

Part 5: Trusting in God's Goodness

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We are working through the book of Proverbs together, and today we are going to be looking at the first twelve verses of Proverbs chapter three.

One of the phrases we use a lot here at Sovereign Hope is "gospel change for all of life." We believe that the gospel really does change every aspect of our lives. The cross of Jesus is so comprehensive that it reorganizes everything about us and the way we view our world.

But it's also a slogan or an idea that is easy to believe, but harder to apply. Our text today helps us to see, apply and actually experience the beauty of this change in our lives.

We are all gluttons for goodness. In each area of our lives we make decisions that we think bring us the most good in life and protect us from the most harm. It's this desire for goodness which makes the gospel of God so wonderfully attractive. God wants us to come to him, to be saved by him, and to honor him because he wants what's good for us.

Unless you see the goodness of God, God will never be trustworthy enough for you to choose to follow him instead of the pleasures of this world.

Additionally, if you see how good God is, how wonderful he has provided and how deep his love is for you in Jesus, then you would be willing to trust him in every area of your life, even in areas which seem counter-cultural.

This idea of trust and reward is really central to our text today. In fact if you have your Bible in front of you there's an almost formulaic pattern for you to see. All of the odd numbered verses commend some sort of faithful and trustworthy action towards God. And all of the even numbered verses show the way in which God rewards those who trust in him.

Which means the big picture we are going to see today is this: **We can do the hard work of trusting God because Jesus has done the hard work of saving us.**

We've all heard the phrase: This seems too good to be true. Well this is pretty much the tone of this passage. But we can break it up into two parts. Part one in verses 1-6 asks us the question: **Who wants this?** We are going to see wonderful truths build around our trust in God. But then in verses 7-12 we are going to see the second question which is: **Who does this?** In that part we see three tests of our trust in God.

So we are going to begin by reading the first part of our passage today where we see our first question: **Who wants this?** Read with me, **Proverbs 3:1-6.**

Did you see the seemingly simple actions this text provides: don't forget my commandments (he's speaking there of God's commands in his law), don't let steadfast love escape you, and trust in the Lord.

And then you see these remarkable promises: God's commands are meant to bring you peace and longevity and not toil and short life. Now if you remember, God gave his law after he saved his people out of Egypt. God's law assumes that people know God as a delivering and good God.

But don't we often forget this when we assess our responses to him? As a parent I know how difficult it is sometimes to convince my children to trust me when I feel like I've done a pretty good job at giving them instruction that doesn't kill them.

But how many times do we see God's commands as a threat to our peace and joy instead of the life of peace and joy?

Additionally, living in God's steadfast love and faithfulness should produce a visible adornment in your life which wins you the favor of those around you. Look at how Paul talks about this in **2 Corinthians 2:14-15**. We are the aroma of Christ.

I was talking to one member of our community group where someone at work began to ask him about his hope in life because he lived differently. Christians when faithfully living out God's love should be a winsome scent and not an offensive one.

And lastly, to rely on the Lord is to receive stunning clarity in life, he makes your paths straight.

Now when we read wisdom literature like Proverbs, there's something we need to understand when we do so. Not only is Proverbs showing us how we should live if we fear the Lord, but it's actually showing us how we were supposed to live, that is, how God designed us to live.

In this way, wisdom literature is idealistic literature, it expresses the ideals, the original plan, and the way things would have been when God created us. In other words it's the picture in your cook book. If you were to perfectly take on the mind of the chef and do exactly as she would, your dish would look just like that.

When the dish fails to match the picture the problem is rarely with the recipe, it's generally with us.

So too when we look at the wonderful promises of Proverbs we see truths which would always and forever have been ours if sin had never crept into our hearts. Because we live in a broken world, God's ideals show up and are generally true in many places, but because of sin our experiences might vary.

We need to understand this if we want to read this book of Proverbs well. Look at the promises in this text: Vs. 1-2, if you remember his teachings, you will see long life and peace. Vs. 3-4, if you do not let steadfast love forsake you, you will find peace with God and with man.

In following Jesus, do Christians always have a long life? No. In following Jesus do we always have favor with man? No. In fact Jesus himself says in Mark 13 that Christians will often be hated because of his name's sake.

In fact, this might sound counter cultural to Western ears, but there is no more persecuted religious minority in the world than Christians.

So why in the world would you choose to follow this God? Because everything about God's ideals that were lost through our sin can actually be restored in part now, and in full later by God's faithfulness to his people through Jesus. We see this in verse three, and this is where we begin to see the beauty of the gospel.

The grammar of what the father is saying here is pretty wild. He is saying you have been loved with a steadfast love, you have received faithfulness, but don't let those things forsake you. Don't let steadfast love leave you don't let faithfulness abandon you.

That word "steadfast love" is the Hebrew word, "hesed," we spoke of last week. It is God's rich covenantal love for his people. "Hesed" was the keen awareness that God desired to recreate a people out of this broken world and to bless them by restoring them back to a right relationship with him. And "hesed" acknowledged that God would bring this blessing, guard this blessing and keep this blessing upon them if only his people would choose to walk in, stay in, and continue in his covenant love.

