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Proverbs 3



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg delves into the extended appeal of the first section of Proverbs, chapters 1 to 9. He emphasizes that making wise choices is crucial, as even small choices can have undesirable repercussions. Gregg also cautions against pursuing vices or seeking only fleeting stimulation, as they ultimately harm and rob oneself of a fulfilled life. He emphasizes the importance of humility and fearing God, as it is only by doing so that one can receive help and grace.

Transcript

The last time we were looking at a survey of the book of Proverbs, and at the beginning of that session, I thought we'd do a light passing over the various sections, but we ended up actually reading large portions, which I intend to continue doing because the first part, the first section of Proverbs, chapters 1 through 9, is different than most of the book, in that chapters 1 through 9 is not simply a collection of sayings. It's not just a collection of Proverbs. It is more of an extended appeal, almost like a sermon from a father to his son to be wise.

He's trying to instill in his son an appreciation for the value of wisdom, as opposed to those things that might allure a young man into more, maybe immediately gratifying or more scintillating pursuits. He's basically trying to make his son not be a fool. And so, the first nine chapters are really the first segment of the book.

And those chapters divide into some smaller parts. Verses 1 through 7, I said, were like an introduction to the whole book. And then in the rest of chapter 1, a part of that, verses 8 through 19, are simply warning against falling in with the wrong crowd, with a bunch of fools.

They may allure you with promises of shared wealth and adventure, but he says they're leading you into a trap. Even a bird can see a trap when it's been laid for it and will avoid it. So, you should be at least as wise as a bird and avoid an obvious trap.

And then the last part of that chapter, verses 20 through 33, is a sermon given by wisdom, something of a rebuke to the simple minded, those who have no use for

wisdom, have no interest in it, and suggesting that if a person will turn to wisdom, they will find it to be rewarding. Wisdom says, I'll pour out my spirit on you. Spirit of wisdom will come upon the person who seeks it.

Properly, and I'll speak my words to you. It sounds like God speaking. Of course, in many respects, it is, because wisdom is the voice of God.

And that's why we've said earlier that wisdom is a means of divine guidance. It's not the only means of divine guidance. There are other ways that God guides.

But many times when people think of God's guidance, they think only of the written scriptures or only of something a little bit different. A little more eerie or mystical or prophetic, you know, a voice from God within. But really, probably, wisdom is that which God intends for us to employ most of the time.

Certainly the word of God, the written word of God, and what we know from that word is always informing us. It's actually informing what we know to be wisdom. But making choices wisely, on a daily basis, we do that without even realizing it hundreds of times.

The time we'll realize that we do that is when we fail to do it and we make a foolish choice about something, some small matter it may seem at the time. But then when there's repercussions that are undesirable, then we realize, oh, I should have been wiser when I did that. I should have thought about that more.

And making choices because you've thought about it and it's reasonable and wise is not unspiritual. Some people think of that as the neglect of spirituality and just relying on your own understanding, which, of course, chapter three of Proverbs says not to lean on your own understanding. Chapter three, verse five, trust in the Lord with all your heart.

Do not lean on your own understanding. And yet, apparently Solomon does not consider that wisdom is so much your own understanding as it is God's communication to the attentive heart and mind. It sometimes feels like your own understanding because it's just it comes to your mind, perhaps quite naturally, if you're a wise person.

I mean, if you're if you are wise, then wisdom naturally arises. As you consider things, you think of them in a wise way. So it might seem like it's your own understanding.

But of course, when he says trust in the Lord and don't lean on your own understanding, he obviously means anything that you would naturally reason that would be contrary to trusting the Lord. It's a contrast. You do trust in the Lord.

Don't do the opposite of trusting in the Lord. Don't think that, you know, trusting the Lord doesn't make sense according to your reasoning and then go with your flawed reasoning. There is such a thing as bad reasoning.

There is such a thing as carnal logic, I suppose. But one thing we need to understand about logic, logic is like mathematics. It will always get the right answer if it's done right.

But you can make flaws in doing math just like you can make have flaws in logic and you can reach the wrong conclusions. There are two ways that you could, you know, let's say, make a mistake balancing your checkbook. One, if you're starting with a figure and subtracting or adding to it, and you're adding and you're subtracting is done properly, but the figure you're starting with is the wrong figure, then of course, you'll have the wrong answer because you started with the wrong figure, even though your method was excellent.

Then, of course, there's the other possibility. You have the right figure, but you do bad math and you do poor adding or subtracting and then you get the wrong answer. With math, as with logic, there's two ways to go wrong.

One is to start with the wrong information. The other is to start with the right information and go wrong with it. And if you make an unwise choice, if you do something that's foolish, you've basically had either a wrong starting point to your thinking or you didn't follow logic consistently.

Logic is simply rationality and reasonableness. You see, all logic begins with some premise and reasons that if this is so, then this must naturally and logically follow, unavoidably. But if you start with the wrong premise, for example, if you start with the premise that there's no God, well then you're going to be, you might be very logical, but you'll reason very wrongly, you'll reason the wrong conclusions because you've got the wrong premise.

