

Part 9: Do This Not That

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We are back in the book of Proverbs today where we are looking at God's wisdom. We've been defining wisdom not as street smarts or intellectual prowess, but as learning to see the world through God's eyes. This ultimately can come only when we learn to see how God has acted for our good in sending Jesus to die for our sins, and if we respond to that, we become wise for life in ways we never thought possible.

Part of what is going on in Proverbs is that Solomon is teaching us that God's wisdom influences so much more than we ever could think.

For example, I have a friend who works for Microsoft and when we think of Microsoft we generally think of it in terms of its primary big products: Microsoft Office, Xbox, Windows. But the truth is that a large part of Microsoft's business actually comes from patents and software which other companies buy and use in thousands of the electronic platforms and software we use without even knowing.

Many of us think that the gospel shapes the big issues in life: eternal salvation, what we do on Sundays, the big token sins we avoid. But it also shapes the small details of our life. This text today is sandwiched between two larger portions on big and scandalous issues. But I think it's intentional on the part of Solomon to remind us that God also cares about the details of our lives.

Because the gospel is bigger than we could ever imagine, its impact is greater than we can ever imagine.

What we are going to look at today from a big picture stand point is this: **God's wisdom teaches us what to do to find peace, and what to avoid to find life.**

We are going to see this in two parts today: first in verses 1-11 we are going to look at **A Guide for Doing What is Good**, and then in verses 12-19 we will see **A Warning Against Doing What is Not Good**.

Let's read our first portion of scripture as we begin to look at our first point today: **A Guide for Doing What is Good**.

What we will actually see in these two opening paragraphs is a warning to avoid material disaster, financial or otherwise. And the father is going to use a very specific example and then build to a more general point. But each of them communicate that God cares about our finances and our labor.

In Proverbs 5 we saw that who you kiss reveals what you believe about God, and throughout the book of Proverbs we also see that what you believe about money and work also reveals what you believe about God. In other words your wallet and your workweek are a windows into your theology.

The first warning for doing what is good has to do with finances and pledges. Read with me: **Proverbs 6:1-5**.

Now what is going on in this text and what does it mean?

Well to first understand this text we need to understand the broader context behind Israel's relationship to loans. In our economy today the Federal Bank puts out guiding standards and rates for loans and lenders. In the Old Testament God called his people out of slavery and gave them his law which would produce a flourishing society saved by grace, he set similar standards for his people.

In Deuteronomy 15 we read that Israelites were able, and encouraged to generously loan money to their brothers and sisters should they have need. But they weren't to charge any interest, at least to those who were apart of Israel.

But God also instituted what is called the Sabbatical Year. As a symbol of God who releases his own people from bondage, every seven years all the debts in Israel would be forgotten. Everyone's balance goes back to zero.

Why is this important? Because it shows that loans were not prohibited, but that in the giving and in the releasing of loans the principle God wanted his kingdom to experience was freedom from the bondage of money. It was ok for someone to be in debt should the need be there, but to be controlled by that debt was not part of God's ideal.

Specifically in our text today, the father is warning the son of cosigning on a loan in a potentially unwise situation. Think of it this way, you have a buddy, or a coworker come up to you and say: "Hey I'm trying to start a business, or buy a car, and the bank won't let me do it unless I can come up with an additional \$3,000 or have you cosign the loan with me."

That would mean that you and your finances would be tied to this persons finances. We might make these kind of agreements naturally in certain places like on student or auto loans for our children.

But here it is implied that this situation might not be the best case scenario. The father alludes that such an agreement might be you getting caught up in your own words which means two things potentially happened. The first is that this individual is an individual who really shouldn't be tied to your finances. There's probably a reason the bank isn't lending to him on his own. He is not responsible and you will bear the consequences of being tied to him.

Or secondly, maybe you knew this individual has a track record of troubles, but you think this might be the opportunity for you to help him get on his feet. But the money you lent him is not money you are actually able to be generous with. It's one thing to be willing to help this individual because you're willing to lose that \$3,000 if he can't pay it back, but it's another think if you can't afford to lose that \$3,000.

