power and so forth.

You might be of a persecuted minority or something like that. But somebody else who's in the majority is in power and oppresses. Those things might make the oppressed person envious of the position of the other person.

Like I said. Envy is sort of a combination of admiration and resentment. Admiration because although the person who's oppressed resents the person doing it.

They kind of admire the position they're in. And wish they were in it themselves. It's one thing to think this oppression is a bad thing.

It's another thing to say I wish I was in a position to oppress others. Like this person's in a position to oppress me. That is desiring to be evil yourself.

And he says there's a reason for not to do it. He says choose none of his ways. Why? Because you'll go to hell? Well that may be true but that's not what he says.

He says because the perverse person's an abomination to the Lord. But his secret counsel is with the upright. Now what this means is.

Regardless of what consequences may come to the person. He's an abomination to the Lord. The assumption underlying this is not that you want to do the right thing to avoid punishment.

But you want to avoid doing the wrong thing. So that you can stay within the secret counsel of the Lord. And not be someone that God abhors.

There may be a hint in this. That if God abhors you. He's going to thump you heavy.

But that's not stated. The real issue here is. Are you and God on good terms? And this

seems to have value in itself.

Apart from any consideration of consequences. That just to have God's favor. Is a positive thing.

It's a privilege. You know we sing sometimes Psalm 73. And I'd like you to look at what that psalm actually says.

And how it progresses. Because it kind of talks about this same principle. In Psalm 73 the psalmist is testifying that he almost backslid.

Because it seemed like the righteous were badly treated. And the bad people seemed to be in the position of being the oppressors. And yet they prospered and so forth.

Psalm 73 says truly God is good to Israel. For such as are of a pure heart. Notice how he defines Israel.

He does not define Israel as an ethnic group. But as a persons of a certain state of heart. Like Paul said he is not a Jew who is one outwardly.

But he is a Jew who is one inwardly. And that is not circumcision of the flesh. But circumcision of the heart.

A true Jew according to even the Old Testament. Is not somebody who's just got Jewish blood. But somebody who's got the right heart.

God is good to Israel. To such as are of a pure heart. But as for me.

My feet had almost stumbled. My steps had nearly slipped. That is I had almost fallen over the edge.

I almost stumbled off the right path. And gone away from God. For I was envious of the boastful.

See there's envy. I was envious of the boastful. When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

For there are no pangs in their death. They die in their beds comfortably. They don't die miserably.

Their strength is firm. They're not in trouble as other men are. They seem to be powerful and rich.

And can buy their way out of trouble. In ways that poor people cannot. Nor are they plagued like other men.

Therefore pride serves as their necklace. Violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance.

They're so well fed. Their faces are fat and their eyes bulge up. They have more than heart could wish.

They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression. They speak loftily. They put their mouth against the heavens.

Their tongue walks through the earth. These people obviously are not the kind of people that God would favor. And yet everything goes well for them.

I was envious of them. He says, therefore, his people return here. And waters are a full cup of a full cup are drained by them.

And they say, how does God know? And is their knowledge in the most high? Behold, these are the ungodly who are always at ease. They increase in riches. Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain.

And washed my hands in innocence for all day long. I have been plagued and chastened every morning. So these people who are wicked, they seem to be doing great.

I have cleansed my heart, but what do I get out of it? I'm the oppressed. I'm the good guy. And God doesn't seem to be on my side.

He said, if I had said I will speak thus, behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of your children. In other words, I thought these things, but I don't think I spoke them publicly because I was afraid I would discourage your people with my grumbling. When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me.

Notice verse 17, until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I understood their end. Surely you set them in slippery places, you cast them down to destruction. Oh, how are they are brought to desolation in a moment? Well, this is not always true, of course.

But you may be thinking that eventually God will somehow have to right these wrongs, maybe even in another life. Though he doesn't mention another life necessarily, he does mention their end. Notice he says, this is too painful for me.

