

PROVERBS



When life gets hard, when I need to slow down, have some time to myself, and just have some time to quiet my soul, to reflect, to pause, I have a spot that I like to go to. It's quiet. It's peaceful. I watch the geese and listen to the leaves on the trees. I sit there and read in the summer, and in winter I just walk through the snow and take in the surroundings. The birds sing, the flowers bloom, and the air just smells good. It's my spot, and no, I'm not going to tell you where it is! Why? Because it is my happy place!

When you think about going to that happy place, where do you dream of going? Maybe you dream of the beach, with ocean waves and sand between your toes with tropical waters. Maybe your happy place is somewhere in your home, that spot where you enjoy the crackling of the fireplace, the warmth of the sun shining through the window, and the ability to have your own spot.

Regardless of where your happy place is, humans have a longing to find that happy place. It's that place that feels restorative to the soul. It's where you go when you need to get away from others.

It's no surprise that we have this longing to find the happy place. We were made to find it. We were made to live securely in it. And Proverbs understands that we have a longing for that happy place – the place that feels like home, that restores our souls, that gets us away from it all. Because Proverbs understands that we were made to enjoy God like our first parents did in the Garden. That was the happy place. It was the place of peace, prosperity, pleasantness. It was the place that we are longing to return to, and it's the place that we are searching for.

But what is surprising is how elusive the happy place is. We search, we want it, we hunt for it...but until we turn in the right direction, the happy place won't be something we can grasp.

Proverbs, however, wants to take us there – to give us the good life in the happy place, and it points us back to Eden so that we would find our way back to where everything good is. So – how do we get to this happy place?

Return to the Happy Place (3:13-18)

The way to the happy place is by starting with a return – going back to the good life. Now this might sound repetitious as we have been going here over and over. But this section begins and ends with the word “blessed.” This is not your typical word that is used in the Old Testament for blessing; it has the idea of happiness and joy because of peace. And there is a hint here of our need to return to the happy place. These verses mention Adam, the Tree of Life, great jewels, and pleasantness – all things that are connected to Eden, the happy place. So let's see these things described with five words beginning with “P”.

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First, the blessing is found in the **profit** of returning. We are told that this blessing is for the one – literally for the man or the *'adam* (Hebrew) who finds wisdom and understanding, because it is better than silver or gold.

Now back in the days of the gold rush, many people went out in search of fine treasure on the west coast. They sacrificed to get across the country and worked hard in streams and rock cervices to find precious medals. The search for wisdom requires this kind of diligence and results in blessing for the one – the Adam, the man – who goes looking.

The second blessing is that it is a **precious** find. Eden, we are told in Genesis 2:12 tells us that there were precious jewels in Eden. It was a garden of delights, and we are told here that finding wisdom is better than finding precious jewels. What makes wisdom so precious is that money can buy food to put on the table, but wisdom puts fellowship around the table.

The third blessing of returning to the happy place is that you **prosper**. By seeking and finding wisdom, it results in a double-handed blessing – long life and prosperity. The treasures of wisdom are worth pursuing because by them you will prosper in the happy place.

The fourth blessing described is how **pleasant** this place is. Eden was described as this idyllic garden where humanity flourished in the presence of God; and at its root, the word Eden has the idea of pleasure. God has intended us to know pleasantness, pleasures at his right hand, joy forevermore.

And the final blessing is described as **peace**. Here we have the idea of wholistic goodness. This is more than the absence of conflict, but the well-being of your whole person. And who doesn't want to live in that happy place where it is peaceful, pleasant, with prosperity and precious profit? We all want that! And Proverbs is offering this blessing to the man who will seek after it with his whole being. It's a tree of life – just like this tree in the center of the garden where God offered his life to Adam and Eve (see Gen. 2:9; 3:17, 22, 24), so he offers life to those who have a gentle tongue (Prov. 15:4) and those who find this wisdom find their desires fulfilled (Prov. 13:12). But there is more than just blessing in this life that is offered. What Proverbs offers is blessings of the happy place now and forevermore.

You want to get back to that happy place? Eden is calling for you. It's available. Will you seek it like treasure? Will you pursue it like your life depends on it?

Live Consistent with the Order of the Good Life (3:19-20)

In order to enjoy the happy place, you've got to learn to live consistently with the order that God has embedded into his creation. Verses 19-20 tell us that the heavens, the earth, and the seas have been created by God with structure, order, and design. While sin has disrupted this order, it's not been completely destroyed. And what is implied here is that if you want to enjoy the happy place, you have to start by understanding how God has ordered this world. He has

The Good Life: The Happy Place – Prov. 3:13-35

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designed this world so that you would have joy, life, and peace provided that you learn to live consistently with the order that he has put into creation. Whenever we live inconsistently with his design, there is anxiety, depression, strife, and confusion. You cannot live a happy life and deny God's order. We won't spend a lot of time here because these ideas will return in Proverbs 8 (where we will see this fleshed out in 8:21ff).

For now, what we need to know is that God has designed the universe so that you would know joy and peace. When you live as one who studies the world and his creation, and seeks to live consistently with his order, you will find that you are returning back to Eden, back to the way that the world was intended to work under God's rule and order.

Keep discerning the secure life (3:21-26)

When you begin to live consistently with God's order, Proverbs 3:21-26 tells us that we have to do what Adam failed to do – to tend and keep this life by discerning and securing the joy of life. Notice how vv. 21 and 26 both have the word “keep” as bookends? This is the language of Adam – keeping the garden from the corruption of the snake. He was supposed to discern good from evil. He was to keep God's instructions. He was to come to God to discern right from wrong. But he failed – he listened to the voice of the seductive serpent and was lead astray.

