

Proverbs 12 // Roots, Fruits and Towers

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[0:00] Our first lesson today will be Proverbs chapter 12, the whole thing. This is on page 645 of the church bibles.

! But whoever hates correction is stupid.

Good people obtain favor from the Lord, but he condemns those who devise wicked schemes. No one can be established through wickedness, but the righteous cannot be uprooted.

A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones.

The plans of the righteous are just, but the advice of the wicked is deceitful. The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the speech of the upright rescues them.

[1:20] The wicked are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous stands firm. A person is praised according to their prudence, and one with a warped mind is despised.

Better to be a nobody and yet have a servant than to pretend to be somebody and have no food.

The righteous care for the needs of their animals, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.

Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies have no sense.

The wicked desire the stronghold of evildoers, but the root of the righteous endures.

Evildoers are trapped by their sinful talk, and so the innocent escape trouble. From the fruit of their lips people are filled with good things, and the work of their hands brings them reward.

The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice. Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult.

[2:46] An honest witness tells the truth, but a false witness tells lies. The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment. Truthful lips are infinite, but a lie is infinite. Deceit is in the hearts of those who plot evil, but those who promote peace have joy.

No harm overtakes the righteous, but the wicked have their fill of trouble. The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy.

The prudent keep their knowledge to themselves, but a fool's heart blurts out folly. Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in forced labor.

Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up. The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

[4:01] The lazy do not roast any game, but the diligent feed on the riches of the hunt. In the way of righteousness there is life.

Along that path is immortality. There ends the first reading. Our second one is from the Gospel according to Luke chapter 6.

We will be beginning at verse 46, which can be found on page 1034.

That is page 1034, Luke 6, beginning at 46.

Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like.

[5:10] They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When the flood came, the torrent struck the house, but could not shake it, because it was well built.

But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation.

The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete. There ends the lesson. Good evening, everyone.

My name is Azariah, if we've not met. It's great to be here with you this evening. Let's begin our time together with a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you that even things written thousands of years ago can still speak truth to us here and now. So we pray that you would prepare our hearts to hear from you.

[6:19] We pray that you would be teaching us and that we would be learning from you so that we could live lives that honor you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. It's going to be very helpful to me and even more helpful for you guys to keep Proverbs 12 open in front of you as we go.

And my first question is, what are you building at the moment? I think all of us in this room are probably building something or building towards something.

You might be doing an education. You might be starting to build up a career. You might be building into friendships. You might be building a marriage or a family.

You might be at the point in your life where you're really starting to think about your legacy and what you're going to leave behind you when you're gone. What plans are you making? What is your time and energy going towards?

Whether it's one of these things or it's something else, I think we're probably all building something. How's it going? It can be a great thing. It can be a hard thing.

[7:26] It can be a disappointing thing. How confident are you in what you're building? How stable is it? What are you building it on? Is it the economy?

Is it the job market? Is it reputation or prestige? We all want to have confidence that the things we're building are secure.

And then when the foundation falls out from under us, it can be absolutely crushing. A job market that just seems impossible to get in on.

Or a marriage that's torn apart by infidelity. Or a family that feels like it's just sort of fraying at the edges as siblings or children move away and relationships grow distant.

Or a global financial crisis that wipes out your retirement fund. And it can feel like the foundations of the world that we've built are crumbling underneath our feet.

[8:28] Well, for the past month and a bit, as we've been working through Proverbs, we've spent a lot of time in the first nine chapters. And over and over, these nine chapters have been telling us to get wisdom.

Solomon the king is telling his sons to get wisdom so that they can rule God's people well. And so they can enjoy the blessings that come from living in line with the order that runs through creation. And now, as we've come to the end of those first nine chapters, we're going to be spending a week in this middle section of Proverbs. And this is probably a bit more like what we expect Proverbs to be.

It's little pithy sayings that make for great memory verses and great fridge magnets and great comebacks. And Proverbs is probably the book of the Bible that's most quoted by non-Christians without them realizing it.

