Proverbs 14-16 • Staying on the Right Path

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Life Bible Ministry

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Proverbs chapter 14 verse one, it says,

"1 The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down." (ESV)

Now earlier in the Proverbs we saw that wisdom was personified as a woman. And for this reason, I think the Revised Standard Version perhaps has the best rendering of this particular verse. Let me put it up on the screen for you so we can see it together. The RSV goes like this,

Proverbs 14:1 RSV
Wisdom builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down.

I like that rendering, frankly. I don't know of anybody who actually carries around an RSV. I won't make you put up your hand if you do. Not that that would be a bad thing.

I remember when I was probably in the fifth grade, and they were giving out Bibles in the church I attended. I think my very first Bible that I received was a Revised Standard Version. And I still have it somewhere in the house. It's red, I mean all red.

But anyway, I like this verse because it basically means regardless of the feminine sort of connotation that is given here to wisdom, the verse isn't really about women. It's about wisdom and it's about foolishness and it's how it can affect a person's home. And I think that's the important thing. The point here is that wisdom, or the application of wisdom, which is basically walking out God's Word you guys. Don't get weirded out when we say, we talk about wisdom, we're talking about living out, walking out the Word.

You hear the Word of God in the scripture, you read it, and you decide whether you're going to walk it out. Wisdom, as it walks it out, can build your home. Can build it up in strength. But foolishness, which is the application of worldly attitudes which are really all about the me centered ideologies and thoughts. Those are the kind of things that are going to tear down a home.

Verse two,

"2 Whoever walks in uprightness fears the Lord, but he who is devious in his ways despises him.

3 By the mouth of a fool comes a rod for his back, but the lips of the wise will preserve them." (ESV)

Verse four,

"4 Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.

5 A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness breathes out lies.

6 A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain, but knowledge is easy for a man of understanding." (ESV)

I like this next Psalm, or Proverb rather, too. Verse seven says,

"7 Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge." (ESV)

Now this is another one of those proverbs that is a kind of encouragement to take inventory of the kind of people who are speaking into your life and influencing you the most. And that's something that we see repeatedly over the course of the Proverbs. It's kind of that... But it's the idea that if there isn't anyone in your life that's encouraging you in godliness... If there isn't someone who is challenging you, that's the better word. Not just encouraging you challenging you in godliness, you're probably not going to grow in your walk with the Lord.

It's kind of like that idea of sports. When our youngest son, Tim, was going through high school, he longed for someone to play basketball with who was better than him. He didn't really like playing with people who had a lesser ability than his own because they didn't challenge him. He never improved

when he played with those kinds of people. He wanted to always look for guys that were better than he was. Because he knew that when he got done, he was going to be a better basketball player.

And really the same is true as it relates to godliness and our walk with the Lord. I'm not saying necessarily that godliness is purely the result of the kind of people we hang with, but it has a huge impact on our lives when you see an example of godliness in someone's life. When you see an example that is something you can look up to and be encouraged by you're going to, you're going to be motivated to kind of have a greater expression of your own walk with the Lord that matches what you're seeing.

And I think this is a very important thing. It says, *"leave the presence of the fool,"* that's what the verse says. Don't hang around the person who is just going to be walking in the foolish attitudes of worldliness and that sort of thing. Because you're not going to find any knowledge. You're not going to find anything that's going to cause you to grow.

I have people say to me from time to time, Pastor Paul, I struggle when I go to work because I'm around ungodly people all day long. And they're constantly talking about their fleshly pursuits and their using all kinds of obscene language. And it just really tears me down. And I get that. I do. And it's something you should probably commit to prayer before the Lord.

The bottom line the Apostle Paul tells us we can't leave the world in which we live. That's just, that's not practical. It's not realistic. You and I can't just say, okay, I don't want to be around those people anymore. You'd have to go live on a mountain, I suppose, somewhere. Out of, off the grid, as they say.

But that's not going to do, because you and I have a calling to share our faith and to be a witness for Christ in the world. By the same token, this passage is talking about influence. Okay? It's not just talking about people who are maybe grieving you because of their language, and their stories, and their attitudes. We're talking here about influence and that's what this verse is really getting at. Be careful, it says.

Verse eight,

"8 The wisdom of the prudent (And remember the prudent is the man who looks down the road to see how his actions and words are going to play out.) *is to discern his way, but the folly of fools is deceiving."* (ESV)

Verse nine,

"9 Fools mock at the guilt offering, (Which was an element of the sacrificial offering made by the Jews.) *but the upright enjoy acceptance."* (ESV) (meaning acceptance by God)

Verse 10. This is an interesting proverb.

