

IT'S ALL ABOUT GOD

PROVERBS 28:1-28

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WE LEARN TO THINK CORRECTLY AS WE SEEK OUT GOD'S WILL FOR US.
WE LEARN TO ACT CORRECTLY AS WE LEARN TO FEAR ONLY GOD
AND WE LEARN TO FEEL PEACE AS WE LEARN TO TRUST IN GOD

OUTLINE

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FEAR GOD AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS. THAT IS THE WHOLE MEANING OF LIFE

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This morning's text seems to center around three themes. The first section instructs us to seek the Lord for understanding. In other words, we can develop right thinking by allowing God to inform us as to right and wrong through our study of the Bible.

Secondly, we are instructed to fear the Lord, as we are about to act. Hopefully, this will motivate us to act righteously and avoid evil.

Lastly, we are instructed to trust in God as we live out everyday life. This will bring us peace. If you have been paying attention over the past few years you will notice that we come across this equation for finding peace and joy.

Right thinking + Right Behavior = Good feelings

The formula really does work.

I think we can all relate to that. We all know that when we are intentionally doing something wrong, we are plagued by guilt and the fear that we will be caught.

Let me give you an example. One day I was preaching on how we should obey the laws of the land and part of being a godly citizen is to pay one's taxes. One of my deacons was convicted by the message. About a week later, he asked me if he could use my office to take care of some sin and unfinished business. I was touched by his determination to make things right. In my office I had one of those pads that when you write on them, they pressure copy onto a yellow page. He happened to be writing on top of it.

When he left, I noticed a copy of the letter he wrote to the IRS had copied onto the pad. Here is what he wrote; "I have not been able to sleep since last Sunday's sermon. I feel extremely guilty. I am sending you \$100 I owe you. If I still cannot sleep after that, I'll send you the rest."

I'm not sure this is what the wisdom writer wants from us. Let's look at how he thinks we should find peace.

Before I get into the text, I want to talk a little bit about how I have approached the book of Proverbs. If you were to quickly look at chapter 28 verses 12 and 28, you will immediately notice that if you skim down to chapter 29, verse 2, the chapters are meant to be connected. And further, if you were to compare some of the topics and themes, you would notice they are parallel as well. I have chosen to preach through the Proverbs chapter by chapter because I think each chapter is meant to stand alone at one level. As you have seen, we could find clusters of thoughts and words in each chapter. I think that my friend Paul Koptak has written perhaps the best commentary on Proverbs that takes this approach. It is worth buying for anyone who wants to study the Proverbs. His commentary is in the NIV Application Commentary series. I have not seen a better work taking the chapter by chapter approach. In fact, I think it's one of a kind.

On the other hand, almost all of the traditional commentaries have taken a topical approach. This is also a worthwhile way to study through the Proverbs. Commentators have looked through the book of Proverbs and have gathered together all the verses that pertain to a particular topic and discussed them as a topic. For example, they may gather all the verses that pertain to a fool scattered throughout the Proverbs, and then study that particular topic.

I think if we really want to understand the Proverbs, we need to study them from both angles. I think the wisdom writers gathered them, scattered them, and organized them to be looked at topically and chapter by chapter.

But thirdly, I think that the book must be looked at and studied from a perspective that looks at how the chapters themselves are organized and how the chapters interact with one another. That would even produce some more interesting results.

If people could find time to study the Proverbs in all three ways, they could study for the rest of their lives and never find all the themes and connections, but it would be fun.

I have made a conscious decision to follow Paul Koptak's approach and study these Proverbs chapter by chapter.

I know that as I examine my own life, I often preach and teach better than I live. For example, in this morning's text, the poet seems to say the answer to anxiety, stress, and disappointment is to marry right thinking with right behavior. If we do, we will find peace and joy. I believe that to be true and I'm going to preach that this morning. However, I also realize that it is easier said than done. But I hope we can encourage one another along the way, since I too struggle to find peace and joy. First let me show you how I think this passage is put together. The first section is dominated by the exhortation to "seek the LORD" in verse 5. The second section is governed by the exhortation to "fear the LORD" in verse 14. And the third section is controlled by the encouragement to "trust the LORD" in verse 25.

