

Proverbs 3:1-12 // Gospel Wisdom

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[0 : 00] This reading comes from Proverbs 3, and we'll be reading verses 1 to 12.! You can find that on page 636 of the Bibles that are in front of you. My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity.

Let love and faithfulness never leave you. Find them round your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, then you will win favour and a good name in the sight of God and man.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways submit to him, and he will make your path straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes, fear the Lord and shun evil.

This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones. Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops. Then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves. As a father, the son he delights in. This is the word of the Lord.

[1 : 11] Amen. Thank you so much for reading, Nicola. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Josh.

Let me add my welcome to Robbie's. I'm one of the ministry trainees here tonight, and it will be my joy to take us through some thoughts on Proverbs. Before we get started, let's bow our heads and pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for your word.

We thank you for the wisdom that it gives us. We thank you that you are the perfect wisdom. You are the word of God itself, and that when we come to it, we can learn and grow and mature.

Lord, we pray that the meditations of all our hearts, and the words of my lips, would build us up. Anything that is good would be remembered, and anything that is false would be forgotten. We ask all this in your name. Amen.

I want to start tonight by telling you a story that Jesus told. If you're interested, you can find it in your Bibles, in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 12, verses 13 to 21.

[2 : 14] Teacher, the man says, Tell my brother to split the inheritance with me. Man, who appointed me judge or arbitrator over you?

Jesus turns to the crowd, and he tells them this story. The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, What shall I do?

I have no place to store my crops. Then he said, This is what I shall do. I'll tear down my barns, and I'll build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain.

I'll say to myself, You have plenty of grain laid up. Take life easy. Eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, You fool.

This very night, your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? Now, I don't know what your reaction was when you heard that we were doing a series on Proverbs.

[3 : 16] Perhaps you were excited, thinking, Excellent! They're getting to it. Perhaps you were perplexed. For most of us, I suspect we didn't have many thoughts other than, I wonder how that is going to work.

You see, often we find Proverbs a little bit strange. A lot of us have probably never read it as a book cover to cover. We tend to pick it up in little individual sections, as pithy one-liners tacked onto the back of our daily devotionals.

Oddly disjointed sayings, which don't seem to make much sense, which are often confusing and hard to apply. Much of Proverbs seems to have more in common with the inside of a fortune cookie

than with what we read in the rest of the Bible.

And then when we do read it, we can get worried that it's sounding very prosperity gospel. It's full of statements which seem to amount to live well, behave well, and you'll have a good life.

And we know that that does not match up with the rest of the Bible. And often, all of that together means that we get tempted to take Proverbs with a little pinch of salt. We can even be drawn into thinking that somehow Proverbs is unreliable.

[4 : 29] Some of you might have come across the idea that Proverbs should be read alongside Job and Ecclesiastes, the other wisdom books of the Bible. The idea is that Proverbs offers wisdom like a brilliant young teacher, but one who doesn't have much life experience.

And that Job and Ecclesiastes are a bit more like a cynical, worldly person who's lived it, seen it, knows what life is like. Those books are able to provide us wisdom for when life is, you know, a bit wrong or a bit more complex.

But the obvious problem with this is this. How many of you are currently living lives that are ideal? How many of you live lives that you would describe as being free of any complexity or any suffering?

See, the problem is if we approach Proverbs as if that's its purpose, we're underestimating it. We're misapplying it. And inevitably, we're going to find it frustrating.

We will not hear what it has to say to us because we're trying to make it answer questions that it was never meant to answer in the first place. We're trying to squeeze it into a mold that is the wrong shape.

[5 : 40] As we start off, I'm going to remind us of a few pointers that Azariah showed us last week, which I think are really helpful to think about with Proverbs. Firstly, Proverbs is a book to train people.

It's to train the simple people to become wise and the wise to become already wiser. You can decide for yourself which category you fall in. Proverbs is like a maths textbook that teaches you to work out the problems.

It does not give you a cheat sheet to the answers. It's wise words from fathers to sons to teach them to think about the world in a way that lines up with what God thinks.

And I think if we keep that clear in our minds, we will find Proverbs so useful to us. Tonight, we're going to look at our passage in two sections and we're starting with the first one. Gospel wisdom is a solid foundation for life.

You see, the author of Proverbs did not think that the things that they were trying to teach were nice truths that were too simple for real life. They were passing on to their sons wisdom which was an absolutely solid bedrock for life.

[6 : 49] Look at verses one to four. My son, do not forget my teaching. Keep my commands in your heart for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity.

Let love and faithfulness never leave you. Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.

You see, these teachings and the commands of the fathers, they're not simple sayings to be reminded of now and again. They're not for going on fridge magnets or to be superimposed on a picture of a lock that you hang up in your bathroom.

