

Proverbs 3

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[0 : 00] I'm after that. We'll read from verse 13 to the end of the chapter. So I'm page 5 to 8. Blessed is the one who finds wisdom and the one who gets understanding.

! For the gain from her is better than gain from silver, and her profit better than gold. She's more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand, in her left hand are riches and honour, her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

She's a tree of life to those who lay hold of her. Those who hold her fast are called blessed. The Lord, by wisdom, founded the earth. By understanding, he established the heavens. By his knowledge, the deeps broke open, and the clouds dropped down the dew.

My son, do not lose sight of these. Keep sound wisdom and discretion, and they will be life for your soul, and adornment for your neck. Then you will walk on your way securely, and your foot will not stumble.

If you lie down, you will not be afraid. When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden terror, or of the ruin of the wicked when it comes. For the Lord will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught.

[1 : 12] Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbour, Go and come again, tomorrow I will give it, when you have it with you. Do not plan evil against your neighbour, who dwells trustingly beside you.

Do not contend with a man for no reason, when he has done you no harm. Do not envy a man of violence, and do not choose any of his ways, for the devious person is an abomination of the Lord. But the upright are in his confidence. The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous. Towards the scorners he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favour.

The wise will inherit honour, but fools get disgraced. It's possible to add life to life. It's possible to add life to life.

Now that isn't as strange as it sounds. Look at chapter 3 verse 21. Chapter 3 verse 21. My son, do not lose sight of these. Keep sound wisdom and discretion, and they will be life for your soul.

[2 : 18] It doesn't mean, of course, that if you have no judgment and no discernment, you're clinically dead. Of course it doesn't mean that. No, like the second half of verse 22 shows, the meaning is that judgment and discernment, when you possess them, they add to your life.

They adorn it. They beautify it. Wisdom and judgment make you beautiful. So a woman's neck is a beautiful thing, isn't it? It's a beautiful thing by itself, but it looks much better with a beautiful necklace.

There's a quality of life that can be added to clinical life. A perfect wholeness. A flourishing. A prosperity. A roundedness. A peace and a beauty. Which makes the living really alive.

So you will know you're alive tomorrow morning, wouldn't you? When you're waiting for the bus, or you're on the tube, or you're back in the office, or you're standing by the photocopier again, or you're on the phone to that difficult client, but when you're hurtling down ski slope, when you're standing with the golden sand beneath your toes, when you're swimming in crystal blue seas, when you're on the top of a mountain, and you look out, when you're at Swansea Bay, and you feel the crisp air crashing in jiffies, whatever your dream consists of, of a perfect holiday, we all know what it means, don't we?

To know places where we feel really alive. We know what that means. All our senses are heightened. In overdrive. And everything is just the way we want it to be.

[3 : 51] And the way we think it ought to be. And we say, I just felt so alive. And the Bible says that the world is heading towards everything. One day being the way it ought to be.

One day life will be added to life. In a stunning and spectacular way. Now the Bible's word for that is shalom. We know that word, don't we? Shalom. We tend to translate the word shalom as peace.

But it's so much more than that. Peace simply means, doesn't it, the absence of conflict. The absence of war. But shalom is much, much more than that. So you can have two opposite armies that can declare a ceasefire and they can call a truce and they can be at peace.

But they're at peace, aren't they? Over acres of smouldering ruins. They've shelved for smithereens. But they're at peace. It is peace, but it's not shalom. When the Bible speaks of shalom, usually the prophets in the Old Testament are speaking about it.

And they speak of a future day. A day where there'll be a new age in which human crookedness will be straightened out. Where rough places will be made smooth.

[5 : 03] Where the foolish will become wise. Where the wise will be made humble. Where deserts will flower. Where mountains will run with wine. Where tears will end. Weeping will cease.

People will go to sleep without their doors being locked. Without weapons under their bed. Lambs will lie down with lions. People will work in peace and they will multiply fruitfully.

Relationships will be harmonious and all of creation will be webbed together in a perfect fit. Humans will be knit together as brothers and sisters. And all of nature and all people will look to God.

And they will walk with God. And they will lean towards God. And they will delight in God. Shalom means universal flourishing. It means wholeness. It means delight.

Shalom means life as it was meant to be. And here's what Proverbs 3 says to us about this. Perfect shalom is future. One day God will give us a new heaven and a new earth.