I couldn't even speak my thoughts. I was afraid I'd discourage God's people by expressing this discouragement and this bitterness. But because everything changed when I went into the sanctuary and I became aware of God.

And notice what he says in verse 25, whom have I in heaven but you? And there's none upon earth that I desire besides you. So this is really what he comes to. He says, I was envious of the sinners, but I'm not envious of them anymore because I've gone into the sanctuary and remembered that I have God and they don't.

Now, since they don't, their end is going to be worse than mine. But the point he's making is I have God and that's enough. There's an old Johnny Cash song I really liked.

In fact, I used to sing it when I was young. I don't know if I can remember all the words now because it's been so many years, but it's called I've got Jesus and that's enough. Remember that old song? He said, I hear you've been talking about me.

I really don't mind. I know you try to block my progress a lot of the time. The mean things you say don't make me feel bad because I can't lose a friend that I never had.

I've got Jesus and that's enough. And that's the refrain. I've got Jesus and that's enough.

It's not saying I've got blessings from God and that is my consolation. My consolation is I've got Jesus. That's all I need.

And that's what the proverb we're looking at in Proverbs chapter three is saying. Don't envy the oppressor. They're perverse in the sight of God.

God finds them an abomination. But what? His secret counsel is with the upright. Being upright might not prosper you in this life that much, but you'll have God.

You'll have fellowship with God. You'll have his secret counsel in ways that the wicked do not. You'll be on good terms with God and that's enough.

Solomon seems to imply because he doesn't really give any other reasons for consolation except that. That God will be with you, not with them. In Proverbs 14 and verse 30.

It says a sound heart is like to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones. Now here, body and bones probably are literal. He's probably talking about physical well-being.

And he's saying that a sound heart, which is the opposite of envy. A sound heart is good for your health. It's good for your body.

It's life to the body. In many cases, your physical health will be dictated by your inner life and your inner well-being. John wrote to Gaius in the book of third John.

And he said, my brother, I desire above all things that you may prosper and be in health as your soul prospers. That is, I hope that your physical health and well-being will correspond to the prospering of your inner life as your soul prospers. I pray that you'll be prosperous and good health.

That is because your inward health has strong influence over your physical well-being and health. And so he says, a sound heart is life to the body. And the opposite of a sound heart in this particular case is an envious heart.

Envy in your heart. That's just rottenness in the bones. It does not make you healthy.

And even if the body and the bones here are taken metaphorically, not necessarily of the

physical, although I think it is. But it can be taken metaphorically, just as Jesus talked about how the eye is the light of the body. And if your eye is good, then your body is healthful.

And if your light is darkness, then your whole body is in darkness or whatever. I mean, Jesus is talking about your spiritual life when he uses the word body. I think there it can be used metaphorically.

In this case, I think that's not what is going on. I think he's saying you're just going to pine away with envy if you allow yourself to have envy. That's not being sound in heart.

When you wish you had things that you don't have. When you resent those who have them. You see, what happens, what envy is, is a tendency to love something more than you love people.

You love possessions or you love position or you love a certain set of circumstances more than you love the people who actually have those things that you don't have. Therefore, you resent them for having them instead of rejoicing that they have them. When my kids were little, we were a fairly poor family.

We didn't have much money and therefore we didn't buy a lot of expensive things for our kids. That was usually just fine. But occasionally my kids would spend time with other families where the kids did have some interesting things that we couldn't afford.

And they'd say, oh, I wish we had those. Wish we could get one of those. And I remember saying, well, why don't you just enjoy theirs and enjoy the fact that they've got one.

That way you don't have to maintain it or own it. You can just enjoy it. Let them own it and maintain it.

You know, you don't have to own it. You don't have to have it. And there's something of the ego involved in there that I have to not just enjoy it and use it.

It has to be mine. That's envy. And the truth of the matter is there will always be something more that you can't get unless you're Solomon.