That's the point he's making. If you want steadfast love and faithfulness, then bind them upon your heart. What is "them" they are the teachings and commands of God's law in verse 1. If you want to continue in God's love, then continue to stay near to God by obeying his commands. That's what verse four implies when it says that keepings these grants you favor with God himself, relational peace with him.

The problem is that Israel didn't want to keep this law. They constantly choose the recipes of the surrounding nations and trusted in their promises for goodness instead of God's.

The law offered goodness and grace, but they got distracted by the pictures on the other books. Israel could never keep the law or follow the recipe. But this changed when Jesus kept the law for us. Look at **Hebrews 10:14-22**.

So how is it that we know God's steadfast love will not forsake you? How do you know that God will be faithful to you tomorrow? Because Jesus fulfilled the whole of the law, Jesus had perfect favor with God, and through faith in Jesus all of that favor and covenant love is bound to you in your salvation.

Jesus begins this restorative process of winning back what sin has lost. He gives us peace in life, and life in death. Life eternal! Jesus rescues us from the steadfast punishment of God's justice and brings us into the steadfast promise of God's love.

Jesus makes it possible for you to know how God would want you to live! Look at how John the Baptist was introduced as the herald of Jesus: **Mark 1:2-3**. John's role was to make clear the straight path that Jesus himself would bring to all who hope in him.

This Jesus came and he called his disciples to do what? To follow him! In God's providence he might choose to bring thick clouds upon our path so that we might not know what is ahead, but in his grace he always allows Jesus in his nearness to be close enough to us that we can see what we need to follow him.

Do you see the wonderful reality of life in God's covenant love? We get clarity on life's road, restored relationships with God and with man, and the promise of fruitfulness all the days of our life.

This should lead us to want what is given in **Proverbs 3:5-6**.

This is a verse that perhaps you have heard before. It's a verse that seems on first glance simple to do. But here is the profound pivot on which this whole passage hinges. If we see that God has been faithful to us in Jesus to deliver us from death, win us back to God, and to provide clarity in life, then why would you ever want to trust yourself?

It is so easy to think that our understanding of our path and our plans can coexist with God's. But here we see that they cannot. And at this point why would we think that we could do better? Why would we think that God is holding out on us when through Jesus he didn't even withhold from us his son?

The task of the Christian who stands by Christ inside of this steadfast love is to acknowledge this new way of life in all of your ways.

My wife and I took our honeymoon in the Bahama's and there they drive on the opposite side of the road. We didn't have a car, but we found out that the couple in the condo next to us was driving to the same beach we wanted to go to and they invited us to ride with them.

It was so funny to watch the two of them drive on the opposite side of the road. At every intersection the guy driving would say to himself, "Left to live, left to live." In other words, stay on the left side of the road and you will live.

This is a wonderful illustration of what it means to acknowledge God in all our ways. It wasn't that this man was unfamiliar with the road, or how to drive a car. But his whole world had been turned so upside down that whether it was a traffic light or a stop sign he reminded himself of this truth.

The language of hanging God's word on our neck and binding it to our heart is meant to show us that we need to have those visible reminders, those audible patterns which remind us of the promise of Jesus so that we might stay in the lane of God's grace.

I hope at this point you are asking yourself, what does this look like? Or perhaps you think you already do this well. Well here Solomon tests our understanding of trust in three ways. Those who want this life, are those who do these kinds of things. This is our second point today: **Who does this?**

That's why he opens the second half of this passage with this: **Proverbs 3:7a.**

Be not wise in your own eyes. In other words what is going to follow are things which we cannot do if we trust in what our eyes can see or what our brains can understand. What is about to follow are actions and beliefs which can only be true when we are willing to surrender our understanding of the world and humbly accept that in Jesus, God has really given to us all things.

These three tests are the ***test of peace, the test of honor, and the test of comfort.***

Let's finish our text today and then we will circle back to each of these: **Proverbs 3:7-12.**

If you want to assess your own trust of God, or if you want to start the process of joyfully clinging to his steadfast love, this is where we can start.

First we see ***The Test of Peace***. We see this in verses 7-8 where he says, "Fear the Lord and turn away from evil for it will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones."

Here again we find the theme of "the fear of the Lord." We've been defining fear of the Lord as a reverent reliance upon God. And here the first test is that if you fear the Lord you will turn from sin.

Why? Because you trust that an obedient reliance upon God is what will heal you, it is a medicinal treatment which will refresh you.

This actually helps us understand why we don't turn away from evil doesn't it? We turn to evil, we participate in sinful things because we think that it has the ability to heal us and to refresh us.

Haven't we all experienced this? Who among us hasn't had a physiological craving for sin? Whether it's the promise of relaxation which comes from drunkenness or mindless entertainment? The gluttonous desire for whatever food demands our consumption? Or the insatiable longing for sexual gratification?

We feel in our bones these desires and we want to turn to these evil devices because we think that once we take that pill, it will solve our ailment, ease our minds, satisfy our needs, but have we ever found that to be true?