If you begin with the fear of God, then the only thing to do next to get the right answer is to reason properly, to think clearly, to think as one should, rationally. And people don't always do that because they think rational thinking, especially Christians, a lot of times Christians think rational thinking, that's just worldly. We need to hear from God.

Well, no doubt we do need to hear from God on many occasions, but on all occasions we have to act reasonably. And I do believe there is a tendency for some spiritual communities to devalue the intellect and to devalue rationality because they think anyone can do that. It doesn't take a spiritual person to think rationally.

We want to get words directly from God. That's our unique province of spiritual people. Well, perhaps it is, but actually it isn't because God speaks to ungodly people too, like Balaam and King Saul, even Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus.

God sometimes speaks to people who aren't godly. So, it's not the unique province of Christians to get words from God. But we are told to see wisdom, as it were, is the voice of God speaking in the mind of a godly person.

So, in this sermon that wisdom gives, although she is personified as a woman in the end of chapter one, she speaks as if she's God. And one could get the impression that hearing from wisdom is hearing from God. And I think that's what Solomon would have us understand.

Wisdom is a genuine means of knowing the mind of God, of getting guidance from God. Now, in chapters two through seven, there is an exhortation to observe parental instructions and commands and goes off into several different branches. We read chapter two and we came to chapter three.

I want to look at that chapter. We're not going to go into great detail and everything in it, but we're still surveying, but somewhat slowly. Surveying the book, we will look, of course, eventually at each topic that the book talks about and then, of course, look at all the problems on those topics individually.

My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands. Now, see that's how chapter two began, something like that. Son, if you receive my words and treasure my commands within you.

This is an exhortation to his son to listen to what his father says, because his father is going to teach him the ways of God and the ways of wisdom. For length of days and long life and peace they will add to you. Again, this is a generality.

You won't necessarily live long because you were wise. You could become victim to a natural disaster or to an accident or to a criminal attack or to war, to disease even. I mean, there's no guarantee.

It's not intended as a guarantee. It's saying that wise conduct tends toward longevity, whereas foolish conduct tends to cut your life short. Whether because it ruins your health because of the vices that you pursue when you're foolish.

Vices can damage your health. You can seem old before your time and expire prematurely because of that. Or just because foolish and sinful habits often get you into really physically dangerous behaviors and running with dangerous crowds that fall prey to perhaps the law, or they fall prey to one another.

And so it's not always the case, but it's generally the case that a wiser person is going to avoid things. I sometimes think of people who love to do dangerous things just for fun. And while I don't mean to be critical of them, I mean, they're a lot braver than I am.

People who like to skydive or bungee jump from very high things or do even more. Those aren't really that dangerous compared to some of the things people do for fun. And I guess it's an adrenaline rush for them, but it doesn't strike me as really wise.

I mean, they're definitely taking their life into their hands and we all do. Every time we

get up out of bed and walk out the door, we take our life into our hands. We don't know if we're going to get hit by a drunk driver when we go outside or what.

Life is dangerous. But to court disaster because it's an adrenaline rush doesn't strike me as the course of wisdom. It's in some respects not any more admirable than to be addicted to alcohol or a drug.

It's an addiction to adrenaline. That's a chemical too. It's a chemical addiction.

And like other chemical addictions, you have to keep increasing the dosage. It's not enough. If you consider the course that movies have taken in our lifetime, how the exciting movies used to be cowboy and Indian shoot them up kind of things.

Now you've got to see people's heads blow up. You've just got to have the special effects have got to be much more graphic or else it's ho-hum. I mean, think of the movies you watched 15 years ago and the special effects.

Think of Star Wars, you know. When Star Wars came out, everyone raved at all the special effects in this movie. It's like 20 times as many special effects as were in 2001 A Space Odyssey, which was a standard setter for its time, you know.

And, oh, look at all these special effects. Well, yeah, that was how many years ago? 40, 30, 5 or something like that. And you watch Star Wars today and you might enjoy it, but it's not impressive.

It's not impressive, the special effects. They don't excite. They don't dazzle.

And the same thing with even animated things now. I used to be fascinated when I was a kid with the sword and the stone and Snow White and those movies. And now these, you know, the cartoons now, they look just like real life.

You know, it's amazing. You're just watching, you're amazed, but not for long. After a few years of that, they're going to come up with something further out.

Because when you're simply seeking fun, when you're simply seeking stimulation, things that are very stimulating now won't stimulate you the same way after you've had them for a while. You have to have more. And so a lot of people do dangerous things because they're seeking that adrenaline rush that they can't get anymore out of things that aren't dangerous.

I wonder sometimes if people eventually are going to require to see actually snuff flicks in order to be excited because you've seen the simulated growths and violent deaths of many people so much. It just gets to be blasé. It's almost like you've got to see someone really get killed this time.