Pride comes before a fall. Better to have people think you're an idiot than to open your mouth and prove it. A friend in need is a friend indeed. All of these can be traced back to these middle chapters of Proverbs and the wisdom that we find there.

[9:38] But we can make the mistake of assuming that that's really all we're dealing with. It's just a bunch of randomly arranged one-liners that give us little individual nuggets of wisdom. And you could shuffle them all around and it wouldn't make much difference.

And maybe as we were reading through Proverbs 12, you felt a little bit like that. It might feel a bit haphazard. We've got some marriage advice in verse 4. We've got animal rights in verse 10.

And verse 17 might make us wonder if one of Solomon's practice proverbs from before he became the wisest man in the world accidentally got past the editor. An honest witness tells the truth, but a false witness tells lies.

Good job, buddy. All of Proverbs is very carefully arranged. It's not necessarily arranged how we expect it to be, but it is carefully arranged.

And Proverbs that seem to be about different subjects will cast light on each other and adding to a through line that's running through a longer section or a chapter. So the chapter we're looking at tonight, Proverbs 12, wants to teach us how to build our lives wisely on a solid foundation, one that stands the test of time.

[10:52] Everything in this chapter is building up to that last verse, verse 28. In the way of righteousness there is life. Along that path is immortality.

But we start at verse 1. According to verse 1, Proverbs wants to discipline us, that is, to train us. It wants to teach us and prepare us for life by showing us how to build our lives wisely on the only foundation that will never fall away.

And so if you're building on the wrong foundation, the absolute worst thing that you could do is reject the teaching that this chapter offers. You can paraphrase verse 1 as, listen up, this is important.

You need to hear it and you need to do it. So let's dig in together, looking at our first heading, Rooted and Established in Righteousness. We're going to be focusing on verses 2 to 14.

So this first section is really teaching God's people how to live their lives well, building on the foundation of righteousness before God.

[12:04] After our big listen up in verse 1, verses 2 and 3 give us a foundation for everything that follows. Good people obtain favour from the Lord, but He condemns those who devise wicked schemes.

No one can be established through wickedness. But the righteous cannot be uprooted. So in Proverbs, wisdom often looks like thinking about and planning for the future, but here, planning is futile if it's motivated by evil intent or selfish ambition.

No matter how clever the plan is, God has doomed it to failure. On the other hand, those who are righteous, who live in love for others and obedience before God, cannot be uprooted.

And this is going to set the pattern for this whole chapter. The wicked will scheme and lie and slander and build false reputations, mistreat their workers, chase after wild schemes, build strongholds, but at every turn, all of this is futile.

No one can be established through wickedness. It might look outwardly successful, it might look easy, it might look attractive, but the foundation is rotten to the core.

[13:27] And so as we think about how to order and manage our lives so that we can enjoy security and prosperity, don't fall into the trap of leaving God out of the equation.

The next few verses, from four to seven, tell us who we should be building a legacy with and why, and it begins with the human relationship with the most potential to make or break us.

Like most of Proverbs, this is addressed particularly to a young man, probably to a young man who's not yet married, but who needs wisdom for choosing the right partner. But I think this verse works basically exactly the same in reverse.

A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, but the disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones. A husband of noble character is his wife's crown, but the disgraceful husband is like decay in her bones.

You don't get much better than the first half and you don't get much worse than the second half. A husband or wife who has a noble character is worth a whole kingdom.

[14:40] They are the crown that adorns their spouse, displaying nobility and wisdom for all to see. But a disgraceful spouse, one who embodies everything that Proverbs has been warning us against, is like bone cancer.

It eats away from the inside and it breaks down the foundations that should be holding us firm and steady. When it comes to building a life on a sure and firm foundation, few things will help you more than marrying a noble spouse.

This verse is a big reminder for those of us who are married or hope to be married. Make sure you're building in yourself a noble character.

There is so much potential in marriage to be an incredible blessing and support in the life of another person. Your marriage partner will influence you more than anyone else.

I'm very grateful that Abby has influenced me a lot more than some people. We can build them up and help them to become established on the right foundation, but if we live our lives chasing folly, living for our selfish desires and building all the wrong things on all the wrong foundations, we will do incredible harm.

