

Part 33: How To Not Faint

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We are back in the book of Proverbs this week as we begin to look at Proverbs 24. This chapter is unique from what we have been in lately because the chapter as a whole assumes trials in the life of the wise son.

This is important for us to understand because we know how trials challenge our ideals. Playing sports growing up, one of the greatest illustrations of this was homeschool basketball players. Most homeschool basketball players would destroy anyone in a game that required accuracy in shooting. Lightening, Hoarse, Around the World, they often had the most consistent and purest of all shots. That's because they spent most of their time shooting baskets on their own. They didn't have other teammates to run plays against, they shot and shot, and shot. They had the ideal practice of what it took to be successful.

But, most homeschool players, when actually playing the game, took a lot longer to adjust. They weren't used to someone opposing them. If they got open shots, they were money, but when it came to shooting with a hand in their face, driving the middle of the lane through traffic, or using their body to get a rebound they weren't prepared for the added reality of contact.

The same is true in many areas of life. Inevitably in marriage, regardless of how well you pursued wise counsel in your engagement, you will encounter moments of conflict and opposition in your relationship that you weren't prepared for. Parenting for the first time, dating, co-workers, people who don't use their turn signals: we think we know how to live and respond well in this world but other people sometimes make it messy!

Life, and certainly following Jesus, would be easy if you were the only person around. But that is not how life is in our broken world, and for Christians we also see that that's not what life is like in heaven.

God made us to live with others in community. This side of glory we will run into times where the burden of all those other people wear against us in different ways. These can range from an annoyance, to a crushing fear. In those moments though, what is actually on display is not your interpersonal skills, or even your lofty ideals, but the strength of your hope. Solomon wants us to understand that following Jesus is great in theory, but in practice it is often hard. To equip us to handle this, he is going to fit us with a hope big enough to keep us in the game.

We are going to split up chapter 24 into two sermons over the next two weeks, each providing a hope which motivates us when our life collides in uncomfortable ways with others. This week we are going to see the goodness of God which moves us towards others, and next week we are going to see the justice of God which gives us peace in the midst of others.

Our big idea today is this: **God's wisdom is a sweet gift which gives us peace and moves us towards others.**

We are going to see this in three parts. We are going to see first a contrast, then a conviction, and finally a comfort. In verses 1-9 we will see a **Contrast between What is Helpful and What is Not**, then in verses 10-12 we are going to see a **Conviction Which Moves Us Towards Others**, and lastly we will see in verses 13-14 a **Comfort Which Gives Us Hope**.

Let's begin by reading our first portion of our passage today: **Proverbs 24:1-9**.

So here we see our first point today: **Contrast between What is Helpful and What is Not**.

Solomon begins here by showing the way in which sin is personally dissatisfying and how wisdom is personally fulfilling. For those of us who might think that for a second the way of sin and evil is actually the way to all of the gratification you want, Solomon cracks open this desire to show us what is inside: violence and trouble. But to pursue God's wisdom is to find inside of it a house filled with everything precious and good.

This wisdom which is given to us not based off our skill or competency, but by our faithfulness to God, not only fills us and satisfies us, but it has a corporate effect.

Look at how he continues: **Proverbs 24:5-9**.

Did you see the contrast? Those who rely on God, are made strong, they are equipped for the challenge and contact of this world, they are made ready for the war of life and assured of a victory!

But how are they equipped for this? By the help of those who share in God's wisdom. They receive wise guidance, they are gifted with a community of counselors who help them see the foolishness of the evil man and the benefit of God's provision in the gospel. This is what the church is meant to be.

The fool on the other hand has nothing to offer to anyone. Wisdom is too tall for him. He can't reach it, like your toddler trying to reach their hand onto the cookie plate, they strain for it but can never have it. Solomon has made this very clear throughout this book: **Proverbs 14:7**.

The other day I showed up at the building and Curt was meeting with some HVAC guys who were trying to help us solve some issues we needed to take care of. Curt said to me, "Oh, I'm glad you're here for this conversation." Now as these three men, who have tons of construction knowledge spoke, I said absolutely nothing. Why? Because I didn't have the same knowledge of them. We were not working from the same deck.

This is what Solomon says the fool does at the gates, which is where these kinds of discussion happen. Because they do not have the wisdom of God in them, they have nothing to offer in conversations like this.

