

Direction Offered
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Allen Power

Proverbs 3:1-12

Opening: **How well do you follow directions? Did you embrace or resist trusting GPS apps and navigation systems? Was it hard to accept that the GPS has a better, faster, more direct route than your favorite route?**

We said the "theme verse for Proverbs is 1:7 - The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Compare that verse with the story of "the fall" in the Garden of Eden. Life was perfect then Adam and Eve messed it up by giving into temptation. **How did they violate blessing and confirm the truth of Proverbs 1:7 above?**

Big Idea: God provides wisdom and direction to those who trust Him (followers of Christ.) The question: Do we really trust Him and follow His direction for our lives or do we miss His blessings by ignoring His direction and instead think we are "wise in our own eyes?"

- I told you last week that my "word for 2020" is WISDOM. In many ways this lesson is for me and I'm willing to let you eavesdrop. ☺
- Last week we gave that caveat: Proverbs are not promises or guarantees. *"They are they are generalizations of how things usually work out."*
- This week I read a differing view from a respected theologian: *"The proverbs will always come true...Proverbs are promises that generally come true now but always come true later. They are generally true in this life, but they are absolutely true in the life to come."* More on that later.
- What we know for certain is that practicing the wisdom of proverbs will enhance our lives today and prepare us for a wonderful eternity with God.

- The first twelve verses of Proverbs three are divided into six sets of two verses that give a command and then the consequences of following it.
- One commentator says these twelve verses are *“about being in a faithful covenant relationship with God... This covenant involved commitments that were to be upheld by each partner.”*ⁱⁱⁱ
- Let’s read these twelve verses (or six commands and outcomes) and see how they apply to our lives today.

Proverbs 3:1–12 (ESV) — **1** My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, **2** for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. **3** Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. **4** So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man. **5** Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. **6** In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. **7** Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. **8** It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones. **9** Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; **10** then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine. **11** My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, **12** for the Lord reproofs him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

- Verse one shows a father (Solomon) urging the child to never forget his wise teaching. We can also apply this to God’s commands in scripture.
- The key is to store those commands in our hearts. That isn’t just memorization alone, it’s memorization plus obedience at the “heart level.”
- Warren Wiersbe: *“It isn’t enough for believers to carry the Bible in their hands; they must let the Holy Spirit write it on their hearts”*^{iv}
- The reward for internalizing and following God’s commands is a full and satisfying life characterized by peace. (Life in our days vs days in our life.)

- Verse three commands that we embrace “love and faithfulness.” Your translation may have other words: ESV: steadfast love & faithfulness, NASB: kindness and truth, NLT: Loyalty and kindness, NKJV: mercy and truth; CSB: Loyalty and faithfulness. Why the differences in these terms?
- The two Hebrew words in this verse have multiple meanings and nuances, and all of them are wonderful standards for us.
- **chesed** Which means goodness, kindness:—deeds of devotion(2), devotion(1), devout(1), faithfulness(1), favor(2), good(1), kindly(7), kindness(32), kindnesses(1), loveliness(1), lovingkindness(176), lovingkindnesses(7), loyal deeds(1), loyalty(6), mercies(1), merciful(2), mercy(1), righteousness(1), unchanging love(2). [# of times in scripture]
- **emeth** Meaning *firmness, faithfulness, truth*:—faith(1), faithful(2), faithfully(6), faithfulness(10), lasting(1), nor*(1), right(1), true(18), truly(4), truth(80), truth that you may correctly(1), truthful(2).^v
- Aren’t those wonderful characteristics? As you meditate on them, wouldn’t you want a spouse or a friend with those characteristics? Wouldn’t you want to BE that person?
- Our Lifeway writer said, “*We wear loyalty and faithfulness like a beautiful necklace around the neck for everyone to see. Equally important, these two features have been etched deeply in a believer’s heart. There they shape our words and actions.*”^{vi} It’s not only about what we think or say.
- “*Thoughts and words are not enough—our lives reveal whether we are truly merciful and truthful. Do our actions measure up to our attitudes?*”^{vii}
- Verse four says the result is “favor with both God and people” and “a good reputation.” **Proverbs 22:1 (ESV)** says, — **1** A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.
- I’m reminded of one of my favorite verses, **Micah 6:8 (ESV)** — **8** He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?
- If we will let Him, God can give us that kind of reputation.
- Some attempt to “fake” their way into a great reputation - what a terrible load, what pressure! God builds our reputation from

the inside out. He knows my heart and people know my actions. It's possible to fool people but not God. If my heart is right I don't bear the burden of fooling anyone, I'll have favor in both God's sight and the opinion of others.

