

PP Proverbs: Peace at the Crossroads

Proverbs 3:1-8

March 8-9

Illus John Wesley was a 32 year old single missionary when he met Sophia Hopkey. She was pretty and intelligent, and Wesley fell in love with her. But he belonged to the Holy club, and one of their ideals was that members should remain single. Was it the will of God for John to marry Sophie or not? His friend Charles Delamotte wrote on one piece of paper '*Marry*', on another '*Think not of it this year*', and on a 3rd, '*Think of it no more*' and put them in a container, closed his eyes and drew one out: '*Think of it no more.*' Wesley was heartbroken, but he took the result to be the will of God. He shortly returned to England, now serving as an evangelist in Georgia and soon fell in love with Grace Murray. This time he listed 7 factors he desired in a wife, and concluded that he was to marry her. But his brother Charles so disagreed, that he galloped over to Grace's home on horseback, ran before her and said, "*Grace Murray, you have broken my heart.*" Then he fainted at her feet, shaking her so badly that she hastily married another man. Finally, a year and a half later, at the age of forty-seven, John did marry Mary Vazeille, but he had a very unhappy marriage, and, twenty years later, she left him. When she did, John Wesley wrote, "*I have not left her; I would not send her away; I will not recall her*"

Have you been to a crossroad in life, and struggled to understand and know the will of God? Wisdom would teach us how to live skillfully when life can be such a confusing maze Who to marry, what career path to take, or investments to make, or medical treatment to take Christian brother and sister, *God wants His children to know His will!* You don't need to flip a coin to make godly decisions, or open the Bible at random like a horoscope or crack it open like a fortune cookie to find that magical verse He delights in us knowing His will, and gives us the ability to understand it and live it skillfully So Solomon begins to teach His son, and us, how to walk to have peace at the crossroads "***My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.***" Proverbs 3:1-2

PP 1-'Let your heart keep my commandments' (3:1-2)

Friends, we are invited into Solomon's parenting: '***My son, do not forget my teaching***' Do not '***forget***', hold what I'm teaching you in the center of your mind, and don't let go Hold them in your mind, not on the periphery but hold them into the center of your mind How do we not '***forget***'? Solomon supplies the answer, '***but let your heart keep my commandments***' 3:1b

Now, you might be thinking, just hurry up and get to verses 5-6, the juicy ones Those are among the most familiar and best-loved ones in Proverbs, life verses for many The tendency is for many to overlook verses 1-4 and focus on 5-6, yet we cannot experience the joy of 5-6 without learning the lessons of 1-4 Let's look more closely at Solomon's words here, '***let your heart keep my commandments,***' **PP** '***keep***' is a strong word; guard something by maintaining your vigilance Do not forget my teaching, keep my commandments, protect them, hold on to them...it's the same thing from both a negative and a positive sense... But notice what is to do the keeping...'***let your heart keep***' them

When you think of your heart, what do you understand it to be?

“Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.” Proverbs 4:23

I want us to look carefully at that... *Above all else* ...nothing is more valuable than the heart

But why is the heart so important that we must guard it above all else?

We commonly point to the head, the brain when we are thinking hard on something, and then point to our chests when we feel something emotional and deep

But the Scriptures teaches that the source of our thinking and understanding is the heart

PP *“But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.” Luke 2:19*

We think in our hearts, calculate from there, ponder in there, set them on things recall to heart

This mind is located in what the bible generally refers to as the heart

But the will is also involved in the heart as from our thoughts, we decide and act

PP *“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7*

PP Peter asked Ananias, *“Why is it that have you contrived this deed in your heart?” Acts 5:4*

What we do find its origin and root in our hearts, through our wills

PP To grow in Christ, Paul says, is to *“become obedient from the heart” Romans 6:17*

The heart is the command center for what you think, and the control center for what you do: it is the mind and the will