God wants us to be generous, but where we are limited in our generosity he wants us to be prudent and wise.

So what happens if you make an arrangement like this and you quickly realize that this was a mistake? You go to that individual, or you go to that lender that you've cosigned with, and you hasten to him. Literally you humble yourself to him and you admit your mistake. You don't sleep on it, you move to get out of it.

There are two wonderful truths in this text. First, God cares about the money he's given to you. When we think of our finances we might think thoughts like, "Will the bank approve this?" But here Proverbs asks us to think, "Does God approve this?" And secondly, it assumes that God knows we are silly and imperfect people who will do foolish things, and even then he wants to help us.

If you've ever been in a situation like this, you know we need help. We need help because in moments like this when you feel trapped you also feel alone. You know that what stands before is either a season of ruin or a season of great humility by going and humbling yourself before another person.

I know men who have pledged and even paid for vacations with college buddies but who realize this trip would come at a great expense to his wife and family, and he had to awkwardly tell his buddies that he wouldn't be able to make it.

I've sat with a couple in pre-marriage where they had made a pledge to marry. They had put down deposits and sent out invites, and I had to say to them, "This pledge might have been unwise." And in those moments what you face is the embarrassing task of telling others the marriage is off.

But this is why God's help is so needed. First, it might be that listening to God here helps us avoid all sorts of bad situations. But secondly, it helps us experience a clear conscience before God himself.

To do what God is commanding here is to enter into a vulnerable and potentially messy situation. Yet you do so with God on your side. There might be tension between you and others, but there is deep abiding peace between you and God and that peace is what actually sustains us.

Look at what Job says to God in **Job 17:3**. Job says, God this world is hard and no one wants to back me up, would you be my security? Would you be the faithful one to stand behind me in generosity and substance? And that's what we have in the gospel. Look at the work of Christ in **Hebrews 7:22**.

In the gospel we hook our debt of sin to Jesus who is able and ready to put his blood on the line for us. So when unwise decisions on a temporary level surround us, we act obediently and responsibly trusting that Jesus is the greater security which stands behind us eternally.

How wonderful is the reality of God's word to us here? God cares about you when you feel trapped and ensnared, and in the midst of anxiety he gives you something to do, the hope of obedience.

What I love about this text is that it provides clarity on our emotions. If you've been in a situation like this you've perhaps experienced a sense of anxiety, but God doesn't say: it's dumb to be anxious about it. Instead he says why should be anxious: "You've fallen into a trap, you're caught in the hand of the fowler."

Some anxiety is wrong when it leads to sinful worry, but some anxiety is a sign from God that we need to turn and listen to God.

Immediately below this text the Father presents another circumstance, poverty and want, which may cause us anxiety, but again he shows that in obeying God we might have peace. This is the second way we are guided into what is good: avoid the dangerous life of sloth.

Look with me at **Proverbs 6:6-11**.

So here the father warns us as his children against the sluggard, or as one translation puts it, lazybones. Who is Mr. Lazybones?

Well if the warning to the son above was to not prioritize the comfort of others above wisdom, Mr. Lazybones is the one who prioritizes his own comfort over wisdom. I think the Bible shows us the two paradoxes of sloth. Here in Proverbs 6 it is the one who in light of all that's going on he thinks his peace is in distraction and withdrawal. But, Paul tells us of another sort of idle person in **2 Thessalonians 3:10-13**.

Sloth can look like doing nothing, and sloth can look like doing lots of things while at the same time doing nothing which actually matters. In other words both the couch and the calendar can distract us from what God has called us to do.

To help us diagnose our own hearts, God points us to the ant.

I love how he tells us to consider it. The sloth can't ignore it and the busy body can't just glance at it. It demands our deep consideration.

Have you ever seen an anthill and seen the flurry of ants going to and fro and noticed over in the corner a group of ants just standing there. Snacking on a piece of Doritos? In fact have you ever seen an ant stand still at all?