These words and lessons are to be bound around your neck, to be written on your heart. The authors of Proverbs expect these words to have lifelong implications for those who take them in. The teachers of Proverbs hope and expect that their words will be taken seriously and applied for the long haul. We should honor that and we should submit to that.

[7 : 54] The authors of Proverbs are putting wisdom before their sons but they're putting them before it with a choice. The authors of Proverbs are saying you can take these truths, these lessons and you can bind them to yourselves.

you can make them the bedrock of your life. You can come to them again and again or you can choose not to and that way lies the way of the fool.

Old Testament Israelites often talked about binding the law to their foreheads and their forearms to remember it, to come back to it time and again and notice that what the fathers say in Proverbs is if anything more emphatic.

Don't just tie it to your hand. Get it around your neck. Get it inside your heart. You need to live and breathe these words of wisdom. You need to get them inside your very souls.

Work at wisdom. Dig down and open up a trench so that you can get the words of wisdom deep inside yourself. Wisdom is not meant to be superficial or surface level but if we get it deep inside it will flow out into our lives.

[9 : 07] Look with me again at verse 3. Let love and faithfulness never leave you. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.

Is that not a glorious thing to think about? I want you to call to mind the times when you've been blessed by a brother or a sister coming alongside you and displaying love and faithfulness.

Think of the Christians you know who've shown you the truth of this. Think of lasagnas and dog walks and babysitting and help with moving. Think of a quiet gentle word.

Think of a brother who comes alongside you and corrects you when you are in error. Think of the brothers and sisters who've helped you grow in wisdom.

Look around this room and imagine growing in wisdom with these dear people. Imagine what it would look like if over the next one year, two years, five years, we helped each other to grow in wisdom, in love, in faithfulness.

[10 : 17] Imagine if we took the instructions of Proverbs seriously and made the practice of love and faithfulness and teaching one another a bedrock of not just our individual lives but of our whole congregation.

What would it look like for us as a group, as a family? Imagine a church where our relationships are saturated with love and faithfulness.

Imagine a church where we help each other to grow into wisdom, to ask the right questions in times of folly, to offer gentle comfort in times of sorrow.

Where do we see God's wisdom displayed now in this day and age? When we look around the world and say where is God's wisdom? My brothers and sisters, we see it in the relationships in this room.

God has chosen to display his wisdom to the world by bringing broken sinners together and transforming us into loving, faithful, wise brothers and sisters who serve one another with all humility and with love.

[11 : 22] Who help each other to grow and mature and become more and more like the image of his son. Why do we need proverbs in our lives, you ask? Because if we get it deep inside ourselves, we will find love and faithfulness flowing out into the relationships around about us because we will build each other up into the wisdom of God.

So great, sounds wonderful, but Josh, what does that actually mean? I mean, how do we actually go about doing that? Well, look with me at verses five to eight. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways submit to him and he will make your path straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes, but fear the Lord and shun evil.

This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones. See, the wisdom of proverbs is not a mystery. It's not a hidden thing. It's not some secret code that's buried somewhere.

It's the same wisdom that we find on every single page of the Bible. In all your ways submit to him. Treasure his words. It's how Jesus talked about the wisdom of the kingdom.

[12 : 34] He said it's like finding a treasure buried in the field, selling everything that you have to own it. Building a life on the foundational wisdom of proverbs is not about passing out some secret code or some esoteric knowledge.

If someone comes to you saying, I've got the thing, I've got the one secret that no one's found for 2,000 years, ignore them. The secret is in the Bible. The secret is in the words. And it's simply this, come to God.

Trust him in every part of your life. The foundational aspect of all wisdom is knowing God rightly. It is the gospel.

Proverbs is a gospel book. It's not self help. It's not legalism. It's not the prosperity gospel. It's not any other distortion of the gospel. Ray Oatlin said this about it.

The book of Proverbs is a gospel book because it's part of the Bible. That means the book of Proverbs is good news for bad people. It is about grace for sinners.

[13 : 37] It's about hope for failures. It's about wisdom for idiots. This book is Jesus himself coming to us as a counselor, as our sage, as our life coach.

I'll let you decide which of those things spoke to me the most. Practically, if you want to make Proverbs the foundation of your life, I have two bits of advice.

One, read Proverbs. Azariah encouraged us last week during this sermon series, we are not spending much time in the middle section 10 to 25, but get into it, practice it, live with it, read it. Second, read the Gospels. Why? Because Jesus shows us what it looks like. He shows us what a life soaked in the wisdom of God looks like.

