

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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Righteousness and Wisdom

Proverbs 3:1-12

Key verse: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart” (Proverbs 3:5).

The Book of Proverbs is a treasure chest of godly, practical advice for the art of living. These 12 verses are a good example of the great wisdom to be gained from the prayerful reading of this divinely inspired book.

Verses 1-2 provide two important keys to the interpretation of Proverbs. First, notice that the author addresses these words of wisdom to “my child” (v. 1). This fact reminds us that Proverbs is often meant to guide the young and direct them into a lifestyle that God will bless. (At the same time, these words of guidance are good for people of any age!) Secondly, the linking of right living with long life and prosperity, in verse 2 and elsewhere, requires us to think about the *type of literature* contained in Proverbs.

Proverbs is *wisdom literature*, and as such its pronouncements should not be read as prophecies or promises but as *general* truths about life. So, for example, verses 1 and 2 should be understood to say not that right living inevitably leads to long life and prosperity but that, in general, living for God leads to a blessed life.

Verses 3-4 tells us that “loyalty and faithfulness” to God and to people brings favor with God and a good name.

Verses 5-6 have often spoken to me: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on you own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” Here, verse 5 emphasizes the importance of whole-hearted trust in the Lord rather than putting all of our trust in our own intellect and knowledge. Fred Smith said, “Certainly God can use a person of great intellect, but only as long as his faith is even greater.”

Verse 6 calls us to “acknowledge” the Lord in all our ways. In 2009, the Ketchum Global Research Network asked 1000 U.S. adults, ages 25-54, what they think about the most while they shower. Here are the top four responses: 1.To-do lists; 2.Problems, worries; 3.Daydreams; 4.Work.

What if we could learn to turn our thoughts and worries into prayers, acknowledging God in all of these areas of life? According to Proverbs 3:6, God

would “make our paths straight,” that is, *remove the obstacles from our path and bring us to where we need to go!*

Underlying these great truths of verses 5 and 6 is the conviction that God leads and guides the steps of those who trust in and acknowledge Him. In Wendell Berry’s novel, the main character Jayber Crow says: “I can’t look back from where I am now and feel that I have been very much in charge of my life....When I have thought I was in my story or in charge of it, I really have been only on the edge of it, carried along. Is this because we are in an eternal story that is happening only partly in time?”

Verses 7-8 remind us that to “fear the Lord” and “turn away from evil” leads to God’s blessing.

Verses 9-10 tell us that when we “honor the Lord” with our first and best, God will honor and bless us in return.

Verses 11-12 let us know that even people who live for God will, at times, experience tests and trials. That doesn’t mean God doesn’t love us. In fact, our trials, described here as “discipline” and “reproof,” can ultimately be seen as God’s blessings in disguise.

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