- Think again of words like, steadfast love, kindness, faithfulness, truth, and integrity. They make a beautiful “necklace” and a sterling reputation.
- Verses five and six are favorite memory verses for God’s people because they are fundamental to having the abundant life in Christ.
- Trust in the Lord with ALL YOUR HEART – TOTAL trust in all areas of life.
- *“The word translated “trust” in verse 5 means “to lie helpless, facedown.” It pictures a servant waiting for the master’s command in readiness to obey, or a defeated soldier yielding himself to the conquering general.”^{viii}*
- As Steve Brock used to say, *“It’s not commitment, it’s surrender!”*
- “Lean not” means putting my full weight on God’s wisdom not mine.
- As one commentator wrote, *“Wisdom starts with recognizing that you don’t have it and looking to God in humility for it.”^{ix}*
- “Lean not on your own understanding” doesn’t mean we turn off our God-given intelligence. It means we’re willing to be “be corrected by God’s Word and wise counselors.”^x
- “Acknowledge Him” in all we do. That’s seeking His direction in every area of life. Wise followers of Christ don’t divide life into the sacred and the secular. You know, *“I’ll check with God on religious stuff and trust my own judgment on the “non-religious” part of life.”* He’s God over ALL of life.
- I would never make an important decision without acknowledging and including Susan, why on earth would I exclude the God of the Universe who has the power to give me a “straight path” to the abundant life?
- I can trust Him completely because of His attributes. He knows everything (omniscient,) He controls everything (omnipotent,) He’s always with me (omnipresent,) He is truthful and keeps every promise He ever made, He cannot change (immutability.)

Best of all, I know He loves me because He sent His son Jesus to die in my place. That's assurance I can trust Him!^{xi}

- Verse seven: Don't be wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and turn from evil. This goes back to what we said about Adam and Eve in the Garden.
- Remember how the serpent (Satan) tempted Eve in Genesis 3:5? "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil."^{xii} [You can be smarter than God!]
- You know those "my kid is an honor student" bumper stickers? [Don't be offended if you have one, I'm making a point.] If we choose to ignore God's direction in our lives we should get a bumper sticker that says, "Follow me, I'm smarter than God!" Imagine the reaction in traffic!
- That's a ridiculous illustration, but how many times do we live our lives and make our decisions without acknowledging God as if we are smarter?
- Eve became "wise in her own eyes" instead of turning from evil and we are all still paying for her disobedience and lack of trust in God.
- The Faithlife Study Bible reminds us: "*Humility is a characteristic of the wise, while arrogance is an attribute of the fool.*"^{xiii}
- The reward of "healing for your body and strength for your bones" isn't a guarantee we'll never get sick, but we all know that a lifestyle based on wise living does improve the quality of our physical and emotional health.
- How many people are sick and suffering from unwise choices?
- We are to turn from evil. "*Evil occurs where and when God's will is hindered by human sin.*"^{xiv} If it's counter to God's will, run from it!
- Verses nine and ten instruct us to honor God with the "first and best" of the material resources He has entrusted to us. It's the Old Testament concept of giving God the "first fruits" of the harvest.
- Question: Why does the government take out taxes by withholding? Why doesn't God handle the tithe the same way?
Why does He give us control over giving back to Him a portion of what is really His?