Solomon, of course, had all the money in the world and all the power in the world and he was able to get whatever he wanted. And he found out even so, it was like frustration. It was, you know, there wasn't satisfaction there.

And Solomon's the one writing this, you know, envy is going to rot your bones. What is the opposite then of envy? Well, one opposite is love people. The person who you envy should be someone that you love.

Isn't that commanded? And if you love somebody, won't you wish them well? Won't you

wish them better than yourself? If you love them as you love yourself, then you should be as glad that they have the thing that's desirable as you would be if you had it. And that might sound idealistic, but isn't that really what it would mean to love your neighbor as you love yourself? I love me, so I want certain things for me. Good things for me.

If I love that person like I love me, then I want those things for him. And him having them makes me as happy as me having them. Unless I love me more than I love him.

In which case, it would make me happier to have them than for him to have them. But if he has something good and enjoys it, I should be glad for that. I should enjoy the fact that somebody that I care about as much as myself has something that I would like to have.

That I would enjoy having. And I can enjoy him having it. So I don't have to envy.

That's quite a concept. Why don't I just enjoy them having it? Enjoy them enjoying themselves. Are they happy? Then that's great.

That makes me happy. Isn't that the way it is with your children? No parent is any happier than their most miserable child. Right? I mean, you may have five children and four of them are doing great, but one of them is in misery.

You're in misery. Why? Because you love your kids and nothing can make you happier than them doing well. I mean, John said, I have no greater joy than to see my children walking in the truth.

Well, that's if you value walking in truth and no greater joy could come to you than that your children are doing. Because you wish for your children the things that you consider to be the best things. And if you value health or prosperity or possessions, then you'd rejoice to see your kids have those things because you love them.

If that's what you value, you think, well, that's good. I want them to have those things. Why? Because you love them.

In fact, you probably love them more than you love yourself. Even a selfish person often will love their children more than they love themselves. Maybe I'm wrong about this.

I can hardly imagine a parent that wouldn't. But maybe I'm naive. There may be parents who don't love their children that much.

To me, natural affection. Until someone's lost their natural affection, they will wish for their children things that they would never be able to have for themselves. I think this is how a lot of the people who came through the Depression were.

They grew up kind of deprived of things because they were children during the Depression. And when prosperity came again after World War II, and they could prosper,

they said, I'm going to never have my children have to suffer like I suffered. I want my children to have all the things I couldn't have.

Why? Because they loved their children. I don't think most people are thinking, I'm going to become rich, and who cares about my children? I think a lot of people thought, when I was a child, I couldn't have these things. My children are going to be better off than I was.

Maybe not everyone thinks that way, but I think a lot of people do. It's an attitude that is easy to relate to. But it's only existing because you love your kids more than you love yourself.

And therefore, their happiness is your happiness. Their misery is your misery. And almost anybody would lay their life down for their children.

And if it was like a choice between going to prison and being tortured, either you had to or your kids had to, you'd certainly volunteer. And you'd rejoice that your kids were free. That they escaped it.

Because that's what love is. Now, if you loved others the same way, then you'd rejoice in their prosperity, you'd rejoice in their happiness, even if it wasn't something you were experiencing yourself, personally. So envy really is, at one level, it's a failure to love.

Another aspect of envy is it's a failure to be content. The Bible actually commands us to be content with such things as we have. If you are, then of course, it will never bother you that people have more.

I don't envy what anyone has in terms of physical possessions, because I don't really want more than I've got already. I've been very fortunate that way, blessed that I've never really particularly... My sins lie in other directions, other areas than that. But it's never really been any interest of mine to accumulate things or to have more than I have.

I actually like to travel light in life. It's much less complicated. I don't like complexity.

I like simplicity, believe it or not. And so, I've never really had a problem with wanting what other people have. I just assume they have it.