But there is third area of the heart: our feelings or affections

PP *“You have put more joy in my heart...” Psalm 4:7*

PP *“but you shall cry out for pain of heart” Isaiah 65:14*

PP Jesus said to His disciples *“sorrow has filled your heart.” John 16:6*

Anxiety is rooted in our hearts, as well as despair, and Jesus taught that we hate from our heart, and love from the heart, and get angry at people from hearts

PP Friends, your *‘heart’* is the command center, the control center, the communications center, it is where you think, plan and feel, it is the mind, will, and feelings

The heart is the root of the problem, and it’s the place of God’s transforming work

The moment a person puts their trust in Christ’s death and resurrection as God’s work of forgiving us our sins, He gives that person a new heart, and begins writing His Law on their heart, or as the New Testament puts it, He begins renewing their mind

He gives that person the mind of Christ, with new desires that moves him to want what God wants and choose what pleases God, out of a heart of joy and peace and hope

My son, *‘let your heart keep my commandments’* is possible only for the Christian, and means that we fill our minds with God’s truth, letting it change our desires, filling us with the joy of our salvation

Learn God’s Word with your mind

Live God’s Word with your will

Love God’s Word with your affections

Notice the life it will give, *“for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.”*

The book of Proverbs cannot be interpreted as a book of promises, they are not inflexible laws that tell you do this and you get that

Sometimes we raise our children with Christian parenting but they depart from the paths of faith

'An apple a day keeps the doctor away' teaches that eating well helps us stay healthy, not a promise that if you eat well you will never need to go to the doctor again
 The statements of Proverbs are safe guides to what will usually happen, snapshots of life showing the normal outcomes of a life of wisdom and a life of foolishness
 The world has discovered the life-shortening power of stress, and it is often true that those who live long on this earth learned to live without it

Let's say that you have arrived, once again, at a crossroads in life and you're confused
 What you need is peace, and peace doesn't require knowing which path to take
 Our struggle is less about lack of information, it is about the lack of trusting our Heavenly Father
 It requires faith that God is sovereign, and will surely direct the steps of His child
 He is a good Father, Who will reveal His will and not hide it, Who is not capable of leading His child wrongly
 Let me sum up verses 1 and 2 this way: A heart that keeps God's Word is a heart filled with quiet trust that stay in perfect peace...even when the path of life forks
 But how we get this peace is what Solomon teaches us next

"Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man." Proverbs 3:3-4

PP 2- 'Write them on the tablet of your heart' (3:3-4)

'tablets' were flat surfaces for writing, sometimes made from stone or metals and then engraved, or the softer material of clay, or sometimes wood tables covered in wax
 Parchment was rare and expensive, so harder, and often more permanent materials were used
 The surface was rubbed smooth until it *glistened*, which is what the word *'tablet'* means
 We are to write on our hearts which are, remember, the control, command and communication centers of our beings
 And we write on them all the time!
 We write things like, *I am a failure, I will never be happy with this, God doesn't care about me, My life is my own to live however I want, I will not make friends here*
 Or we write things like, *That person doesn't deserve forgiveness, I'm going to have a bad day*

But that writing leads to stress, so Solomon says to write ***"steadfast love and faithfulness" 3:3***
 What we are to write on our hearts are thoughts like these: *God has never done me wrong, I can trust Him* or *If not for God's grace, I am capable of committing the worst sins there are*
 These thoughts have the mind of Christ, Who is writing on our hearts all the time, every day!

PP ***"And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."*** 2 Corinthians 3:3

God has given us a new heart, a new tablet, not of stone, but one of flesh, and the Holy Spirit is writing the truths of His unfailing love and mercy and faithfulness to you
 You might stumble in a sin again, and start writing lies on your heart: *God is tired of me, He is giving up on me, He hates me!*
 The Holy Spirit is telling you to grab the pen of God's Word and write the truth!

God has mercy for you, wants to cleanse you so He can dwell with you in peace, and He has the power to help you overcome that sin!

