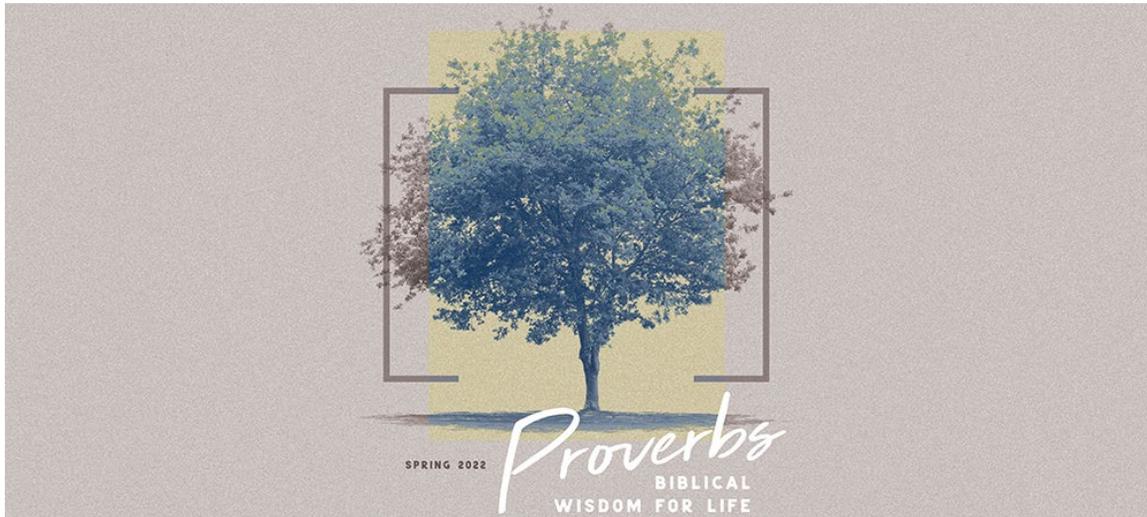


Week 3: Proverbs 3: The Value of Wisdom

Hook



Main Point: Wisdom is more valuable than anything else we could have in this world.

Early in Disney's animated classic *The Lion King*, King Mufasa takes his son, Simba, to the top of Pride Rock to gaze over his kingdom. One phrase stands out in the conversation he has with Simba – never go toward the place covered by shadow. But Simba is impetuous and short-sighted. Deciding to brave the place his father warned him against, he takes the plunge into danger. He barely escapes death – only because of the strength and bravery of his father – showing himself unworthy for the mantle of king. In *The Lion King*, Mufasa offers a valuable piece of advice and wisdom to his son as he develops into the future king, but Simba disregards this wisdom because he wants to forge his own identity by making his own right choices. Because Simba makes this choice, a series of events is set into motion that causes his life to spiral. All because he was unwilling to listen to his father's wisdom.

Q: What are some unwise decisions that you made as a child? What were the consequences?

Q: Did anybody warn you against this action? Why did that person warn you?

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Book

Main Point: Wisdom is more valuable than anything else we could have in this world.

Proverbs 3:1–10 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Trust in the Lord and His wisdom, not your own.

Q: What do love and faithfulness have to do with trusting in the Lord's wisdom?

Q: What promises do these verses make to us?

This chapter can be divided into three sections: (1) 3:1–10: five sets of instruction with a result for each, (2) 3:11–20: contains a hymn in praise of wisdom, (3) 3:21–35: an appeal to walk in wisdom. Each section opens with “my son,” as many proverbs do, but this book is not only written for Solomon’s biological sons. It is also written for all the “children” of Israel and any of us who want to learn from his wisdom. Solomon shared that these teachings would:

- Prolong your life for many years (v. 2)
- Bring you peace and prosperity (v. 2)
- Help you win favor and a good name with man and God (v. 4)
- Make your paths straight (v. 6)
- Bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones (v. 8)
- Give you plenty of food and drink (v. 10)

Remember that these promises are not *guarantees*. They are general principles.¹ In general, if you live by God’s wisdom, you will have peace, prosperity, favor and health. But plenty of people who live by God’s wisdom get sick through no fault of their own. Not everyone who follows Jesus is prosperous, at least financially. And Jesus said that if you follow Him, the world may hate you because of it (John 15:18-20). That doesn’t sound like winning favor with man. Solomon was not guaranteeing health and wealth, as some “prosperity Gospel” preachers do. He was saying that these proverbs are a good way to live. They are not only the right thing to do in God’s eyes, but they will also benefit you.