"10 The heart knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy." (ESV)

You maybe have even heard the first part of this proverb. Because I hear it even in places where you wouldn't expect to hear any kind of Bible verses quoted. *"The heart knows its own bitterness,..."* And essentially what this proverb is doing is it's kind of warning you and I against a casual empathy that might come up to, or that might cause us to respond to someone going through a difficult time by saying, I know how you feel.

Well, the fact is you may have gone through something similar to what they've gone through but you don't necessarily know how they feel. Their actual feelings could be very different from your own. Because we bring different sorts of things into our life experiences and our own situations. Whether painful or joyful are very personal, very personal. And it's, you can share about what you've gone through and how you, made you feel. And maybe even how the Lord brought you through it, But to necessarily kind of just say, well, I know exactly what you're feeling, may not in fact be the case.

Verse 11, it says,

"11 The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish." (ESV)

Verse 12, important proverb here.

"12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of *death."* (ESV) (correction- to death)

Wow. You know, it talks about *"There is a way,..."* When the Proverbs refer to the way of a person, it means the path they're walking. So there's a path that you could walk on that you think is absolutely correct. This proverb says that "a man's way may seem completely right and in his heart in keeping with the truth. But in the end he discovers it is a path of destruction, or a path of death."

And I'm kind of reminded of a verse in the Gospel of John where Jesus speaks of the persecution that would come upon His followers. And He says this. Look at John 6. I'll put it on the screen. John 16:2. It says,

John 16:2 (ESV)
They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he's offering service to God.

Here's why I bring up this passage. There is a way that seems right to a man but in the end, it leads to death, he says. Jesus is telling His disciples there are going to be people who are going to persecute you, and they're going to believe in their heart they are doing the right thing. In fact, they're going to believe they're not only doing the right thing, they're offering a service to God.

I believe that the Apostle Paul before he was the Apostle Paul, believed he was serving the Lord by persecuting Christians putting them out of the synagogue. Even giving his consent to their death and arrest and so forth. He believed it with all of his heart. The proverb says that is a very common thing. And the idea here is that evil is very deceptive.

We forget something. Even though the Bible tells us, we forget that evil masquerades as good. It looks good! It can look very good, and somebody can be very convinced that the path they're on...I believe what Paul was doing to the church when he was Saul of Tarsus was actually evil. He didn't think so. He didn't think it was evil. He thought he was serving the Lord. How do you keep from getting sucked into something like that?

We all know people that have been deceived. We also know that they're just as genuinely convinced that they're in the right as you and I. So how do we know that we're in the right? How do you and I know that we're on the right path? How do you and I know that we're not on the path to death when in fact we are convinced in our hearts and minds that we are on the right path. How do we know?

Well, I think that there are certain...There's certain wisdom that God has given us that we can see as several kind of pointers or barometers that help us to understand when we may be on the wrong path, or how to stay on the right path as an example. I want to lay out for you some ways here. Let me put these on the screen so that you can see them together. We'll call this "Seven Ways to be Sure." Okay? Seven ways that you can be sure that you're on the right path.

7 ways to be sure…

1. Be wise in the whole counsel of God’s Word

Number one. Be wise in the whole counsel of God’s Word. I find that one of the key mistakes that people make regarding their belief in certain things of scripture is that they are focusing on a passage to the exclusion of the rest of the Bible. And because they have this myopic view of one particular verse, or one particular idea that may be even touched on in several verses, that idea is not given balance by the rest of the counsel of God's Word. And therefore there's an imbalance in their understanding related to the Word of God. I see this all the time.

And I've experienced it in my own life. And the Lord has had to bring correction to say, well, yeah, but what about? And then when you begin to see that there's a greater and more enlarged and complete dynamic to the revelation of God's Word, you are balanced in your understanding. And you are, there's a safety factor.

One of the things I love about teaching through the entire Bible, Genesis to Revelation, is there's a built in safety factor involved in that. If we did nothing in this church but talk about the gifts of the Spirit from January through December, that's all we ever talked about we'd probably be a mile wide and an inch deep.

If we talked about another topic and just to the exclusion of all else that's not balanced. And it's so easy if you're not taking the whole counsel of God’s Word to be imbalanced. It's very, very easy. So, it's just so important that we are wise in the whole counsel of God's Word. And we know what the scripture has to say because I believe the scripture not only brings balance, it brings safety.

Number two. This is an important thing, too, that we often see in people who have gotten off the wrong, right path.

7 ways to be sure…

1. Be wise in the whole counsel of God’s Word
2. Avoid the views of any person who claims unique insight

Avoid the views of any person who claims unique insight. Be very careful of any individual who comes along and says, I've got the inside track and nobody else does. I've got a unique revelation from God. I heard; you didn't. You got to

come to my house. You got to come to my Bible study. You got to come to my church or you're not going to know the truth. Listen, that's how cults get started.