He was the son who learned perfectly the wisdom of the father and built his life on it. If you want to see straight paths in your life, if you want to see favor in your relationships, look at and imitate Christ Jesus.

[14 : 46] When we read Proverbs in the line of the whole Bible, we see that it's not some abstract disjointed extra that doesn't quite fit in anywhere. It is a manual to teach us to live life like Jesus lived.

Lastly, if we want to see the wisdom of Proverbs as the foundation of our lives, we need to learn one more thing, to fear the Lord. We're not going to go into this too much because I think Azariah really hit the nail on the head last week, but I do want to add something.

Notice verse 7 is really going to help us flesh out what I said last week. We know that fear of the Lord means relating rightly to God, it means honouring him, and it means obeying him.

But let's add to that. Do not be wise in your own eyes. You see, we live in an age obsessed with wisdom.

Everywhere you look, you can see examples of people rejecting the wisdom of previous generations and of God himself to build up the thing that they want. You can in seconds be offered perfect wisdom for everything from sorting out your relationships, to your wallet, to your fitness, to your kitchen cupboard, to your pet's personality.

[15 : 56] If you look online, you will find wisdom everywhere. Or at least you'll find things pretending to be wisdom. We live in an age that screams I know best.

I know best. Don't tell me how to live my life. I know best. But if we are to fear God, if we want to be wise, it means we must let go of the right to be wise in our own eyes.

God is to be underestimate this. Let's not underestimate this problem because it is foundational to each and every one of us. In Genesis 3, we read that Eve took the fruit of the tree.

Eve reached out, the very first sin, and took it because it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. Since the very beginning of our fallen race, we have rejected the fear of God in favor of replacing his wisdom with ours.

If we want to make the biblical wisdom of Proverbs a foundation in our lives, we've got to let it correct us. We've got to submit to it. When the wisdom of the world tells you get rich, put your security in money, invest, you listen to the wisdom of God telling you, honor him with the first fruits of your crops, be generous to the poor.

[17 : 17] When the wisdom of the world tells you sleep with your partner before marriage, everybody else is doing it. It's good for your relationship. We listen to the wisdom of God telling us, honor the marriage bed and keep it pure.

When the wisdom of the world tells you work sucks, cut the corner, get ahead, be selfish, the wisdom of God says in everything you do, honor him.

Work as if you work for the Lord. When the wisdom of the world tells you no one's looking, it's safe to behave however you like, remember that the wisdom of God says there is nothing hidden which will not one day be revealed.

If we want to make the wisdom of Proverbs the rock solid foundation of our lives, we have to get to know Jesus and submit to his ways and put his truth over our truth, his words over our words, his wisdom over our wisdom.

That's what it means to put gospel wisdom as the foundation of your life. Fortunately, Proverbs also tells us how gospel wisdom works as a guide to the edges of life.

[18 : 28] We've seen how important it is to make the wisdom of God your bedrock. But now let's look at some worked examples, how it works out in life. Like the first problem in a new chapter of the maths textbook, the author of Proverbs has already filled up some of the answers so we can get to grips with it.

What does the wisdom of God look like at the edges of life? What does it look like to be wise when you're in the good place, when life is abundant and full of joy?

What does it look like to be wise when you're in the hard place, when life is soul? Proverbs helps us with both. Proverbs and plenty. Let's read verses 9 and 10 again.

Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruit of all your crops. Here, the author of Proverbs teaches us how to be wise in abundance.

And notice, it's not give God something and he will give you something else back. It's not trying to bribe God. You see, the authors of wisdom, the authors of Proverbs understood that to live before God means that you recognize that everything you have comes from God.

[19 : 42] Everything you have comes from God. My son John is too. Currently, his favorite word is my. He's discovered that he can put the word my in front of anything in an attempt to claim it.

Sometimes, those things will be good for him. For example, my porridge. Yes. Sometimes less so. My car, talking about my Ford Puma that he would like to try and drive.

He doesn't understand the difference. He only understands the desire to have things that he doesn't have. He makes it nakedly obvious that humans default to covetousness and possessiveness.

I own the things that I have and I want the things that I don't have. But the Bible holds us out a different truth. Every good thing you have is a gift from God.

As Christians, Christians, we don't get to put the word my in front of anything. Every penny in our paychecks, every family holiday, every well cooked meal, all of it is a gift from our Father in heaven.

[20 : 54] This is why this is not the prosperity gospel. The prosperity gospel says I own these things and I give them and I get more. Wise living in abundance says everything I have is a gift from above.

And so I'm going to honour God with it. That's how Proverbs teaches us to live in abundance. Give it to God. Live in gratitude to him. Honour the Lord with your wealth, with first fruits.