The well-known and often memorized verses 5–6 are right in the middle of this section, acting as the thesis statement. If we trust in the Lord and lean on His understanding instead of our own, He will make our paths straight. Imagine the benefit of a straight path over one that winds through the wilderness – over hills, through valleys, around

obstacles. A straight path gets you where you're going so much faster!² This doesn't mean that God will take away every obstacle and make things easy and smooth for you, but the general principle applies. If you follow your own wisdom instead of God's, you're more likely to take wrong steps that have negative consequences and throw you off track.

We must realize that sometimes the path may *seem* winding and bumpy to us, but from God's perspective it's actually "straight." It's taking us right where He wants us to go. As pastor R. C. Sproul wrote, "Hindsight, as they say, is always twenty-twenty. When we find ourselves in the place where the Lord wants us, we can often look back and see that the confusing path it took us to get there was actually perfectly straight, and that what seemed like twists and turns at the time were necessary steps along the road. When we feel as if we are wandering, we must remember that if we are trusting in God, He is actually guiding us on His straight path."³

The focus in this passage is on the Lord – following His commands (v. 1), having His heart of love (v. 3), fearing Him (v. 7), and honoring Him with all we have (v. 9). Following God isn't about rules or religious ritual; it's about our hearts, and our hearts have to be "all in" (v. 5; Romans 2:28–29). We are to honor Him with *all* that we are and *all* we have. Our whole lives belong to Him (v. 9; Romans 12:1–2; Colossians 3:17).

Moses told the people to bind God's law on their foreheads and hands (Deuteronomy 6:8), Solomon tells them to write love and faithfulness on the tablet of their hearts (v. 3). "Tablet" refers to the law of Moses, written on two stone tablets by the very finger of God (Exodus 31:18). But in the new covenant, God promised He would write the law on their hearts instead (Jeremiah 31:33). Here, instead of the law written on their hearts, it's love and faithfulness, because God's law *is* the law of love. The law is summed up in two things: love God and love others (Matthew 22:36–40). Jesus said His command is love (John 13:34–35). Paul wrote that none of the religious stuff we do matters if it isn't done in love (v. 3; 1 Corinthians 13:1–3). When we live in steadfast love and faithfulness, we walk in God's wisdom, trusting in His path rather than our own.⁴

Q: Share a time when you trusted in God's wisdom over your own. What was the result?

Q: Give some examples of how following Jesus is the way of love and faithfulness.

Proverbs 3:11–20 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Wisdom is more valuable than gold, silver, or jewels.

Q: Why does God discipline the one He loves?

Q: What are some practical reasons that wisdom is so valuable?

Solomon has already given us some practical good results we get from walking in God's wisdom – straight path, prosperity, health and favor. Here he exploded into a hymn of praise for wisdom, personified as a woman (“she”), just as we saw in chapter 9. This hymn has the same sentiment we saw there – wisdom is worth pursuing with the same passion you would pursue the perfect wife. Wisdom is more precious than all the valuable things of the world: silver, gold precious stones (vv. 14–15).

Solomon even said wisdom “yields better returns” than gold (v. 14, NIV). Wisdom is a solid investment. When we invest in wisdom, we will see great returns in our lives. What kinds of returns? Solomon listed things similar to those listed in the first section: long life, riches, honor, pleasantness and peace. Again, none of these things is guaranteed in this life, but living by God's wisdom, generally speaking, is more likely to lead to these things.

When we read this passage, we can't help but think about the kingdom to come, not only because of the description of peace and life is heavenly, but because Solomon's description of wisdom reminds us of Jesus' description of the kingdom of God. It is more precious than any jewel. Nothing you desire compares with it. It's worth selling everything to attain it (v. 15; Matthew 13:44–46).

One day we will experience the final kingdom, but until then, we can get a taste of it now, whenever we live as kingdom people walking in His wisdom on this earth. Things won't be perfect physically because we live in a fallen world. But we can experience things like supernatural peace (Philippians 4:6–7) and a new abundant life (John 3:1–8; 10:10) in the here and now.