The main idea of this morning's text is this. **WE LEARN TO THINK CORRECTLY AS WE SEEK OUT GOD'S WILL FOR US. WE LEARN TO ACT CORRECTLY AS WE LEARN TO FEAR ONLY GOD. AND WE LEARN TO FEEL PEACE AS WE LEARN TO TRUST IN GOD.** In other words, since we know that right thinking combined with right behavior can bring us peace and joy, the poet is going to try and give us some helps in achieving these goals. I am going to read you a portion of Moses' speech to the Israelites as they prepare themselves to go into and possess the Promised Land. He says,

"¹And now, Israel, listen carefully to these laws and regulations that I am about to teach you. Obey them so that you may live, so you may enter and occupy the land the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. ²Do not add to or subtract from these commands I am giving you from the LORD your God. Just obey them. ³You saw what the LORD did to you at Baal-peor, where the LORD

your God destroyed everyone who had worshiped the god Baal of Peor. ⁴But all of you who were faithful to the LORD your God are still alive today.

⁵You must obey these laws and regulations when you arrive in the land you are about to enter and occupy. The LORD my God gave them to me and commanded me to pass them on to you. ⁶If you obey them carefully, you will display your wisdom and intelligence to the surrounding nations. When they hear about these laws, they will exclaim, ‘What other nation is as wise and prudent as this!’ ⁷For what great nation has a god as near to them as the LORD our God is near to us whenever we call on him? ⁸And what great nation has laws and regulations as fair as this body of laws that I am giving you today?

(Deuteronomy 4:1-8 NLT)

This passage is the formula for finding peace in life. Right thinking followed by right behavior leads to a life filled with abundant peace and joy.

I. SEEK GOD (VS 1-11)

Seek First The Kingdom Of God And All His Righteousness. He Will Take Care Of Everything Else.

In verses 1-11 the poet encourages us to seek God. His exhortation is to **SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND ALL HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS. HE WILL TAKE CARE OF EVERYTHING ELSE.** You will immediately recognize that the word law stands out as the connecting word in this section. There is a lot of debate as to whether this refers to the first five books of the Bible known as Torah, or whether law is used in a more general sense to include wisdom. I tend to think it refers to the more specific use of the word law describing all the rules and regulations Moses gave the Israelites that would govern their social, moral, and religious lives. However, let me quickly add that the nature of wisdom is to take these laws and apply them to everyday, real life situations.

A. SEEKING GOD IN LEADERSHIP (1-3)

In verses 1-3, the poet reminds us to seek God in leadership. In other words, kings, dictators, politicians, and people in any sort of leadership position will be held accountable by God. I think verse one describes the principle that God sees and holds us accountable for our actions. Wicked people really do know they are wicked. One of the signs of wicked people is that they are paranoid. In Edgar Allen Poe’s story of *The Tell Tale Heart*, a man guilty of murder drives himself mad. After killing someone, the villain buries the body under the floor. Afterwards, he continually hears the heart of the victim beating. The beating heart gets louder, and louder, and louder, until it drives him mad.

Evil leaders know how ruthless they are and how they got to the top. They know what type of cruelty they are capable of, and so they are very much aware that some new ambitious upstart can take them over by evil as well. The crueller we are, the more paranoid we are. That is just the way God created us.

But the more pure and innocent we are, the bolder we are. We are not to be naïve, but Jesus said we are not to be afraid either.

Verses 2 and 3 clearly describe the state of modern day world affairs. If we were to judge nations on how they measure up to God's laws, I think it is safe to say there is not now, nor was there ever a nation that is godly or Christian. There is worldwide oppression of the poor. There is no real concern for social justice or fairness anywhere in the world. Jesus predicted that there would continually be wars and rumors of wars. And these would increase towards the end of time. Look how devastating the poet predicts these evil leaders are to a nation's health. There will never be order and fairness. Evil leaders are as damaging to a people as driving rain and hail are to crops. The driving rain and hail kills crops.

The answer for good leadership is found in verse two. Leaders who are committed to following God's laws will bring a sense of fairness, justice, and goodwill to their people. But alas, this has never happened in all of human history. Leaders tend to be ambitious and ambition is not a quality that God is looking for in leaders. God is looking for servants.