[16:04] And then in verses 5 to 7, we get an escalating series of proverbs which show the consequences of building on the right or the wrong foundation. The plans of the righteous, in verse 5, are just.

The speech of the righteous rescues them, in verse 6, and so the house of the righteous stands firm, in verse 7. But the deceitful advice of the wicked seeks to undermine.

The words of the wicked lie in wait, ready to pounce and destroy. But in the end, despite all of this, they are overthrown and are no more. Righteousness before God is a firm and lasting foundation that cannot be undermined by the deceitfulness of the wicked.

The next six verses come in pairs and teach us wisdom about some of the things that we might be tempted to make our foundation.

Verses 8 and 9 are about reputation. Reputation is a good thing. A person is praised according to their prudence. Careful wisdom will earn you a good reputation and there's nothing wrong with that. [17 : 18] It's certainly a lot better than the alternative in the second half of the verse. A person with a warped mind has completely rejected God and wisdom and as such is completely twisted against the order of the moral world and the good of the community.

This person is despised by all. So a good reputation is a good thing to have, especially when it comes through being wise and prudent.

But verse 9 gives us a caveat. It's better to have no reputation at all but have the means to provide for yourself and for others than to pretend to be someone, to manufacture a false image of status but have nothing.

Reputation is a good thing but it's not a foundation. It has to be built on something else or it's empty. All right then, so you can't eat reputation but how about wealth?

Get a good bank balance behind you, healthy share portfolio, maybe a bit of crypto, found a start-up, hire someone else to run it and then retire at 30 and travel the world.

[18 : 33] Verses 10 and 11 are about work. Verse 10 isn't about animal rights, it's about how you steward the resources God has given you.

How do you treat your workers? For most of the Israelites in this time period, all their income was based around what they produced from the land that they lived on.

Every family had been given land by God and they worked that land. They farmed, they raised stock and that was how they supported themselves and contributed to the community. And this land was handed down through the generations.

So the first half of verses 10 and 11 commend working the land and caring for the animals that help you to do so or that you are raising on that land.

Care for their needs as a steward of God's creation and work the land you have. Do the things you've been given to do well and righteously.

[19 : 35] Contrast this with the wicked. They're cruel, maybe they're cutting corners to get ahead, overworking and mistreating those under them, trying to eke out more than they need. Even their kindness is cruelty.

And instead of working their land, they chase after wild fantasies, get-rich-quick schemes and their lack of sense will end in a lack of everything they need to survive.

So this passage is telling the Israelites to steward well what God has given them, to work the land and care for the animals so that they may have plenty of food for their families, but there's nothing here to build your life on.

Verse 11 warns us against the dangers of chasing fantasies. The pursuit of wealth that tells you that doing the simple things well isn't enough. You have to get more, you have to be more, you have to do more.

That'll get you chasing fantasies in no time. It's not a foundation. And then lastly, how about security? I don't need to be fabulously wealthy, I just want to be comfortable.

[20 : 40] Nice neighbourhood, reliable car, insurance policies so that I just don't have to worry about everything in my life. Verse 12 compares two kinds of security. The stronghold of evildoers and the root of the righteous.

The image of a stronghold is like a fortified castle on a hill. It looks incredibly secure and powerful, but we're speaking metaphorically here.

The wicked see this sort of untouchable security that these people who've gotten ahead through doing evil seem to have and they want it.

I want to be secure like that person's secure and I don't care what they had to do to get there. But this stronghold, this picture of a castle becomes a trap for those who built it.

They get caught in their own lies and their own corruption and they cannot escape when it all comes crumbling down. On the other hand, the righteous are described like a tree, deeply rooted into a good foundation.

[21:47] They endure as the wicked fall and escape the trouble that the wicked had been plotting for them. So across this whole first section, verses 2 up to here where we are, verse 13, righteousness is the foundation that underpins a good life.