You might say, well now wait a minute. Isn't the Apostle Paul one of those kinds of men who had a unique insight. No, he's not. The Apostle Paul was given insight into the revelations of the things of God. But Paul was in complete agreement with Peter, and James, and John, and the other Apostles. And he makes a mention of that, in fact, in one of his letters.

He says there was a point in his ministry where he went to the brothers in humility and laid before them the revelation God had given him for fear that maybe he had been running his race in vain. And he says, I laid it out before them. And they were in agreement. Paul was not a unique person in that sense.

So, Christianity is not based upon the elements of one human being saying, I've got it and you don't. You need to come to my study, or come to my way of thinking, or whatever.

7 ways to be sure…

1. Be wise in the whole counsel of God's Word
2. Avoid the views of any person who claims unique insight
3. Avoid the belief that only the Bible translation is true

Number three. Avoid the belief that only one Bible translation is true. We are so blessed in our country today to have a multiplicity of Bible translations. And they're fantastic. And I have a Bible program on my computer that I use for studying. I have about somewhere between like five to eight Bible translations open all the time sitting side by side so that I can look at them. And yeah, there are differences in wording between the translations but the meaning is the same. The meaning is the same.

Now, if I were to pull up a single translation like the New World Translation that the Jehovah's Witnesses say is the only Bible translation and there's no other, I'm going to find that it has a completely different message. And, those people are kept in that group by the belief that they've got the only one true Bible translation.

I'll never forget a number of years ago, back when we were in Washington, Sue and I. I had some J dubs come to my door. And I was in Bible college at the time. And I'd been given, in one of my classes, a list of all of the English Bible translations that had ever been translated in English up to the present time. And

it was a long list on a piece of paper, and the New World Translation was on that list.

And I'm talking to these people at the door, and I said let me go grab something. And I went and got this thing, and I showed it to them. And I actually highlighted it in yellow and I showed them. And I said this is a list of all of the English translations of the Bible that have ever been produced. That's just English. That says nothing about all the other languages.

But I said, each one of these Bible translations represents a translating committee of individuals who had dedicated and devoted their lives to understanding the original languages of Hebrew and Greek. And then that smattering of Aramaic that's actually in the New Testament as well. And I said, these people are scholars. Okay? And I had them look at that list. I said, these are people who devoted their lives to the scholarly understanding of these original languages.

Now you're going to stand there in my doorway and tell me this one that's highlighted, is the only one that got it right? And they both looked at me and said, that's what we believe. Well of course that's what they had to say. But I wanted them to see how ridiculous that claim is. And how that fuels the fire of just this radical kind of an understanding that we've got it, and you don't. And that just feeds our pride you guys, and you know that, right? That's all about pride: We know it. We know the truth. You don't.

I am so blessed by the fact that we have so many Bible translations to read from. I had a person write me just yesterday who said that she just bought a new Bible and the particular translation. And she was just all upset about whether she had gotten the right one. And she was all kind of scared that, she said, I don't want to have a Bible that's got stuff left out, or things that people are trying to keep us from knowing.

And I knew where that fear comes from. That's not from God, first of all, and it's from some radical people who believe that there is only one translation, and if you're not reading it, you're not getting the Word of God. So I took the time to explain that that's just not the case, I mean, unless you're looking at some cult Bible. If you're looking at a genuine, acceptable, modern translation of the Bible, you're going to do just fine. You're going to do just fine. So, we got to be careful about those sorts of things.

Number four. I think an important way to be sure that you're walking on the right path is keep praying for clarity.

7 ways to be sure…

1. Be wise in the whole counsel of God’s Word
2. Avoid the views of any person who claims unique insight
3. Avoid the belief that only the Bible translation is true
4. Keep praying for clarity

And what that means is, if you pray, I believe the Lord's going to lead you. I believe the Lord is going to make things clear.

I've seen it happen over and over and over again with people where they're confused about something or they have a lack of clarity on something and they lay it before the Lord in prayer: "God I need wisdom, I need understanding." And He answers that prayer. And we shouldn't be amazed at that. God wants you to know His truth. And it's not something that man has packaged. It's something God gives and wants to convey. So, keep praying. Keep praying.

And then the next one goes with it. Be humble.

7 ways to be sure…

1. Be wise in the whole counsel of God’s Word
2. Avoid the views of any person who claims unique insight
3. Avoid the belief that only the Bible translation is true
4. Keep praying for clarity
5. Be humble

Don't become prideful because you're going to be a target for the enemy if you allow pride to make you think that somehow you found the one true way that nobody else has. And again, that only feeds the pride of man. Stay humble.