I'll look at it and enjoy them having it, but I don't need it myself. It says in Hebrews chapter 13, Hebrews 13, 5 says, Let your conduct be without covetousness. Covetousness is the desire to have more than you have, which is obviously a part of what envy is.

And be content with such things as you have. The opposite of envy, the opposite of covetousness, the opposite of greed, the opposite of what we're talking about here is to simply be content with such things you have. But that's easier said than done.

How can I be content with what I have? Well, he says this, Because God has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper. I will not fear.

What can man do to me? Now, notice he says, be content with what you have because you have God. Isn't that the same thing that Proverbs 3 was saying? Don't envy the oppressor. They don't have God.

You do. Well, the psalmist in Psalm 73 says, I was envious of the wicked because they're oppressive. But then I realized they don't have God.

The cure to envy is to value God appropriately. To value God more than you value everything else. Then the fact that you have God and he will never leave you nor forsake you means you can be content with whatever you have or don't have.

Paul said in 1st Timothy 6, he says, Having food and raiment, we will with these things be content. Now, Paul often had more than food and raiment. So do we.

But he said, well, if I don't, I'll still be content. If we only have food and only have raiment, that's really all we need to survive. Then we'll be content with that.

And I would dare say that if Paul didn't have food and raiment, he'd be content too. Even if he died, he died content. He made that very clear in Philippians.

I'm torn between things. Do I stay or do I leave? I'd rather depart and be with Christ. I mean, so even if I don't have food and raiment, even if I die of exposure or starvation, that's really not bad to die of gain, he said.

If you love God supremely, if he's everything to you, then you can't be envious of people except maybe envious of their better relationship with God, which is something you can acquire. That's just it. You can have any level of relationship with God that you will devote yourself to because God is available equally to all.

And so if you envy somebody else's closeness to God, well then you can pursue that and have it. You don't have to envy them. You can't necessarily have every possession people have.

If they have a bigger house or a bigger car or a bigger jet or bigger friends list on Facebook or whatever, you can't necessarily get all those things. You may or you may not. There's no guarantee, but there's a guarantee.

You can have as much of God as you want. And if you envy people for their relationship with God, then let that spur you on. But for no other reason should you ever envy people because God is the thing of value that you have and can have as much as you want.

You can be in the secret council of the Almighty if you are righteous, but the wicked are

deprived of that. So the real answer to envy is to value God as one ought to. To love God and to love people.

It's the same basic stuff, isn't it? What it all comes down to. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Then you won't envy people who have other stuff that you don't have because you'll have God and God is like worth all the other stuff and more.

And love your neighbors yourself. So if he's got something you think is desirable to have and you don't have it, just you love him as you love yourself. Enjoy his happiness.

Enjoy his good fortune. There's no place for envy in the heart of somebody who has Christian attitudes toward God and toward others. Remember Paul said, I've learned whatever state I'm in, therewith to be content.

I can be abased or I can be bound. I can be empty or I can be full. But I've learned whatever state I'm in to be content.

How could it be that? He says, I can do all things through Christ, through strength. I have Christ. That strengthens me.

That makes it irrelevant to me. What else I may have. OK, so on this matter of envy, look at Chapter 23 of Proverbs.

Proverbs 23, 17. It says, Do not let your heart envy sinners, but in the fear of the Lord, continue all day long. For surely there is a hereafter and your hope will not be cut off.

Now, here is another motive for not envying sinners. The first was that they're an abomination to the Lord, but God's secret counsel is with the righteous. So the first reason not to envy sinners is that they don't have what you have, God.

And that's enough to have. But there's another reason, and that's because there's a hereafter. Now, we use the word hereafter to mean after you die.

That's our common thought, you know. The hereafter. We think of it always, our conditionings think of it as heaven or hell is a hereafter.

But hereafter just means there's something after this. After this moment. What's happening right now isn't the last chapter.

There's more. And in all likelihood, Solomon was thinking as David was in Psalm 73. Or whoever the writer of Psalm 73 was.