Now here's the wonderful truth of the gospel, none of us can reach this kind of wisdom on our own. Paul says in Romans that all of us have fallen short, none of us can reach the counter by our own efforts. The difference between the wise man and the fool is not that the wise man can reach it and the fool can't. The difference is that the wise man realized that wisdom came down for him in Jesus Christ, and the fool refuses to accept that gift.

I love how James calls godly wisdom, "wisdom from above." He doesn't say that "wisdom that is above," he instead says wisdom from above which implies that which was above proceeds downward to those who are lowly. If you want this wisdom you realize not your brilliance, but your brokenness. You realize that we cannot reach what God has called us too, but Jesus has come down to give it to us through faith in him.

To be wise in scripture, to contribute to those around you, the requirement isn't to know everything. It is to know one thing and that is the gospel: that there is a God and it is not you, and that more than earning the favor of this God our sinful hearts of denied and downplayed his glory like art thieves and con-men, but the Father in his goodness, sent his son Jesus Christ to die for the crimes of us foolish glory thieves so that we might know not only wisdom, but the God of wisdom.

This is the high level ideal of wisdom! Look at how Paul puts this in **Colossians 2:8-10**. We have been filled with Jesus himself! Here is the fulfillment of wisdom's house! Here is the pleasant and precious riches of grace. We have something to offer because we have Jesus himself.

Here we see that God's wisdom in Jesus gives us strength and counsel which we use to help others! This seems simple then in theory, but in the following verses Solomon brings this wonderful ideal into the sometimes messy places of our life. Let's read of this in **Proverbs 24:10-12**.

Here we see our second point this morning: **Conviction Which Moves Us towards Other**.

Solomon just showed us that when we are won to Jesus Christ, we are filled with a spirit of strength and a spirit of counsel. But now he says: how are you planning to use those two gifts when it gets hard. He warns of a day of adversity. A day when your friends no longer see the work of the Holy Spirit in you as something welcomed, but as something annoying. In that day, will your strength faint?

God's not after the beauty muscles of sanctification. When he gives us his wisdom, he desires for us to use those gifts even when it's difficult. While is easy is to admire your strength in the mirror, it is difficult to use your counsel and might to move towards others who are in danger of their own death.

While Proverbs does speak often of caring for those in physical danger, we can assume here that he is speaking of people you know, perhaps even brothers and sisters in Christ who are leaving the path of wisdom and taking the path of foolishness. Solomon has already warned us of the seductive lady folly who takes men into her home to kill them with her violence, and the dangers of drunkenness that cause people to stumble into their own graves.

These trials challenge your commitment to wisdom. How do you consider the strength of your faith? If you had to assess your level of spiritual maturity, which standard would you apply to it? For many of us we would perhaps assess the amount of years in which we have followed Jesus, many more the token sins which we have avoided in life, and still others the amount of theological truths which we have grown to know and love.

But what, here, is the test of the strength of your faith? Your ability to care for your brother or sister who is being led astray by the false promises of sin—caring for your neighbor even when it comes at great cost to yourself.

Maybe at this point you take up the hypothetical response of the son in this text: **Proverbs 24:12a**, "Behold we did not know this!" Didn't know this? Solomon replies **24:12**.

He says you should know this based off what you know about God. For us, who have seen the fullness of God's wisdom in the works of Christ, isn't our ignorance even more inexcusable?

Consider Jesus' parable in **Luke 10:25-37**.

Or consider Jesus' critique of the scripture quoting and law producing Pharisees: **Matthew 23:1-4, 11-12**. The Pharisees took comfort in their religious knowledge, but they were unwilling to help others who were burdened in their walk with God.

Consider how Jesus speaks to the role of the church in **Matthew 18:10-14!**

If God's wisdom wakes us up to the reality of sin and the devastating effects it has in our life, if God's wisdom shows us that it's not perfection that is required but instead perseverance in Jesus Christ, then shouldn't we then by that same wisdom be motivated to save others who are wandering from this path?

In the church we will encounter people have walked into a dangerous mess of sin. Our gut reaction to this day of adversity is to shrink away in fear, or to lash out in a sort of self-righteous anger. But the gospel gives us something better, it gives us a conviction to move forward in love and in truth towards those who need our help.