Six, avoid man-made religion and tradition.

7 ways to be sure…

1. Be wise in the whole counsel of God’s Word
2. Avoid the views of any person who claims unique insight
3. Avoid the belief that only the Bible translation is true
4. Keep praying for clarity
5. Be humble
6. Avoid man-made religion and tradition

When you look at Christendom as a whole, there is a ton of stuff that we do that is not in the Bible. A ton. And people get all caught up in it. And it becomes for them truth. And it has nothing to do with truth. It has to do with tradition. Or it has to do with man-made religion.

When I say man-made religion, I mean things that we do, or Christians do, that are frankly just not in the Word of God. And I don't want to offend anyone, but if you want a good example, just look deeply into Roman Catholicism. There's a boatload of stuff in there that is nowhere in the Word of God. It's just not there. You cannot find in the Word of God where you got to confess your sins to a priest. You can't find it. And yet it's a staple of Roman Catholicism.

And that's just one single example. And I'm not criticizing, I'm just making a point and stating a fact that if that's going to be the center of what your faith is going to rest on, it's in a very shaky foundation because it's not resting in the Word of God. It's resting in the man-made elements of religion that we've imposed upon scripture. We just have to be very careful. Stick to the Word. Stick to the Bible and don't run off on tangents or allow religious ideas that man has come up with to dominate your path.

And then finally number seven is, just have faith that God's going to lead you into truth.

7 ways to be sure…

1. Be wise in the whole counsel of God's Word
2. Avoid the views of any person who claims unique insight
3. Avoid the belief that only the Bible translation is true
4. Keep praying for clarity
5. Be humble
6. Avoid man-made religion and tradition
7. Have faith that God will lead you into truth

He said He would. He said He would lead you into all truth. That's the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will lead you into all truth. So, have faith that He's going to do that. As you pray, trust. Trust that He is going to do that.

So, seven things. Seven ways to be sure that you're staying on the right path. We spent a lot of time on that one. Let's keep going.

Verse 13,

"13 Even in laughter the heart may ache, (That's very true, isn't it?) *and the end of joy may be grief."* (ESV)

Verse 14, it says,

"14 The backslider in heart will be filled with the fruit of his ways, and a good man will be filled with the fruit of his ways." (ESV)

Okay, we've already defined ways. That's the path you're on. This verse sounds at the beginning, when you kind of look at it superficially, it sounds like it's just another passage on sowing and reaping. The backslider's going to get what his ways are, and the good man is going to reap what his ways produce and so forth. But I want you to notice it's not just talking about the backslider. It's talking about "the backslider in heart." Did you catch that? *"The backslider in heart..."*

Do you know in the Hebrew that phrase, the backslider in heart, is literally "the turned away of heart." It speaks of someone who has turned away. Okay? And so, it speaks of one who is entertaining in their heart things they know to be contrary to the wisdom and insight that we've been given through the Word of God. They know it. They know that what they're entertaining in their heart is contrary to God's Word and yet they continue to entertain it anyway. And God's Word says, "they'll be filled with their ways." But there's also a promise to the good man or the man who is walking in the wisdom of God that "he also will be filled with the fruit of his ways." It could be good or bad either way.

Verse 15,

"15 The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps." (ESV)

And boy, that's just a verse we've heard over and over again. Prudence is that idea of looking down the road, considering your path, and making the best decision.

Verse 16,

"16 One who is wise is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool is reckless and careless.

17 A man of quick temper acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated."
(We'll talk more about a quick temper later.)

18 The simple inherit folly, (which is foolishness) *but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.*

19 The evil bow down before the good, the wicked at the gates of the righteous.

20 The poor are disliked even by his neighbor, but the rich has many friends." (ESV)

Boy, you might look at that verse and you think, wait a minute, what's it teaching? Well, it's not teaching anything. It's an observation. Solomon is simply making an observation. He's not saying you need to be rich so you'll have lots of friends. It's not what he's saying. He's just saying this is what I've observed in life. So yeah, you got to understand that many of the Proverbs are observations without a moral directive. They're just observations. Okay?

Verse 21,

"*21 Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner,* (We've talked about how the Bible thinks about, or considers a man who treats his neighbor badly.) *but blessed is he who is generous to the poor." (ESV)*

Verse 22,

"22 Do they not go astray who devise evil? Those who devise good meet steadfast love and fruitfulness." (ESV)

Verse 23,

"23 In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty.