[6 : 04] That's what he will do. But when you know God and when you trust the Lord and when you honour him and you fear him Shalom begins now. And God has already begun his work isn't he?

Of putting things back to how they ought to be. As I want to show you that. Our first point really is the promises of wisdom. The promises of wisdom.

Look at verses 1 and 2. The promises of wisdom. Read verse 1 and 2. My son if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments that's Proverbs chapter 2 not Proverbs chapter 3.

My son do not forget my teaching. But let your heart keep my commandments. For length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.

The word for prosperity here is Shalom. And will bring you prosperity and peace they will add to you.

[7 : 05] That is Shalom. But it's trying to show you at the end of verse 2 or what it should do or the NIV should show you is that it's more than just the removal of conflict.

It's the positive presence of flourishing. And the NIV which is a better translation of Proverbs says for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity.

It's saying it's more than the absence of conflict. It is a positive presence of flourishing. And the prosperity at the end of verse 2 does not mean financial wealth. It means wholeness.

It means health. It means well-being. And this is one of wisdom's promises. If you get wisdom remember my teaching keep my commandments and then length of days and years of life and peace and Shalom and wholeness will be added to you.

Wisdom will add to your life. Now we're going to see in verse 2 and 3 how we should understand these promises. They are not a universal guarantee. We'll see that. But they are a general rule.

[8 : 14] The wise person tends to live longer. Not always of course. But generally we know it's true don't we? Make good choices about alcohol, drugs, sex, relationships, career, money.

Make wise choices and you will tend to live a healthy happy and balanced life. Make foolish choices in those areas and as a general rule the curtain will come down early.

We know that don't we? That is a very simple way to live longer and it's God's way. That's the first of wisdom's promises. Verse 2 it will bring you Shalom. Now let's look at the next promise.

The next promise is in verse 4. Wisdom will bring well it's described isn't it as love and faithfulness. So you will find favour and good success.

Then you will win favour and a good name in the sight of God and man. Let love and faithfulness will never leave you.

[9 : 15] Verse 3 let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you. It will win you favour and a good name in the sight of God and man. That's what we saw last week isn't it in the previous

chapter.

We saw that build character and your reputation will take care of yourself. Love and faithfulness. Steadfast love and faithfulness. Love towards God love towards others.

Faithfulness towards God and faithfulness expressing itself to each other will make you from the inside out the sort of person that will have a standing with others.

Why do you love to shop in Waitrose? Those of you who shop in Waitrose those of you who can afford it. Why do you love to shop in John Lewis? I think it's how we are treated in it isn't it?

It's how we are treated in it isn't it? I was in Morrison's this week and I asked for something and the guy grunted at me and just pointed and shouted something about Isle 2 and in Waitrose you ask where are chilli beans or something like that or bay leaves I think I was looking for he shows you to the place asks you if there's anything to do customer care stamps John Lewis's and Waitrose reputation now you notice this person this person who is at work is marked by love and faithfulness you've seen it haven't you?

[10:37] You've seen that in people the way they treat the secretary at reception on the way to that kind of plush top office floor it's the way they treat the client it's the way they speak about their staff when they're not in the room you've seen them put the bins out you've seen them stay late to help you or you've seen them finish early so they want to get home to put their kids to bed it's part of shalom human beings thinking well of each other because of who they are esteeming one another highly because of what they do and how they speak and how they treat each other it's all part of how things ought to be the third promise is in verse 6 in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight straight paths in Proverbs are very simply morally right paths doesn't mean the paths will always be clear or that it will always be obvious but that when we know the Lord the paths we walk in for life will be the right one the path of your life probably looks anything but straight to many of you but what we need is the bird's eye view isn't it

God's view of the world not the world's eye view from where we stand in other words whatever it feels like to us if we are walking through life knowing God it will be a straight path the fourth promise is in verse 8 and it is health to your body healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones it's very simple at verse 2 a right relationship with God leads us to mental and physical well being now again it's not a universal guarantee but it's a general principle now what I want you to see is do you see what I've noticed this week how holistic the bible's view of life in God's world is isn't it wonderful you did not come to it this evening as a disembodied spirit with the kind of issues of your body and your mind and your relationships at home that's what I deal with at home and work somehow disconnected from what we're doing here tonight as believers