Solomon starts not with their truth, but with yours. He shows how serious this is in the life of others by showing us how serious it is in our own heart! He says first in verse 12, "Does not he who weighs the heart perceive this?" So we see first of all that God sees our hearts, he knows what wickedness lay inside of us. But then he goes onto say in the end of verse 12: "and he will repay man according to his work."

In other words God doesn't just care about how you live in regards to him, he also cares how you live in regards to other people. Look at **1 John 4:19-21!**

It's here in this moment of outward reaching love that people often accuse the church of legalism. But don't we see in these passages that gospel love isn't rooted in an unfair standard of other people's obedience, it's actually a result of our own personal obedience towards God.

We are called to care for others because we know we too will have to stand before God! That's the truth, but in this is also love for us. Wonderful, beautiful love. Look back at the middle of **Proverbs 24:12**.

Here is the reality of following Jesus as a broken person in a broken world: Often times when we are called to pursue our brother or sister who is stumbling away into the dangerous ground of sin it is harmful to us to reach out to stop them. Those who grab hot pans falling to the ground are not caught off guard when the same pot they wish to save is the same pot which burns.

Moving with wisdom and love towards those who are living in a way which will harm them, might be extremely difficult, extremely nerve-racking, and it might cause you great fear.

But, does not he who keeps watch over your own soul know it?

What is our conviction that allows us to move towards others even when it's hard? That God watches (guards/maintains) our own soul. If the God of this world watches over us in Jesus Christ, and if nothing in all creation can separate us from that love, then can we not as representations of that eternal love reach out and help our brothers and sisters in the same way?

Don't we see this in scripture! From the midwives in Egypt risking their lives to save the children, Rahab risking her lives to save the Israelite spies, Jonathan facing the disfavor of his father to care for David, Esther risking her life to save the whole people of Israel, the most guarded we are, the most secure we are in the arms of Jesus, is when we are willing to entrust ourselves to him even when it seems ominous to our flesh.

What does it look like to make these moves in counsel and strength? I think it can look like three things: evangelism (sharing the gospel with those who are perishing), discipleship (helping others keep to the path of life), and church discipline (calling those back who have veered into the snare of death).

Each of these are hard in their own way, but at every step God is faithful to use his wise people to make one another strong, and satisfied.

This is where Solomon makes a seemingly abrupt transition into the text which follows: **Proverbs 24:13-14**.

In what seems like an awkward transition, here we see that in light of God's wisdom for hard situations, God also nourishes us for the sake of these hard situations. Just as is always true in the gospel, God gives us what he requires from us.

This is our final point this morning: **Comfort Which Gives Us Hope**.

In the 1996, cinematic masterpiece film, "Space Jam" featured a group of rag tag Looney Tunes who partnered with Michael Jordan against a talented, massive, and angry group of aliens. At one point in the film Bugs Bunny shares with his team a special drink he calls, "Mike's secret stuff." This drink was allegedly what gave Michael Jordan his skill and if they drank it they too would be like Mike.

Sure enough they drink it and they begin to find great success on the floor only to find out the secret stuff was only water.

Here is the wonder of what Solomon is talking about in his day of adversity. In the trial of your faith, when it seems difficult to follow the commands of God, God gives us secret stuff. But this stuff is not a placebo effect, it is real.

But even more than that God could have sovereignly chosen to communicate the power of his wisdom in any way he wanted. He could have said eat kale, for it provides for you the nutrients you need. Eat plain chicken for it is light in fat and high in protein.

God could have chosen to communicate the effectiveness of his word to empower us in the midst of our weaknesses by pointing to the myriad of bland but utilitarian goods of our world, but in God's merciful kindness to us his wisdom is not a call to what is bland but to what is most delicious and sweet.

God's wisdom is the very craving our hearts long for. It is what we desire at the end of a long day. But as the theologian Charles Hodge's says, it provides the satisfaction men seek in opiates, but it has the opposite effect. Where alcohol and drugs may provide a sweet satisfaction it ultimately dulls us where God's honey invigorates us. It leads us not to the couch to digest its sweetness but to the work of ministry to enjoy its sweetness.

What is this wisdom? It is the word of God. Look at **Psalms 19:7-11, 119:102-104**.

It's no secret that in the American church discipleship and costly counsel have been in the decline for a number of years. Part of that is due to the fact that we don't know our own Bibles any more. A recent survey came out that showed most Christians spend more time reading social media than they do their Bible.