And then after that, what? It's not wise to pursue the wrong things or things that are not,

you know, what God has in mind for you to do. But people do. And it's in many respects foolish and foolishness can shorten your life.

People who do really dangerous hobbies will often find that they don't live as long, although they had a good time. And sometimes that's all that matters. A lot of times people aren't interested in living long, but they're just interested in enjoying the life as they have it.

That's not wise. Some people I've known who, I had a relative who died. He lived, he didn't die really young, but he died younger than he had to.

And he had cancer. And he still smoked cigarettes. He got apparently, cigarette smoking apparently was the cause of his cancer.

And he, you know, was very much incapacitated by cancer, but he just wanted to keep smoking rather than stop. And he said, well, it'll shorten my life, but I'll enjoy it more. Now that's how foolish men think, you know, enjoy it more.

But is your life for enjoyment? I mean, if you're robbing God of some years of your life, which he really has claim on, I remember someone was telling me about a preacher who was grossly overweight. And another preacher came up and said, I have a word from the Lord for you. You're robbing God.

And the preacher said, what am I robbing God? You're robbing him of years of your life because you're not eating healthy. You're bringing an early demise or at least courting it. You know, people who are overweight or who smoke and do these things sometimes live long.

But all things being equal, they will not live as long if they eat and behave and entertain themselves in foolish ways. Wisdom tends to give length of days, Solomon said. And peace.

You'll have a lot less conflicts with people if you follow the ways of wisdom, tact, discretion, goodness. Those are all part of wisdom. And if you're good to people, there'll still be some people who don't like you, but you're going to have fewer enemies that way.

You're going to have a more peaceful life. Wisdom has good dividends it pays. Let not mercy and truth forsake you, he says in verse three.

That is. Be a person who exhibits mercy and who follows the truth. Don't stop that.

Don't let those qualities abandon you. Bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

In all your ways, acknowledge him and he shall direct your path. So acknowledging God's sovereignty, acknowledging God's rule over your life, acknowledge him in everything. And he'll direct your path.

Someone was here last night talking to us. It was Dave who was visiting with his wife. And he was saying that he was at a group of Christian tradesmen or businessmen or something like that.

It is, I think, a group from his church if I'm not mistaken. And they were talking about their practices, their business practices. And he said that they said overtly that they make a division in their minds between their religion and their business.

That is to say they they have certain standards they have to live by when it comes to their religious life. But when it comes to their business life, they don't follow the standards. They it's not I guess they don't consider that very profitable to be completely honest or to be, you know, ungreedy or unambitious or something, you know.

So they when they're at church, I mean, he said he was he was he admired them for admitting it, but they didn't seem to have enough sense to know that was a bad thing to admit. They were saying it as if that's normative. They they thought, well, of course, you know, when you're in church, you have to behave a certain way.

But when you're in business, it's a dog eat dog world out there. You have to put on your other set of morals and. And.

So, no, you acknowledge Lord in all your ways and all your activities, all your activities are lived under the awareness that God is the Lord, that God is the one who's that you're supposed to be pleasing and then he'll direct your path. Do not be wise in your own eyes, fear the Lord and depart from evil. The fear of the Lord causes a person to depart from evil.

There's a problem that says that later on by the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil. So don't think you're smarter than God, but fear God and do what pleases him rather than thinking you can outsmart him and get what you want instead. It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones.

Again, the suggestion is you'll be better off in terms of physical health if you live a wise and prudent life. Just like the long life, it's a tendency to generality, probably on balance. True, more often than not.

Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the firstfruits of your increase, so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine. Now, once again, this is the same kind of an observation as these others we've been talking about. It's not always going to be the case that a person who's generous is going to be wealthy.

To say your wine vats will overflow with new wine and your barns will be full means that you're going to have an abundance of physical blessing and material blessing. And many Christians do, but not all Christians do. And even the ones who honor God.

With their substance don't necessarily rise to the wealthiest echelons of society. In many cases, the most wealthy people in society are the most unscrupulous and the most ruthless and the most ungodly and the most criminal. But, on the other hand, the idea is that if you want God to bless you in material things, make sure you're honoring him with the material things he's already given you.

With the firstfruits, don't put God's interest last, put it at the front. If you've decided to give 10%, if you've decided to give any percentage of what God's given you to the Lord, don't say, after everything else is taken care of, I'll look for that amount to give to God. If you feel led to devote a certain amount to God, make sure he gets it first, because otherwise there may not be enough left after you've done all the things you'd like to do.

Make God's interest the first interest. Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. In Matthew 6, 33, they said, and all these things will be added to you.

The things he mentions are food and clothing. Now, he didn't indicate vast wealth. Food and clothing can be just the most basic things needed for sustenance.

And Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 6, having food and clothing with these, we will be content. That's not wealthy. That's not having full barns and overflowing backs.

And Paul certainly honored the Lord with his substance and with everything in his life. But Jesus did too, but he was not a wealthy man in earthly terms. On the other hand, if it was my desire to be wealthy, I'd want to make sure that I kept God on my side and gave him the first place.