God is not saying to you I'm really concerned that you have a good spiritual moment on Sunday evenings from 6 o'clock till 7 o'clock but after that well it's kind of irrelevant what you do now the promises of wisdom are this if you get me and if you find me and if you love me you'll be skilled at navigating life well look at the commands which enable us to become this sort of person look at all the verbs don't forget my teaching verse 1 remember it keep my commands in your heart let steadfast love and faithfulness let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you bind them to your neck write them on your heart verse 5 trust the Lord verse 7 fear the Lord verse 9 honour the Lord in chapter 2 we've told to accept God's words in the Bible and store them up and now in chapter 3 it's as if the father goes up a gear and says don't simply get them but guard them lash them to your body internalise them your heart you see is your security system and every day the world around this is trying to rob you of the shalom of good standing with others and of straight paths and of nourishment for your very bones there is a way there is a world and a way of being that is sick and dying and heading towards death and destruction and probably say to you and I that we need to have an internal fortress God's words hidden in your heart written on your heart shaping your mind and will and actions and desires and priorities and perspectives and as you take God's word in you give back out to

God in three ways you trust him you fear him you honour him his words to you and your stance towards him that is the path of wisdom the life of human flourishing laid out for you to embrace so what's required to be like this let's look at wisdom requirements look at verses 5 and 6 wisdom's requirements there's five trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight isn't it that's what we say they're probably the most famous words in Proverbs aren't they you know them if you've been in Club 16 or 24 7 or you know them we write them in cards don't we to one another

and they teach us to trust God entirely exclusively and exhaustively entirely exclusively and exhaustively trust in the

[15 : 59] Lord entirely with all your heart can you see that there's a story about a man in America crossing a frozen river on a winter's day he did not know how thick the ice was and he's very nervous and so he inches along on all fours along the river and he's gingerly feeling his way forward on the ice that's across the river on all fours when he hears behind him a thundering noise and he looks behind him to see a man with four horses pulling a wagon across the ice of the river at top speed well that man was a local wasn't he he knew how thick the ice was and so he drove his horses and his wagon onto the ice half-hearted trust in the Lord is like a man crawling across the ice on all fours an entire trust is when your whole being is placed upon him so tomorrow morning you might believe that the lift in your work if you've got a lift in your work you might believe that that lift will take you securely to your floor let's say it's the fourth floor you might believe that but you only trust it when you actually get into the lift don't you and you press the button so how do you know tonight if you're trusting the Lord how do you know if you're trusting the

Lord entirely well one way to examine yourself is to ask if you know what it's like to trust him exclusively that's the second half of verse five you see it gives another angle doesn't it trust in the Lord with all your heart entirely and do not lean on your own understanding you trust the Lord entirely when you trust the Lord exclusively not your own ideas not your foibles or desires or perspectives but God's so let's dig a little deeper here's how one commentated puts it and this gets us to the heart of it do you merely agree with the Bible or do you obey it in other words what do you do when the Bible contradicts what you think is true or what you want to be true or what you think might be better who do you go with who do you lean on yourself or the Bible if we merely agree with the Bible then what's happening is that our response to

God and his word is not one of obedience it's just merely coincidence the Bible just happens to line up with what I think in a given area that says this commentator and I think he's right when you trust in the Lord entirely then you will let the Bible challenge your most cherished thoughts and feelings the way to gauge how much you lean on your own understanding is to ask how much you lean on God's understanding even when it doesn't make perfect sense to you you know those times for a child isn't it a two year old child learning to jump off the edge of the pool for the first time into the open arms of a parent so you've got two realities of a little toddler standing on the edge of the pool two realities staring at them in the face one is the reality that they're going to fall and they know enough about life even at two years old to know that they don't like falling and that experience teaches them that falling is painful and the other fact is the open arms of mum or dad standing in the water and experience has taught them that those arms in front of them are safe and strong so there's a major moment of personal crisis for the two year old am I going to lean on my own understanding or am I going to place my weight all my weight on someone else one writer on Proverbs says that a life of Christian character and depth of maturity comes about through a long deep process of unselfing that is brilliant unselfing and increased awareness awe and devotion to someone else someone higher than me more authoritative than me someone more good than me you see that unselfing in verse 7 can you see it be not wise in your own eyes in your own eyes isn't that a wonderful expression it's a way of saying that although our physical eyes are always looking outwards aren't they we're looking at people we're looking outwards in the world we also have a kind of internal screen constantly at work all day where we're looking at ourselves and most of the time our internal eyes are saying to us aren't they good to go