That's an easy way to become judgmental. If we don't know what God says the Christian life should look like we will either not care about others or we will hold others to a standard which is not the gospel, that's legalism. But more importantly if we aren't reading the Bible then we ourselves don't see the wonderful goodness, hope and encouragement there is for us when it comes to ministry and love in our broken world.

To not know the honey of God's word is to err on subjectivism on one hand and stoicism on the other.

On the subjectivism side we hear the creed, "this is my truth." Those who champion this think that truth is only subjective, if it is good for me then it is true. It roots goodness in the individual's experience alone and not in any sort of outside truth.

Therefore any truth which comes from the outside and threatens the experience of what is good, is seen as a threat.

Then there is the stoicism that often runs rampant in the church. This group correctly places truth in the sphere of God's objective realities but they fail to acknowledge that this objective truth is experientially good! They stoically follow God's orders because he is God, but they refuse to see that God desires for you to enjoy his truth! One side separates truth from goodness and the other goodness from truth, but in God's word is truth for our good! It is our honey!

I remember a seminary professor who was invited to come and lecture about a biblical view of sex and gender. One other scholar who was there ultimately said: "I wish it were another way, but this is what God has chosen to be true." My professor then exclaimed, "No! There is no other way we should want this! If this is God's truth for us, then this is God's good care for us, this is God's way of loving us, this is God's good for us!"

God's word is true and it is good! It is honey which is sweet, but also honey which is sustaining.

Twice in Paul's letters he tells the church that using our strength and counsel to do good is exhausting. He says to both the Galatian and Thessalonian church, don't grow weary of it even though it's costly.

So how do we not grow weary in this? We should eat God's honey. In closing here are two points of application.

First, read God's word.

We started a Bible reading plan in January and we are just about to finish up the Old Testament. But starting on August 24th we begin the New Testament with the gospel of Matthew. If you are looking to start, or join back in, this is a great place to practice not only eating honey, but sharing wisdom with others. You can find the Bible reading plan on our website, or download the "Read Scripture" App and follow along with us.

We read God's word because God's word is where he most clearly reveals himself. It's hard to trust the goodness of something you don't know, so reading God's own words about himself and how he saves us in Jesus gives us a clearer picture on who we are called to place our trust.

Reading the Bible can be difficult at times, there are parts of the Bible that even for me are difficult to understand but take heart for even drippings of this honeycomb are sweet to our taste.

The best way to read the Bible is to read the Bible. I wonder how many of us are so enslaved to idols of pride and acceptance that it's our fear of not understanding the Bible that keeps us from reading it. It's no shame to wrestle with reading scripture. That's what the church is here to help with!

Furthermore the Holy Spirit reads the Bible with us and to us! The Holy Spirit has so inspired God's word, that in Augustine's words, the more difficult passages stimulate our appetite by their weight, and the simpler passages satisfy our hunger with their clarity.

The more we read God's word the more we see what he requires of us in the gospel, how Jesus is faithful to help us, and how we can help others as they follow Jesus as well.

But secondly, not only are we to read God's word, but we are to apply it. Honey has a sweet and subtle smell, but it's not the smell which Solomon points to, it is the taste.

I often say that many of us often fall into the category of "Food Network Christianity." On the Food Network you can see delicious meals cooked to perfection, you can watch someone eat them and use their words to describe their taste to you. But the reality is, while you might be able to understand the concept of what the food tastes like based on what you have seen and heard, Food Network viewers have never actually tasted the food.

To taste it, you need to get off the couch, drive to the restaurant, and do the work of paying for it.

So too in reading God's word it means little if we are unwilling to get up and actually apply it. We might be able to tell others of God's sweet provision, but the question you need to ask yourself is have you tasted it?

Have you chosen not just to understand the provision and goodness of God, but have you actually chosen to pay the price of applying it so that you can say by firsthand experience: "I've tasted God's goodness."

This is what we get to move towards others with in love. Have you turned away from sin and found that this honey is sweeter than you ever imagined! Have you found Jesus sufficient to satisfy even when earthly comforts are few?

If so then you have motivation to continue to eat his word and apply it to your life. If you've tasted it then you can move to the contested and often difficult places of helping others and you can know that you are doing this for their good and for your good. And that as you seek to call them back, you can trust God both with your experience and theirs for you have tasted his honey!