

Faith and Trust

Devotional Reading: Psalm 56

Background Scripture: Proverbs 3:1-12

Today's Scripture: Proverbs 3:1-8

I. One Law

Proverbs 3:1-2

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.

1a. Although the text leaves the speaker unidentified, we assume that a father is instructing his *son* (see Proverbs 4:1). The book of Proverbs presents wisdom from God as a quality that can be passed from generation to generation through teaching (4:3-7).

Frequently in the Old Testament, the “law” refers to that given by God to His people. However, the qualifier *my* indicates that this particular *law* consists of a father’s instruction to his son. The son is told to *forget not* his father’s law because of possible risks that such forgetfulness might incur.

1b. Most modern-day perspectives consider the heart the emotional center of a person. Such views believe this emotional center lacks the capacity for rational guidance or direction. In the Old Testament, however, the *heart* refers to a person’s inner being. Among other aspects, this inner being includes a person’s volition, emotions, and knowledge. The centrality of the heart led the father in Proverbs to warn his son regarding its

safe keeping. The son must be willing and able to receive his father’s exhortations and apply them to his life.

One way that the son could *keep* his father’s *commandments* would be to commit them to memory. The Law of Moses commanded parents to teach their children about God’s law (see Deuteronomy 6:4-9). Parents honor God when they train their children to follow God. Further, children obey God and receive a blessing when they give honor to their parents and follow their commands. Remembrance of the law and commands is the foundation of a life strengthened by God.

2. When a child honors his or her parents, the days of that child “may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee” (Exodus 20:12). The promise of a *long life* stands in contrast to the promise that whoever “pursueth evil pursueth it to . . . death” (Proverbs 11:19). As a child follows and honors his or her parents, that child is entering a life of wisdom. Later, the father describes wisdom as a woman who holds “length of days . . . in her right hand” (3:16). While a long life is not inevitable, a flourishing life begins with seeking wisdom from godly parents.

The Hebrew understanding of peace sometimes does imply an absence of

conflict. However, the Hebrew word for *peace* can also encompass ideas of flourishing, relational harmony, or the completeness of God's work. It is the first two aspects that this father is most concerned about for his son.

II. Two Virtues Proverbs 3:3-4

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.

3a. *Mercy* and *truth* are key words in the Old Testament, especially regarding the attributes of God. *Mercy* frequently refers to God's loyalty and commitment toward His people. God's mercy is rooted in His faithfulness and promises. His mercy seeks redemption and safety for God's people. *Truth* conveys the idea of reliability.

The father's concern is not only his son's behavior; the father also desires to see the son's heart transformed. A transformed heart will result in changed behavior. A life that appears righteous but lacks a rightly ordered heart is full of hypocrisy and sin. The heart's deception will someday be exposed. The father wants his son to do good actions—actions that come from a heart transformed and oriented toward the virtues of mercy and truth.

A heart filled with mercy and truth should be the foundation for the son's behavior. A life seeking God's wisdom results in that life developing mercy and truth that will bear fruit through righteous and wise actions. These attributes are part of God's character, so they should be part of the character of His people.

3b. In biblical times, necklaces were signs of honor or rank. To *bind* something around one's *neck* revealed the importance

and significance of that item to the wearer. The figurative language in this verse highlights the extent that the son should go to develop a life of mercy and truth. The opposite of a life with these virtues would be considered "stiffnecked"—rebellious and disobedient.

The command to *write* mercy and truth *upon the table of the heart* is another example of figurative language. This verse also alludes to Deuteronomy 6:6-8. In those verses, God commanded the people of Israel to internalize His law and apply it to all areas of life. Such virtues are not to be hidden from the world. Instead, a wisdom-filled life will develop these virtues in the heart. Such lives are "declared to be the epistle of Christ" through God's Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:3).

4. To *find favour* in a person means to hold that person in high regard. Even children, when they follow God, can receive favor from other people and God. To have a *good understanding* signifies character and integrity of insight that leads a person to act righteously. This character develops when a person seeks the wisdom of the Lord and lives in obedience to Him.

