

Wisdom For Righteousness

Printed Text • Proverbs 3:1-12

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: IDENTIFY God's principles for living purposeful lives; TRUST that God's wisdom reveals purpose and meaning of life; and SEEK God's wisdom when making choices in daily life.

In Focus

"We can do this together," Greg offered. Robbie didn't know how to respond. He was disappointed that one of his business associates launched a side business without consulting him. Not to mention, Greg started a business Robbie didn't believe in. "We can do this on the side. What do you say?" Greg asked, breaking into Robbie's train of thought.

"First, let me say "congratulations." But I won't be joining you. My family started this business, and this is where I'm supposed to be."

"Yeah, our bills are paid, but we could be rolling in dough. Don't you want to never worry about money again?" While the answer was an affirmative, Robbie knew going into the business of PayDay loans, just to make money, was the wrong thing to do. As far as he was concerned, PayDay loans were legal loan-sharking designed to trap people in financial slavery while keeping banks out of the community. One owner of a PayDay business Robbie knew was living in a mansion and driving luxury cars before being charged with fraud and embezzlement. Robbie knew it was his conviction to stay put.

"Yes, I know I could live more comfortably, but I believe the wise thing to do is keep working at my family's business. My business is meant to bless our community by building it up—not to curse it by destroying it. This business will be around long after those PayDay businesses shut down," Robbie said.

Today's lesson teaches that wisdom protects, preserves, and provides. What is the most insightful piece of wisdom you have ever heard?

Keep in Mind

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Depart (Proverbs 3:7) cuwr (Heb.) — Avoid, shun

B. Firstfruits (v. 9) re'shiyth (Heb.) — Beginning, best, chief

Say It Correctly

Chronicles. KRO-ni-kels

Septuagint. sep-TOO-a-jint

Torah. TO-ra

KJV

Proverbs 3:1 My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments:

2 For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.

3 Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:

4 So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.

5 Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

7 Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil.

8 It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.

9 Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase:

10 So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.

11 My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction:

12 For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.

NLT

Proverbs 3:1 My child, never forget the things I have taught you. Store my commands in your heart.

2 If you do this, you will live many years, and your life will be satisfying.

3 Never let loyalty and kindness leave you! Tie them around your neck as a reminder. Write them deep within your heart.

4 Then you will find favor with both God and people, and you will earn a good reputation.

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.

6 Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.

7 Don't be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

8 Then you will have healing for your body and strength for your bones.

9 Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce.

10 Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with good wine.

11 My child, don't reject the Lord's discipline, and don't be upset when he corrects you.

12 For the Lord corrects those he loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights.

The People, Places, and Times

Solomon. He is the author of the majority of the book of Proverbs and the son of King David of Israel by Bathsheba. As David's life was full of turmoil and darkness (though with many triumphs and blessings), he wanted a different life for his sons. His hope for a calmer life began with naming the child; Solomon's name means the peaceful one.

Solomon's life was much more peaceful and affluent than his father's life. Perhaps that can be attributed to the way Solomon lived. When God gave him a choice, Solomon chose wisdom over riches (1 Kings 3:4–9), and was known as the wisest man ever to live.

Like his father, Solomon chronicled his life through his writings—David through the book of Psalms, and Solomon through Song of Songs, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. In Proverbs 3, Solomon is persuading his own son on the benefits of living wisely.

Proverbs. A proverb can be defined as a brief and to-the-point saying that expresses a basic truth or practical precept. Teaching by proverbs was an ancient way of teaching among the Greeks, and it was popularly used because of its plain and simple methodology.

Background

Though many regard the book of Proverbs as a collection of wise sayings from primarily King Solomon, we would do well to regard the Holy Spirit as the ultimate source. The proverbs are just as timely to be practiced today as when they were first given.

The first chapters of Proverbs are looked upon as a preface—an introduction that explains the book's scope, intention, and background. In most Bibles, Proverbs 1 is labeled as "The Purpose of Proverbs," and chapter two is considered as an invitation to the benefits of wisdom. Chapter three outlines the benefits of wisdom when they are applied because of one's trust in God.

At-A-Glance

1. Three Regards (Ecclesiastics 3:1-6)
2. Three Exhaltations (vv. 7–12)

In Depth

1. Three Regards (Proverbs 3:1–6)

King Solomon advises his son with three regards. The first—to have a continual regard for God's precepts—can be found in verses 1 and 2. Verse 1 reads, "My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments." Solomon admonished his son to do more than memorize the Scriptures. Knowing that God's Word can be forgotten as quickly as it is memorized, Solomon encouraged his son to keep God's commandments in his heart. While the mind records words, the heart paints pictures with detail and emotions, and gives purpose and inspiration to mere words. There is an often quoted adage, "People will forget what you said, they will forget what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel." It is true that the heart retains what the mind forgets.