B. SEEKING GOD IN JUSTICE (4-7)

Verses 4-7 remind us that we are to be seeking God in justice. Now this has nothing to do with our seeking personal justice. In other words, this has nothing to do with me, having been treated unfairly, going out with a vendetta to get justice. This has everything to do with finding justice for my neighbor who doesn't have the ability to get justice for himself. I am glad that I have several pastor friends who continually work for social justice in our nation. I'm glad they are my friends because I need them to make me aware of what issues need to be addressed in our nation. Look at verse 5 because this is the key to this section. It says that evil men do not understand justice, but people who diligently seek God understand the concept of justice fully. I am both sorry and ashamed to say that I probably fall on the side of people who don't have a clue as to social justice issues. We live in a country where institutional racism is a real problem. Yet, I don't even know how to address it. I know it exists, but I have no idea what to do or even where to start. I think that it is easy for me to ignore it, because I don't suffer from it.

Look at verse 4. Maybe I don't actively praise wicked people, but neither do I really stand up against them and resist them. And in verse 6, if I were to really examine my life, I would resemble more the rich man whose ways are perverse than I would the poor man who is righteous.

I think it is very easy for those of us who have overcome poor beginnings to become successful to be the least compassionate of all. And I think that is because there is a lot of pride beneath the

surface. There is a lingering thought in us that since we work hard, we deserve what we have obtained. But how true is that really? I could have been born to a mother and father living in the Sudan. My parents could have been killed by rebels and I could have been orphaned at ten-years-old. How successful do I think I could have become with that start? I could have been born in India to parents who were HIV positive. How successful do I think I could have become with that start?

What's really sad and convicting for me to think about is that if I don't get an "A" in a class, especially when I think I deserved an "A", I can get all crazy and start complaining about the injustice of it all. If I think someone overcharged me or cheated me out of a few dollars, I'm ready to demand a pound of flesh. What is the matter with me? What is the matter with us? People are starving to death. People are being slaughtered every day. People are dying of AIDS, and I seldom spend time thinking about it. In our own country, children are being born and raised in the slums and being taught that they will never escape their situation. If you're like me, you say to yourself, "I want to help but I just don't know how." I'm glad I have friends who are involved in this and so one of my goals for personal growth is to get in touch with them and let them educate me.

My goal is spelled out in verse 7. I want to be the kind of son that God is proud of. I want to be discerning enough to stop indulging my every whim and start working for justice. I never want to bring disgrace to God.

C. SEEKING GOD IN HOLY LIVING (8-11)

What this all means is that we commit ourselves to seeking God in Holy Living as described in verses 8-11. First of all, listen to the description of people against whom God takes a stand. God takes a stand against people who enjoy life at the expense of the poor, verse 8. God won't even listen to the prayers of people who won't submit to reading the Bible and obeying the laws described in it, verse 9. In verse 10, God will make sure that those who attempt to lead His children astray will end up shooting themselves in the foot. And in verse 11, God will make the proud look foolish.

On the other hand, God listens to the prayers of His children as they try to follow His way. As God's children care for the poor, God takes notice and blesses them. And God gives wisdom to His children as we pursue holiness. Let me summarize this section this way. God makes His will perfectly clear in the Bible that was inspired by His Holy Spirit. God leads us and empowers us to desire and do right things by filling us with His Holy Spirit. God has prepared all sorts of good works for us to do. God has promised to take care of all our needs. Our sole job is to follow Him. **SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND ALL HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS. HE WILL TAKE CARE OF EVERYTHING ELSE.**

II. FEAR GOD (VS 12-18)

Fear God And Keep His Commandments. That Is The Whole Meaning Of Life.

We seek God's will for us by reading the Bible, meditating on it, studying it, and memorizing it. Our thinking is developed, corrected, and matured as we spend time in the Word. But right thinking is not enough. We must marry right thinking with right behavior. Verses 12-18 inform us to fear God. In the book of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon summed up life like this. **FEAR GOD AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS. THAT IS THE WHOLE MEANING OF LIFE.**

Sometimes in order to make Christianity palatable, we don't talk much about the fear of God. Yet, the writers of Proverbs have asserted that fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. If we truly understood how holy, how powerful, and how big God is, we would be like bible characters that fell down like dead men when God approached them. God is perfect and He will not tolerate sin. To be sure, we are cleansed and made perfect by the blood of Jesus, but we should never forget that we serve a dangerous God.

A. FEARING GOD (12-14)

Verses 12-14 deal particularly with fearing God. Verse 12 is merely an observation. When evil rulers come to power, people tend to hide out. They don't really want to be noticed. However, when good leaders come to power, there is cause for celebration. We have seen evil dictators abuse their people and when the dictators were deposed, great celebrations broke out.