24 The crown of the wise is their wealth, but the folly of fools brings folly.

25 A truthful witness saves lives, but the one who breathes out lies is deceitful.

26 In the fear of the Lord one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge." (ESV)

Verse 27,

"27 The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death." (ESV)

What is the fear of the Lord? We've talked about this several times. It is the ever-present understanding that God is sovereign, that He is observing the sons of men, and that we are accountable to Him for our words and our actions. And the Bible simply is saying that when a person has that understanding that it is going to be a fountain of life to them. Because ultimately, it's going to turn them away from things that they would do if they didn't believe there was a God to whom they are accountable. It's as simple as that.

Verse 28,

"28 In a multitude of people is the glory of a king, but without a people a prince is ruined." (ESV)

Verse 29,

"29 Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly." (ESV)

This is a great proverb. And it reminds me frankly of a passage in James chapter 1 when it talks about the person who is slow to anger. Look at James chapter 1 up on the screen. Verse 19, it says,

James 1:19 (ESV)
Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Isn't that a great reminder? Man's anger does not produce the righteousness of God. Why? Because our anger is usually very self-centered. It's very fleshly. When we lose it, I mean, the Bible does talk about righteous anger. And we saw Jesus do it in the Gospel several times, being righteously angry. I don't know that I've ever experienced that phenomenon. I just don't. But usually, my anger is very all about me and how I feel.

I'm reminded here in James that my anger does not bring about God's righteousness. It doesn't do anything toward that end. But we're told here in this proverb that "a quick temper actually exalts folly," which is a poetic way of saying, a quick temper invites foolish actions. It invites dangerous words, and it invites deep wounds.

And an individual who recognizes they have a short fuse needs to bring that to the Lord, and ask Him to bring balance and direction to that because a short

fuse, or as the Bible calls it, a quick temper, is a very, very dangerous thing. Very dangerous thing.

I always encourage girls when they're on the dating side of getting married, before they've gotten married, well, watch out. Watch out. Don't connect yourself to a man with a quick temper. It's not going to be good.

On the opposite side, verse 30 says, look at this,

"30 A tranquil heart (or as the NIV says, *"a heart at peace"*) *gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot." (ESV)*

Now this is really interesting because in this passage, it actually talks about health benefits, which I think are substantiated by the things that we know today. It's basically saying that when there is a heart that is at rest, meaning that it's trusting in God, it's tranquil. It's at peace. It is actually going to have health benefits. That doesn't sound crazy to me at all. I mean, I think we all know that when a heart is not at rest, when it's full of all kinds of chaos and unrest, that it's going to also have a health deficit. We know that. This is basic stuff.

Now in this case the opposite, or the contrast, they're giving is envy. So now we're talking about a tranquil heart is basically a heart that is content. But an envious heart is a heart that is not content with what I have. It looks at what others have and says I want that. And there's this constant striving. And it says that it actually rots the bones. That it has a negative health impact to a person's life. Very interesting.

Verse 31,

"31 Whoever oppresses a poor man actually insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him." (So it is honoring to God to be generous to the needy.)

32 The wicked is overthrown through his evildoing, but the righteous finds refuge in his death.

33 Wisdom rests in the heart of a man of understanding, but it makes itself known even in the midst of fools. (ESV)

Verse 34,

34 Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." (ESV)

And I like this verse because it's a reminder that there's more that makes a nation great than just military prowess, or a high gross national product. Here it says it's righteousness. Righteousness. But when a country is filled with sin, it becomes a reproach.

Verse 35,

"35 A servant who deals wisely has the king's favor, but his wrath falls on one who acts shamefully." (ESV)

Let's go to Proverbs chapter 15. This time we're going to just go through and pick out the verses that we're going to be talking about.

Verse one,

"1 A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (ESV)

By the way, this is just another observation by Solomon. But I remember when it was a revelation to me. It was an observation to him, but I'd never heard it before, and I didn't know that. And I remember reading it and I remember thinking, "wow! that's amazing!" And then I tried it out and I found out it worked. And I thought to myself, "wow!" If I respond to someone's harsh comment with a soft and gentle response, it just disarms the whole thing. And instead of there being a conflict and an angry strife, it just calms the situation right down.

And I think one of the best things we can do when we're in the wrong, if somebody is angry with you and you know that you're in the wrong, the first thing you can, the best thing you can do, is to very gently and very calmly just say, "you're absolutely right. I'm very sorry about that. I shouldn't have done that. Would you forgive me?" People don't know how to respond to that, people in the world. I hope a Christian does.

There are obviously some people in the world that would probably know how to, what to deal with that. But the vast majority are looking for a nose-to-nose conflict when they get in your face and get all angry. It's almost kind of like they're baiting you to respond in like manner. But when you just diffuse it by saying "you're right, that was really dumb, I'm really sorry, I shouldn't have done that." It's just amazing what happens. You should try it.