Discernment was what Solomon asked the Lord for in 1 Kings 3:9-10. It was what every king was supposed to do. And it's what you and I are called to do – to keep this life from being corrupted by the temptations that come along.

When we keep discerning the good life, Proverbs tells us that it creates a security: you can sleep well! When you're anxious, your sleep is disrupted. But when you trust in the Lord, you can rest in the peace of Christ. When you keep discerning the good life, it keeps your feet from stumbling and it makes your life look beautiful. It keeps you from fear and dread. It keeps you from being afraid when wicked people come to ruin. It keeps you secure, and from tripping you up in life.

The happy place, we begin to see, isn't just a future with God, but a present reality. The happy place isn't merely a place like heaven; it is daily life living with God. The happy place isn't finding some spot that takes your troubles away but it is living securely in the steadfast love and kindness of God who can keep you from stumbling. And the happy place is a reality that we are intended to discover and live in day after day after day here and now as we wait for God to bring us to his happy place!

As we learn to live for that happy place and as we await our God bringing us there, we are to...

Humbly Do Good (3:27-35)

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Surrounding these verses are a command – not to be affected by the wicked (vv. 25, 33). The wicked will come to ruin. But those who live in a discerning way are those who seek the Lord and humbly do good. Five negative commands are given in 3 couplets. Let's look at how we are to do good.

First, vv. 27-28 tell us that we are to do good by doing good now. Instead of saying to your neighbour, "I'll help you later," when you can do it now, Proverbs simply says, "Just do it!" This is the principle of Deut. 24:14-15 and Lev. 19:13: Don't wait to pay wages to a worker; just pay them! If you can help someone now and you have the ability to help, radical generosity says that you should help them! The happy life is the life of service, and Jesus said that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). You can do good!

Jesus told us the story of the Samaritan who came along a Jewish man who had been beaten by robbers on the Jericho road and left for dead. When the Samaritan saw the Jew, he didn't look at him by his race or religion; he looked at him as his neighbour. He took him to get cared for, paid the bill, and said he would return to see if more was needed. Jesus said that this is what it means to love your neighbour as you love yourself (Lk. 10:25-37). But notice also that the Good Samaritan knew his limits. He couldn't care for the man himself. He didn't stay to do all the care. He had the resources, knew his limits, and helped. This is what it means to be a good neighbour. What would your neighbourhood look like if you served your neighbours in this kind of way? What kinds of conversations would open up about the Lord?

The second set of commands is in vv. 29-30 – live for your neighbour's good. Don't plan harm against them, especially when they live beside you trusting you. Don't break their trust! Work from that trust. Again, the language of a neighbour is used in v. 29. The people around you – live in such a way that you foster the community around you. Don't stir up trouble! As Paul would say, as much as it depends upon you, live at peace with all men. Find ways to be the peace-making neighbour. Find ways to encourage your neighbours to get to know one another.

The third set of commands in vv. 31-32 encourage us to be content and not jealous at those who prosper by doing wrong. In v. 32, it contrasts the crooked person with the upright person. The crooked person is an abomination to the Lord, whereas the person who is upright can stand straight and tall because they are in the Lord's inner circle. We remember that the happy place isn't found easily, quickly, or simply. It takes a diligent search. It takes the work like one who is mining silver and gold.

And when we do good, it does not lead us to be proud, but flows from a life that has known that God has prepared these good works for us to do. God has prepared the place for us to go. From beginning to end, it has been God who has been at work. We don't exalt ourselves over others, we are humble because God will scorn the scoffer and give favour to the humble. Or, as James and Peter say, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Pe. 5:5; Jas. 4:6). And why can we be humble? Because we...

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See the Wisdom of Christ

We all want to be in the happy place. We pursue happiness like it is our birth rite. People are desperate to hang on to life. The fear of dying is palpable. When you don't know how to get forever happiness, you have to live like this life is all that there is. But as Christians we are different. We know that we are looking forward to something far better than this life. We want to live for the sake of our loved ones and friends. But there is also a part of us that longs to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. We have no fear of death. We don't worship life in this world. We are ready to be with Jesus. We don't make this world our heaven. But we live for heaven now and work out heaven in our hearts as we wait for that day this day. And the way that we work for that day this day is by pursuing wisdom.

Wisdom realizes that the path to joy comes in admitting that we are broken, mired in sin. We find life by admitting that apart from God we are spiritually dead. We find life when we realize that apart from Christ we face final and eternal judgment. So, we turn to Christ crucified and risen for the forgiveness of sins. We see in the crucified Christ the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:30). And we find our joy in the cross where forgiveness was purchased for us. Another way of putting it is that when we turn to wisdom, when we turn to Christ, we gain life. And when we gain life we gain joy.

Everyone wants to be in the happy place. Everyone wants heaven. Everyone wants to go back to Eden. But wisdom says that you can't get there on your own. You need someone to take you there. So the One who left the happy place came to earth and tasted death so that we do not have to fear it, but overcame it and now has gone to prepare a place for you. So don't let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in Christ. In our Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would Jesus have told you that he is going to prepare a place for you? And if he goes to prepare a place for you, he will come again, so that where he is, you may be also (Jn. 14:1-4) You need someone to prepare that place for you so that you know that there is a secure home for you forever, a place guarded and kept for you. And when you pursue Jesus, you find the One who does that for you and takes you to the happy place where you can enjoy him forever.