

# Proverbs 16

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 19 May 2019

Preacher: Chris Roberts

[ 0 : 00 ] Please sit down and turn back to Proverbs 16 that we read earlier. We're carrying on in our whole! series looking at various stages of life. Tonight we're going to think about midlife.

! We're just going to focus on these nine verses in Proverbs. Middle-aged. Sounds pretty awful, doesn't it? It is that stage of life, I think, where for the first time you realise that you're on the wrong side of time. People have midlife crises, don't they?

Now I want to avoid putting people in boxes during this series, but we can't deny, can we, that life for a person in midlife, in their 40s, 50s, is not the same as life was in their 20s. Things change, don't they?

I was reading the other day, kind of all these bank holidays that are happening over May.

Apparently the NHS is preparing itself for an influx in greater domestic injuries in A&E.;

Over the first May bank holiday, there was a spike in incidents involving people doing DIY.

Apparently it's mainly middle-aged men, going up ladders, using power tools, bodging DIY jobs at home, attempting things that they used to be able to do in their 20s, denying that they're not quite as athletic as they once were.

[ 1 : 51 ] But I want us to see tonight that the midlife crisis, whatever that is, is a theological crisis. The problems that we have, not just in midlife, is it? So don't switch off if you're younger or older than that.

The problems that we have are basically down to the problems that we have in our vision of God. The midlife crisis is a theological crisis.

And in this section of Proverbs, it shows us three basic things about the Lord that anyone, really, but especially I think those in this period of life, need to hear again.

And they're really, really basic things. They are things that we knew and know and were taught as children growing up in the church, if that was us.

And things that we teach to younger people. But until now, perhaps, they were just in our heads, but not really in our hearts. They were easier to say than maybe to believe totally.

[ 3 : 01 ] But I think these truths have become pertinent to us now, later in life. And the three things are that the Lord rules my life, the Lord is right about my life, and the Lord rescues my life.

First of all, the Lord rules my life. It can come as a shock, can't it, that one day you wake up and you look in the mirror and you think to yourself, where on earth has all the time gone?

If that has not happened yet, it will happen. You wake up and suddenly your children aren't children anymore. Your marriage, if you're married, has reached double figures.

And that's a great thing, isn't it? But people at this moment can have a bit of a moment of disappointment. The most of the firsts that come in life have been and gone.

My first job, my first car, my first family holiday, my first kiss. You're not old, but you're not young either. And life has just kind of carried you along.

[ 4 : 10 ] And suddenly there comes a struggle to come to terms with something. That our story hasn't quite worked out as we planned. And a significant passage of time has passed before we realise what's been true all along.

That my story hasn't worked out the way I wanted. Because actually, it is not my story at all. The sovereignty of God over our lives kind of bookends this section of Proverbs, doesn't it?

Look at verse 1. The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. And then jump to verse 9.

The heart of the man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps. In verse 1, he's saying, isn't he, that while we may have had a plan, in practice, on the ground in life, what we end up doing and saying is determined by things that we didn't plan.

And we realise, maybe later in life, I haven't been living my life. My life has been living me. Because God rules my life.

[ 5 : 29 ] There's a story of when the preacher Spurgeon was invited to preach out somewhere and he prepared his sermon, he planned his sermon and he'd written it. He planned it on this text in the Bible.

And in the sermon, he went to that text, he opened up the Bible, and he got through his first two points of the sermon. But at that moment, the lights in the church, it was wintertime, just went out. And they were plunged into darkness. But rather than cancelling the service, Spurgeon kind of had to think on his feet and carried on with some impromptu thoughts about how Jesus was the light of the world.

And only Spurgeon could get away with that, couldn't he? He planned something, but it didn't work out, that he was plunged into darkness. And I wonder whether in midlife, it kind of feels a bit like that.

We've been doing what we've been doing all along, and often in midlife, something can happen to make us stop. Because the light suddenly failed.

[ 6 : 37 ] A parent becomes ill. Children that we've kind of poured our lives into leave home. Our health gets complicated.

A career that we've kind of lived for is cut short. And what we planned doesn't materialise. And we end up doing and saying things that we never planned to do or say.

Because in the end, the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. That's what that proverb means. It's not random, is it? It is because God rules our lives.

Not us. We make plans, but God makes things happen. We propose events for our lives, but God disposes events.

If our lives were a piece of music, imagine it, we realise, don't we, that God is the composer of the whole orchestra, and we're merely improvisers with the instruments.

[ 7 : 39 ] And he just lets us play along. Notice the writer, he's not saying that there's no point in making plans at all, is he? Or having goals. No, verse 1, that the plans of the heart do belong to a man.

And we are to commit, verse 3, our plans to the Lord. We are to make plans. But he's saying that in all of our freedom to do that, to make plans, we are only ever going to advance God's designs.