Skip down to verse three,

"3 The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good." (ESV)

By the way, this is the reason people have the fear of the Lord. This verse explains it right here. Because they know the eyes of the Lord are keeping watch on everything that is good, everything that is evil, and so forth.

Skip down to verse eight,

"8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him." (ESV)

We talked a little bit earlier about man-made religion and people being religious when their heart really isn't in it. The Bible is full of examples about what this verse is talking about. Which is somebody making a sacrifice to the Lord when their heart is far from Him.

One example that we're given in the scriptures is when King Saul was in the midst of disobedience. He was openly disobeying the Lord. And he was sacrificing, making an offering out in the open field with his army. (1 Samuel 13:9-14) And you'll remember that Samuel came to him and confronted him with his actions. And Saul made all kinds of excuses about what he was doing. And he says, I'm giving this to the Lord. I'm doing this sacrifice to the Lord. How could it be bad if I'm doing it for the Lord?

Remember what Samuel said? He said, to obey is better than sacrifice. (1Samuel 15:22) That's where we get that saying which has frankly transcended the passage in which it was given. To obey is better than sacrifice. Obedience to God is better than empty religious observance. God is not looking for your religious observance. He doesn't care anything about your religious observance. He wants your heart. He wants you. He wants your devotion. Okay?

Skip down to verse 11. It says,

"11 Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord; how much more the hearts of the children of man!" (ESV) Sheol refers to the abode of the dead. And Abaddon is really the same place, but it carries a connotation of punishment that goes along with it.

Basically, what this verse is saying is even though these things are a mystery to you and I, we don't know what's beyond death exactly. The Bible doesn't give us a lot of insight.

I remember a number of years ago, and this is like about 35 years ago, I went to a conference where there was an old...I think I can say it without, yeah, he was old at the time. He was probably, I'm not going to say how old - old was, I was a lot younger. Old was a lot younger back then, but I thought he looked pretty old.

He got up and told us that he had been recently diagnosed with a disease that may not end his life early, but it certainly got him to thinking about his mortality as a believer. And he started telling us in this conference how it had motivated him to start looking through the scriptures about what to expect next. And he told us all, he said, I got to tell you, the passages are kind of few and far between. There's not a great deal there. God has chosen not to give us a lot of insight because faith is required where there's not a lot of insight.

We're trusting. There's enough for us to trust, but there's not a lot of specifics. It's largely a mystery. So what's this passage saying? It says listen, the things that are a mystery to man, like death and the grave, they lie open before the Lord. And that's of course, a way of saying they're completely open to Him. He knows them entirely. The idea here is how much more the hearts of man and what is in a man's heart. Our hearts are completely known to God's perfect wisdom. And we got to remember that. It's one of the things that motivates the fear of the Lord. And not a fear that causes us to shake, but a fear that causes us to live our lives circumspectly.

Verse 15. Skip down there.

"15 All the days of the afflicted are evil, but the cheerful of heart has a continual feast." (ESV)

This is a really amazing verse when you kind of look at it because it's true that you and I can't always choose the difficulties that we face in life and the challenges that come against us. But we can choose our attitude about those things. And that's kind of convicting. And a lot of it comes down to an attitude of the heart. So it's kind of our decision.

Again, I can't decide what kind of challenges are going to face me. But I can decide how I'm going to face them. What my attitude is going to be, and whether or not I'm going to put my total focus and attention on my problems or on the Lord.

I want to remind you of some words that we read in the book of Philippians. Can I show it to you on the screen? Chapter 4:8,

Philippians 4:8 (ESV)
Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, (he says) *if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."*

Can I remind you where Paul was when he wrote these words? Prison. Prison. He could have written in his letter, guys, let me tell you what prison's all about. Let me explain to you what a day-to-day monotony of prison life has. It begins at 5:30 in the morning when they start clanking things on the bars and wake us up. And then we go... and then...there's the monotony of...and there's this...

You can imagine what prison was like in Paul's day. He could have wrote about it. He could have even complained. But from prison, Paul instead said, brothers, whatever is good, and you saw the list. Think about those things. And that is going to determine, frankly, a lot of where your heart is going to go in the midst of whatever trial you're facing. That's going to make a huge determination. It's going to have a lot of influence. Where's your mind? Where's your thoughts? Are they focused on the problem in front of you, or are they focused on the solution? Are they focused on the power of the Lord? And so forth.

Verse 17. I like this,

"17 Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it." (ESV)

Isn't that good? I think today we'd probably say, better is a happy meal with love than a steak dinner at Texas Roadhouse with hatred. Is that a good modern, I don't know, I don't know good, nice restaurants. If it doesn't have a drive-up window I haven't been there. But I think there's a lot of truth there.

