

# **FINDING THE ABUNDANT LIFE**

## **PROVERBS 13:1-25**

**By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn**

**M.I. JESUS SAID THAT HIS DESIRE FOR US IS TO ENJOY AN ABUNDANT LIFE. IN ORDER TO TAKE HOLD OF THIS ABUNDANT LIFE, WE MUST KNOW WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO GET IT.**

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## **FINDING THE ABUNDANT LIFE PROVERBS 13:1-25**

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Again, let me remind us that I think this chapter is not just a bunch of unrelated proverbs thrown together; there is a theme that runs through this chapter. The first word that keeps popping up in this chapter is the word for soul in Hebrew, *nephesh*. It appears in the form of craving, desire, life, soul and others. In this chapter, it has the nuance of those desires and emotions that drive us.

The second word that keeps popping up throughout the chapter is instruction. The word in Hebrew, *musar*, means instruction, training, or discipline. It is a rigorous word. It has to do with living an orderly and disciplined lifestyle.

If you put these two thoughts together, I think we can easily see that the chapter is all about channeling the energy we have into fulfilling our natural desires in healthy, godly ways.

That concept in itself is also interesting because God's name is not mentioned at all in this chapter. However, from what we have already learned throughout the book of Proverbs is this: Oftentimes, the father or teacher speaks for God, so we will have to assume that the father's instruction here is based on the law and word of God.

We all have this desire to live the abundant life that Jesus promises. But the problem is; I think that many of us are confused as to what the abundant life means. Let me give you an example of how our priorities often get confused, even in church. One of my friends who pastor's a church in a small southern town recently wrote me this letter. To put it mildly, I think we can assume he is a little naïve, he writes,

“Dear John,

I hope that attendance at your church is much better than mine. Mercy, pastoring isn't as easy as I thought it would be.

We had a bunch of sick folk, and added to all the shut-ins, made for a whole lot of empty seats. I was feeling sort of discouraged, but I got up and preached anyway. The problem was with all those empty seats, the echo in the church gave me a headache. After church, my wife put me in the car, and took me for a ride in the country to clear my head. As she drove, I felt myself reviving.

Not only did my head clear, but what I saw renewed my faith in God. I tell you brother, I saw miracle after miracle. My Sunday school superintendent had called to tell me that he was deathly sick, and that he couldn't make it to church. But there he was, driving down the road with his favorite fishing pole sticking out the window. I tell you, only a miracle could have snatched him out of the jaws of death.

Then there was my head deacon. He left a message on my answering machine that his back was so jerked out of line that he thought he might have to have surgery. But I want you to know that when we drove past the golf course, there he was, hitting golf balls on the driving range. Hallelujah, our prayers worked!!

One of our deaconess' sisters called and said her sister was experiencing stomach problems and didn't want to take a chance on having a mishap at church. But glory be!! There she was, standing in line at the Old Country Buffet. Another healing.

All told, we saw that 20 of our sick folk had taken a turn for the better and were up and about. Not only that, but I just couldn't help from rejoicing over all our shut-ins that got themselves healed too. One of our shut-ins that doesn't come to church because he's allergic to crowds was healed. I saw him in line buying a ticket at the ballpark. One of our ladies, who hadn't been to church in eight months because of her arthritis, was coming out of the shopping mall with both arms loaded down with packages. And then there was another one of our deacons who hasn't come to church for the past month because of a bum knee. And glory, there he was playing basketball at the park.

Seeing all these mighty miracles and healings got me so worked up, I started singing the Doxology. Yes sir, John, I'm expecting a packed house next Sunday, with all the miracles and healings.

I look forward to writing you next week.  
Your good friend,  
Billy-Bob"

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Now I'm pretty sure that would never happen at our church, right? But I do think we often confuse what is valuable and important. I think that our goals and desires are often twisted by the world.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus said that He came to earth to give us life, and to give us life to its fullest. I think the problem we face today is that first of all, we have defined a full life according to the world's standards, not God's. And so we don't even know what a full life looks like, and secondly, we are so caught up in our own self-centeredness, that we can't even look up to find the full life that God has for us. Here is the main idea of this morning's text: **JESUS SAID THAT HIS DESIRE FOR US IS TO ENJOY AN ABUNDANT LIFE. IN ORDER TO TAKE HOLD OF THIS ABUNDANT LIFE, WE MUST KNOW WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO GET IT.**

Let me quickly show you how this passage is set up. You will be able to see it on your outlines. Verses 1-11 match up with verses 20-25, only in reverse order, and verses 12-19 describe what the essence of the passage is about.

