

PROVERBS 3: 1-12

My child, do not forget my teaching,
but let your heart keep my commandments;
² for length of days and years of life
and abundant welfare they will give you.

³ Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you;
bind them round your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.

⁴ So you will find favour and good repute
in the sight of God and of people.

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.

⁶ In all your ways acknowledge God,
and God will make straight your paths.

⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and turn away from evil.

⁸ It will be a healing for your flesh
and a refreshment for your body.

⁹ Honour the LORD with your substance
and with the first fruits of all your produce;

¹⁰ then your barns will be filled with plenty,
and your vats will be bursting with wine.

¹¹ My child, do not despise the LORD's discipline
or be weary of his reproof,

¹² for the LORD reproves the one he loves,
as a father the son in whom he delights.

First let me say something about the language for God. "God" and "The Lord" are one and the same. "The Lord" (*Adonai* in Hebrew) is just the special name for the God of the Hebrews. Usually, it is reflected by the 4 letters: YHWH. Hebrews would never speak it out of respect for the transcendent holiness of God. "The Lord" is the replacement word.

Who is speaking in this passage? Is it a human teacher of wisdom? Is it Wisdom herself? Is it God? Perhaps it is God, through Wisdom inspiring the teacher and this collection of proverbs.

So then, what is the "teaching" and "commandments" of wisdom that will give an abundant life to the one who internalizes and practices them? (1-2) There are four teachings/commandments offered in this section of proverbs:

1) (3-4) Loyalty and faithfulness in all your relations. Loyalty means you stand by people whether they are present or absent. Faithfulness means you stick with them for the long haul. But this doesn't mean you stand by them and stick with them when they are in the wrong. As we will see throughout Proverbs, our core commitment is to God. True loyalty and faithfulness means we tell the truth and stand up for right even if that may hurt our relations and cause us to be accused of disloyalty and unfaithfulness. True loyalty and true faithfulness can only be trusted if people in our lives are devoted to the highest truth no matter where it must lead.

2) (5-8) "Trust in the Lord and not in your own insight... Do not be wise in your own eyes... Turn away from evil." When do we experience dissonance between our conscience and God's commandment on the one hand, and our own thinking, rationalizing, and desire on the other? There are so many pressures and influences upon us. We want to make certain people happy and certain people like us. We want to make our lives easier and smoother in the world. We want to avoid conflict and disagreement where we can unless we have a bitterness or frustration in us that will find blame anywhere, everywhere and in everyone. How do we stay rooted in God's will and way of justice and love, even against our own insight and wisdom which may rationalize the ways of evil? We don't think of it as evil. It is dressed up as good and we want to dress it up as good if we want to pursue it. It takes time, devotion, meditation, and prayer to discern what is of God and what is not. We must be prepared for dissonance in our lives and choosing God's wisdom over our own. This is the way to developing true wisdom in ourselves. It is not our wisdom, but God's wisdom in us.

3) (9-10) Generosity, giving, sharing... It will always come back to you double and triple, but not always in the way you expect... We learn to value things more deeply when we think of them as gifts given out of generosity rather than as duty or as debt paid or paid back. It takes faith to give without strings attached, to give with our hearts not expecting a return. When we don't expect it, it always comes as a gift and much more wondrously received and enjoyed for so being.

4) (11-12) Finally, when do we suffer some "reproof" from God the way we do from a parent, a partner, or a friend? To reprove someone because you also want to put them down is different than reproofing someone who's done something wrong or hurtful because you care about them. If we experience such reproof as from the Lord, it is because we think of it as just and right and in accordance with God's law of love. We are reproofed through our conscience, when some situation backfires upon us and we realize our motives or actions were not right, or when we are confronted by the consequences of our behaviour. When we see what happens to challenge us as from God, we recognize we must learn from it and do better next time.

One final note. Rewards are mentioned and often the language of reward appears to be material and physical. But as we know, doing the right thing doesn't necessarily reward us with material benefits or a long and healthy life. In fact, doing the right thing can cost us things, even friends, family, a job, and even our lives. If we do not find reward of a spiritual nature more valuable than any material/physical reward, we will never travel far on the road to genuine wisdom as the book of Proverbs teaches. What do you think?

PRAYER: Thank you, O God, for wisdom however it comes into our minds and our hearts. We thank you because we recognize in faith that genuine wisdom comes from you. We thank you for strengthening our commitment to loyalty and faithfulness in our relationships. We thank you for giving us faith to trust in our commitment to your love and justice above our own wisdom wherever it suits us. We thank you for opening our heart to give generously and to receive what others give as gifts to be cherished rather than debts paid and expectations fulfilled. We thank you for the ways we have been challenged and reproved when we have done wrong causing hurt and harm intentionally or not. May your love and forgiveness heal us and heal our relations where that can be... In Jesus' name; Amen.