As we continue to read in Proverbs we will hear the call of Lady Folly and her adulterous song. She promises relief, healing balms, and soul satisfaction. But the medicine of the world is poison to the soul.

But if we see what God has done in the gospel we are able to realize that he alone promises healing and refreshment. Jesus himself says in Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Or look how Paul puts it, **Galatians 5:1**. To fear the Lord is to be set free from the false calls of peace and healing that sin offers. Here's a wonderful truth from Proverbs 3:8: God wants your wounds. He really does. He really wants to help you, to heal you, to refresh you. But if you believe that, you must turn from evil.

If you wrestle with turning away, I encourage you to talk with another believer about it, ask them to help you trust in the Lord with all your heart. Because to acknowledge God is to not trust what the eyes see about sin, but instead to trust what God himself says about it.

The second test of our trust is ***The Test of Honor***. Look again at **Proverbs 3:9-10**.

I'm interested to know what you thought you heard when you read this text. How many of us read this text and heard, "give to the Lord with your wealth."

And by that measure you thought you have already applied this passage. Or maybe you thought that here comes the church's call for my money. But that's not what Solomon is after here is it? He's after honoring the Lord with your wealth and with your firstfruits.

This changes things in three practical places.

First it changes how we give. We give not because God needs our money, we give because God's after our honor or him. God doesn't need your money. But because God is after your joy in this world he prescribes generosity as a break-check for your soul.

A lack of honorable giving to the Lord reveals a dangerous lack of honor in your heart.

Secondly, this applies to everyone, but I want to speak specifically to college students who consider yourselves to be lacking in the wealth department, God wants you to honor him with your firstfruits.

By including wealth and firstfruits it's not just speaking of the money you have, but the whole sum of your career. Your studies, your degree, the sum of your whole vocation is meant to be offered to the honor of God and not the honor of self. What would it look like for all of us to consider the ways in which our hours on the clock and not just the percent of our paycheck show a unique honor to God?

Lastly, honoring God with your wealth not only shapes what you give, but what you get. If God were to look at your purchase history on Amazon, would he be honored? Would he see someone seeking to enjoy the things that God has given with a clear understanding that only God satisfies? Or would he see us trying to purchase what only God himself can provide in the gospel.

If God has provided for us in the most costly and eternal way by the blood of his son, then aren't we able to trust him in physical ways? To really believe this is to realize that obeying God will not destroy us and leave us without provision. That's what is meant when Solomon adds that do to this you will never run out of what you need. Your barns will be full and your vats teeming.

This might sound like the prosperity gospel. If we give, we will get. God is a genie and if we live generously he will give us health, wealth and happiness.

Now I want to be careful here because the Proverbs actually do affirm a lot of that. Obeying God is what is best for the whole of your life. But that doesn't mean that God's favor is only in the provision of what is good.

How do we know this? Because immediately after we see Proverbs 3:10 promising God's generous giving to those whom he loves, we see in verses 11-12 God's discipline for those he loves.

This is the third test: ***The Test of Comfort.***

Read with me: **Proverbs 3:11-12.**

Our world is frantic about comfort. Every product you purchase is based on a promise to make life easier and more comfortable.

Trusting in God, and not trusting our own eyes demands that we realize the false promise of worldly comfort. Worldly comfort has no category for understanding biblical discipline.

The world says if it hurts and if it's hard, then it's hardly worth it.

But here is the promise of the Lord's discipline of those whom he loves and in whom he delights. Did you catch that astounding promise in here? This discipline that Solomon is talking about is a tangible and real experience not of God's displeasure, but of his immense love and delight in his children.

What do we mean when we talk about discipline here? Well it's football season which means I must use a football analogy. There are sometimes where you will see a football player running laps around the field because he is being punished for something.

This is a discipline from the coach in order to correct him. But sometimes you will see someone running on the football field and it's not to correct him, but instead to get faster, and this too is also discipline.

Sometimes God's discipline comes into our life and wakes us up to something we are doing wrong. And just like a father with a child, this is rooted in love. But sometimes God lines us up on the line of the football field and makes us run not because we've done something wrong, but because he wants to make us stronger. Why? Because he delights in us and wants us to do well.

The author of Hebrews quotes this very Proverb and then he says this: **Hebrews 12:7-13**.

God's discipline is meant to comfort us. To lift our drooping hands and strengthen weak knees.

What does this mean? This means that those who trust in God do not fear God's corrective or strengthening discipline because they understand his immense love for them.

If we worship the idol of comfort we will loath what God uses to love! But if we see that in Jesus our greatest punishment has been removed, then we long to be made stronger by God. We endure hard times not because God is disappointed in us, but because he delights in you and wants you to trust him more and more.

This Proverb began by talking about our hearts for God and ended by showing us God's immense heart for us. If God loves us like this, then what do we need to fear?

In the gospel God has shown us that through Jesus he is restoring to us a trust which leads to a greater experience of his love both in life's highs and life's lows. So let us trust in him with all our hearts and together seek to see and act not through what is right in our own eyes, but through the eyes of scripture.