Secondly, if you look at the first verse and last verse of chapter 13, you will notice that they compliment one another; a wise person is a righteous person. She gets wisdom and righteousness by humbly following the instruction and discipline of her parents. She will live a satisfying and fulfilling life. But mockers, know-it-alls, and those who refuse to listen to their parents, will end up with unsatisfied, unfulfilled lives.

Third, we will see the themes of desires and disciplines interact with one another; developing right desires and attitudes will lead to a satisfying life.

I.       DEFINING ABUNDANCE (Vs. 1-11)  
**WE MUST FIRST COME TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS TRULY VALUABLE IN LIFE.**

Verses 1-11 define abundance for us: **WE MUST FIRST COME TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS TRULY VALUABLE IN LIFE.** Here is a little test for us: If we were to take time to think about what we spend our money on, what we spend time thinking about, and what we spend our time doing, it should become relatively clear what we think is valuable. The poet wants us to examine our souls. Now we may miss this in our English texts, but let me help us out. This word for soul is used six times throughout this chapter. Let's look quickly at them. I will try to read the verses as literally as I can.

The first occurrence is found in the second line of verse 2. "And the soul of the treacherous -- violence." The NIV translates that, "the unfaithful have a craving for violence." Look at the first line in verse 3. It says, "He who guards his mouth – guards his soul." The NIV says, "He who guards his lips guards his life." Verse 4 uses the word twice. "The soul of the lazy want -- but get nothing. The soul of the diligent is made fat." The NIV translates that verse, "The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied." Look down to verse 19. The word is found in the first sentence, "A longing fulfilled is sweet to the soul." And finally in verse 25 our word is found in the first sentence, "The righteous eat to their soul's satisfaction." The NIV says, "The righteous eat to their heart's content."

I think the poet wants us to know from the beginning that true happiness is found in our souls, richness comes from within, not from without. The problem is that most of us are looking for things "out there" to make us happy.

A. AN ATTITUDE OF ABUNDANCE (Vs., 1-6)

Verses 1-6 describe an attitude of abundance. Abundance, richness, fullness, is in the end attitudes. You see, I think that's what this chapter is all about. We spend our

time, energy, and money chasing after things that satisfy our stomachs, but our souls starve to death. Here is how we develop attitudes that will lead to things that satisfy our souls.

Look at verse 1: This attitude smacks right in the face of what we are taught everyday. It says, “A wise son heeds his father’s instruction.” This word for instruction, *musar*, is a tough word. Listen to the sentence with the full force of the word. Wise children embrace their parents’ teaching, correction, instruction, and discipline. These are tough concepts to swallow. But the fact is that wisdom comes through discipline. When I taught college, some students looked for the easy way out; some didn’t read the books I assigned, some didn’t attend all the classes, some cheated, and some copied papers. They may have passed the class, they may have gotten A’s, but I can assure you of this, they didn’t get the understanding of the material. Pursuing holiness is not easy. It is difficult to obtain godly wisdom. But there are two promises; if we diligently pursue holiness, if we humble ourselves and submit to God, we will gain wisdom, and the second promise is that we will also find the abundant life that Jesus promised.

But we don’t like the words submission, humility, discipline, and hard work. In general, we are a society that is lazy, looks for easy answers, and demands instant gratification. These attitudes will guarantee that we will never find wisdom and for certain we will never find God’s abundant life.

So the first attitude we need to adopt to find the abundant life is discipline. That includes the humility to accept instruction and the determination to stick with it. The rest of verses 2-6 reinforce this idea. Verses 2 and 3 remind us that we should keep

our mouths shut and listen more than we talk. We should also keep our conversations focused on good things.

Verse 4 reinforces the hard work required to find fulfillment in life. The lazy people have all these desires; they want good things in life, but since they're lazy, they never find satisfaction. On the other hand, people who are hard workers, and are diligent, usually reach their goals.