I was reading a book a couple of weeks ago by Paul Tripp, the American writer, and it's called *Lost in the Middle*. And he speaks about kind of a period of midlife.

And he's got kind of seven, seven difficulties with midlife. And he, they all begin with D, conveniently. Dissatisfaction, disorientation, discouragement, dread, disappointment, disinterest, distance.

And kind of after that, I was thinking, you need to add an eighth one there. Depressing, Tripp. I don't think it's all that bad, is it? I don't think it is. Maybe it is for you, I don't know.

[ 8 : 55 ] And those D's are hardly exclusive to midlife, are they? We can all feel those things at different points in the Christian life. But what is helpful in that book is how he shows that in midlife, particularly, things can come along and happen that cause a crash.

Things come along and we're like those crash test dummies. And we're smashed against our creeds. Yes, I've said God rules all through my youth.

But something comes along and we're smashed against that. And I've got to believe that in much more of a fuller way now. Until this brick wall came along in my life, I hadn't seen that.

And I hadn't really had the chance to believe that. I hadn't seen the weakness of my own grasp of my own life. And of who God is. And now I've got to believe that the Lord, he rules.

He rules my life. So he rules my life. Secondly, the Lord is right about my life. The Lord is right about my life. When you're reading Proverbs, often it's quite hard, isn't it, to work out what the structure is.

[ 10 : 12 ] It just feels like kind of throwing lots of thoughts at us in a random way. But I think here there is a clear section with those bookends in verse 1 and 9.

And there is a bit in the middle that is really important. And the bit in the middle is a portion on pride. Verse 5. Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord.

Be assured he will not go unpunished. There's a hint of this as well in verse 2, isn't there? All the ways of man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the Spirit.

It seems there that there's a connection with this planning thing and a pride thing. He's saying here that those who plan as if they alone are rulers of their lives are arrogant.

And we may go through life not realising we're doing that at all. Pride is just it's a kind of just saying to God isn't it? I know best and I'm right about how to live my life and what's best for me and you're not God.

[11:27] I'm right about what matters and what I need. And so we make goals and we make plans. We make plans to have a good career and raise good children and we make good plans.

There's nothing wrong with those things, is there? But often our plans kind of push God out and we live as if we rule and that seems right in our own eyes.

And God says that is an awful thing to do. It's an abomination he says. It's a really really strong word.

It's the same word used in other places in the Old Testament for when God's people looked at the idols of other nations and of gods made out of gold and silver and wanted to worship them.

It's an abomination to God to say I know best God for my life. But in midlife when things kind of start getting difficult God might sometimes be revealing our arrogance.

[12:39] Things come along and expose what we've been living for all along. And things that we've been holding on so tightly are taken away and there's this crisis that happens.

And we're made to admit our golden idols our idols of health and of leisure and of career of influence and power and of relationships.

And we are faced here aren't we with the awful truth that God finds that kind of pride really displeasing. He's not softly softly here is he?

He's saying quite clearly I hate the way you have done that. I hate the way that you have gone proudly through life saying I am right.

God says that is so wrong. As we get older we spend more time thinking about the past don't we than the future. Someone said that you become less like astronauts and more like archaeologists.

[13:43] we dream less of reaching the stars in the future and spend more time digging up the past. And as we kind of look at this in a passage like this in a time of life like this where maybe our plans haven't worked out and the weakness of our grasp on God is laid bare when things happen and it feels like there's nothing new ahead and it's kind of all in the past.

And we fixate on yesterday and the failures and it just feels like so easy to give up isn't it? We could spend all of our time thinking about what could have been and what I should have been in the past.

But we're told here that in all the disappointment and the conviction of misplanning and of pride in life the Lord rules over my life the Lord is right about my life but thirdly the Lord rescues my life.

The Lord rescues my life. If I've come to the conviction that there is still an arrogance in my heart towards God and things have happened in my life to expose that and to bring it out.

God hates that arrogance but there is hope. The Lord rules and he's right about us and so that means that even when we have messed up he can do something about our lives and he can rescue our lives.

[15:19] The overwhelming sense of this passage is the call I think to a renewed optimism in the Lord which I think is something that we might struggle with in midlife when we feel like we've seen it all before and we've heard it all before.

look at verse 6 by steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for and by the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil.

There's a ring of optimism in verse 3 again isn't there? Commit your work to the Lord and your plans will be established. Do you see what he's doing there?

he is calling us to both let go of the past and its iniquity and to let go of a proud grasping of the future.

It is to come to God with our arrogance and with our pride and to repent, to turn from that. That's what verse 6 is saying. It is possible today to have iniquity atoned for, covered over in turning to him for rescue.