The second concern that Solomon encouraged his son to keep was a regard for God's promises, as found in verse 3. "Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart." Solomon made sure to let his son know that life wouldn't always be rosy. He encouraged his son to depend on God's promises and faithfulness during difficult times. He urged him to wear God's promises and faithfulness as one wears a treasured necklace,

never meant to be removed by its owner. Solomon taught that his son must also have a continual regard for God's providence. Verse 5 reads, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding." Though Solomon was wise and rich and had many forms of success, he taught that none of these things would have been possible without God. So Solomon encouraged his son to seek God's will, direction, and provision for his life through prayer.

Just as David desired a more peaceful life for his son Solomon, Solomon wanted the same for his own son. Solomon knew that if his son kept a persistent and continual regard for God's precepts, promises, and provision, he would lead a life of unspeakable advantages.

2. Three Exhortations (vv. 7–12)

Solomon was an exhorter, one who inspired others to action through encouragement. In verses 7 through 12, he gave his son three exhortations, each enforced with a good reason. The first can be found in verse 7, "Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil." To fear the Lord is to live humbly and dutifully before Him. Some people who consider themselves as wise are self-reliant, prideful, conceited, and arrogant. It is impossible to fear the Lord and be wise in your own eyes. In verse 8, Solomon cited the advantage of fearing the Lord. It is good health and strength of the body, or "health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones."

"Honour the LORD with thy substance and with the firstfruits of all thine increase," is the second exhortation, and is found in verse 9. Solomon lived in luxury but recognized that it was poor substance if he had not honored the Lord with it. Solomon was known for dedicating his belongings to the Lord, and he encouraged his son to do the same. The blessing of giving back to the Lord what He gives us is "increase," as indicated in verse 9.

Verse 11 contains the third exhortation, wherein Solomon advises his son not to disregard God's correction. Solomon knew that hating, ignoring, or hardening oneself, while under affliction, prolongs it. While being corrected by God is hard, it is necessary. Solomon taught his son that God's correction is not vindictive or for punishment. It is for grooming and producing, and is done out of love. The advantage of being receptive to God's correction includes sharing a close, delightful, and loving relationship with God.

Search the Scriptures

1. What are the advantages of keeping God's Word in the heart (Proverbs 3:2, 4)?
2. Whose path is directed (v. 6)?
3. Whom does the Lord correct (v. 12)?

Discuss the Meaning

Read verses 11 and 12 and consider this: If God gives to those who give back to Him, then why are so many tithing Christians financially struggling?

Liberating Lesson

The cares of life are choking the strength out of families. Financial challenges, underemployment, depression, and addictions are just a few of the things that pull parents

away from their families. Today, many parents are too worried, too busy, and too overwhelmed to take time with their children. As a result, we find many children sexting, murdering, failing school, doing drugs, and having babies. In Proverbs 3, we find Solomon—a busy king with 700 wives and 300 concubines—making time to teach his son how to live. How can the Black church as a spiritual community empower parents to become active participants in their children’s lives, in spite of life’s challenges?

Application for Activation

If it is not us personally, then we all know people who are struggling to raise their children. Try your best not to judge yourself or them as bad parents, and commit to do better yourself, or to help them do better. Pray for direction, and ask God for help. Do something productive this week: find a counselor, attend a parenting support group, talk with your pastor or other godly parents, get active in your child’s school, and talk to your child. With God, it is possible to restore and resurrect parent-child relationships.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Proverbs 3:1–12

1 My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments:

The writer of Proverbs begins the chapter with the affectionate and familial language of endearment, “my son.” He exhorts his “son” and, by implication, the reader, not to forget his “law” (Hebrew torah, to-RAW) or the teachings and commandments that are to follow. To “forget” (Hebrew sakach, shaw-KAKH) does not merely refer to the natural slippage of memory that can result from drinking alcohol as in 31:7. Here, “forget” refers to willful, deliberate neglect and diversion of attention (cf. 2:17). The author of Hosea conveys this latter sense more clearly in Hosea 4:6 where God threatens to “forget” Israel’s sons because of their sins. The deliberateness in Proverbs 3:1 is also present in the word “keep” or, literally, “retain” (Hebrew natsar, naw-TSAR). The word occurs in Proverbs about 25 times. “Keep” is more than mere rote memory or