I don't want to give him the first place whether I want to be wealthy or not. He's just saying that it is often the case, and maybe in Israel it was, because Israel's blessings were material. The promises God made to Israel were of material blessing, whereas to us they're more in terms of spiritual blessing.

It is possible that maybe most of the time a person who was righteous in Israel was prosperous. Though even then, I'm sure there were exceptions because Jesus said, blessed are you poor. And it says in James, God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith.

It's a different kind of riches than full barns, but it's still riches of a sort that's of value, maybe of greater value. So, being physically poor isn't a shame or a proof that God isn't blessing you or a proof that you're not really honoring the Lord with your possessions. Verse 11, My son do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest his correction.

For whom the Lord loves, he corrects, just as the Father, the Son in whom he delights. This is quoted in Hebrews chapter 12, in verses 5 through 11, the argument that we should be receiving the chastening voice is you've forgotten the exhortation that speaks to you as to sons, and then he quotes this passage. God does chasten, God does discipline.

And what does that look like? Well, at the very least, it looks like inward conviction of sin. If you go the wrong way and you're God's child, he'll be convicting you about it. You won't feel great about it internally.

But in addition to that, God can actually order circumstances to be rather uncomfortable. He can allow the consequences of your sins to materialize. You know, so many times we don't appreciate how sin does have consequences because God apparently protects us from those consequences, just graciously.

If every time we did something foolish or wrong, if the worst conceivable results could come of it, we'd have the most disastrous lives, more than we could imagine. Because we do foolish things that the upshot of them could easily be disastrous. Way too frequently.

And yet, the disasters don't usually materialize because of the grace of God. But sometimes He'll just let it. Sometimes it's time for you to learn the lesson.

Get a little spanking so He'll let the consequences of your actions come upon you so you'll learn not to do that again. Happy is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding. For her proceeds, that is, wisdoms, are better than the profits of silver and her gain than fine gold.

She is more precious than rubies and all things that you may desire cannot be compared with her. Length of days is in her right hand. In her left hand, riches and honor.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness and her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her and happy are all who retain her. From time to time, wisdom literature speaks of the tree of life.

Now the expression obviously reminds us of the Garden of Eden, where there were two notable trees that were singled out for attention. One was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat from. But there was the tree of life.

They were not forbidden to eat from that until they sinned. Then they were forbidden to eat from it. The tree of life was actually for them to eat from, and its nature is revealed in the comments that God makes after they have sinned and said He didn't want to allow them to reach forth and eat from the tree of life, lest they should eat and live forever.

Apparently the tree of life in the garden was a tree which if you would eat of it, probably continually, it would continually sustain your natural life. I don't believe the tree of life was that we're supposed to see it as something that if they ate at one time, they'd live forever. For the simple reason that we find the tree of life again in the New Jerusalem in Revelation chapter 22 in the first three verses, I think, and it says the tree of life was seen in the New Jerusalem and it brings forth its fruit every month or twelve times a year.

Well, why would that be necessary if all you have to do is eat at one time? If you eat at one time and have eternal life from that point on, you wouldn't need it to bring more fruit out every year in perpetuity. The idea seems to be it's a tree from which one should eat regularly. And so long as one continues to eat of it, that long they continue to have their life prolonged.

And Adam and Eve, we don't know if they had even eaten of the tree of life before they sinned. We don't know how long he lapsed. They might have even eaten it previously.

I'm not saying they did. We don't know. But God cut them off from continuing to eat from it so that their life then would expire rather than be perpetuated.

But the tree of life obviously represents, at the very least, eternal life. We Christians would say it no doubt represents Jesus. Because it says in First John, chapter five, verse 11 and 12.

First John 5, 11 and 12, this is the testimony that God has given us eternal life and this life is in his son. Now, therefore, the son is like the tree of life, the eat of him and eternal life is in him. And he who has the son has life.

And he means, of course, that eternal life he's just mentioned. He who does not have the son does not the son of God does not have life. There's an eternal life that we have in Christ, like like a vine has branches that draw upon its life.

So long as they're attached, so long as they continue. Just as Adam and Eve would need to continue eating from the tree of life in all likelihood in order to continue to have eternal life. So we need to continue in Christ.

We have continuous eternal life as long as we abide in him. But we must eat of him on a regular basis, on a continuous basis. It's not as if we eat of him one time and then we have eternal life.

We can neglect him for the rest of our lives and still have an eternal life that we possess. It is drawn from him continually, like the sap of a vine is drawn upon by the branches continually. And as Adam and Eve, I think, were intended to eat continually from the tree of life so that they would live forever.

Now, the tree of life being a picture of eternal life and for us of Christ, it's kind of interesting. It says that wisdom is a tree of life to those who take hold of her in Proverbs 3, 18. And happy are all those who retain her.