I don't remember if it was David or someone else. But the writer of 73 Psalms was saying, you know, when I went to the sanctuary, I realized their path is slippery and they're going to come down hard and so forth. And he's obviously thinking in terms of providence in their life, punishing them eventually.

They're not going to get away with it completely. But he's not necessarily thinking of hell. I mean, he might have had that concept in mind, but it's not stated.

Just saying that what's happening now isn't the last word. Things can change. Things can turn around.

There is an after this as well as there is a present. Eventually, there will be some kind of reckoning for them. And so you want to avoid that.

Chapter 24, verse 1 says, Do not be envious of evil men. Same thing. Nor desire to be with them.

For their heart devises violence and their lips talk of troublemaking. Okay, again, the reason not to envy them is not stated in terms of how bad it's going to be for them, but how bad they are. You just don't want to be bad.

There's, you know, virtue is its own reward in some cases. There's something to be said for having a clean conscience. Living life with a clean conscience, you sleep better.

You don't have the rottenness in your bones that an unsound heart gives you. As he said earlier. There's just something desirable about someone who's got clean thoughts and good behavior.

You don't want to envy them because their heart devises violence and their lips talk of troublemaking. Is that the reason? Is that why they're not enviable? Yeah, because their thoughts are not in the way you want your thoughts to be. You don't want to be like that.

So don't envy them. You should only envy people that you want to be like. And that should be the godly.

Verse 19 of chapter 24. Do not fret because of evil doers, nor be envious of the wicked. For there is no prospect for the evil man.

The lamp of the wicked will be put out. Not clear exactly what he has in mind there. The lamp of the wicked will be put out probably means he'll die.

But of course everybody will die. So he may have something. He may have an annihilation after the grave in mind.

I don't know. As opposed to what? As opposed to a righteous person having some kind of ongoing reward. Which is never specified clearly.

But certainly Proverbs was written by a wise man. A philosopher. And philosophers have always speculated about what happens after people die.

Even when there's no revelation. Even when people don't have the Bible. Every religion

in the world has something to say about what happens after you die.

You're reincarnated or there's something else going on. It's like intuitive. Without any special revelation from God, people intuitively know there's something beyond this life.

It just doesn't make sense for creatures as spiritual and as rational and as superior to the animal world as humans are. It just doesn't make sense that something as creative and magnificent as a soul would just disappear and not be there anymore. Like when you put a candle flame out, it's just snuffed out.

Where'd it go? Well, it just disappeared. It's not anywhere now. The idea that the human soul could just disappear.

You think about the creativity and the inventive genius and the deep emotions expressed in song and poetry. The amazing products of the human soul. How could that soul be something that just is material that ends when the material life ends? That's how atheists and materialists think.

They just think, well, the soul is just generated by the brain. The brain is just an organ. But to not confuse the brain with the mind.

The brain, of course, stops and deteriorates after death. Brain activity stops. But what about the mind? What about that soul? What about the personality? Where does it go? Well, Solomon and basically all philosophers have felt like it must go somewhere.

There must be something more. It just cannot be that a person who believes in God, a good God, can also believe that God leaves wrongs unredressed eternally. You just can't believe that the God who is wise and good has made a system where people can be good people and miserable every day and die that way.

And there's just no reward. How could that be just? How could a God who is just set up a system like that? There certainly must be something more, even if he has told us nothing about it. That's what I think Solomon was presuming in all likelihood here.

He's saying, you know, the wicked, their lamp's going to be put out. But that's in contrast with the righteous. Certainly God can't just put out the lamp of the righteous.

There's too many unrewarded good deeds in the righteous man's life that God simply can't leave that debt unpaid. And certainly not every act goes rewarded in this life. So, people have always realized there must be something besides this life.

Whatever it may be, only God really knows for sure. Having talked about envy and jealousy, real quickly I want to talk about resentment, which is obviously a close kin to it. But resentment isn't always in the form of envy.

