

# PROVERBS

I remember recess time in elementary school so well. We wanted to play boot hockey since we couldn't bring sticks to school. So at recess we would divide up into teams, make nets, and kick a tennis ball around the school yard.

After a while, there were certain people you didn't want to play. They were rough, they were mean with their words, they cheated. It just stole the fun out of the game. Over time, what ended up happening was that there were those who broke off and started their own boot hockey game. It was smaller, not as exciting, but it had less drama and was more enjoyable. There weren't squabbles about the rules and there was a lot more fun. And over time, this group became larger and larger until the other boot hockey game dwindled away.

Life is like this game of boot hockey: there are ways that things flourish and grow, and there are ways that things get ruined. Living rightly makes a difference, though it can be hard in the moment. But in the long run, there is something better and more enjoyable than having your own way. Proverbs 10-12 lays out for us the way to the good life through the life that lives rightly – or what is called 'righteousness.'

I don't normally show my work so that you see how I pull together a sermon – if you watch, you'll generally figure out my patterns. But in Proverbs 10-29, I'll try and pull back the curtain a little bit so you can see how I've done this. Because chs. 10-15 are all antithetical sayings, and because I believe there is some coherence to how the Proverbs are put together, I looked for themes and how various Proverbs were put together. Then I made a list – what is the righteous and what is the wicked result? And from there I tried to synthesize the results.

So let's consider – what does the righteous life look like, and why is good?

## **Find Satisfaction in the Lord (Prov. 10:1-5)**

How do you find satisfaction? These verses function as a chiasm – they build and the middle becomes the most important idea, which is that the Lord satisfies the righteous and thwarts the wicked. So that helps us to understand how we find satisfaction – in money and work, the way to find satisfaction is to be right with God. Righteousness might not look profitable outwardly at first glance because it requires hard work and honesty.

But here is the way to the good life: by being righteous through faith in the Lord, because it frees you from death (v. 2). And when God is your satisfaction, then nothing else is going to hold you captive. When you know that you can trust the Lord even when the results don't work out the way you want, you won't be captive to the pragmatism of this age. Righteousness works because the end leads to life and life eternal. So if you suffer for a little while now, you can know that the Lord won't let you go hungry. Instead, he will satisfy you with what you need because he will deliver you from death. And this becomes the key to understanding the righteous life.

Proverbs, you see, are not promises. They are general statements that prepare us for the principles of life. So when things don't go the way you want and you suffer, Proverbs reminds us that there is a bigger picture in view than just your immediate pleasure and good – there is an eternal good. So we don't come to Proverbs expecting that a general statement is a promise and God has to do things this way. Instead, we understand Proverbs to be teaching us that there is a long-term satisfaction by walking with the Lord and in his ways.

When we trust the Lord, we aren't expecting everything to work out perfectly in the moment. We are trusting him to work things out in the end. And that enables us to be satisfied in the Lord. And that picture is painted for us in v. 5 – the one who gathers when harvest comes is a prudent son. We don't gather before the harvest, and we don't sleep when harvest comes. The way to the good life is to plant now and expect that we will reap a harvest in due season if we don't give up!

## **Be Wise With Words (Prov. 10:6-23; 12:1-28)**

Just like that boot hockey game became so frustrating that people left, many people give up on others when they feel discouraged. The way of the righteous is described in these verses beginning with the mouth. Their mouths reveal that their hearts have been changed. They bring forth blessings, are a fountain of life, they have understanding and knowledge, they restrain their lips and by their words they feed many. They welcome the words of instruction and correction and find life that leads to more life.

But the wicked use their words to hide, stir up trouble, they slander and the more they talk they think that their words don't matter – it's just a joke. And in the end it leads to ruin because they reject the wisdom of others; instead, they lead others astray.

When our hearts have been changed by God, we see a change in our mouths – the words we use, the way we talk to others. For the Christian who has found satisfaction in God, what happens is that our hearts are changed and our words change. We want others to be built up.

Our words are powerful because our God is a speaking God. He spoke everything into existence by his word. And he has given us words, and words can be used to bless or to destroy. The righteous life seeks to bring blessing, to be a fountain of life. This is the point of v. 21a – words feed many!

Just think of what it is like to be around two different kinds of people. One person might talk well, but you get them in private and they are critical about their in-laws, their work, about other people. And what happens in your brain? They're probably going to talk about me this way. It makes you withdraw. But consider the person who knows that they can change more by encouragement than correction. They build you up. Their words feel like life. Why is that?

Proverbs 12:20 will speak about the source of words – they come from the heart. And a heart that has the life of God will bring forth words that are life-giving.

But connected with our words is when to use them and when to be silent. The person who knows how to use their words is slow to speak because they're a better listener than talker; This person knows how to conceal things that would be harmful (12:16, 23) and listening and receiving correction (12:1, 15). They avoid bragging (12:9) and rash words of anger (12:16). Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

By becoming a better listener, we can speak truth and peace (12:19, 5, 17, 22). This means that truth brings healing and trusting relationships.