Verses 5-6 address the issue of integrity. We will always be tempted to cut corners or take short cuts. But in our pursuit of righteousness and hopes of finding the abundant life, doing things by the numbers are necessary.

I'm really hoping that you see the connection in these Proverbs. Even though they look like unrelated themes, they point back to one theme. Here is the picture: We are after a very valuable treasure and that treasure is the abundant life that Jesus promised. In order to find this treasure, we must be disciplined in our search for it. We must be humble enough to follow the map, and not by taking any short cuts. We must use our strength, our talents, and our abilities in pursuit of it. We must be determined and never give up, even when the going gets tough. I'm wondering, if you're not experiencing the full, abundant life that Jesus promised, could you say that you have the right attitude or that you may need an attitude adjustment?

#### B. RECOGNIZING ABUNDANCE (Vs. 7-11)

Or perhaps, you're not sure of what the treasure looks like. Verses 7-11 will help us in recognizing abundance. What's really neat about these verses is that they unexpectedly flip rich and poor around. Let me give you a few quick examples: Look at verse 7. We have a pretentious man pretending to be rich, while at the same time we see

a rich man who is not pretentious, whom everybody thinks is poor. Look at verse 8, it sounds as if the rich man's money is what makes him safe and secure, an example is, if he is kidnapped, his family will be able to pay the ransom.

However, look at the second line of verse 8: The poor man doesn't have to worry about being kidnapped, because kidnappers won't waste their time on the poor.

But look what is really valuable in verses 9-11. Righteousness, wisdom, humility, and hard work are more valuable than material riches. Like Jesus said, money can be stolen, moths can eat up expensive clothes, rust can ruin property, but nothing can touch wisdom and righteousness. Are we starting to see what the poet values? The abundant life doesn't have to do with material possessions. It doesn't have to do with status, popularity, or power. It has to do with becoming more like Jesus. The treasure we are in pursuit of is not happiness, it is holiness. In our quest for the abundant life, we must first be able to identify real treasure: **WE MUST FIRST COME TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS TRULY VALUABLE IN LIFE.**

## II. DESCRIBING ABUNDANCE (Vs. 12-19) **PURSUING RIGHTEOUSNESS BRINGS AN ABUNDANCE OF PEACE, JOY, AND CONTENTMENT.**

In verses 12-19, we will see the poet describing abundance for us: **PURSUING RIGHTEOUSNESS BRINGS AN ABUNDANCE OF PEACE, JOY, AND CONTENTMENT.** Jesus promised us an abundance of peace, joy, and contentment. The reason most of us don't ever experience the peace, joy, and contentment that Jesus promises is because we are looking for them in the wrong places and things.

### A. ATTITUDES OF ABUNDANCE

As we look through this section, let us look first at the attitudes of abundance. Look at verse 14. All the verses in this section are written in antithetical parallelism. The second line describes the opposite of the first line. If you look at these verses, you will see that every second line begins with but. However, in verse 14, the second line completes the first. If we want to find the fullness of life that Jesus promises, we have to be dedicated to following His teachings. As we commit ourselves to living life the way God lays it out for us in the Bible, we find the peace, joy, and contentment of our soul's desires. If you look through these eight verses, you will see that the ones who find this abundant life are committed to following God's teachings. In verse 13, the wise respect the commands of God. In verse 16, the wise act out of godly knowledge. In verse 17 they speak words of healing. And in verse 18, they listen to correction. I think it's important to get a feel for those who end up enjoying life. They are humble. They are interested in pursuing their relationship with God. They listen to good advice, and they follow correction. They are interested in pleasing God. That's a winning attitude.

On the other hand, you can easily see in these verses that people who never find the abundant life have bad attitudes. They insist on doing things their own way. No matter how miserable they are, they continue to refuse to let go of wrong thinking and wrong behavior. They stupidly and stubbornly insist on doing things their own way.