passive retention. The father (teacher) states the reason and reward of obedience in 3:2. Obedience will bring a long and peaceful life. Just like there is a price to pay when we forget important things, there is a reward for obedience and remembering to do the right things. Although this passage applies to the Scripture as we now have it, the law and commandments to which the writer alludes are those that immediately follow, from verse 3 onward. The admonition, “let thine heart keep my commandments,” implies, of course, spiritual obedience—an obedience which arises from the inward principles of the heart being in harmony with the spirit of the Ten Commandments—but it implies, further, external conformity to their requirements: we are to “observe to do” them (Deuteronomy 8:1).

2 For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.

The expression, “length of days” (Heb. ‘orek yowm, o-REK yowm), literally means “extension of days” and signifies the prolonging of life; its duration to the appointed limit. It occurs again in verse 16 and in Job 12:12 and Psalm 21:4. It is important to note that “length of days” is represented as a blessing in the Old Testament, depending, however, as in these verses present, on the fulfillment of certain conditions. Thus in the fifth commandment, God added a long life to the honoring of parents (Exodus 20:12), and God promised “length of days” to Solomon at Gibeon, on the condition that he walked in the ways, statutes, and commandments of God (1 Kings 3:14). The Jewish expression “long life” (Heb. shaneh chay, shaw-NEH KHAH-ee), literally means “years of life,” although containing the thought of longevity stated in the previous expression “length of days,” amplifies it. It is life in a qualitative sense—a life worth living, the good life, indicated by “peace” or “shalom” (cf. also v. Proverbs 3:17). The teachings also bring a state of wholesome, peaceful well-being primarily realized in relations among people. In 3:2, peace is not just a matter of inner tranquility or absence of trouble; peace includes material “prosperity” (NIV) or wholesomeness. One could live long without truly living. So the idea of the years of life is that there will be many years in their fullest sense—true happiness and enjoyment. However, we must be careful not to understand “prosperity” only as having money to pay bills, buy food, etc., as a financial enticement to righteousness.

3 Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:

Verse 3 actually shows how far removed Proverbs is from an ethic of external obedience and reward. “Mercy” (Heb. cheçed, KHEH sed) and “truth” (Heb. ‘emeth, EH-meth) are the two basic covenant terms in Israel. Cheçed in this context is essentially fidelity to obligations arising from a relationship, while ‘emeth is essentially that upon which one can rely, that which is stable. However, the exhortation to hold on to mercy and truth is more than an emphasis on trust in God’s fidelity to the covenant. It includes internal character. It is firmness and constancy in keeping and executing one’s promise, hence the NIV translation, “faithfulness.” Obedience is more than lip service or outward show. Instead, it must become an integral part of the disciple—internal character of the heart. The author looks for inner integrity that manifests itself in all interactions with God and people. The command to “bind them about thy neck; write them on the table of thine heart” further indicates that the character of the reader is in view, rather than just his/her behavior. By “binding” and “writing”, the teacher is stressing that the teachings become a part of the disciple’s nature. A disciple is to hold the teachings permanently in

memory, making them an indelible part of his/her character. We require more than being reminded. Writing on the tablet of the heart (cf. Proverbs 7:3; Jeremiah 17:1) signifies permanency (Isaiah 30:8; Jeremiah 31:33b).

4 So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.

The verse states the outcome and provides the final motivation: “favour and good understanding.” The Hebrew word for “understanding” (sekel, SHE-kel), although capable of different meanings, here refers to regard and reputation. As in 2 Chronicles 30:22, it denotes the judgment awarded to anyone, the favorable opinion one has concerning him or her. Both God and humans will approve such a person. To find favor “in the sight of God” is to be acceptable to God and enjoy a sense of His approval. Favor “in the sight of . . . man” is that which others feel toward those whose character can be found blameless. For example, Genesis claims Joseph to have found favor in the sight of his keeper while in prison (Genesis 39:21). In Proverbs 3:4, “good understanding” indicates the way others see us—their perspective or attitude. Although godly people suffer at first where they are not fully known or when among those opposed to God, a truly godly and benevolent character will, in general, be prized wherever it is well known.