I haven't. They are always working and why are they working? To provide food for themselves and for their colony. Who told them to do it? No one!

It's what the ant was created to do. And here on this note he turns to Mr. Lazybones and he says, what's your excuse?

Do you have no counselor? Do you have no excuse? No! Not only were we made in the image of a God who is creating and working God, but he has shown us something about the sum of our lives.

Did you know that work is part of God's perfect plan for us? In Genesis 1 we read of God's perfect creation where he calls the world "good," seven times. And in this good and perfect world look at the implied task of man in **Genesis 2:5-8**.

God made man to do what? To work the ground.

This sounds pretty lame until you realize what this work was. This work was the command for Adam and Eve to work together to expand the Garden of Eden. The Garden of Eden was this place of perfection, where God dwelt perfectly with his people and there was no sin, no harm and no disease. This work was wonderful work, joyful work, the work to invite others into this beautiful relationship with God.

Now sin in Genesis 3 frustrates the work. The ground which was soft is now hard and bears thorns. But just as an ant is made to work to provide and in so doing obey God, so too are we called to work and provide and in so doing glorify the God who made us.

Here it's almost as if God is poking us with a stick saying do something! Look at verse 9: "How long will you lie there, when will you arise from your sleep?" Even the ant recognizes he was made for a purpose don't neglect yours. Do something.

Our purpose is to work at all things for the glory of God. In Genesis Adam and Eve were called to expand the Garden and in the gospel we are called to expand the Kingdom by making disciples of all nations. All of our work is part of this commission God has placed on our lives. That's why Paul can say so boldly in Colossians 3:23, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men."

Here again we see this wonderful peace that only God's word can bring. Mr. Lazybones looks to rest and to sleep so that he might have for a moment, peace. We've all been there haven't we? But do you see what happens in this lifestyle? Poverty will come upon you like a robber in the night, lack and want will sneak up on you like an armed man. You think this life will bring you peace but it will rob you of it.

But this is the beauty of God's word to us. In the gospel we rest from our work, but we also rest for our work.

We rest from our work because the gospel reminds us that we cannot earn our standing before God. By our own work we can never get what we want from this world or from God. But faith in Jesus recognizes that it's Jesus perfect work that is what we needed and in a wonderful miracle Jesus' work is counted to you so that you might have real, true rest.

But this rest from work also leads us to rest for work. Here we are on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day. We gather here to remind ourselves of the rest we have in the gospel so that we can go out filled for our work week knowing that we can love others and please God in everything we are doing.

Why would we neglect such a grace!

When life is hard or confusing, God gives us enough clarity to know what it looks like to obey him. This is what it looks like to choose what is good.

But here is where the narrative switches a little in Proverbs 6:12. The previous verses caution us against inactivity, but these next few verses warn us of the danger of unrighteous and harmful activity.

This is our second point this morning: **A Warning Against Doing What is Not Good.**

And here I want you to notice the activity that stands in contrast with the threat of inactivity we just looked at: **Proverbs 6:12-19.**

Here is the paradox that stands behind the first 19 verses of Proverbs chapter six. It may seem that you are doing nothing. It might seem that you've simply opted to live with unwise decisions or that you're just getting a little rest. But the truth is, we are never doing nothing.

If we are not active to do what is good, then we are active in doing what is not. Our hands may be inactive, but our hearts never are. Our feet are never static even when we sit perched on an easy chair.

Here the father wants us to see the dangers of the worthless man. There is something worse than material bankruptcy and that is spiritual bankruptcy.

In verses 16-19 we see God's heart towards the wicked man, but in verses 12-15 we read of the anatomy of the wicked man. Did you notice how his whole body is active?

His mouth is crooked, his eyes are deceitful, his feet are strategically placed, his finger identifies the object of scorn or attack, his perverted heart cannot do anything but scheme evil and he sows disruptive discord wherever he goes.