Skip all the way down to verse 30,

"30 The light of the eyes (and that refers in this context to the good news brought by someone into your life) *rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the bones." (ESV)*

When a messenger comes into your life with good news, it's that you can see the light of their eyes and it rejoices your heart. Verse 33, by the way, that's a good reminder about sharing good news with people. Even if you don't have good news about their life, you can tell them good news about the Lord.

Verse 33,

"33 The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor." (ESV)

Okay. Good verse. So, to fear the Lord is to accept instruction and wisdom. They're synonymous. And humility, which is a humble heart, and do you guys understand that is absolutely what's required to be teachable? Lord, teach me. I don't know as I should, teach me. It is always necessary for that to happen. And that must be there before honor.

Chapter 16, verse 1,

"1 The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord." (ESV)

Now this is an interesting verse. Let me tell you first of all what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that everything you and I say is from the Lord. I kind of wish it did. But if it did, we'd go around saying, "and that was from the Lord." And they'd be able to respond and say, "so was that." And then we'd all be confused.

What it's basically saying is that when wisdom is given voice, it is from the Lord, okay? When God's wisdom is given voice, the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.

Verse 2,

"2 All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit." (ESV)

Very similar to the last chapter where we read that there's a way that seems right to a man. This way we're talking about a man whose ways seem pure, but ultimately God weighs the intent of the heart.

Verse 3,

"3 Commit your work to the Lord, and your plan will be established." (ESV)

All right. Hey, isn't that great? You just got a carte blanche promise. Just commit your way to the Lord and it'll be good. That's actually not what he's saying here though. This is not that kind of a thing. In fact, please understand, the Proverbs aren't about promises they're about observations. If this is Solomon observing something, what is he observing? Well, he's observing that when a person commits their work to the Lord, God establishes it.

But you know what you and I have to ask is, what does it mean to commit your work to the Lord? What does that mean? Well, it's interesting. The word commit in the Hebrew, actually is translated elsewhere "roll." Roll your work onto. It carries with it the figure of rolling. Like rolling one's burden onto the Lord. Roll your burden and so forth onto the Lord. It's speaking of a complete dependence upon God. Commit your work to the Lord means to completely and utterly depend on God. That's what it's talking about. It doesn't just mean I'm just saying I'm doing some religious thing to cause...I'm going to force God to bless my business venture.

Verse 4,

"4 The Lord has made everything for his purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble." (ESV) And this is a verse about the sovereignty of God. That tells us that even the wicked are brought to fit somehow into God's plan.

People ask me all the time, if the devil is evil why did God create the devil? Well, He didn't, actually. He didn't. And I'm not saying that Lucifer is self-created. I'm saying that when God created Lucifer, he was not the devil. God gave His angels, including human beings, the power to create. But that still messes with some people's minds. They'll say, "Yeah, but He knew he was going to be Satan." Yeah, I know. God knows everything. Well, so why did He create him even as a good angel if He knew that he was going to go bad?

Well, you and I are getting into areas where we have a real struggle to answer questions along those lines because we just can't know. But you know what we can know? We know that in God's economy there are no loose ends. And the Lord knows how to work all things in accordance with the purpose of His will, including the existence of Satan. And Satan is even used by the Lord to accomplish God's purpose. And that doesn't mean that God uses evil, but the enemy's on his own track. But the Lord allows certain things to take place so that His purpose may be achieved.

I bring to your remembrance the statement that Jesus made about Peter on the night that they were having the Last Supper. And Jesus is telling them that they're all going to desert Him that night. And Peter says, not me. And the Lord says, actually, you're going to deny three times that you even know Me. (John13:38, Luke 22:31, Matthew 26:34, Mark 14:30) No, Lord, I'm not going to do that! He says, Peter, let Me tell you something, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. And then He went on to say, but I've prayed for you so that when you return, you will strengthen your brothers."

Do you know what that phrase means? It means, I gave him permission. We're going to let him do that. Because you know what, it's going to be necessary for you to be the man that we have determined for you to be. Because we're going to allow the enemy to knock some rough edges off that just couldn't get knocked off otherwise.

The enemy accomplished God's purpose in bringing about the work of Peter's heart to establish him as the apostle that he was. So that's what this proverb is saying. It does not, however, mean that God created people to be evil so that He could punish them. I don't believe that. I'm sorry, I don't believe it.

Skip down to verse 7,

"7 When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." (ESV)

Again, this is an observation. He's saying basically that when a man is living a godly lifestyle, and that means he's walking out things like forgiveness, he's walking out things like not carrying a grudge and so forth. It's generally going to tend to make him a man who's going to be amenable to others, even his enemies.