Resentment can be caused by other causes than envy. In chapter 13 and verse 12, it

says, hope deferred makes the heart thick. But when the desire comes, it's a tree of life.

Now, there are a number of times in which the term tree of life is used in the book of Proverbs. The tree of life seems to be used in Proverbs as a symbol of just that which gives refreshment, that which gives revival in a person's life. It's really used kind of a variety of ways.

It's hard to really nail down one particular way in which the image of the tree of life is used in Proverbs, because it's used in a lot of different contexts. And I've puzzled over it many times. And it just seems in general to be a positive blessing.

Apparently refreshment, like I said, refreshing of the life. But the important thing here is the first line in verse 12, and that is hope deferred. What's that mean? You have your hopes set on something.

And that thing you hope for doesn't materialize, at least not quickly. Deferred means long drawn out, which means that you have to wait for what you're hoping for. You don't have instant gratification.

It's delayed. But deferred would suggest delayed really considerably longer than you were prepared to wait, considerably longer than you expected. You were hoping for something, and it did not materialize.

Sometimes it never materializes. When you have a hope that does not materialize, that makes the heart sick. I believe that the sickness the party is talking about is what we would talk about in our day, we call it resentment.

Resentment is that we are not happy about something, and we think it's not right, and we're going to be upset about it. And the cause of resentment is a deferring, or maybe even a total cancellation of the things we hope for. This is an important relationship fact, that people become disappointed with each other because they have expectations of each other.

If I don't expect anything from you, if I'm not hoping for you to do anything, or be a certain way, then I'm not ever going to resent the fact that you aren't, because I never expected you to be. But if I thought I had reason to expect something of you, and you disappoint me, that will give me occasion to be resentful, upset with you, to harbor resentment, and my heart to become twisted and sick. I believe that many people who we would call mentally ill are probably people who simply have not dealt well with deferred hope.

Now, deferred hope, consider this, whenever you meet somebody, unless it's somebody that you have planned to have no ongoing friendship or relationship with, you have certain expectations of them. You don't expect them to walk up and spit in your face for no reason. If they do, you'll be very disappointed.

You don't expect them to gossip about you or lie about you. You expect them to be more or less loyal. And in certain relationships, you develop much more expectations from people, because the relationship itself is defined by greater degrees of commitment and so forth.

You expect your children to continue to appreciate what you did for them. You expect your parents to be loyal to you. You expect your spouse to be faithful.

And more than that, you might even expect people to always be thankful when you do things for them. Every time we are upset with someone, it's because they didn't meet an expectation we had. We might not even have known what that expectation was.

It's just that they disappointed us, and they can't disappoint you unless you expected them to be different. And certainly, one of the things that destroys relationships, maybe the thing that destroys relationships in every case, is deferred hope. That is, expectations.

I hoped they would do this. I expected that they would be this way. And it didn't turn out as I had hoped.

They were not what I expected. That is what caused resentment. And you know, the sad thing is that, in the case many times of husbands and wives, one party or both becomes sickened toward each other.

Their hearts become resentful and sick, and there's a sickness in the relationship that never gets healed. And the reason is because the husband did not meet the wife's expectations. She did not meet his expectations.

And in many cases, they didn't even know what the other person's expectations were. They were unspoken expectations. It was not even that they knew that they were disappointing the other person, but there were expectations in the relationship that maybe were never communicated.

Maybe they were unreasonable. Or maybe they were reasonable enough, but the person neglected to do them and didn't know that they were disappointing the other person, because they had never known that they were expected to do differently. That's how many friendships end.

Someone gets offended by you, and you don't even know why they're offended. And in a lot of cases, it's because they thought you would do a certain thing, and you didn't know. I can think of a number of people who used to be friends of mine that aren't very happy with me anymore.

I never understood why. I couldn't think of anything I'd ever done wrong to them or unkind to them. Never had an argument with them.