Every day He is blotting out and erasing the lies that the enemy is writing, that the world is teaching and that the flesh is believing, and rewriting His truths, strengthening our faith

Because of Him, yesterday's lies are turned into tomorrow's hope!

New thoughts producing new desires, creating new choices yielding new affections!

So friends, learn to examine your hearts, and discern who is writing there

And examine what is written and be diligent to see if it is God's truth

The Christian who learns to write on their hearts ***'will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.'***

Blessing from God and people, divine and social, and suddenly the redemptive genius of God snaps into focus as you will be a beacon of light for His glory!!

God wants to lavish spiritual blessings of peace, mercy, favor and success upon us because the unsaved, whom He want to rescue, will come to us for the secret to our success

The believer whose heart guards God's Word, and writes on His own heart daily truths of His mercy and love, will live powerfully, and will not be paralyzed at the crossroads of life

PP 3- 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart' (3:5-8)

This passage is all about the heart and for the third time, Solomon returns to it

If you expect to experience the great truths here, then your heart must be keeping God's Word, writing the truth on them, experiencing the peace and favor He has for you

And an untroubled spirit of peace is what allows our life's journeys to get at a foggy, confusing crossroad in life and trust!

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil." Proverbs 3:5-7

The Hebrew language has several words translated ***'trust'***

PP This one is the feeling of well-being and security that comes from being confident in God
The word literally means to *lie on the ground, face down in surrender*, but with that yielded spirit comes the release of *peace*

A double-minded, wishy washy heart will encounter life's crossroads and be unable to have peace and well-being

But one who yields in total surrender to the Lord with 'all your heart' will have that peace, knowing that their Father in heaven is utterly faithful, good and powerful

The problem we all share is our tendency to trust or ***'lean on your own understanding'***

PP ***'lean'*** does not mean to incline on something, but support yourself fully by it; to rely on it
Or as 3:7 says, to be ***'wise in your own eyes'***, thinking you are smart enough to figure out life

PP Martin Luther once said, *"The first thing that faith does is to knock the brains of reason out."*

PP *"Pseudo-faith always arranges a way out to serve in case God fails it. Real faith knows only one way and gladly allows itself to be stripped of any second way or makeshift substitutes. For true faith, it is either God or total collapse. And not since Adam stood up on the earth has God failed a single man or woman who trusted Him."* A.W. Tozer, The Root of The Righteous

Faith in Christ is the willing surrender of my very life to the dominion and care of Jesus Christ
 But notice just how much of life needs to be lived face down in full surrender, ***‘In all your ways acknowledge Him...’***

PP ***‘acknowledge’*** means more than admitting or accepting that God exists, it is a very intimate form of knowing...personal knowledge...or experiential knowledge

When we learn, love and live God’s Word (Mind, Affections, Will-verses 1-4) we experience His favor and blessings (verse 4) and yield our very lives into His hands (verse 5), not relying on our ability to figure out which path to take (verse 5), but instead, knowing God more and more deeply and personally, ***‘He will make straight your paths’ 3:6b***

Ancient roads were constantly in need of repair from the rainy seasons

When a king traveled, teams of servants went out and smoothed rough places, removed fallen trees and landslides, in order to make his path free of obstacles

This is what God does for His children, He removes obstacles, smoothing the road, making the way clear for us to reach that which He intends for us

This doesn’t mean an easy life, but a life that will accomplish God’s will, *for the will of God will never lead you where the grace of God will not enable you.*

So do not be ***“wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.”*** **Proverbs 3:7-8**

‘Fear the Lord’, our faithful God, the result of awe and adoration, giving us a single-minded desire to know, love and serve Him with all our hearts!

Where anxiety and stress can make us sick, trusting and loving God brings us healing and life

My son, says Solomon, you are going to reach many crossroads in your life

Keep God’s Word with all your heart, mind, will and affections

Write God’s faithfulness and mercy on your heart every day

And trust in Him, surrender full to Him with all your heart

And you will find peace at the crossroads of life, and God will enable you to discover and live His will for you!

Amen?

Pray