#### B. RECOGNITION OF ABUNDANCE

That's too bad, because they will never recognize abundance when they see it. The recognition of abundance is important. I think verse 12 states it nicely. It says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick." Listen, many of you are hoping for things that are not what God has for you. You may be pursuing an unhealthy relationship. You may

want to get rich, or famous, or powerful. You may have all sorts of goals for your life that have nothing to do with God's plan for your life. You may be chasing after pleasure and happiness. Has that boy friend or girl friend really made you happy? Has that husband or wife really made your life complete? Has that new car or new house or new job or your latest vacation brought you all the contentment you thought they would? If we keep trying to find the abundant life in chasing after the things of this world, we will always be frustrated. Why, because we are hoping to find love, peace, joy, and contentment. And since we can't find this in the things of this world, we will become heartsick. We will become hopeless. As long as we continue to hang on to things that God is not about to give us, we will never be happy.

But look at the second sentence in verse 12. It also matches the first line in verse 19. So this section begins and ends with this thought: If we desire what God wants for us, we will always experience peace, joy, and contentment and we will experience the kind of love that only God can give us. Think about this, when we get something that we really want, we are happy. When we dedicate ourselves to worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism, then we will find the abundant life that God promises. We will find favor with God and people as we dedicate ourselves to serving God.

The way to finding the abundant life is by dying to ourselves and coming alive in Christ. I've said this many times, especially at weddings, but I think it's worth repeating. If you chase after happiness, you'll never get it. It will always remain just out of your reach. But if you pursue holiness, happiness will catch up to you.

Here is the message of this section loud and clear: **PURSUING RIGHTEOUSNESS BRINGS AN ABUNDANCE OF PEACE, JOY, AND CONTENTMENT.**

III. DISCOVERING ABUNDANCE (Vs. 20-25)  
**THERE ARE SOME DEFINITE STEPS THAT WE CAN TAKE THAT PUT US IN A POSITION TO EXPERIENCE THIS ABUNDANCE.**

And again, in verses 20-25, we see this concept of discovering abundance reinforced. This is a practical section: **THERE ARE SOME DEFINITE STEPS THAT WE CAN TAKE THAT PUT US IN A POSITION TO EXPERIENCE THIS ABUNDANCE.**

A. WORKING TOWARDS GOOD RECOGNITION (Vs. 20-23)

Verses 20-23 help us to understand what working towards good recognition looks like. Let me start with verse 23 because I don't really understand it. I understand the concept, but I don't really understand how to apply it, especially in this context. It really talks about social justice. In Israel, fields were left undeveloped every 7th year. During this 7th year, whatever popped up out of the ground was for the poor to harvest. It seems as if, unrepentable landowners were refusing to allow the poor to come in and harvest the crop. There are many stories of intrigue in the Old Testament concerning people stealing land and also not taking care of the poor. The main point here is that good, godly, wise people are concerned for the poor. If we are godly people, one of our primary concerns should be for social justice. We are to care for one another, never exploit or use one another.

Now let's get back to these verses: How do we put ourselves in a position to receive the abundant life? First, we are to surround ourselves with wise, godly people.

You can pretty much predict what your life will be in five years based on the kinds of people you choose to be with. Look at verse 20. If you hang around with godly people, the chances are you'll be godly. If you hang around with fools, you'll probably be a fool 5 years down the line.

Here is the key. I've noticed, especially in churches, that loners and outcasts tend to gravitate towards one another. They will always be outcasts and loners and here is the sad thing: They oftentimes think they are actually growing in the faith. If we want to place ourselves in a position to receive God's abundance in our lives, we should hang around with a variety of godly people. I try to surround myself with godly Christians who think much differently than I do since I need a different perspective on life. If I surround myself with people who think just like me, there is no chance to grow. The key is that we must surround ourselves with people who love the Lord, but think in different ways than we do. That will help us to grow.

In general, people who pursue righteousness find the abundant life and they are able to pass it on to their children. Look at verses 21 and 22. The word 'good' connects these two verses. In Hebrew, the last phrase of verse 21 is "shall be rewarded with good." Verse 22 starts out with "the good." Our society and most of the cultures we come from instruct us in the importance of leaving an inheritance to our children. My parents came from Italy, worked hard so I could have a better life. They will pass down to me an inheritance. Hopefully, I will add on to that and pass down an inheritance to my children as well.