You see, what the Lord delights in is dealing and speaking truthfully. He condemns the one who schemes and speaks falsely. What we need are words that will show that righteousness comes from a changed heart, which is why we need to...

## **Be Right with God (Prov. 10:24-32)**

Where our lives are going are determined by how we view life in relation to God. All of life ought to be viewed in relationship to God. We need to keep the eternal view in perspective. When we live in the fear of the Lord (v. 27), there is hope, joy, strength in trials, and we are established and never moved (like the creation). We know what God's ways are and what pleases him, and this fuels our desire to please him.

But for the wicked, dread will come by following wickedness because it results in death. Life is short, death is near, and not following the Lord's way leads to destruction. There is no life apart from God (v. 30), and so the way of perversity only increases (v. 32)

The righteous life doesn't begin by what we do – that's a rule-based religion. The righteous life begins by our relationship with God – have we confessed that we need him so that we will never be moved (v. 30)? That we would know what pleases him (v. 32)? When we are right with God, what he does is he establishes us (v. 25) just like he established creation (3:19). His words are powerful to make heaven and earth, and his words are powerful to establish you as a new creation. This is what makes you righteous – you have turned to trust him and he establishes your life not only for now but for forever (v. 27)! And that continues to produce right living so that you can...

## **Sow Generously in Righteousness (Prov. 11:1-31)**

In verses 1 and 20 of this chapter, we are told what the Lord hates – in fact, the language is stronger than hatred. He finds certain practices an abomination, and those practices are described as false balances and being crooked. Together, these two statements about the Lord then are countered with the opposite – what the Lord delights in – fair business and blameless

ways. Behind most of these sayings then is what a righteous life looks like. And one of the major themes that comes up is that when we sow generously in righteousness, we benefit others and we show that we have been delivered from sin and death. The reason for this is that when we live the righteous life, we have been justified by faith. We stand right before God, so we desire to do right to others. We want others to flourish, not just ourselves. We want to be a blessing to others, and in the end the more we act with generosity, the better off we are. Why is this?

First, let's consider what happens when we are dishonest. If we take advantage of people, gain wealth by corrupt ways, and pursue wealth for our own benefit, people will find out. They will be grateful when we are gone (v. 10), and because we have been stingy, we our lives have been lived for ourselves and not to the benefit of others. Wealth that is earned for your own selfish good is not honouring to the Lord. In fact, cheating others to gain wealth is called an abomination because it is dishonest, crooked, and does not reflect the heart of God.

This language of abomination is quite strong, and it is used in the Old Testament, especially in the book of Deuteronomy in regard to worship and idolatry (cf. Deut. 7:25; 12:31; 17:1; 18:12; 23:18; 27:15). What happens when we love money rather than loving God is that we serve money. We make it our master. It rules us. Instead of it being a tool that leads to life for others, it leads to our destruction and death.

Honesty and generosity with our money are ways that we can show that God is our God and delight in him. Just consider integrity: By being honest, we are showing that integrity blesses the world. Business must be built on integrity. Just consider what happened to one automaker when it was discovered that their vehicles were designed to hide pollution. A few years ago it was discovered that this one brand was not as environmentally friendly and that the company had made it so that when the vehicle was tested for pollutants. When the vehicle was hooked up to testing machines, the engine was designed to run differently and make it appear that it was cleaner and better and more efficient than it was. The end result was a massive drop in sales and a lack of consumer confidence. The company issued a statement apologizing for their unethical behaviours.

But consider what happens when you buy from someone who is honest. You trust them and you know that what you're being offered is what you are getting. One business that I really appreciate is our local garage. I know if I go in there, they will tell me exactly what is going on with my vehicle and what options are available, plus they will tell me what they would do if they were in my shoes. The common grace of doing business with integrity means that trust is built, it's good for their business because I want to tell others that they are trustworthy and reliable, and other people are served well.

On the other side, by being generous, we resist the temptation for money to control us and master us. It cannot be our god. When I am generous, I am saying that I delight in the Lord more than money, and I can trust him to provide for me, and I reflect his heart as a generous God. But Proverbs makes it clear that there is another benefit to generosity – that the one who gives gains. This is the point of vv. 23-31 – generosity is like sowing seed that brings blessing not

only to the giver but to others! And don't you want to be a blessing? Because the good life isn't in how much you accumulate, but in how you can share the blessings you've received!

See the Wisdom of Christ

When Jesus came, he left the riches of heaven and didn't consider equality with God something to hang on to Paul says in Philippians 2. Instead, he came to give life, and life to the full (Jn. 10:10). His words were words to bring life to those who would fear the Lord. He spoke the words that would bring eternal life. And this leads us to know what is good and pleasing to God our Saviour, that we would test and and approve what God's perfect will is – what is good and pleasing to him.

I think back to the boot hockey days on the elementary school yard and what I saw was how simple things can make a big difference. Playing honestly, being an encourager, being generous – all of these factors lead to a better boot hockey game on the school yard.

But that was boot hockey – and that was just recess. What leads to a good life is knowing God, turning to him, trusting him, and finding his ways are for your life. And when you find that his ways are life, you will have the life-giving life of God to share with the world and be generous.