Here is another truth the bible asserts. All of us are sinners. In fact, we were all born spiritually dead. The bible says that we were born as enemies of God. People who become arrogant, proud, and entrenched in their sinful way of life, are not willing to humble themselves before God. The bible is pretty clear about what happens to people who are unwilling to confess their sin and submit to God. Pharaoh hardened his heart when God, through Moses told him to let His people go. God left Egypt in total ruin. Plagues devastated the land. Animals were dead, crops were dead, the waters were polluted, the first born child in every house was dead, and the entire Egyptian Army was lost in the Red Sea. Once the most powerful country in the ancient world, God left Egypt a garbage dump. There are many examples in the Bible of God taking powerful rulers and countries who ignored Him, and ruined them.

On the other hand, being in a right relationship is readily available to everyone. If we confess our sins, renounce our sins, and follow God, we will find mercy. By the way, that's a nice definition of repentance. In the New Testament, the word for confession literally means to say the same thing. When we confess, we are saying the same thing as God. It is acknowledging that we agree with what God says about the sin. In other words, we are humbling ourselves to say we are wrong and God is right. Then we turn from our sin. That's the Hebrew word for repent, to turn around. So true repentance, is humbly naming the sin the same way God names the sin, then making a commitment to never do it again. We often want to fudge around our sin, we try to justify it, or even redefine it. But here is where good old fashioned fear of God should motivate us to do right.

B. FEARING EVIL (14-16)

Verses 14-16 remind us to fear evil. We have been warned throughout the Proverbs to stay away from evil people. Evil people are angry, violent, self-absorbed, and negative. Their fate is clear. The book of Revelation says that those who take a stand against God will be cast into the eternal fire. Jesus describes hell as a place of eternal torment. We need to think about that. People in hell will be suffering so much that they wish they could die, but they can't. Knowing what awaits those who rebel should motivate us to live upright and holy lives; at the same time we should witness to unbelievers that they may escape this horrible eternal destiny.

On the other hand, as we are willing to name our sins, repent of them and pursue holiness, even though we will never be able to completely defeat sin in this life, we can be confident that God extends grace and mercy to the humble. If we realize how sinful we are and how holy God is, we can really start to understand the power of God's love in sending Jesus to die for our sins. We can really start to understand the meaning of God's grace and mercy. This will allow us to be very humble and never arrogant.

C. NO NEED TO FEAR (17-18)

Because of God's magnificent love, verses 17-18 remind us that those who are in Christ Jesus have no need to fear. Again, unrepentant wicked people have every reason to be afraid, but those who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior can have confidence that God will lead them safely home. If you have not humbled yourself, confessed your sins, and received Jesus, please don't wait another minute. Once we dedicate our lives to following Christ, it is His blood that keeps covering our sin so that we can know we are in a right relationship with God. Confession and repentance keeps us in that close fellowship with Him and with one another. Again, let me state this one more time. Life is all about God. We are to **FEAR GOD AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS. THAT IS THE WHOLE MEANING OF LIFE.**

III. TRUST GOD (VS 19-28)

Trust In God With All Your Heart. Do Not Lean On Your Own Understanding Or Worldly Wisdom.

And that brings us to the last part of our formula. When we fill our minds with right thinking, and when we marry that with right behavior, we will experience peace and joy beyond all human understanding. As we think and act correctly we will learn to trust God as described in verses 19-28. But trust is the key because now our thinking and our behavior are contrary to what the rest of the world is doing and thinking. We will be tempted to doubt God's Word and God's ways. But here is the command. **TRUST IN GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART. DO NOT LEAN ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING OR WORLDLY WISDOM.** We've heard that theme before in the Proverbs, haven't we?

A. TRUSTING GOD TO PROVIDE (19-22)

Verses 19-22 remind us to trust God to provide for us. Greedy people, lazy people, and dreamers tend to chase fantasies and look for get-rich-quick schemes. They will end up doing unethical things to get rich. But in the end they will lose everything. They will starve and end up in poverty. They will lose their family, their friends, their health and they will starve emotionally and spiritually.

God's way is to work hard, to be diligent, and to trust Him to provide. We will find not only an abundance of food, but we will find an abundance of happiness and peace. God blesses honesty, hard work, and faith.