In the last part of this hymn, Solomon said God created this world by His wisdom (vv. 19–20). That means when we walk by God's wisdom, we are living the way He intended us to live. Since He is the Creator of this world and of us, who knows better the way for us to live in this world? It's only logical that God knows best. Knowing that He knows best and knowing how much He loves us are why we can trust in Him and His path for our lives. The ESV Study Bible says, “Just as wisdom is the means by which the Lord founded and established creation (v. 19), so it is the means by which the one who finds it will be sustained (v. 19) and established (vv. 13–18).”⁵

Q: Describe a time when you experienced the fact that wisdom was more valuable to you than physical riches. How did wisdom help you when money couldn't?

Q: What are some of the spiritual riches God has given you?

Proverbs 3:21–35 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Wisdom will lead to action: doing good to others.

Q: Summarize the “do nots” in this passage in one sentence.

Q: How does humility help in the pursuit of wisdom?

Each of these three sections begins with a similar command to “my son” to not forget his father’s teaching (vv. 1–2), to not grow weary of God’s rebuke and discipline (vv. 11–12), and to not lose sight of wisdom and discretion (vv. 21–22). These are reminders of the importance of wisdom and of persevering in the journey to pursuing it. With all the distractions and temptations in this world, it is easy to lose sight of wisdom. But if we stay the course and keep pursuing it, we will not need to fear (vv. 24–26) and our feet will not stumble (vv. 23, 26). Even deeper, it will be life for our souls (v. 22).

In the center is a series of “do not” commands about how not to treat others:

- Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due (vv. 27–28).
- Do not plan evil against your neighbor (v. 29).
- Do not contend with a man for no reason (v. 30).
- Do not envy or follow a man of violence (v. 31).

Solomon has already told us that wisdom is about love and faithfulness. This section shows us love in action. These aren’t just commands, they’re descriptions of how to love your neighbor. Theologian and author of *Exposition of Proverbs* Charles Bridges said these verses “strike at the root of selfishness.”⁶ Each of these principles is about loving others in humility, putting the needs of others ahead of your own, as Christ later exemplified (Philippians 2:1–11).

These “do nots” aren’t specific rules, as we see in the Mosaic law (Exodus–Deuteronomy), but they provide us with general principles – do good and not evil (vv. 27–29) and don’t fight for no reason or be violent at all (vv. 30–31). This is strikingly similar to Paul’s description of how to live in community in Romans 12: “Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.... If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Romans 12:9–21). This passage in Romans also frames loving other as humility or putting others needs before your own (Romans 12:10). This is how Christ loved us –

washing our feet, laying down His life for us – and it's how He commanded us to love others (John 13).

Q: Why is it hard to put the needs of others before your own?

Q: Why is withholding good from someone just as bad as doing evil to them?

Q: How is God calling you to humble yourself and love someone as Christ loved you?

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Took

Main Point: Wisdom is more valuable than anything else we could have in this world.

When we submit ourselves to our heavenly Father's wisdom, we begin to understand the true essence of His design for life. Rather than facing shadowy places full of danger, we understand the great love God has for us and that He has instructed us to live from that place of love. Wisdom comes from the very character of God, and becoming wise is an integral part of the Christian walk. When we walk with the King, we know what He thinks of all kinds of danger and strife. The brave King we follow wants the best for us, which is why He has given us the Proverbs. Shadowy places are not home to those He loves. Rather, our place of belonging is in the light of His kingdom.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Why is wisdom so valuable? What can wisdom do for you that money and power and all the other "valuable" things in this world can't do? How have you seen the benefits of wisdom in your own life?

PRAY: Pray for God to reveal to you how He is calling you to love and serve someone in your life. Is there a difficult person you've been struggling to love? Is there some way you have been selfish and need to learn to love selflessly? Is there a person you need to reach out to? Someone who needs your help? Or just a listening ear and some support? How is God calling you to do good and not evil to those around you? Is there someone you have not been loving as Christ loved you?

ACT: Act on your prayer. Whatever it is God revealed to you in prayer, do it. Whether it's reaching out to someone who is hurting, asking forgiveness of someone you have not loved well, or serving someone in need, go live out your love in action.

Hook, Took & Editing by Hayden Seeley

¹ Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981).

² John H. Walton, Mark Chavalas, and Victor H. Matthew, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000).

³ R. C. Sproul, "Straightening Our Paths" *Ligonier*, February 11, 2015 - <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/straightening-our-paths>

⁴ William Arnot, *Studies in Proverbs: Laws from Heaven for Life on Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1978).

⁵ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

⁶ Charles Bridges, *An Exposition of the Book of Proverbs* (New York, NY: Robert Carter, 1871).