I'm good to go how I feel about this must make it right how I see things must be the right way to see this that's not how I see things we say that don't we to each other but being wise in your own eyes does not mean that you're the sort of person who always thinks they're better than other people or more intelligent than other people there's probably people here tonight who are the kind of people who are inside your head when your internal eyes look at yourself you think you're useless you think you're worthless and you think you're no good compared to anyone else there's lots of people like that proverb says this proverb says that it is just as much of a form of being wise in your own eyes as the proud and confident person do you get that for what you're doing is you're trusting your own view of yourself do you think that what you feel must be right no says this father to his teenage son and to us turn things around always be suspicious suspicious of yourself always be suspicious of your own take on things especially when it's to do with your view of yourself and learn to sell your suspicion of God and what

God says down the river trust the Lord doubt yourself that is the path to Shalom that is the path to wisdom and to holiness entering Shalom as a person does not come about through strained willpower but through resting my world on the shoulders of the Lord Jesus on the shoulders another and that means resting my world in its entirety on God the third aspect of what this trust is is what I call exhaustive trust so do you see it verse 6 in all your ways in all your ways your career your relationships your sexuality your money your home your children your retirement your holidays your TV watching your leisure your church attending your whole life everything so that there is not one bit of you that is unconnected and your life not one bit of your life that is off limits to Christ and his word and his rule in your heart and mind verse 6 is much much stronger than we have it here it is not in all your ways acknowledge that is weak in all your ways literally know him so acknowledgement is what you do to the security guard as you walk into work or in the shop isn't it or maybe to the person on the door today that gave you a sheet or a hymn book it's a kind of polite tipping of the hat hi how are you doing it's a kind of politeness

[24 : 05] I've clocked you you're there I'm here now let's get on let's get on with life isn't it that's what you do when you acknowledge someone acknowledging someone it's not knowing them but this is meant to be an active seeking to please obeying and serving them a constant attention to who God is and what he said and what that means for every area of your life knowing every area of life that God rules knowing God in all areas changes everything we've seen that in the last couple of weeks knowing God makes you a certain kind of husband a certain kind of mother knowing God makes you a certain kind of employee knowing God makes you a certain kind of teenager knowing God makes you a certain kind of bus driver knowing God makes you a certain kind of accountant certain kind of engineer certain kind of doctor so the straight paths for a bus driver to living and walking and working may not be the same as the same kind of straight paths for a surgeon to walking but God will make them both straight he will make them right and true and upright and honourable and whole and healthy and flourishing when you know him and the work that he's given you to do and let me finish this with this the writer gives us two case studies and two examples two case studies and two examples of what it means to trust God exhaustively he shows us what it means to trust God in a time of plenty and a time of pain two of you like the opposite ends of the extremes of life plenty and a pain this is where the rubber hits the road it's why the trust of the

Lord it's not a kind of indoor sport for Sundays but it's something that affects every area of your life it trickles down how you use your checkbook and how you understand your tears so the first test case is wisdom and plenty verses 9 and 10 honour the Lord with your wealth and with the face fruits of all your problems then your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will be bursting with wine to honour God is to esteem him as worthy to count him as valuable to give proportionate weight him and the first thing to notice is that this is exactly the right word to use in connection with wealth isn't it because what we esteem what we value what we honour we pay for and we spend money on so if you think that a certain kind of car is worth it if you can afford it you buy it don't you so if you buy an Aston Martin instead of a Fiat Punto it's because you're prepared to honour one and not the other with your wealth and so literally verse 9 is honour the Lord from your wealth honour the Lord from your wealth and give him of your wealth to him out of your wealth and what will decide how much you give is how much you trust him what is he worth you're willing to spend aren't you more on an iPad an Apple iPad than you are on the kind of Tesco's home brand tablet aren't you you're willing to spend more on the Apple because some of you love the brand far too much but you trust Apple don't you and you love Apple so you honour Apple from your wealth will honour honour the Lord and the first fruit of your crops the best of your produce not the season's end this is tremendously challenging where does the best of your wealth go so your heart displays what it counts valuable and worthy and honourable and beautiful one of the most beautiful things the Bible does with money is that it tells us to give yes and it tells us to dig deep but it never beats you up into giving what the Bible does is it shows us who God is and it says to you how do you feel about it how do you feel about it because how you feel about God and how you regard God will decide how tightly you hold the purse strings is he worthy of being trusted or will you lead on your own understanding for here's how it works in Proverbs Proverbs says to you and money is good wealth is good we should pray for one another to prosper in their jobs will come through the sermon in his own right money is good but there's something better isn't there verse 13 blessed is the one who finds wisdom and the one who gets understanding for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold she's more precious than jewels and nothing he desire can