- The government gets “theirs” before we can spend it elsewhere.
- God chooses to test our faith and faithfulness by giving us the choice to honor Him (or not) with our time, talents, and treasures.
- My faith and obedience will be reflected in whether I give Him the first and best, the leftovers, a “tip,” or nothing at all.
- The result is “barns filled with grain.” This isn’t prosperity teaching. The principle is that God will supply my material needs after I give Him the first and best. Jesus said in Matthew 6:32-33, “...your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. ³³ Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.” ^{xv}
- Jesus also said in Matthew 6:21: ²¹ Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. ^{xvi}
- Giving the first and best to Him also focuses our heart on His Kingdom.
- Verses eleven and twelve are about the “Lord’s discipline.” We’re not to reject or resent the correction and discipline of a loving Father.
- We need to be clear that God will not punish a follower of Christ for our sin because Jesus already paid for our sin on the cross (see Romans 8:1.)
- Because we still have a human nature that can slip into sin, our Heavenly Father WILL correct our bad behavior for our own good, “just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights.” The verse doesn’t say it will be fun when it happens. **Hebrews 12:11 (ESV) — 11** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.
- God corrects us in love to prepare us for blessing.
- One important point: Trials in life are not always correction for sin.
- “Sometimes...difficult times come even when we have no flagrant sin. Then, our response should be patience, integrity, and confidence that God will show us what to do.” ^{xvii}
- One last point. Some might read these verses about “length of life, favor, success, healing, barns filled with plenty” as payoffs

in exchange for obedience and ask, “What if I obey, and God doesn’t “pay?”

- First, anyone who approaches these verses like a “points system” to a perfect life hasn’t studied their Bible.
- Even if God worked that way, (He doesn’t!) none of us could be obedient enough to earn “perfect prosperity, health, and success” from God.
- Secondly, a perfect life with no problems is not a promise of God. Jesus said we would have trouble as long as we are in this world (John 16:33.)
- The giants of scripture had their share of suffering and yet were blessed.
- These are guidelines for living not guarantees of a life with no problems; however, the personal experience of generations of Christ-followers has proven that living by these principles results in much more blessing than being “wise in our own eyes.”
- Finally, if someone says they obeyed and God didn’t pay, I’d ask, what’s your definition of pay? My Bible says Jesus paid it all so I could have eternal life forever, and if we’ve trusted Him as Savior and Lord, all of these blessings will be ours for eternity, forever,-- a lot longer than this life.
- As Jonathan Aikin writes: “...it’s not your best life now; it’s your best life later and forever.”^{xviii}

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- God provides wisdom and direction to those who trust Him (followers of Christ.) The question: Do we really trust Him and follow His direction for our lives or do we miss His blessings by ignoring His direction and instead think we are “wise in our own eyes?”
- If we live in trust and obedience to His wisdom, we will display loyalty, kindness, steadfast love, honesty, and integrity. We will enjoy a good reputation and favor with God and people.
- If we bring all our decisions to Him and filter them through His word, we’ll be amazed at how much straighter our path is compared to when we rely on our own “smarts.”

- If we recognize our lack of wisdom and run from evil, He will keep us from things that can destroy our physical, mental, and emotional health.
- If we honor Him with our treasure, He will meet our material needs.
- If we see his “divine discipline” as “evidence of divine love.” We won’t resent it, we’ll know that He’s equipping us to be blessed.
- His wisdom is available, do we really trust Him totally so we can be blessed by it?

ⁱ Smith, J. E. (1996). *The wisdom literature and Psalms* (p. 470). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

ⁱⁱ From a discussion by Bruce Waltke on the proverbs as promises in The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1–15, 107–9. Akin, Jonathan. *Exalting Jesus in Proverbs* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) . B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid*

^{iv} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Skillful* (p. 38). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^v Thomas, R. L. (1998). *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries : updated edition*. Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc.

^{vi} Explore the Bible – Leader Guide – Lifeway 2020

^{vii} Tyndale. *Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size)* (Kindle Locations 149544-149545). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

^{viii} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Skillful* (p. 38). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^{ix} Akin, Jonathan. *Exalting Jesus in Proverbs* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) . B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

^x Tyndale. *Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size)* (Kindle Locations 149550-149552). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

^{xi} Resting in the Faithfulness of God – Dr. Charles Stanley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=neNE7pXtX24>

^{xii} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Ge 3:5). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^{xiii} Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Pr 3:7). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

^{xiv} Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In *Harper’s Bible dictionary* (1st ed., p. 287). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

^{xv} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Mt 6:32–33). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^{xvi} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Mt 6:21). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^{xvii} Tyndale. *Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size)* (Kindle Locations 149573-149575). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

^{xviii} Akin, Jonathan. Exalting Jesus in Proverbs (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) . B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.