Give him the best that you've got. And then notice what is his response to that attitude? Yet more generosity. Our God is a good father who loves to give us good gifts.

His abundant provision to us reminds us of that, helps us to see that he loves us. The wisdom of Proverbs is to remind us to see the good in the world about us as coming from him and belonging to him.

That's Proverbs in plenty. But we also have Proverbs in pain. For others of us in this room, that abundant living seems very, very far away.

[22 : 03] My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline. Do not resent his rebuke. Because the Lord disciplines those he loves as a father the son he delights in.

Sometimes life feels like a trial, like a struggle. We feel rather than good gifts from our father above, we are only receiving blow after blow. Proverbs gives us wisdom on how to live in that place as well. Firstly, notice this, it doesn't tell you God is good, therefore you should really just ignore all the suffering and the pain. This is important because sadly as Christians we can get hit with this quite a lot.

You tell someone how hard life has been, how much pain you are in, you pour out your soul to a friend and they respond with oh well God works in mysterious ways, but isn't it good that God loves you?

The Bible even gives us examples of this. In 1 Samuel we read the story of Hannah. Hannah is a woman who is heartbroken. She has no children and it's devastating.

[23 : 13] She weeps to the man that should love her the most, her husband, and he simply says, why are you troubled? Am I not better than ten sons? Do you see how unhelpful it is?

Rather than sitting with her hardship, acknowledging her pain, he glibly just says cheer up. That is not wisdom. That is selfishness disguised with some cheap words.

Proverbs does not make that mistake. It makes it clear that sometimes we face real hardship, that we face rebuke and difficulty. It acknowledges that.

It says the pain is real, the suffering is real, but the authors of the Proverbs want to give us a truth to hold on to in the midst of that pain. Do you see it right at the end of verse 12?

Because the Lord disciplines those he loves. As a father, the son he delights in. Proverbs acknowledges that life is often hard, but it encourages us.

[24 : 22] The wise person sees that God is at work. God is the one who is moving things. We heard this morning in our One Kings preach, we saw behind this curtain, we saw what's going on in heaven, that even the most evil things, even the things that are destructive come under the authority of God.

Life is hard, but God is at work. And far more importantly, God loves you. God loves you.

He is a good father and he delights in you. When we are being disciplined, when the circumstances of life are being used to test us and to try us, we're not being punished for stepping out of line. Let me say that again. We are not being punished by God for our moral failure. There is a difference between punishment and discipline. Discipline is done so that we may grow and we may mature and that we may learn to rely more and more on God and less and less on the world. Notice that in Proverbs here, two things go together. A proverb about abundant wealth and a proverb about the discipline of God. The reason I think that is so is because it highlights the discipline of God teaches us not to rely on the things of the world but to look to our Father in heaven.

[25 : 52] discipline from our Father weakens our love for the world and strengthens our love for the Father. Hebrews quotes these very verses to remind his audience that they are beloved of God.

God is not waiting to smack you if you step out of line. He desires to see a peaceful foot of righteousness in your life. He wants you to grow up into the image of the Son in whom he delights. that's what he wants of you. As a father disciplines a son in whom he delights every single one of us God looks at you and says I want to see them become more and more like the image of my Son. And sometimes we receive abundant good gifts and sometimes we receive discipline but in all of it God is at work lovingly growing you up. He gave us Proverbs to be helpful in that. Proverbs is helpful to us because it reminds us that in all seasons we must make the wisdom of God the absolute foundation of our lives. Proverbs is helpful to us because as we live as gospel people we will see our relationships flourish with love and faithfulness.

[27 : 06] Proverbs is helpful to us because it reminds us that his wisdom is better than ours. I told a story at the beginning of the sermon about a man who came to Jesus.

He came to Jesus with a question and the wisdom of Jesus exposed his heart. The man had not built his life on the solid and firm foundation of the wisdom of God.

He put his trust in wealth and in the wealth of an inheritance and he hoped that Jesus would line up with his agenda. He was a fool.

Let's not be fools. listen to the wisdom of the one greater than Solomon. To be wise means listening to Jesus and making his words the bedrock of our lives.

I'm going to pray and then the band are going to come and lead us in song. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you came to this world, that you are the word made flesh, that you show us what a life absolutely saturated in the wisdom of God looks like.

[28 : 19] And thank you that it is our delight as your people to evermore be grown into maturity, into becoming like the image of your son. We pray, Lord, that in good times and bad, we would put your words in the foundation of our life, that we would honor you with the first fruits and that we would trust you and love you in the times of discipline.

Lord, we pray that by the work of your spirit, by sitting under your word, we would know evermore what it means to follow you and to look like your son. Amen. Greg and the band are going to lead us.