God, in verse 2, bestows His favour on those who live in the way that He's commanded us to. And then verse 14 acts as a bridge that is connecting the first and second halves of this chapter. From the fruit of their lips people are filled with good things and the work of their hands brings them reward. So we've already seen the work of their hands but now what about the fruit of their lips? This is our second point on the sheets. The lasting fruit of wise lips looking at verses 15 to 23. And we're starting off with another big listen up.

The way of fools seems right to them. But the wise listen to advice. Once again, you could paraphrase it as listen up, you need to hear this.

[22:58] If, like me, as we've been going through this series, you've been reading some of these middle chapters of Proverbs in your own time, you'll have noticed that they have a lot to say about speech.

I haven't done the tallying up but there's certain sections through this middle chapter where I think there's a good sort of 20, 30% of the verses are all about speech. How we speak, how we respond to what others say and who we listen to has a massive influence on our growth in wisdom and it has a massive influence on what we're building and what we're building it on.

From the fruit of their lips, people are filled with good things. So, we have in this section a multitude of Proverbs about how speech shapes and affects the community of God's people but it doesn't start how you might expect.

Verses 15 and 16 ask us to look at ourselves first. It begins with how we listen and respond to the speech of others. The wise listen to advice and the prudent overlook an insult.

Fools ignore advice and are quick to anger and not afraid to show it. Living in a community, even in the community of God's people, means we will need to talk to one another and we'll need to practice responding well, both when we get wise advice and when we have to deal with clumsy miscommunication and sometimes even when we're deliberately insulted.

[24:33] But if we get our listening right, then our speech will start to follow. And then if we look at verses 17 to 22, there are common threads that run through them all.

Truth versus lies, harm versus healing, evil versus joy. The foundation for good speech is truth. An honest witness tells the truth isn't saying if that person is telling the truth, then they're being an honest witness.

It's saying if that is an honest person, they will tell the truth. In a post-truth world, one of the most valuable things we can cultivate is honesty.

We've all sort of just gotten used to the idea of fact-checking and cross-referencing and never taking anything you hear at face value, not trusting any media source or any commentator, but how refreshing it is when you know someone you can trust to tell you the truth.

On the other hand, a false witness, someone who has practiced deceit until it's part of who they are, can't help but lie. It's very hard to be truthful if you've stopped putting a high value on the truth.

[25:58] And in the context of a nation seeking to exercise justice and righteousness together before God, you need to be able to rely on one another's honesty.

When this was written, there was no fact-checking, no security cameras, no Google. For example, someone who was unafraid to be dishonest, to get ahead, could do enormous damage.

And it's incredibly tempting. Well, they're not following the rules, why should I? If they're lying to get ahead, then it's okay for me to lie to take them down, put them back in their place. Verse 18 says, The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment. Deceit is in the heart of those who plot evil, but those who promote peace have joy.

No harm overtakes the righteous, but the wicked have their fill of trouble. We see lying and deceit, causing harm among the people of God, piercing like swords, but we also see that these things will pass away.

[27:17] In the end, the wicked too will be filled with the fruit of their lips. But this also means that we have tremendous opportunity.

The words that we speak can bring healing from the harm caused by thoughtless and damaging lies. The truth that we speak to one another can bear fruit for eternity, but one day every lie ever

told will pass away.

There's genuine joy to be had in promoting peace with each other where harmful speech has sown division. There is no harm that can overwhelm the righteous and no lie that can overpower the truth because, verse 22, the Lord detests lying lips, but He delights in people who are trustworthy.

What a joy it is to be in a community where we can trust one another. If you've, like me, grown up in church, you might take it for granted, but we're in a community where hopefully, at our best, we can trust one another.

We can speak eternal truth to one another day by day to bring healing and peace and joy with our words in a world where words are more often used as weapons.

[28 : 52] and the ones who plot evil are masters of deceit. The Lord delights in people who are trustworthy and so should we. Let's value the truth.

Let's value the people who tell us the truth even when it's not what we want to hear and yet use our words for healing. And then finally, we finish with a gentle reminder, and I say gentle because there's a few more verses in Proverbs that say the same thing much more roughly, about the easiest way to avoid many of the pitfalls of our speech.