Now when things are describe this way, it's easy to understand that we shouldn't want this. Yet the appeal behind this is that this person is getting to do exactly what they want to do. Unlike the ant or the wise man, this man heeds no instruction. He is out for himself and if we've seen anything in our world it is that the wicked often prosper.

That's the problem the book of Ecclesiastes presents: Why is it that the wicked prosper?

We see music videos, movies and magazines all week showing people who by Biblical standards would be fools. And while we don't want to be wicked, isn't it easy to subtly learn to want what the wicked have?

When we see their wealth, their rest, and their relationships, we begin to allow little things to slide in order to get a taste. We are fine with a little discord here if it helps there. A little devious talk here if it benefits here. A little sin here for gain there.

The Bible calls this pride and it blinds us to true reality. J.C. Ryle says of this: "**Pride makes us rest content with ourselves--think we are good enough as we are--keeps us from taking advice--refuse the gospel of Christ---turn everyone to his own way.**"

The sin of pride seduces our eyes, but this is why we must learn to see and hear God's warning in this text. Solomon gives us two dangerous reasons we should avoid this lifestyle.

The first is that living according to this body of work destroys a gospel community.

I don't think that it is possible for us to overstate how important God considers your contributions to the community of his people.

Sin is always corporate. In verses 16-19 there is the emphatic list that Solomon gives of six, even seven things the Lord hates. The ending of these lists is generally considered to be the significant and weightiest aspect. What is that in this list: the one who sows discord among his brothers.

If we are not busy with the activities of righteousness, we will become busy with the duty of discord. Wicked activity endangers the church. Even if you think yourself strong enough to sin in safety, it endangers the rest of us.

But this is the second reason why we ought to avoid this lifestyle, it kills us.

The wicked think they are living their best life now, but verse 15 shows us their end: **Proverbs 6:15.**

Why such devastation? Because of the displeasure of God. Look at **Proverbs 6:16.**

This is such a powerful statement that is missed on us in English. When it says that these are seven things which are an abomination to *him*, that Hebrew word for *him* is *nephesh*. Which in other places is the Hebrew word for breath or soul.

God loathes these things in his very soul, they are an abomination to him.

This list presents a problem for us because to some degree don't we all find something we are guilty of here? And yet what this shows is that we have earned the displeasure of God and harmed the good of others.

It would seem that the implied solution to this unrighteous activity is to turn and to be righteous. But here is where we must understand what Solomon is saying.

Here is an individual whose mouth is crooked, whose eyes are haughty, whose hands are covered in innocent blood, whose feet run quickly to evil, and whose heart devises devastation.

This is not a problem of one appendage, this is a problem of the whole person. Sin enslaves our whole body and puts us to work on building a legacy of sinful debt against a righteous God.

But see the hope left for us earlier in **Proverbs 4:20-22**.

We don't need new hands, we need a whole new body. We need to be born again.

This my friends is the hope we have in pursuing what is good and putting off what is dangerous. For if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation.

Jesus really does give us a new perspective on what the good life is, but more than that, he takes away the displeasure and judgment our sin deserved.

He takes away the pain of passivity and the deadly nature of our mistakes and he gives us his Holy Spirit so that we might be busy with the things of the Lord.

How do you apply this text first and foremost? You must be born again. This comes only through the wisdom of God in Jesus Christ, humbling yourself repenting and accepting his gift of salvation.

But then once we are renewed, we then submit ourselves to righteous activity without delay.

Look with me at **Romans 12:1-2**.

There are many of us in here who can apply this text in all sorts of ways. Some of us need to go right away after this and repent to God or to others of places where we were being inactive where wisdom tells us to be active with the works of righteousness and obedience.

Others of us need to go to God or to others and repent of places where we have been active but not with the things of God.

When we begin to understand all the places that God's path is meant to include, we will be often be amazed at how hard some of these commands are. But by the power of Jesus in us we will also be amazed at the peace and pleasure that comes in walking with God along the way.