



# gracefellowship

Series: Letters to My Children  
Date: October 23, 2022

Title: The Big Three  
Passage: Proverbs 3

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 3

Who have you had in your life that gave you good counsel and advice? A lot of my Dad's advice rings in my mind. Dad always wanted to instill a good work ethic in my brother and me. I can remember him saying, "Boys, it's funny how there is never enough time to do something right the first time, but there's always time to go back and do it again." In other words, "Just take your time and do the job right the first time, otherwise, you have to make time to go back and do it again."

You can probably all recite things you've learned from other people over the years. This morning as we jump into Proverbs Chapter 3 I really feel like this is the culmination of things Solomon shared with his son over many conversations and over many years. We are going to approach this a little differently today than we have the first two chapters. This doesn't really flow like a narrative. Instead what we find are three sections that Solomon is sharing wisdom, and from our perspective, God is sharing with us.

The first section we find Solomon focusing on how to have a relationship with God. In the second section the focus is on our relationship with wisdom. Remember, in Proverbs wisdom is being personified as a woman- she is a person we can relate to and identify with. We can really see how wisdom is embodied in Jesus, but Solomon writes as if wisdom is a woman, and we are invited to know her and have a relationship with her. Then the third section of this chapter focuses on how to be in relationship with other people, specifically our neighbors.

So, this morning, let's pull up a chair and imagine having coffee with King Solomon. I don't drink coffee, so I've got hot chocolate! As we sit down at the table, the first direction the conversation goes is to relationship. What a profound place to start! All of our lives boil down to the relationships we have. The Bible is mostly a book about relationships. We all struggle with relationships. There are things that are difficult in relationship with God. Let's not sugar coat things this morning; none of us are sitting here going, "I've never had an issue with God or questioned Him about anything." If you are thinking that, you're either naive, lying

to yourself or your relationship with God is pretty shallow! To be in relationship with God is to struggle! When you go back to the story of Jacob, we find him one night alone in a field and the Angel of the Lord comes to wrestle with him. He fights this angel all night long. Eventually, right before day break the Angel touches his hip, dislocates and stops the fight. Then the Angel says, I'm going to change your name from Jacob to Israel, because you have wrestled with God and prevailed. The chosen people of God came from the descendants of this man and their entire history is essentially one huge wrestling match with God! In some ways, there appears to be something God takes joy in when we get to know Him so well we are willing to wrestle with Him.

And who among us hasn't had relationship issues with other people- especially our family and neighbors- those closest to us? This is a huge area of conflict in a lot of our lives. Our marriages are challenging. Raising children is hard. Do you remember the first time you realized your kids had thoughts of their own and they didn't necessarily hold to your views? When they are little they just kind of do what you do and think like you think- then something happens and they develop independence and start forming their own opinions! There is both joy in that moment and a sense of terror that strikes! Then you have your neighbors living around you. Some of these people you like and get along with. Others are more difficult and you might try to avoid them! But you have to learn how to navigate those relationships, especially if you are going to leverage those relationships for Kingdom purposes.

So, as we dive in to Proverbs 3, we have a chance to hear how to lean into the relationships. Let's start with seeing how we should approach our relationship with God.

**:: Proverbs 3:1-12**

**1 My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart,  
2 for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity.**

**3 Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck,  
write them on the tablet of your heart.**

**4 Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.**

**5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own  
understanding;**

**6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.**

**7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.**

**8 This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.**

**9 Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops;**

**10 then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over  
with new wine.**

**11 My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline, and do not resent his  
rebuke,**

**12 because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.**

Again, I can imagine these being things Solomon communicated to his son over the span of many years and probably more than once. I see this almost as a greatest hits of Solomon writing to his son and reminding him what it means to be in relationship with God. And as he writes these things we see that a relationship with God has major advantages.

- You'll win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. (4)
- He will make your paths straight. (6)
- Shunning evil brings health to your body. (8)
- Financial stewardship results in abundance. (10)

Having a relationship with God isn't just about following a bunch of dry commands and living a moral life- there is blessing associated with living in the ways God prescribes for us. The most famous part of this passage is Proverbs 3:5-6

**5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;**

**6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.**

But we shouldn't stop there, we should include verse 7 as well...