A life of character will not only be pleasing *in the sight of God*, but other people will also recognize it. The apostle Peter admonished believers to live in a way that would lead unbelievers to glorify God (see 1 Peter 2:12). A good name and good reputation take time to develop. Not only do these things provide a personal benefit, but they are also avenues to honor God and reveal God to other people.

III. One Trust Proverbs 3:5-6

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.

5a. We tend to place trust in things and people other than God. At best, this misplaced trust can lead to futility. At worst, however, it can lead to destruction. Misplaced trust does not lead to any lasting and eternal wisdom.

However, the father's efforts were intended to result in his son's developing *trust in the Lord*. The Lord is worthy to be trusted because He is the source of salvation. When people trust the Lord, they experience blessing from Him.

To display trust *with all thine heart* implies a total commitment. This kind of trust is an all-encompassing act; it requires the totality of a person's being, beginning with one's inner being.

5b. The book of Proverbs contains numerous warnings against pride. The reminder to *lean not unto thine understanding* is another warning in that regard. Only foolish people trust themselves more than the wisdom of the Lord. Their downfall is inevitable. When people consider themselves to be wise in the eyes of the world, their so-called wisdom amounts to foolishness in the eyes of God.

6. To *acknowledge* God means to know Him and give Him proper recognition for His activity in a person's life. It involves intimate knowledge of God and a willingness to submit to His will. When people submit to God, they do not forge ahead as though God does not exist. Instead, they recognize God's power and presence.

IV. Two Actions Proverbs 3:7-8

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.

7a. The opposite of trusting in and submitting to God is to consider one's wisdom as the final say. To be *wise in*

thine own eyes is to be sure that one's own wisdom is superior and ultimate. When people depend on their own wisdom and do what seems right to them, they are no better than fools.

God is the source of wisdom and desires to give His people wisdom through His Spirit. As a result, God's people should avoid lives of pride and arrogance and seek out wisdom from God.

7b. To *fear the Lord* involves having an attitude of reverence, awe, wonder, faith, and trust in the Lord. It is impossible to be wise in one's own eyes and, simultaneously, fear the Lord. Instead, an attitude of humility is required. Those who fear the Lord come to have true wisdom, which leads to an avoidance of evil. To *depart from evil* involves an attitude of repentance—turning away from sin and turning to God in faith and obedience.

8. This verse begins with a Hebrew idiom that provides difficulty to translators. The translation of *navel* is accurate to the Hebrew text. However, the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation) has the word for *body* instead. Perhaps the Hebrew text is an example of a literary practice of using a part of the whole to represent the whole. In this case, the *health* of the *navel* is representative of the health of the entire body.

A life of humility, fear of the Lord, and obedience to Him results in the complete wholeness of a person. The son is promised health and vitality when he follows his father's teachings. We know, however, that a person's status in life does not correlate to the quality of a person's heart. While people may experience wholeness and health in part while on earth, Scripture promises a time in the future when "God shall wipe away all tears . . . and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain" (Revelation 21:4).

Involvement Learning

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Into the Lesson

Write your favorite “word of wisdom” or proverb (example: “Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth”).

Most proverbs help us make good decisions and point us to having positive relationships. Today, as we study the proverbs of Scripture, consider how we can apply their wisdom to our lives of faith and trust in God.

Into the Word

Read Proverbs 3:1-2. Write down at least two commands from the Scripture and consider how to apply memory strategies to remember the commands.

Read Psalm 15:1-3; Matthew 9:12-13; and 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. How do these texts relate to Proverbs 3:3-4?

Read Psalm 18:2; Proverbs 3:5-6; Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 11:33; Ephesians 1:11-12; Hebrews 13:8; and James 1:17. Based on these texts, complete the following sentence:

We can trust the Lord because He is . . .

Read Proverbs 3:7-8. What does “fear the Lord” mean?

How is “fear the Lord” foundational for today’s Scripture?

Key Verse

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart;
and lean not unto thine own understanding.
—Proverbs 3:5

Into Life

Identify an area of your life that you can change by applying one of the principles from Proverbs and write it in the space below.

Thought to Remember

God’s children seek the wisdom of their heavenly Father.