To me, we were on great terms, but suddenly they were against me. And in a few cases, upon inquiry, I found out that they were disappointed because they had thought that they were going to get more time with me. Sometimes when we had our school in Oregon, people who were long-standing friends of mine would come, sometimes from other countries, as students to our school.

And they didn't know I was quite busy in the school, and that I'm running a school and teaching a school that they thought were just going to hang out together. I thought they were coming to be students. That's what they applied for.

But in many cases, them being in the school with me didn't end up being good for our friendship because they eventually resented the fact that I was as busy as I was, and that we didn't spend a lot of time together. This happened with a guy who came, a pastor, a friend of mine from Germany, came over, and he ended up being very resentful toward me at the end of the year. We were great friends for years before that.

But I didn't realize that he thought that I was going to be coming over to his house and hanging out with him all the time. And I had a whole bunch of 25 students that all would like to have my time, and I had a family and children. And, you know, he had these expectations I didn't know about.

And I just observed him growing more distant and more, really, what it turned out to be resentful toward me because he had hoped that things would be a certain way, and that's not how they turned out. And the sad thing is if he had told me that that's what he expected, I could have told him, stay home. It's not going to be that way.

Relationships would often be far more successful, there'd be far fewer rifts in relationships if people clearly communicated what their expectations were of others. But one reason we don't is because we assume everyone knows what we expect. We assume everyone has the same expectations as we do.

It doesn't occur to us to say, let me tell you what I'm expecting from you in this relationship. Because we think, well, isn't it like common sense? Doesn't everybody have these same expectations? And we will grow wiser and better in relationships if we realize that not everyone has the same assumptions we have. And that before we become resentful of someone, we might check and see whether they knew that we had certain expectations.

And we might even ask whether we're to blame for the fact that they didn't meet our expectations because we never told them that we expected that of them. And we expect them to read our minds. And they can't do that.

And we just thought, well, they should be like me enough to know exactly what I'm thinking. Certainly they want the same thing as I want. But maybe they don't.

So this hope deferred and the resentment that it causes is a real wedge that the devil uses to destroy people's hearts and relationships. And we need to be aware of that dynamic. I think this is a very profound proverb applicable to many, many situations, many applications.

Chapter 18 and verse 19 of Proverbs says, A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city. And contentions are like the bars of the castle. Now the bars of the castle keep some people outside separated from the people inside.

It's hard to get through the bars of the castle. It's hard to break into the castle. You're going to have a hard time.

Those who are outside the bars and those who are inside the bars are going to be separated. And getting them together again is not going to be okay as long as those bars are there. And contentions between brethren are like the bars of the castle, hard to overcome, hard to reconcile.

Why? Well, let's talk about a brother who's been offended. Once again, why do people get offended? Why would I ever be offended to you? Because I thought you were going to do something different and you didn't do what I thought. You didn't meet my expectations, so I'm offended.

Now, the fact that you're a brother of mine makes it harder because I have more expectations from a brother than from a stranger or from a casual friend. My brother, he's supposed to be my homie. He's supposed to have my back.

He's my brother. There's more opportunity for him to offend me because I have more expectation from him. So, he's saying that an offended brother is hard to win back.

Why would that be? The word resentment is not used here, but that is certainly what's being described. Somebody resents their brother or somebody who they had expectations of who didn't meet their expectations. Then there's a resentment.

There's this festering hatred of sorts because hopes were deferred. Expectations were not fulfilled. So, probably one of the most valuable things to understand about relationships in general is the role that is played in relationships of the whole area of expectations.

And everybody knows people who've become offended by you. You've offended people, but you didn't intend to offend anyone because you didn't know that they had expectations of you that they had not communicated. So, you just went your merry way thinking all was good.

And all the while, they were resentful because you weren't doing what they thought you were going to do, what they expected. There's a few more categories we're going to talk

about in this area of heart matters. Then we're going to move along to areas of relationships.