5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

There are two commands in verse 5. The first is to trust God with all one’s heart. The word “trust” (Heb. batach, baw-TAKH) carries the force of relying on someone for security; one’s confidence is to be in the Lord and not in human understanding. “Trust” in God does not mean faith as a mental assent to a theological proposition. Trust actively negates any thoughts of passivity or resignation. It connotes a feeling of security and confidence in the fulfillment of expectations. To trust in God is to believe that He can and will do what He has promised and is supposed to do. Realizing that we are, in and of ourselves, incapable of ensuring our own success and happiness, we should trust God and not for a moment doubt His wisdom to discern what is ultimately best for us. The call here is for a trust characterized by total commitment—“with all your heart” (v. 5, NIV) and “in all your ways” (v. 6, NIV). We, like Abraham, must be fully persuaded that He is faithful to fulfill what He has promised (Romans 4:21). From this conviction, we are to commit all our concerns to Him so that we can be directed, ordered, and overruled as His infinite wisdom sees best. “Trust in the LORD” (Hebrew biynah, bee-NAW), means giving up one’s confidence or trust in one’s own understanding exclusively.

The command to trust God “with all your heart” (Proverbs 3:5, NIV) means that the total personality is to be committed to God’s care, although it emphasizes the mind and volition. The prohibitions are against depending on one’s own understanding and against intellectual pride (vv. 5b, 7a). We are to use our understanding, but we must not transfer to it any measure of dependence that should be placed on God alone. These expressions call for absolute obedience and surrender in every realm of life. Relying on one’s own human (natural) understanding, or setting a high value on one’s own wisdom are the opposites of a trusting dependence on God. The commitment of the heart to God means that all the beliefs and decisions of life are to be submitted to God. Every practical decision of life is in view here. Human wisdom is inadequate, but divine wisdom is sufficient for guidance in life.

6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

Verse 6 literally translates as “in all your ways, know Him.” To know God in all our ways means giving constant attention to the divine will and presence. We often consider some things important and some less important; some small and some casual, but we must acknowledge God in all things, even in those that we sometimes consider accidental. When obedient faith is present, the Lord will direct or, literally, “make straight”, the believer’s paths in spite of difficulties and hindrances. James Moffatt paraphrases the verse nicely: “Have the mind of him wherever you may go, and he will clear the road for you” (A New Translation of the Bible). We are to acknowledge God: (1) by referring everything to Him; (2) by praying for and expecting His divine guidance; and (3) by consulting and applying His will as revealed in His Word. This trust and acknowledgment do not exclude or preclude our own individual endeavor. We must think well, consult wisely, act diligently, and trust wholly. The assurance in this verse is that God will direct our lives and enable us to reach our destination.

7 Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.

Verses 7 and 8 are essentially a repetition of verses 5 and 6, where the writer urges the reader to trust in the Lord. Here the author urges us not to take ourselves too seriously, but to reverence the Lord and avoid evil. The admonition is a warning against self-sufficiency, self-conceit, and self-reliance. This verse formulates the principle of relying on God rather than on one’s intellectual resources and wisdom. To be “wise in thine own eyes” is to be in an utterly hopeless situation. According to 26:12, “there is more hope for a fool” than for such a person! Trust in God means giving up confidence in oneself, honoring God with one’s material wealth, and allowing God to become one’s teacher and father. Even when one acquires wisdom, one must hold to humility and not allow confidence in his or her intellect and learning to displace the demands of confidence in God and faith. Here, too, there is a difference between human wisdom and divine wisdom (cf. Isaiah 5:21). There must be a higher source, and Proverbs 3:7b clarifies it: “fear the LORD and shun evil” (NIV).

8 It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.

Compliance with the wisdom of verse 7 is therapeutic: it will bring health to the body and nourishment for the frame. The healing that the fear of the Lord and avoidance of evil bring is first spiritual. The benefit of true wisdom is physical health and vigor. The navel and the bones are symbols for the whole body. Knowledge of God that leads to spiritual well-being has its effects on psychological and physical aspects of human personality. As health to the navel and marrow to the bones represent physical strength, so the fear of the Lord is the spiritual strength of God’s children.