In Proverbs 11, 30, chapter 11, verse 30, it says the fruit of righteousness is a tree of life. Again, probably meaning eternal life. Although I'm not sure Solomon had a real revelation about the reality of eternal life.

It wasn't spoken of much in the law, for example, or in the Old Testament in general. But certainly a long life, a prolonged life, and maybe even eternal life was in Solomon's mind. But that long and eternal life is the fruit of the righteous.

In chapter 11, verse 30, it says in chapter 13, verse 12, that hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life. Which is kind of a strange statement. I mean, it's not entirely clear how he's thinking there.

But one could say that when people are hoping in God, but maybe they're hoping unrealistically and their hope does not materialize. Or maybe they are hoping for something genuinely promised, but it doesn't happen as soon. It's deferred, it's delayed.

Then the heart grows sick. It's like I've known many people who in the Jesus moment were converted under preaching that said Jesus was coming immediately. Jesus was coming immediately and people came forward in droves.

And then he didn't come immediately. A whole generation has come and gone. Or not gone because we live a long time, but it's been 40 years.

It's been a generation since those Jesus people were converted. And they were told that this generation would not pass before all these things are fulfilled. They had this hope that Jesus would come very soon.

Well, he didn't come very soon. Their hope was deferred. It doesn't mean that hoping for Christ to come is an unrealistic hope, but to think it's going to be in a particular time frame is unrealistic.

And therefore, they had an unrealistic hope. And when it didn't happen, as they thought, they grew bitter against Christianity. They'd left the faith in many cases.

But when that desired thing comes, then it is a tree of life. Those who wait for him, who don't let their heart grow sick, and they wait for that desired thing to arrive, it will be for them eternal life. It even says in chapter 15, verse 4, that a wholesome tongue is a tree of life.

And again, the meaning of that, chapter 15, verse 4, it's hard to know exactly how he's thinking, but that's just the point about Proverbs. Sometimes it's hard to know what he

means and you have to think about it. That's the idea.

They provoke thought because the meaning isn't just on the surface. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. He's obviously talking about how what one speaks can promote spiritual good or spiritual harm.

A perverse tongue will break somebody's spirit. That's doing spiritual damage to them. But it can also promote life, even eternal life.

And that's especially true, of course, if what you're sharing with them is the gospel. And yet, not only sharing the gospel itself to an unbeliever, but even to Christians. Paul says in Ephesians chapter 4, let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.

So our speech, that, by the way, is Ephesians chapter 4, verse 29. We should govern our speech so that what comes out of our mouth can minister grace to other people, that it can minister spiritual advantage to them, edification. Not corrupt communication that may be pleasing to their ears or amusing or something that doesn't really give them any spiritual benefit, but only speak that which is useful for edification.

That's for spiritually building up. A wholesome tongue can advance spiritual life, even eternal life in some cases. Anyway, I just thought I'd dwell for a moment on how Proverbs uses this expression, a tree of life.

It's not always obvious what he has in mind when he uses it, but he does use it these, what, five times. First of all, Proverbs 3.18. Then verse 19, the Lord by wisdom founded the earth. This was going to be brought out more in chapter 8 when wisdom sings a song boasting of her accomplishments and so forth.

She'll say, the Lord possessed me in the beginning and he framed the world by me. What it means, of course, is that God in creating everything did so wisely. He used wisdom.

Wisdom is personified in the poetry, but wisdom is just really wisdom and God's possession of wisdom is exhibited in the wise way in which he built everything. And so the Lord by wisdom founded the earth. By understanding, he established the heavens.

By his knowledge, the depths were broken up and the clouds dropped down the dew. My son, let them not depart from your eyes. What of them? This must be going back to probably the very first verse, my commandments.

Do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commandments. Apparently that's what he means by them in verse 21. My son, let not them depart from your eyes.

Keep sound wisdom and discretion so they will be life to your soul and grace to your neck. Then you will walk safely in your way and your foot will not stumble. When you lie

down, you'll not be afraid.

Yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet. Now, that is so often true that when we are deprived of sleep, it is because we are worried, anxious, regretful, contemplating something that if we'd been wiser, we would never have done, would never have said. And now there's repercussions and they're complex and they're haunting us and they deprive us of sleep because we realize we're not even sure that the repercussions have all played out.

There may be more to come. You realize you've done something foolish. Maybe there haven't been any repercussions yet, but you'd laid in bed contemplating how foolish what you did was and how how bad things could go because of it.

You have wisdom. You don't have that kind of problem so much. You do the wise thing.

Any time you do the wise thing, you'll have never any regrets, any reason to regret it. You might get persecuted for doing a wise thing. Certainly, Jesus always did the wise thing.

He got himself killed, but I think he had no regrets. You might have, you know, momentary sensations of fear of some of the things that are people are going to do to you. But you see it because you fear the Lord.

You have a clear conscience and therefore it's a different thing to to be aware that you could suffer some harm for doing what's right. But Jesus could bless you if you suffer for righteousness. You could leap for joy when that happens.