Say less. The prudent keep even their knowledge to themselves if the time or the circumstance isn't right. But on the other hand, fools reveal the truth of who they are by their thoughtless speech.

And so now, let's look on to the last part of this chapter and think about how we can build on the firm foundation that Proverbs 12 is commending to us. We've seen so far, verses 1 right up to 23, God's favour on the righteous establishes them securely so they cannot be uprooted.

He delights in the trustworthy and fills those who speak truth and peace with the good fruits of their lips. But we know that for Israel this wasn't their outcome.

[30 : 20] The land was overtaken by wickedness and deceit. The people were uprooted and exiled. They didn't build on the foundation they'd been given, the old covenant.

They weren't able to. They were led astray by liars and then became liars who led other people astray. Others ruled over them and their hearts were weighed down with anxieties.

They followed after other nations and their gods led astray by the wicked. Those that conquered them grew rich off the spoils. They had not stayed in the way of righteousness and so they continued to be ruled by death.

The promises we read in 24 to 28 not promises in the sense of if you put this in this will come out and you just hit a button and it happens but these principles that they were meant to enjoy the blessings of didn't happen.

They failed to build on the right foundations. And so this chapter in Proverbs for us isn't primarily about working well or speaking honestly or obeying the rules to get God's favour.

[31 : 34] This chapter is challenging us to ask what foundation are we building on? What foundation are we trusting in? And this is where the passage that we had from Luke chapter 6 read to us earlier comes.

It comes at the end of Jesus' first big sermon recorded in Luke. He's been telling people how to live as citizens in the new kingdom and He finishes the sermon by calling His listeners to build on the foundation of His words.

Not just by listening to them but by putting them into practice. A foundation that will never be shaken has been provided for us. Jesus obtained God's favour for us with His righteousness.

We can't be uprooted from Him. He is the noble husband whose character grants us the church His bride a crown to live and reign with Him forever.

He is the honest witness whose every word and action can be trusted to show us perfectly who God is and what He is like. His words brought healing to a broken world far from God and it was His joy to make peace between God and His people.

[33 : 02] He lived a righteous life. He defeated death for us so that we who walk the path He has set for us will live forever with Him. Proverbs 12 tells us that we need a sure foundation.

foundation. But the gospel shows us exactly who that foundation is and how we are to live our lives on it.

Proverbs 12 gives us practical wisdom so that we can build well on this foundation we've been given. As Jesus says in Luke 6, why do you call me Lord, Lord and not do what I say?

As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice I'll show you what they are like. They're like a man building a house who dug deep and laid the foundation on the

rock.

It's not enough to know that there's a stable foundation over there or if I dig deep enough down into this granite and build in that it'll be stable. You have to actually do it.

[34:08] It will take work to make sure that your life is built securely on the foundation that Jesus provides us. There's no flood or disaster that can sweep us off that foundation.

It's never going to crumble away underneath us. It's the only foundation that will last for eternity. So then we can read Proverbs 12 with joy.

If we've been given a foundation that will never fail why would we build on anything else? And we can build with confidence knowing that the things that are built up around us and against us through evil through deceit through lies will not stand.

So let's be building one another up on this foundation. As Proverbs 12 teaches us our words have incredible potential.

Let's be speaking wisely into each other's lives. Let's be building one another on the foundation of Jesus and the words he has spoken. There is nothing else we can say that has more potential to heal or more potential to promote peace or that is more trustworthy.

[35:22] Let's build together on the firm foundation of Jesus living in his righteousness so that we can receive the eternal life he has given us. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you that your word teaches us how to build our lives so that we can never be shaken. thank you that Jesus has provided for us a sure foundation.

Thank you that by your Holy Spirit you are growing us and building us up in him and thank you that we have one another so that we can be built up together. We pray that as we read this wisdom from Proverbs that you would be helping us to build well on the foundation that we've been given.

Help us to resist the temptation of deception or shortcuts or making ourselves look impressive or building our own kingdoms. Help us to trust in you to build righteously on the foundation of Christ. We pray this in his name. Amen. We're now going to sing a song Build My Life.