**7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.**

How many of you have figured out that sometimes the best way to learn is through someone else's mistakes? The school of hard knocks is a great teacher, but if I can spare my kids from going through the pain I endured simply by letting them learn from my mistakes, I want to do that. The problem is, a lot of us repeat the generational mistakes of our parents. Instead of learning from their sins or avoiding the mistakes they made, we dive headlong into the same patterns of behavior or belief.

If we were sitting for coffee with Solomon this morning I think this is one of the main areas he would address with us. I bet he would say, "The sinful human heart desires to go it's own way and do what it pleases. Be careful of that mentality."

Instead we are to trust in the Lord with all our heart. We aren't meant to lean into our understanding about things. The wickedness in our hearts causes us to want to be in charge and ignore the teachings and instruction of God. But Solomon says to us, "If you're God's child, submit to Him in all things, and He will give you straight paths to walk on." The Christian life is about surrendering fully to God and trusting that He will keep you on a good path. In fact, the word trust in Hebrew means...

**Trust- to lie helpless facedown: It pictures a servant waiting for the master's command or a defeated soldier laying down his arms before a conquering General.**

If you really want to walk a straight path in life, it will require you surrendering the ways you think, believe and feel to God and being willing to embrace His ways, even when it goes against your natural inclinations.

That's why it's important to include verse 7 in what we memorize: "Don't be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil."

Then Solomon is going to change the focus of the conversation to a second relationship we need to focus on, our relationship with wisdom.

**:: Proverbs 3:13-26**

**13 Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding,  
14 for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold.  
15 She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her.**

**16 Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.**

**17 Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace.**

**18 She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed.**

**19 By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place;**

**20 by his knowledge the watery depths were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew.**

**21 My son, do not let wisdom and understanding out of your sight, preserve sound judgment and discretion;**

**22 they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck.**

**23 Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble.**

**24 When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.**

**25 Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked,  
26 for the LORD will be at your side and will keep your foot from being snared.**

Last week we talked about how searching for wisdom is like a treasure hunt. Solomon includes that same kind of language here when he says finding wisdom is more profitable than silver and yields a better return than gold.

Are there any prospectors here this morning? It doesn't look like it. So, this doesn't hit home with us, right? Here's what I would compare this to in our lives: Gaining wisdom and getting understanding from God is...

- ...more important than a job promotion your chasing.
- ...more valuable than the degree your investing in.
- ...of greater worth than the relationship you think will complete you.
- ...more important than whatever you hold as a treasure.

Solomon would say, "Look at the benefits that come into your life when you invest in a relationship with wisdom and gain understanding."

- Long life is in her right hand/ riches and honor are in her left hand
- Her ways are pleasant
- Her paths are peace
- She is a tree of life (imagery from the garden of Eden)

Gaining and operating in wisdom will never harm you. In fact, it's the opposite that is true. Being foolish and going against the ways of wisdom leads to hurt, shame and death.

There is a part of this section that has had particular significance to me that I wanted to share with you. When our family was trying to determine what God had in store for our future about moving from Arkansas to Tennessee I prayed this passage almost daily. We were in a church we loved and a ministry that was going really well. I never saw myself doing anything other than youth ministry in my life. However, God had some different plans and started planting a desire in my heart to take on a Lead Pastor role. When Grace Fellowship's Elders originally contacted me and showed interest in pursuing me to join this Staff Team I was both excited and terrified! My personality has some challenging sides to it. One is that I overthink and second-guess things. I can get to a point where I am just restless and sleepless when I don't know if I'm going in the right direction or I'm not sure what decisions to make.

When it came time to decide if we were going to stay at our church in Arkansas or move to Kingsport, I was a mess. I wanted to lead my family well, but I knew it would be a hard transition. We had just bought a house 2 years earlier and I knew that it was not at the top of my wife's priorities to move again! There was a lot of wrestling with God in prayer to determine if I was listening to His voice and operating in wisdom or if I was full of my own ego and operating foolishly. That's when the Holy Spirit led me to this passage and I began praying it every night.