But it's hard to rejoice when you're suffering because you did something you knew better than to do it or should have known better than to do it. And now you're suffering for it. That's then you have, of course, the added pain of haunting regret for what you did.

So when you lie down, you'll not be afraid. Yes, you'll lie down and your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden terror nor trouble from the wicked when it comes for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught.

Now, verse 27, do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in the power of your hand to do so. Do not say to your neighbor, go and come back and tomorrow I'll give it when you have it with you. Now, this means that if you.

I mean, there's any number of situations he might have. He might have in mind when you have employees here, the Bible actually in the Old Testament advised people who are employers to pay their employees daily. Now, things were different in that society than this society.

Most of our employees can manage getting a paycheck every two weeks and live in

between. In biblical times, people were so poor, almost there was no middle class. There were there were some very rich people and a whole lot of very poor people and very poor men.

They had about enough to feed their family for that day if they're lucky, if they happen to be employed that day and they got paid daily. Even the parable of Jesus, about the man who went out and hired workers, some worked all day, some worked for a few hours, some worked only one hour again. At the end of the day, they come for their paycheck.

That's that was the way it was supposed to be. Actually, the law of Moses required that a laborer be paid the same day at the end of the day. And that's mainly because they didn't have enough to make it two days.

In most cases, they just got paid one day as much as they would need to feed their family the next day. And so you may have in mind that you shouldn't defer to pay your laborers when you actually have the money. Don't say come back tomorrow for it.

But it's also possible he's talking about repaying a debt or you've got something of your neighbors that he's lent you and he wants it back. And don't say, well, tomorrow when he wants it now, you've got it now, you can give it now. I remember this verse guiding us at times when we first started the Great Commission School on the Oregon coast.

We were very tight on finances most of the time. Part of the reason was that we although we charged room and board, we never really charged it. If people didn't have it, we let them come anyway.

And so we always had more people eating than paying. And we had a big facility. I mean, the electric bill, it sounds like \$3,000 a month.

And that was back when \$3,000 was a lot of money and utilities were not cheap. I mean, they were a lot cheaper than now, but we had a lot of expenses. And there were times when we'd have just enough to pay the bills, but there was something we really wanted to get more a few days later, but we didn't and didn't want to spend the money to pay the light bill when that would deprive us of the ability to get something we really wanted.

But whenever we're in that situation, this actual verse, don't say your neighbor, go and come back and tomorrow give it to you when you have it with you. You owe it now, you've got it, pay it now. And so we'd pay on it in a timely way every time, even though it would make us feel more comfortable to have a little cushion or there was some other thing we wanted to invest in for the school.

We figured existing bills should be paid in a timely way, even though you can probably get an extension or you can, you know, I mean, people can't get the money out of you quickly if you don't pay on time. They might take you to court, but that'd take them a

long time. They might not even do it because it would cost so much to go to court.

So, you know, you might feel like, well, I can get away with not paying this on time, at least for a while. And wisdom is, at least moral wisdom in the Bible, is not something where you do the thing you know you can get away with. You do the thing that's right by your neighbor.

If you owe it to him, you've got it, don't delay it. Don't tell him tomorrow I'll pay you. Pay it off, get your debts paid off.

You'll sleep a lot better. Do not devise evil against your neighbor for he dwells by your side for safety's sake. Do not strive with a man without cause.

If he has done you no harm. So, don't pick on people who've never provoked you. Your neighbor is there to be a friend in need.

When you have need, he's there to help bolster you and protect you from aggression and maybe help you when you're poor. You're there for him that way too. Don't devise evil against him.

You're supposed to have a mutually supportive role. That's what neighbors are for. Verse 31, do not envy the oppressor and choose none of his ways.

For the perverse person is an abomination to the Lord. But his secret, that is God's secret, counsel is with the upright. The secret of the Lord is an interesting concept.

The idea being that everybody has secrets that they tell only to their best friends. There are things that you let the public know. And there are things that you let a larger circle of friends know.

And there are things you would only tell to your most trusted friends. They are the most personal things. The most intimate things.

And you don't share them with just everybody. You save them from the people you think are reliable. People who you think will not pass them along because they're secrets by definition.

There are things that you possibly wouldn't tell anybody. Except you can hardly bear to keep it all to yourself. And so you want to share it with somebody.

But you've got to find somebody trustworthy. In one of the Proverbs it says a faithful person keeps secrets. And God has secrets too.

And he doesn't tell everybody his secrets. He tells them to his friends. Close friends.

Remember Jesus when he was in the upper room with the disciples in John 15? He said,

I'm not going to call you servants anymore but friends. Because a servant doesn't know what his master is doing. But I have told you everything that my father has shown me.

So the idea is you are the guys I'm going to trust with all the stuff that God has shown me. I'm not going to tell everybody this stuff. You're my friends.

Servants are nice too. It's nice to have servants in the household. But they're not privy to all the secrets.