This is a good thing, but maybe that's why verse 23 is here and so confusing. Maybe the inheritance we are to pass on to our children is the life of faith, the treasure

map that leads them to the abundant life. It is nice to pass on material blessings to our children. However, if we don't pass on to them the love, peace, joy, and contentment found in holiness, then all those material blessings are garbage.

If we truly believe that the peace, joy, and contentment that God promises are what are valuable in life, then we should be diligent about passing this on. We should remind our children that they were created, gifted, and blessed to serve God. That is our purpose in life. If we don't help them identify their personalities, spiritual gifts, talents and abilities, and if we don't help them to find places to serve God with these, then we are passing on to them an empty life, doomed to hopelessness.

#### B. WORKING TOWARDS A GOOD ATTITUDE (Vs. 24-25)

And verses 24-25 give us some instruction in working towards a good attitude. I guess that I have to confess that if I lack one quality as a good parent or a good pastor, it is that I'm not a very good disciplinarian. I really do love my children and I love all of you, but I'm not always good at discipline. I think if you want to get the most out of me, I'll tell you how I operate. Hopefully, I will usually give you the right course of action or information. But I will always leave it up to you to follow through. If you take it and follow through, I'm happy. If you don't, I'm not very likely to engage with you further concerning that issue. I'm sure that is a real weakness of mine, as a parent and as a pastor.

Let me tell you what verse 24 is not about. It is not about corporal punishment. This verse is not permission for parents to beat their children. Here is my opinion: When we are dealing with children, I'm going to assume that we are smarter than they are. We should never have to resort to yelling or screaming, and we should never have resort to

hitting. In my opinion, the only time a spanking is required, is when the child is doing something dangerous. The spanking is to prevent him from getting hurt.

And again, look how the poet mixes the metaphor in verse 25, “The righteous eat to their soul’s content.” What we are really hungry for, nothing in this world can satisfy. Our souls are hungry for peace, joy, contentment, and the love of God. The wicked, the stubborn, the stupid, will never find satisfaction. But those who surrender their lives to God and His will for their lives will never go hungry. Their souls will always be satisfied and full. We must be humble, we must give up our worldly desires, and we must pursue righteousness with all our strength: **THERE ARE SOME DEFINITE STEPS THAT WE CAN TAKE THAT PUT US IN A POSITION TO EXPERIENCE THIS ABUNDANT LIFE.**

It really helps to know what we are looking for. It’s not a man, a woman, a job, a car, a house, or anything else this world has to offer. It’s being loved by God; it’s finding the peace, joy, and contentment in life that makes us rich. It’s ours for the taking. Jesus promised it: **JESUS SAID THAT HIS DESIRE FOR US IS TO ENJOY AN ABUNDANT LIFE. IN ORDER TO TAKE HOLD OF THIS ABUNDANT LIFE, WE MUST KNOW WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO GET IT.**

But that’s really the problem, isn’t it? We have been so confused by the world, that we don’t even know what is truly valuable. Many of us are disappointed with God because He hasn’t given us what we want when we want it. And others of us are holding on to desires and dreams that are not consistent with what God wants for our lives.

I think this is a perfect illustration of why many of us are not enjoying the abundant life.

**In Africa, tribes often hunt monkeys in this manner. They put nuts in a narrow necked jar, and tie the jar securely in place. A monkey plunges his hands into the jar to seize his prize. However, with the nuts in his hand the monkey has doubled his fist, and his doubled fist will not pass through the neck of the jar. Now he has a problem. If he releases the coveted nuts, he can withdraw his hand. If he hangs onto the nuts, he is trapped. He prefers to hang onto the nuts. When the trapper shows up with a big stick, the monkey goes nuts, jumps up and down, and chatters with rage, fear and frustration, but won't let go of the nuts -- not even to save his life. Then the hunters come and beat in the monkey's brains.**

Many of us are getting our brains beaten in by life. The reason may be that like the fool in Proverbs 13 and like the monkey, we are holding on to things that are not in keeping with the abundant life that Jesus promises. We are holding on to sins, mastered by lust, and clutching to evil desires.

Jesus intends for us to live lives filled with love, joy, peace, and contentment. Please don't be like the trapped monkey. Let go of whatever it is that you're holding on to, and escape with your life, to find God's abundant life.