9 Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase:

An important element in a person’s relationship with God is honoring Him with one’s wealth and firstfruits—to give back to God some of one’s wealth as a sacrifice in recognition that God is our source. Many scholars have noted the uniqueness of these verses that command a liturgical (worship, ritual) offering (see Exodus 23:19; Numbers 28:26–27; Deuteronomy 18:4; 26:1–2). The

admonition reminds the faithful of their religious duties to God. “Honour” (Hebrew kabad, kaw-BAD), as in this Scripture, sometimes implies giving gifts or benefits (Numbers 22:37; 24:11; Judges 9:9). Nevertheless, “honour” here also signifies, as usual, showing respect and paying homage. Kidner poignantly states, “To ‘know’ God in our financial ‘ways’ is to see that these honor Him” (Proverbs, 64). The Hebrew word hōwn (hone), here translated as “substance” or literally, wealth, refers to the product of one’s righteous labors (see the Septuagint, LXX). “Firstfruits” refers to topmost, first in its kind, or simply, the best. “Increase”, or abundance, translates the Hebrew word tebûw’âh (teb-oo-AW), which refers to the produce of the earth—one’s own crops and husbandry. The implication of these words is that one must give to the Lord from the entire range of one’s possessions. Our profession of faith in Christ is a mockery unless it affects how we spend our money as well as all other concerns of life. Our possessions ought to be consecrated to God, spent in conscious obedience to His will and used for His glory—as in the sustenance of worship, the support and extension of missions, the relief of the poor, the sick, the needy, the widow and orphan (cf. James 1:27).

10 So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.

The command to give is followed by the promise of blessings in the “barns” (Hebrew ‘ačâm, aw-SAWM) or storehouses and the “presses” for making wine. When one honors God with a portion of one’s increase, he or she will receive material blessings. We can and should trust God with our gifts and for our material needs. These verses show a principle of stewardship rather than a guarantee of material wealth and prosperity. The promise held out to encourage the devotion of one’s wealth to Jehovah’s service, while appearing at first sight as selfish and questionable is in reality a trial of faith. The promise echoes the language of Moses in Deuteronomy 28:1–8, where, among other things, he promises that in return for full obedience to God, Jehovah will command a blessing upon the “storehouses” (v. 8) and industry. The principle is otherwise expressed in Proverbs 11:25 and is exemplified in other passages in the Old Testament (Haggai 1:3–11; 2:15, 19; Malachi 3:10–12), and in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 9:6–8; Philippians 4:14–19).

11 My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction:

The final specific instruction warns the disciple not to rebel against the Lord’s discipline, because it is evidence of His love. Abundant prosperity shall flow from honoring Jehovah, but He sometimes sends affliction and, without this, life would be incomplete. The verb “despise” (Hebrew ma’ac, maw-AS) is “to reject” and “to condemn.” “Chastening” (Heb. muwcar, moo-SAWR) means “correction” not by reproof only (as in Proverbs 6:23; 8:30) but by punishment also (13:24; 22:15). The meaning here is expressed by the Greek word paideia (pahee-DI-ah), and is found in the Septuagint LXX, which is “instruction by punishment,” discipline, or schooling. To “be weary” means to loathe, abhor, feel disgust, or vexation toward someone. So the expression “neither be weary” reinforces the previous phrase “despise not”, and represents a more deeply seated aversion to Jehovah’s plans. The word “correction”, like muwcar in Proverbs 3:11, has a twofold meaning of either punishment or chastening, as in Psalm 73:14; or reproof or rebuke, as in Proverbs 1:23; 5:12; and 15:31. It is here used to mean “chastening” or “punishment.” To loathe the correction of Jehovah is to allow the aversion to estrange us completely from Him. If we are spiritually “weary of his correction”— if we “resent his rebuke” (3:11, NIV)—we ignore our

belief in the truth that “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28, KJV).

12 For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.

The verse provides the motive for submissiveness to God’s corrections—they are the corrections of covenantal love. The writer employs the familial relationship of father and son in order to reconcile us to God’s corrections. God corrects those whom He loves after the same manner as a father corrects the son whom he loves—an idea that is taken from Deuteronomy 8:5. The idea of the paternal relationship of God to humankind is found elsewhere (Jeremiah 31:9; Malachi 2:10) and especially finds expression in the Lord’s Prayer. When we learn the truth of this passage, we shall be drawn to, rather than repelled from, God by His corrections. Proverbs 3:12 finds its parallel in Job 5:17, “Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty.” The gracious end of earthly trials appears also in Hebrews 12:2–6; compare this with Romans 5:3–5 and 2 Corinthians 4:17. One must accept suffering as an act of divine love, not repudiate it and rebel against one’s condition. One must not engage in indignant questioning, scornful rebellion, and proud efforts of stoical (indifference to pain or pleasure) fortitude.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Malachi 4:1-6

TUESDAY

Numbers 15:37-41

WEDNESDAY

Psalms 115:3-11

THURSDAY

2 Corinthians 9:6-12

FRIDAY

Proverbs 3:27-35

SATURDAY

Proverbs 3:13-26

SUNDAY

Proverbs 3:1-12