Only good friends are. And it says a perverse person is an abomination of God. But his secret counsel, the word counsel is not actually in the Hebrew.

It's in italics. It's not in the Hebrew. Just as God's secret is with the upright.

If you look at Psalm 25 you find that this expression God's secret was used before Solomon's time by his dad David. In Psalm 25 in verse 14 it says the secret of the Lord is with those who fear him. And he will show them his covenant.

And so those who fear God or as Solomon says the upright are in a special relationship with God. A relationship of confidence where God will trust them with things he wouldn't trust other people with. He will not cast his pearls before swine.

But he has pearls. And he has holy things he won't give them to dogs, but he'll give them to someone. He'll share with godly people things he will not share with everybody.

In Amos chapter 3 and verse 7 it says surely the Lord God does nothing unless he reveals his secret to his servants the prophets. That's always been an intriguing verse to me Amos 3 7. The Lord will do nothing but he reveals his secret to his servants the prophets. There are people who were in the Old Testament referred to as men of God or servants of the Lord.

They were the prophets. A man of God the expression a man of God in the Old Testament meant a man that belongs to God in a special way who is God's spokesman. It was always a reference to a prophet.

We would refer to any godly man as a man of God today. But in the Old Testament the term man of God specifically meant a prophet. And there were men of God that God would share his secrets with and they would share them with the godly.

But God wouldn't do anything of significance apparently without letting his friends know about it first. That's one reason I've always wanted to be open to hearing when people claim to be prophesying. I don't I don't believe that everyone who claims to be prophesying really is.

I don't believe everyone who says the Lord really is speaking for God. I think there's some people who make mistakes and I think there's people who are just plain deceivers

who talk that way. But I do want to hear the real prophets.

I want you know if God's going to do something he's not going to do it without telling his friends and I'd like to be with his friends. I'd like to be in on that insider information because God has secrets. He doesn't share them with everybody.

Now Proverbs 3 verse 33. The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked but he blesses the habitation of the just. Surely he scorns the scornful but gives grace to the humble.

This is rendered a little differently when it's quoted in the New Testament. I'm sure you're familiar with it. It's God resists the proud that gives grace to the humble.

It's actually quoted in James 4 6. It's also quoted in 1 Peter 5 5. Just exactly quoted but not from the Hebrew from the Septuagint. It's in the Septuagint the Greek Old Testament. That it says God resist the proud that gives grace to the humble.

Here in the Hebrew it says he scorns the scornful but gives grace to the humble. So actually verses like this have always struck me as very important verses to bear in mind because it shows that a person who is humble is going to receive aid from God. You receive grace.

Now grace can mean you know a generous treatment from God better than they deserve. Or it can actually mean empowerment and assistance from God. As when Paul prayed for his thorn in the flesh to be removed and God said no my grace is sufficient for you.

He doesn't mean I'm going to forgive you your sins. He said I'm going to uphold you and strengthen you in the midst of your suffering not remove the suffering. Grace is we often think of grace only in its function as God's generous willingness to forgive those who don't deserve forgiveness and it is that but his grace also is seen in his enabling his empowering his upholding his people in time of great need.

So the Bible says let us come boldly to the throne of grace we might find mercy and grace to help in time of need. In Hebrews we find mercy. That's the forgiveness of our sins and we find grace to help us the assistance of grace in our lives when we come boldly to the throne of grace.

So God gives that to those who are humble that is those who don't think highly of themselves those who don't put a lot of confidence in themselves those who aren't looking to themselves or even thinking that it would make any sense to look to themselves for the things necessary but they're looking to God instead. Faith is an act of humility trusting in someone else instead of trusting in yourself but the proud and the scornful God resists them. I can't imagine anything more undesirable than to have God resisting me and I'm trying to do something and I'm hitting a wall and that wall is God

saying sorry I'm going to resist everything you do because I'm your enemy I'm not going to bless what you're doing I'm going to thwart everything you're doing.

Being proud is an offense to God in Proverbs 6 it says there's six things that God hates yea seven are an abomination to him and the first thing listed is a proud look. There are certain things God just cannot stand in a person and top of the list is a proud look that's Proverbs 6 verses 16 and 17. It just seems so inappropriate for a puny creature to be proud when there's such a great God watching and that he's supposed to be measuring his own self a person is supposed to measure his own self by the standard of God not by the standards of other people and anyone who's proud is not considering that standard they're considering a false standard it's just foolishness and I guess I even when I was first a teenager in the ministry I remember thinking that you know being proud is a scary thing to do because God resists the proud.