But you got to remember Solomon is not using this proverb to look into the New Testament period and to cover every possible situation. Because Jesus said when a man walks in righteousness he's going to be, he's going to come under persecution. Paul told us those very words in fact, echoing the heart of Jesus. He said to live a godly life, you will be persecuted.

This is not a promise. Again, this is an observation that when a man is not causing trouble, because he's living a righteous life in a way that pleases God, it's going to tend to make him get along with people, including his enemies.

Skip down to verse 9,

"9 The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." (ESV)

Another proverb reminding us of the sovereign oversight of the Lord. I don't think this means that everything is fixed. It just means God is sovereign.

Skip down to verse 20,

"20 Whoever gives thought to the word will discover good, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord." (ESV)

And I love this reminder because it tells me that the simple exercise of thinking ahead of time about giving thought to the Word, giving thought to what we're going to say, weighing the impact is always a good thing.

Verse 24,

"24 Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body." (ESV)

Here you and I are reminded of the impact of the words that we say to people. Our words can be, as it says here in the ESV, "gracious." Your Bible may say "pleasant," or they could be the opposite. But if they're pleasant they have the quality of honey from the honeycomb. It says here which is both sweet and brings health to the body. Have you ever thought about your words bringing health to someone? Isn't that an interesting thought that your words can bring health to someone?

Verse 26,

"26 A worker's appetite works for him; his mouth urges him on." (ESV) That's something our government forgot a number of years ago.

Skip down to verse 32,

"32 Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." (ESV)

This is such a good proverb. It's saying that the strength of character that is required of a man to control his tongue and his emotions, is better than the power of a man to overcome a city with military strength. Isn't that something?

I want you to see on three consecutive slides here online, what James says about the tongue. He says, first of all,

James 3:1-10 (ESV)
Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well.

He goes on,

James 3:1-10 (ESV)
Look at ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

James 3:1-10 (ESV)
For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

The power of the tongue. The proverb says he who rules his spirit, he who can control his emotions, and obviously control his tongue, is better than a man who can take a city by force.

And finally, verse 33,

"33 The lot is cast into the lap, but it's every decision is from the Lord." (ESV)

In the Old Testament they used to cast lots. And it was considered a respectable way of determining the will of the Lord right up into the New Testament times. In fact, the very last reference we have to casting lots is in Acts chapter 1, right before the Holy Spirit fell upon the church in power. That's the last reference. And I'm glad it's the last reference because the Spirit came to give us a much better way of determining His will.

But casting lots was not unlike rolling dice. Can you imagine rolling dice? Okay, if it's a six, we're moving to Portland. If it's a four, we're moving to Seattle. Here we go. It's basically that sort of a thing. But they were trusting that God was going to be in it.

Well, today, we have the wonderful revelation of God's will that is kept for you and I in the pages of scripture. And even so, even if you've read your Bible all the way through, there's probably going to be some questions in life that you're going to come up against that the scripture's not going to have a specific answer for. And it happens, doesn't it?

What are you going to do? Well, we don't roll the dice anymore because we now have God's Holy Spirit. We have the power of the Spirit. We've been given the gifts of the Spirit. And we have been given, as Paul told us, the mind of Christ that we can make a determination.

As we study the Word of God, as we wait on the Lord in prayer, as we seek His wisdom for the things that we need answers for, we can trust that God's going to lead us. God's going to guide our path.

But it's not easy. And you know what I see Christians doing all the time? Looking for a loophole or a shortcut. And so what they'll do is they'll go to people who are older and maybe more mature in the Lord. And they'll kind of. instead of asking for counsel, they ask for answers. And they're going to people the way they should be going to the Lord.

I think that people can be great as counselors to help you determine and pray with you and walk those things out with you. But many times that's not what people go to others for. They just say, what do you think I should do? What do you think? Well, tell me what to do. And we do them a great disservice if we answer that question. Even if we say, well, if I were you...

We shortchange ourselves when we refuse to wait on the Lord for whatever reason. Because you know what, that's how growth takes place in a Christian walk. And it's not easy. It's very, very difficult. And there are some of you, personality wise, and I know that because I'm one of you, who don't like to wait for things. I am not an extremely patient person. And especially if there's a pressing need that I feel is of great importance, I struggle with being patient.

But that's how we grow. Learning to press in and hear the voice of God. Learning to discern His voice through the Word of God. Through being, quieting our heart, listening for the voice of the Spirit, listening as we're being

taught the Word, as we're reading the scriptures, listening for His voice. That still small voice. There are no shortcuts.