compare with her long life is in her right hand and her left hand are riches and honour her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace she's a tree of life to those who lay hold of her those who hold her fast are called blessed

I see there it is what I want and what you want and actually what we want every time we spend our money on something beautiful and expensive and worthy of our money what we want is the tree of life verse 18 we want human happiness and wholeness and flourishing we want shalom and the world and us in it and our lives the way it ought to be that's what we really really want and money cannot give you it it cannot and it will not buy you happiness money can put food on the table but not fellowship around it money can buy you a house for not a home it can give a woman jewellery but it can't give the woman the love she really wants notice none of this is saying wealth is wrong it is a great good it is simply saying there's a greater good than wealth so in the Old Testament the Old Testament people gave 10% of their income in fact they gave a lot more than that but I don't want to go into that there's a command in the

[30 : 44] New Testament there is no such command it seems to me but it is an expanded principle of generosity the question how much should I give can be replaced by a better one how can I manage my affairs better how can I be more wise so that I can give more or here's an even better one what would a life of shalom with my money look like who would benefit from my money what am I doing with my wealth what am I living for with it why has God given it to me I'm sure you noticed I hope you noticed in verse 10 there is a reward for honouring God with our wealth is this a kind of prosperity gospel verse 10 if I give to God will he give back to me and then I'll get even richer well some people think so but it misses the entire point doesn't it in the way Proverbs is written we're going to see this later Solomon says give me neither riches nor poverty that's Solomon's wisdom for both can destroy a person from the inside out no if you invest for God's sake he will give you more to invest for his sake simple if you are faithful in being generous with what

God has given you he's much more likely to give you even more to be generous that's one way to think about verse 10 but use another way verse 10 is followed very quickly by verses 11 to 12 in other words times of plenty are sometimes followed by times of pain and the promise of verse 10 is not an absolute guarantee of God's universal blessing it is a general principle as Jesus said with the measure you use it will be measured back to you but also sometimes along that there will be pain or pain fatherly discipline and it's clear from the New Testament that the Lord's discipline his fatherly rebuke might be words spoken to us which hurt which chastise us or very likely they are circumstances which are difficult and hard and here's where the rubber hits the road trust in the Lord with all your heart then and lean not on your own understanding then and in all your ways acknowledge him I have two little saplings well they're here tonight aren't they two little plants who one day

I hope will grow up to be strong oak trees I hope Noah will be a man of character and he will be a woman of character like I do every child in this church so we plant seeds together don't we we plant sunflower seeds not long is it when you plant sunflower seeds March April something like that and what do you do when you plant sunflower seeds well you put it in the garden when it's a little bit and you put a stake in the ground don't you and you tie the plant to the stake that's what it's like growing up isn't it that's what it's like growing up you need help to grow up straight and tall and true and it's why mum and dad discipline you alright it's not because they don't love you it's because they delight in you and your mum and dad discipline you because they want you to flourish and they want you to grow do you understand that

Marius good and that is what some of us feel right now isn't it that God is tying us for a stake and he's making our life grow straight and true in a direction which is not the direction we would have chosen for ourselves and it feels like discipline but it is the way of shalom and it is the way of wholeness and maybe not now maybe you might not even get to see it completely in this lifetime but one day you will and Proverbs says to you in your tears do not be wise in your own eyes for in your own eyes you will only despise your heavenly father for it and will not see his delight in you he loves you and so do not resent him for his chastened love let's pray let's pray let's pray