I've always felt like I wished I was more humble than I am because God will give more grace and I'm not very humble. Sometimes people introduce me like in my own basis when they introduce me to the new school from the new students and they say this is the you know the humble you know servant of God or something like that I think where'd they get that I know myself better than that I know I hope I'm not pretending I hope I'm not pretending to be humble and fooling people because I'm not very humble but it is my desire to be humble I mean the thing about being humble there's a lot of people pray that God will make them humble but honestly that's not God's first preference it's always humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and he will lift you up you humble yourself God doesn't humble you unless it's that great pain I mean God does humble people but that's as a last resort they should have humbled themselves you got two choices you can humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and he'll lift you up or you can not humble yourself and let him humble you which usually means humiliate you. When God humbles you it's rather rough because he's got to knock the pride out of you and that it can be rough treatment from God so humble means to lower to put yourself lower Paul says in Romans 12 10 that we should in honor prefer one another put yourself in the lower position of the other person I mean the other person's low above you in your in your estimation or at least if not the way you really honestly estimate them you might really know that they're not as good as you in some area but but you're going to you're going to consider them at least as important or more important than you and and defer to them that's lowering yourself in Philippians chapter 2 Paul says let everyone esteem the other better than himself place yourself lower and that's in the context where Paul says let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus he existed in the form of God and he lowered himself he emptied himself and took on the low position that's the mind of Christ that we're supposed to have in us so to humble oneself just means to reduce yourself in your own estimation and if you can't quite convince yourself that you're really worse than others and maybe you're not and maybe you shouldn't think you are after all you're not supposed to be unrealistic humility really is realism but it's not always realistic

to say I'm really a lot worse than this person over here because this person might actually be as bad as I am or worse and good chance they are but I don't know that to be true but I know myself I know my flaws and therefore I look at the other person and give them the benefit of the doubt I don't know them to be as bad as me they may be but that's not for me to judge I'm here to judge myself in Romans chapter 12 and verse 3 Paul said for I say through the grace given to me to everyone who is among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think but to think soberly Romans 12 3 don't think of yourself more highly than you should but rather think soberly what's he saying if you think too highly of yourself you're not sober and by sober he doesn't mean the opposite of drunk he just means like a person who isn't sober but like a person who's drunk you're kind of you're seeing reality out of focus you got blurred vision you know your your judgment is impaired when you're not sober being sober means to have unimpaired judgment and so he says don't think too highly of yourself because that's the opposite of thinking soberly if your judgment is not impaired you'll know not to think too highly of yourself and if you do think too highly of yourself it's the most inappropriate apparently the most inappropriate attitude that a human being can have because in in the sight of God everybody's so small that anyone who thinks otherwise about themselves is just it laughable it's ludicrous and offensive to God because it means that they're not thinking of God or they may be thinking of him but but thinking of him too low so they're not particularly seeing themselves as his inferior anyone who's in touch with reality knows how inferior they are to God and that's that's the basis for humility once in a while you find somebody who doesn't pay attention to God's superiority and as a result they they're proud of themselves I think of that passage in in Psalm 50 I have to say I don't remember what the verse number is but I believe it's in Psalm 50 God says to he reviews because as you thought that I was all together such a one as you imagine people thinking that being able to even consider that that God is just all together like us maybe that's not the song I'm not seeing it there but I thought it was in Psalm 50 anyway doesn't matter where it is God said it somewhere and was it 50 21 thank you thank you Psalm 50 21 these things that you have done and I kept silent you thought I was all together like you God says but I will reprove you reprove you and set them in order before your eyes anyway since we live our lives with the consciousness of God and God is infinitely superior that should automatically cause us to dread thinking that we're anything Paul said if anyone thinks he is anything when he is nothing he deceives himself don't let anyone think more highly of himself than he should but think soberly esteem others better than yourself so that's what the Bible says about humility and and it says that God gives grace to those who are humble now there are those of course and I'm thinking of those of the Calvinist persuasion who would say that there are no humble people until they receive grace that God has to graciously not only choose but regenerate you and and give you grace and then you can humble yourself then you can repent then you can believe but before that happens you're so totally depraved that there's no way you'd humble yourself but the Bible always makes it the opposite I'm not really sure how a person can can hold to a theology that is so much the reverse of what

the Bible says in every place in every place it's if you believe you'll have life if you humble yourself you'll have grace it's not if God gives you grace you'll humble yourself if if you have life then you'll believe it never says that it's never stated in the Bible but it's always stated if you do this then God will respond in this way and and one of those is that if you're humble God will give you grace and there are humble people even non-christians there are humble non-christians now and many people say no no they can't be any because they're not submitted to God they're elevating themselves above God well they don't know about God but if they are truly humble God will give them grace I don't know if that means they'll be saved but God will have favor toward them God prefers humility in people it's a beautiful thing to him whereas arrogance and pride and scornfulness is offensive to him and he scorns the proud says the wise shall inherit glory proverbs 335 but shame shall be the legacy of fools a wise man and others will be honored the memory of him will be honored but the legacy of fools is shame man who chooses a path of foolishness might enjoy himself for a while but he'll be remembered with he'll be remembered shamefully people will not think highly of him in retrospect and and even in his lifetime he may just be viewed as a jerk and have nothing but shame to show for his choices so that's how chapter three goes we're going to stop there