[16:35] So God says yes regret the pride but in your regret repent. Don't wallow in regret.

There is iniquity there but I will cover that if you come to me and I will atone for it. He will break the power of counseled sin in our lives and because I rule your life, I even rule your mistakes.

Verse 4, the Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble. He's saying everything in your life, even the wicked things, have been made and ordained by me.

Everything? Yes, everything. Everything. things. Even things that are wrong and have displeased me, even the wicked things and wicked people in the world are somehow in God's wisdom, sovereignly ordained by him.

I rule, God says. And the wrongs done by us and done to us, he's not pleased with them, is he? But he rules even over those things.

[ 17 : 53 ] Without being the author of evil and wicked, somehow he's saying, I am going to make sure that every loose end in your life is tied up. And even the bad things you will see will fit into my master plan.

Going back to the story of Spurgeon being plunged into the pitch black, apparently afterwards, people came up to him in the weeks to come and said that they'd been converted by the first two points of the sermon.

And others came and said they'd been converted by the last points of the sermon, the bits on Jesus being the light of the world. And he noticed, he noted afterwards that if he'd carried on with the original plan, the same would not have happened.

It is to say, isn't it, with Spurgeon, given all that's happened in our lives, even the bad things, Lord, with you, you rule, and the same wouldn't have happened in my life now.

God is saying stop rehearsing and nursing past hurts and mistakes as if the answer is with you, because you cannot see the order the Lord will bring from your confusion.

[ 19 : 11 ] Stop fearing the past and fear the Lord instead. Let go of the past. Because I can cover the past, God says. I am sovereign over the past.

I can rescue your past and turn it out for good. I rule and I'm right. And you need to let go of the future as well. He's saying here, isn't he, that the plans we make are important, but they're no less our plans and activities because they're his.

we still should make plans. What we decide and how we live matters. But instead of always dreaming of the next thing, dreaming of retirement, or fantasising about it, or proudly seeking the future that we've planned for ourselves, God says, no, give that to me as well.

Give the past to me and the future to me. Commit your work to the Lord and your plans will be established. If you look at verse 9, what we looked at with the children, the heart of man plans his way, the Lord establishes his steps.

That's a positive verse there. It's not just saying that God rules, but that when we do recognise that, and our desire for the future is made in good faith with him, then he doesn't just rule our steps, but he establishes our steps.

[ 20 : 41 ] Give the future to God and he'll see you right. He'll make your feet firm. Give me your future and I'll deal with your fear.

That's what he says in verse 7, isn't it? When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. Give me your future and trust in me, live for me, and I will deal with what you fear.

I'll handle the people and the things that you fear, if you can trust in me and you can fear me. The lights that flicker and the darkness that comes our way, the wall that we might smash into at some point in our life, in all that God says, look, I rule, I rule it all.

And you have a chance now, wherever you're at, to rethink what you're doing in your life. In your story, all the firsts may have been and gone, and what people normally do is to try and get them back, isn't it?

Get a new car, get a Porsche for the first time, get a new job, get a new home, get a new husband or wife. I need more firsts in my life, because I've been there and I've done that and there's nothing to look forward to.

[ 22 : 08 ] So what I need to do is hit rewind on my story, because it hasn't turned out the way I planned. But the excitement and the joy and the satisfaction and the release and the relief here, comes in the very fact that it is not our story.

And we don't live our lives, but our lives live us, because God rules our lives. And that is a great relief, isn't it? That is a great relief to know that we are improvising in a way, because God is composing and we cannot see the order that the Lord will bring from our confusion at any point in life.

We cannot see the order that he will bring from our past sins and our shaky future. God will be God and the Jen Wilkin writes in a book on the attributes of the Lord.

She says the Lord is simultaneously the God of the past, present and the future, bending time to his perfect will. The past has no missed opportunities with the Lord.

The present holds for him no anxiety uncertainty. And the future holds for him no uncertainty. He is the God who was, the God who is, and the God who is to come.

[ 23 : 36 ] The midlife crisis is a theological crisis. And any crisis actually is a theological crisis, isn't it? Because we've forgotten who God is.

Maybe one day we woke up and we looked in the mirror and we thought, where on earth is all the time gone in my life? Because I've been there and I've done that and there's nothing to look forward to.

And what has come of all my cravings? And my values and my treasures and my idols? What has come of my pride? But if we can admit that now, and we can admit that God rules, and God is a right, there is great hope tonight.

There is hope for him to redeem and rescue your life. And to make it worthwhile from this point onwards. That he might atone for iniquity and establish our steps from this point onwards.

And so we need to let go of the sins of the past, don't we, and give them to him. And we need to let go of the fears of the future. We need to let our regretting turn into repenting.

[ 24 : 53 ] Because he rules and he rescues our lives. So let's do that now, let's pray.