B. TRUSTING GOD IN RELATIONSHIPS (23-27)

This next section may be a little bit harder for us to practice. Verses 23-27 tell us to trust God with our relationships. I am a people-pleaser by nature. I think it is often easier for me to just go along to get along. It really takes a lot of courage to engage in true relationship. We have talked about this before but let me just remind us of the principle that in order to be in a good, healthy, godly relationship, we must be courageous enough to speak the truth in love and humble enough to receive the truth in love.

Again, we have lost a sense of the commandment to honor our parents. In foreign cultures and even in the United States until about a couple of generations ago, families looked after one another. Now I realize there are a lot of special cases, but let me again just state the principle. We are to honor our parents. In the context of the commandment, it primarily referred to finances. In other words, it was the children's duty to look after the well being of their parents. It takes time and energy to look after our parents. But here is where trust in God comes in. We are to trust God to provide for us as we provide for our parents. But again, that goes counter to our culture which preaches that we look after ourselves first. I know of several cases where children have taken all their parents' money and property. The children are living well while the parents languish in a public nursing home.

We are to trust God with our relationships as we speak and receive the truth in love. We are to trust God to provide for us as we provide for our parents.

And further, we are to enter relationships with the poor. As we learn to trust God to provide for us, we will have a heart to help those who are less fortunate. Trusting God to meet our needs will help us not to be stingy. A real sign of how much we trust God is by how much money we give away. We indeed are called on by God to be involved in all sorts of relationships.

C. TRUSTING GOD TO JUDGE (28)

And verse 28 is an encouragement to trust God to judge. Notice the use of the word *when*; when the wicked rise to power and when the wicked perish. It doesn't say *if*, it says *when*. It is safe to say that for the greater part of human history, the wicked have ruled and continue to rule. Even in our country, politicians pay lip service to God and moral issues, but in reality, money drives politics. If there were no God the reality of life would be too depressing to deal with.

Let me leave us with two thoughts here. Verse 28 states the facts. People really have no power to change systems, so, for the most part, people play along. That's equivalent to hiding. But we have been encouraged to stand as bold as lions in righteousness. We don't need to fear the wicked and the powerful because we serve the King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus will come and right all the wrongs. We must continue to speak righteousness and live righteously. We may even lose our lives for it. But we are never to lose heart. We are destined not only to live in eternity, as co-heirs with Christ, we are destined to rule with Him in eternity. If that's the case then we should be in training because we want to be righteous rulers where the people rejoice and thrive. But remember, we belong to a kingdom that is not of this world. We will always appear to be out of step with the world. **TRUST IN GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART. DO NOT LEAN ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING.**

There are no short cuts to peace and happiness. It is a simple formula that takes humility, courage, hard work and diligence. Right thinking combined with right behavior leads to peace and joy. **WE LEARN TO THINK CORRECTLY AS WE SEEK GOD'S WILL FOR US. WE LEARN TO ACT CORRECTLY AS WE LEARN TO FEAR ONLY GOD. AND WE LEARN TO FEEL PEACE AS WE LEARN TO TRUST IN GOD.** Like I said at the beginning of this message, I know how difficult this is to pull off. But I think we need to spend time identifying what's important and to leave the small stuff behind. R.C. Sproul tells this story about Albert Einstein in his article, "*Right Now Counts Forever.*"

"An anecdote survives about Albert Einstein. He was once asked by a student, 'Dr. Einstein. How many feet are there in a mile?' To the utter astonishment of the student, Einstein replied, 'I don't know.'

The student was sure the great professor was joking. Surely Einstein would know a simple fact that every schoolchild is required to memorize. But Einstein wasn't joking. When the student pressed for an explanation of this hiatus in Einstein's knowledge he declared, 'I make it a rule not to clutter my mind with simple information that I can find in a book in five minutes.'

Albert Einstein was not interested in trivial data. His passion was to explore the deep things of the universe. His passion for mathematical and physical truth made him a pivotal figure in modern world history."

Sproul goes on to say, "We are called to a similar passion. A passion to know God."

Maybe that's it. No, definitely that's it ... for me anyway. I have my mind cluttered with so much worldly insignificant stuff, that it clutters my mind and clouds my judgment. I want to have a passion to know God, and Him alone. I want God to develop in me right thinking and I want Him to empower me to act rightly. Then I'm sure I will find that shalom type of peace the Bible writers

talk about so much.