

DIRECTION GIVEN

Proverbs 3:1-12

A natural desire of parents is for their children to be successful and have a “full and meaningful” life. We could certainly relate this desire to what some might call “natural affection.” Because of this desire, parents will pass on what they have learned to their children in order to help them avoid serious mistakes that could cause significant harm to their children.

In this section, a father directs his son to remember his teaching, including love and faithfulness (Prov. 3:1, 3). In doing so, the son will be ensured a long and successful life (vv. 2, 4). The father also tells his son to trust in and acknowledge Yahweh rather than his own wisdom (vv. 5–8), to honor Yahweh with his wealth (vv. 9–10), and to accept Yahweh’s discipline.

Remember – 3:1-4

¹ My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; ² For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you. ³ Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man. Proverbs 3:1–4 (NASB95)

There are many things to learn as we read the Proverbs. The specific words used have implications that we often overlook but this can certainly be useful to us as we put the proverbs into practice.

The initial thing we see is “to whom the admonitions are given.” Without getting bogged down in gender questions (but recognizing that the teaching applies to both sons and daughters) the “take away” for us is that there is an implied degree of maturity needed for such teachings to be effective. The designation of “son” versus “child” recognizes the maturity needed when reasoning and logical arguments are being made in the teaching process. Of course, younger children need discipline and training but the methodology is different from what will be effective for young teenagers.

The first caution we see is the need to remember what we have been taught. What is the cure for forgetfulness? If we listen to the ads on television, we might conclude that “Prevagen” is the answer. The problem with that is the only scientifically controlled study ever published showed that it worked only as well as the placebo control. In other words, it did not work. There is no magic bullet or “pill” that is going to prevent cognitive decline associated with aging. Keeping stress factors low, maintaining good general health, and keeping our minds active seem to be the best suggestions. Even with all these “things” we still need to help our memories by frequent review and practice of things we consider to be important.

We may have the best memories of anyone whoever lived and it would be for no advantage if we are “remembering” the wrong things. In the first part of our text we see an emphasis on the teaching of the father to the son. This statement in itself presumes that the father is an active participant in the education and training of his children when they are old enough to learn. There is also an implied assumption that the father actually has knowledge of what is important and appropriate to teach the next generation.

To a great extent, many of the problems we are seeing in our country can be related to the non-participation and even absence of the fathers in rearing children. In some cases, even if the fathers were involved, there are many errors related to training children that are being promoted and used. Our culture has “evolved” over the past several decades to the point that we find that married couples make up 68 percent of all families with children under age 18, compared to 93 percent in 1950. In addition to this change, the situation of both parents working outside of the

home has grown and less time is available for interactions of parents with their children.

Assuming that the person being taught is given the truth and is able to remember what is taught, there are important considerations of what is actually done with the information. One option is to simply add it to the data base in our minds and it becomes another “fact” of things we have heard and stored away in our memory. Another option is that we realize the implications of the information and we “take these implications to heart” and actually make application of the information in our attitudes, our speech and in our actions.

If all we wind up with are just mental facts, then what we’ve been taught is somewhat inconsequential; however, by embracing that which is “beneficial” and rejecting that which is “harmful” we will have a more complete and longer life. The “beneficial” things we are to embrace are defined for us in the parallel statement beginning in verse three as “kindness and truth.”

Most of us might be thinking “well, of course, we should always be kind and always tell the truth.” From what we see happening in our world today, we could conclude that some people have never, ever even considered the possibility of being “kind” or “truthful.” Unless these principles are taught and embraced, then the natural tendency of lost humanity is “harsh criticisms” (opposite of kindness) and saying whatever they think will help their selfish motives (many times this is the opposite of truth).

The fourth verse is essentially an explanation or another way to state what we read in verse two. “Favor” would be parallel to “length of days and years of life” and “good repute” would certainly lead to a peaceable (or complete) life. There is an unstated assumption in the appeal to the young person to follow the teachings of the parent and that is that the youth would want to be in a “favorable” situation and have “good reputation.” There is much evidence that many people will go out of their way help young people in their life journey if they are thought to be deserving rather than someone who is rebellious.

Trust – 3:5-8

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. ⁸ It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones. Proverbs 3:5–8 (NASB95)

As we saw in the initial words of this passage (verse 1) we were encouraged to not forget what we have been taught. Here the teacher returns to a theme which he mentioned in the first two chapters which directed our focus toward God, toward reverence for God, and toward living Godly lives rather than following our own ideas or the ideas of the rest of the world that does not know God. Not only were we taught what our starting point is (the fear of the Lord) and that on which we are to focus, we are now advised to be fully committed in this pursuit of knowledge, understanding and wisdom. Half-hearted is a good description of the way some people approach opportunities. They will try something and fail and they give up with investing in the effort to learn and develop the skills needed for success. The idea of “all your heart” speaks of the extent of our commitment to do things God’s way and not what “appeals” to what we have imagined to be the way things are or even relying on what the so-called “experts” may tell us.