**:: Proverbs 3:21-24**

**21 My son, do not let wisdom and understanding out of your sight, preserve sound judgment and discretion;**

**22 they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck.**

**23 Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble.**

**24 When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.**

I began praying, "God if this is your leading and I'm operating in wisdom in pursuing this job, give me the ability to sleep in peace. When I lay down at night, quiet my mind and help me not to be afraid that this step is wrong for my family." From the moment I started praying that prayer, I found rest and peace. The physical ability to lie down without fear and to sleep in peace helped me to trust I was following God's path and not my own selfish path.

Maybe you're facing a major decision in your life today and your mind is torn. If you are pursuing God's path, wisdom will allow you to find rest. If you find yourself restless and fearful about the direction you are taking, wisdom may be telling you that you have stepped onto the wrong path.

If we were sitting across from Solomon this morning, he might take another quick drink of his hot chocolate before changing the subject one more time. This time he would want to talk about the relationships we have with other people. Earlier I said that the Bible is extremely focused on relationships. The Bible isn't really an instruction manual about how to keep laws and obey rules; it's more like a guide for how to be in relationships and do them well. First the Bible helps us know how to be in relationship with God and then it informs us how to be in relationships with people.

Solomon begins to relay messages he has probably said 100 times to his son, but now he is going to write them down. And God would say these things to us today- we are His children and He wants us to know how to live well with our neighbors.

**:: Proverbs 3:27-35**

**27 Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act.**

**28 Do not say to your neighbor, "Come back tomorrow and I'll give it to you" — when you already have it with you.**

**29 Do not plot harm against your neighbor, who lives trustfully near you.**

**30 Do not accuse anyone for no reason — when they have done you no harm.**

**31 Do not envy the violent or choose any of their ways.**

**32 For the LORD detests the perverse but takes the upright into his confidence.**

**33 The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous.**

**34 He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed.**

**35 The wise inherit honor, but fools get only shame.**

What I noticed over and over again this week as I read this passage was two words: DO NOT!

He says it over and over again. It's almost as if he's saying to his son, "Just don't be a jerk, okay?" There's a lot in this passage that sounds like the 10 Commandments. 6 of the 10 are written about how to be in relationship with people. Our relationships with our neighbors really reflect our relationship with God. It's hard to be in a good relationship with God and be a bad neighbor.

Do your neighbors know you're the kind of person they can come to for help? Are you there for them when a need pops up in their life? Would your neighbors even know your name? Or are you so stand-off-ish that they have no clue who you are?

Earlier this year we talked about how to be more engaged as a church in evangelism. That's a scary word for a lot of people and it conjures up images, especially for those of you who grew up in the church, of going door-to-door and trying to start conversations about Jesus with strangers! What we suggest instead, is a method to share your faith with your neighbors using an acronym: BLESS.

B- Begin in prayer. Prayer walk through your neighborhood and ask God to give you opportunities to meet your neighbors. Pray for people to be open to a new relationship when God opens that door.

L- Listen. When you get to meet your neighbors, really listen to them. Learn their story; find out what interests them; listen for ways you can engage with them.

E- Eat. This one is everyone's favorite! As you get to know a neighbor invite them to a meal. It's amazing how much people will talk and share with you when they are enjoying a meal!

S- Serve. Look for opportunities to serve people in your neighborhood. When you listen to people's stories you will find ways to serve them!

S- Share. Ask God for opportunities to share your faith with your neighbors. Over time you earn the right to be heard. As you live out your faith, loving and serving them well, you want to look for the opportunity to share the impact Jesus has made in your life.

Recently I was reminded of a quote (I can't remember the author). She said, **"God doesn't need more soldiers, He needs better neighbors!"**

Wisdom helps us know how to be neighbors with a passion for bringing Kingdom influence to the places we live, work and play.

As we close this morning, let me ask you a question Solomon might ask if he were sitting with us: Which relationship sphere do you need to invest in most this week?

- How are you abiding in relationship with God?
- What does your pursuit of wisdom look like?
- Where are you investing in relationship with your neighbors?

This week read Proverbs 3 every day and write down one thing that the Holy Spirit reveals to you. Also ask Him to show you where you need to grow in these three core relationship areas.

- Pray