“Fully trusting in the Lord” goes hand-in-hand with a “healthy distrust of ourselves.” Sometimes we may think that we know a lot and that we make good decisions which, if we are not careful, can result in serious mistakes. Prayer should not be our “last resort” in making decisions about directions in life but should be our “first step.” Thinking of the Lord “first” could be argued to simply be following the first commandment. It is a practical way to show proper reverence (healthy fear) to the Lord which will result in rejecting other ways of dealing

with life issues.

Most of us think that if we “do the right things, show kindness to others, and work hard that we will be successful.” We would be hard pressed to find a one-for-one relationship; however, we know (in general) that proper conduct will lead to physical well-being, and in a deeper sense will produce integrity or wholeness in our lives. Godlessness is the true sickness of humanity.

Solomon went on to reemphasize the correct motivation for choices we make in life and that is our relationship with God. Proper reverence for God (fear, respect, love) is critically important and should form the background and framework for all of life. This relationship has such significance that it takes up 40 percent of the Ten Commandments. Additionally, as we know from what Jesus taught His disciples in John chapter fourteen, it is the motivation for our obedience to the teachings of Christ. Jesus told them, “If you love Me, you will keep my commandments.”

If we fail to factor in this proper relationship with God (as our only motivation) we can find ourselves with a set of rules and regulations that are very similar to those followed by many of the major religions of the world and the teachings of many of the secular scholars and philosophers. The so-called Golden Rule that Christ said was the summation of the Law and the Prophet is that “our actions toward others are to be what we want their actions toward us to be.” Even though most of the other religions and philosophers stated this “rule” in the negative, the same basic ideas are found in Hebrew teachings.

My guess is that if we were to ask most Christians to state their basic philosophy for living that most would quote something sounding like the Golden Rule. When most of us consider this Golden Rule, our thoughts tend to be that good behavior or action on my part will benefit me as I receive a reciprocal response from the other person so that everyone is benefitted. If that thinking is our motivation, then we might be tempted to avoid interacting with certain people if we suspect they will not treat us in the same “good” way we treat them. If that is our thinking, then we could easily conclude that our motivation is basically selfish.

On the other hand, if our motivation in all we do (including our interactions with others) is to “reverence the Lord,” then we will conform our behavior to be like His behavior regardless of the potential response of others. Will there be benefits? As we see in verse eight, there will be “healing and refreshment” which are “outcomes” rather than “motivation” for what we do.

Honor – 3:9-10

⁹ Honor the LORD from your wealth And from the first of all your produce; ¹⁰ So your barns will be filled with plenty And your vats will overflow with new wine. Proverbs 3:9–10 (NASB95)

These two verses could be the inspiration for Malachi 3:10 which instructs the people to bring their tithes to the store house. The passage from Malachi is sometimes presented as a “do the right thing and you will be rewarded for it” motivation. In fact, most of us have heard sermons on tithing that encouraged tithing because “all of us want to be blessed with material abundance.” Based on the emphasis of this teaching in Proverbs, we would do well to present Proverbs 3:9-10 along with Malachi 3:10 since we find an emphasis on the proper motivation for tithing or giving of our wealth to the Lord. Solomon clearly saw that the motivation was to “honor the Lord.” The “filled barns” and the “overflowing vats” were the outcomes which benefit us but are not “why” we do what we do.

The intent of this couplet has a wider application than to Jewish tithes. To ‘honor God with our substance’ is to use that which God has given us in a way that brings glory to Him.

Accept – 3:11-12

¹¹ My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD Or loathe His reproof, ¹² For whom the LORD loves He reproofs, Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights. Proverbs 3:11–12 (NASB95)

As all of us know and have experienced, the general truth “do what right and for the right reasons, then things will work out well” does not always happen. There are times when things just do not “come together” and it may even seem that our world is falling apart. There are situations where we might find ourselves in “hard times” and we can actually see (perhaps in hind sight) a “cause and effect” situation. We can certainly learn from such 20/20 hindsight. There are other situations in which we can see no logical reason why we are experiencing trouble. The account of the life of Job is a perfect example of such things.

Solomon realized that sometimes the difficulties we experience in life are used by God to help us in a “course correction” if we have drifted off the path on which we should be walking and at other times these difficulties are use to strengthen us and draw us closer to God in our relationship with Him. It is always good to keep in mind that God is our loving Heavenly Father Who desires the best for us. That realization (in the words of Alexander MacLaren) will help us see that

“Griefs and pains are not tokens of anger, nor punishments of sin, but love-gifts meant to help to the acquisition of wisdom. They do not come because the sufferers are wicked, but in order to make them good or better.”

Our response to such difficulties we have in life is typically a prayer to “stop what is happening” so we can “get back to normal” or where we are comfortable. It is sobering to realize that “getting back to normal” can hinder our growth and to slow down the process of becoming more like Christ (Roman 8:28-29). We also may find that we have difficulty in doing what James advised in his letter – “count it all joy when we have various trials.”

Some people respond to such trials with outright rebellion and anger toward God and others may assume an attitude of resignation of stoic acceptance and just give up. Both these responses do not help us in becoming wiser by actively learning from such experiences and finding way to be cooperative with what God is doing in our lives.