

Seek

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- [0 : 00] One or two Proverbs from Proverbs chapter 20 which are virtuous characteristics for us as believers to be considering.
- And you'll see that I've posted a question from last week if you were here last week. You know what that means, sponges or waterproofs.
- How are we taking the word of God in our lives? Is it something that we soak in and it applies to our life and it changes what we think and how we live?
- As we are governed and led and molded and moved by the Spirit, or have we become rather spiritually impervious? And the word of God is like water of a duct back to us.
- It doesn't affect our lives, it isn't challenging our conscience, it isn't molding who we are. Because believe me, that is what is easy to happen.
- [1 : 04] It doesn't require great expertise to become spiritually impervious. We don't need to work hard at it. It's not a difficult issue. It's so easy for us just to read or listen or respond to God casually and in a way that is more like a waterproof than a sponge.
- If I can continue to use that challenge for us. We looked at some negative things. But now as those, I guess it's linked a little bit to the whole idea of fruit of the Spirit.
- Maybe in more practical, well, maybe not more, I don't know if it's more practical or not, but it's just proverbs. God's own common sense. And we're looking at them, five of them this evening, just very briefly.
- And the first one is, that's the five virtues, to be faithful. In verse six, it says, many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who confined.
- Now I don't think in any of these proverbs in terms of translation, it's referring just to men here. It's mankind or humanity or people.
- [2 : 17] It's not an excuse for all the women just to go to sleep because it's not referring to them. It is referring to humanity generally. So many a person claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who confined.
- It's important to watch what we claim in lives, in our lives. You know, we might claim to be people of great love and unfailing love. But that's possibly a dangerous thing to claim.
- But Jesus, the word here is speaking very much about faithfulness. And it's a rare gift of grace. I'm not going to spend time on these things tonight. I'm just going to go through them briefly.
- But remember, this spirit of faithfulness is characteristic of being faithful. It's a great thing.
- It's a great thing in marriage. It's a great thing in our individual lives. It's a great thing in the workplace. It's a great thing in friendship. A gift of grace that we are faithful, that we keep on going, that we have a dogged determination to do the right thing.
- [3 : 26] And we don't give up and we don't walk away and we don't turn aside from either our faith or our Christian lives or our Christian companions or indeed the church.

As easy for us, the easy thing to do is to give up, particularly when we've been wronged. But our lives are to be consistently graceful and forgiving and able to be people of the word.

And I would encourage you to be faithful in your relationship with Jesus Christ. It's easy to be up and down and to be inconsistent.

That's something we find easy in our lives. But it's a great thing. It's not a particularly cool thing, but it's a great thing to be faithful.

It's not flashy, but when we wake up in the morning to faithfully open the word, to speak to someone that we know and love and to pray for them and to faithfully keep that going.

[4 : 37] I can't do that anymore unless I've got a diary. I give up after a number of days or weeks. If I don't have a diary to pray for people, then I give up.

I'm not faithful to do that. But faithfulness will sometimes involve something practical, like keeping a diary so that we can pray consistently. How many of us will be those who've experienced answered prayer in our lives from maybe someone who's prayed for 20 years faithfully, consistently, not giving up?

It's not a mark of little faith that we keep praying, as if, you know, well, God isn't answering our prayers because we're not praying enough. And we're not praying faithfully enough, and we don't have enough faith.

That's often not the case. It's a mark of great faithfulness to keep on praying, to keep on persevering with God in prayer. That's what we're called to.

We're called to a life of faithful living, faithful, consistent biblical living and faithful in our ongoing character life as it unfolds, because Jesus Christ was faithful.

[5 : 52] Jesus Christ was faithful in the desert when he was tempted to go another way in order to be our Savior. He was faithful in the garden when his capillaries burst in his forehead and he sweated great drops of blood because of the stress and the pressure of the moment, as there wasn't another way to go.

But God said, no, he was faithful. He was faithful to the cross, and he's faithful to the grave, and he was faithful to the resurrection and to the ascension. So we have our example and our witness and our inner power coming from Jesus Christ himself.

So faithfulness, think about how you would apply that in your week this week, whether you're single or married or working or in relationships, for maybe you're tempted to break faith and particularly think about it in your Christian life.

And then to be right is a second virtue that I'm going to look at this evening very briefly. In verse 7, the writer of the Proverbs, God's Book of Common Sense, he's the righteous man who leads a blameless life, blessed are his children after him.

Now I think there's a wrong way and a right way that we could think about this. We could think about this as someone who is a bit arrogant and who always says, well, I'm always right, you know, I'm the guy, I'm the person, I'm always right.

[7 : 16] I always know what the Bible means. I always know what the Bible says, and I'm right and you're wrong, and I'm big and you're small or whatever it might be. But that's not really what's been spoken of here.

It's really the recognition of being righteous, being covered with the righteousness of Christ. And it's very paradoxical actually, because the righteous man, the person who's right, who's righteous, is paradoxically the most self-aware person.

The person most able to see his own need, her own need of forgiveness and their own need to change. Isn't that an interesting paradox? The person who's righteous is the one who is most self-aware and most dependent on the righteousness of Jesus in their lives, and we're covered in his blamelessness in our lives.

And that's a great thing. And when we live that way with an honest self-awareness and in a sense a critical self-analysis that comes to the cross and is cleansed and renewed, then that affects our life.

It affects spoken of here's blessing of the children after them. I think really what the proverb is just saying is that kind of life, blameless because it's relying on the perfection of Jesus and the forgiveness of Jesus, it has a positive consequence in the lives of those that are most closely influenced by us, in this case the family spoken of.

[8 : 56] Those dependent on us. In other words, if you live an honest life before God, where you are aware of your weakness and need and also aware of God's grace and the freedom and the joy that that brings, then that affects the people closest to you.

They will see your honesty, but they will also see and remind ourselves of this, our hypocrisy. If we are not honest, if we are hypocritical in our life, if we think we're good and perfect and always right, but we're not self-analytical and we're not confessing and we're not dependent, then that kind of hypocrisy just can't be hidden.

You can't pretend to be great all the time. These are people that are closest to you, we'll see through that. They can see that really clearly and none more so than children.

And I think in a sense there's a reference to that also, that children will mimic and follow what they see in their parents and their grown-ups and that's significant.

So righteousness and living right is something we seek and we look for and can only find in that ongoing relationship with Jesus.

[10 : 15] I know I'm like a stuck record these days. I know that. But the gospel doesn't allow me to go anywhere else, it keeps pointing back to the inexhaustible freshness of Jesus.

If I can't make it fresh then I hope that Jesus will make it fresh to you as we go into, for his inexhaustible freshness to know the virtuous life that comes from salvation, redemption and forgiveness.

To the third thing, we're going through it, we're getting there, is to understand others. Verse 5 says, the purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding, a person of understanding brings them out.

And it's great, it's biblical psychology. It's a reminder to us that the wisdom of God in our lives, when we ask for wisdom, it gives us a great understanding of people and it enables us to draw out what is in the depths of other people's lives.

And that's a good thing. It helps us to understand others. Grace gives us an interest in other people. There's not such a thing really as a good understanding of grace that makes us selfish people or disinterested in other people, people.

[11 : 38] But rather grace is what enables us to take time with people, maybe people whose hearts are deep waters, who don't naturally share, who don't wear their heart on their sleeves, who are closed books, who are unknown to most people, who are unknown maybe even to themselves and who build barriers around themselves so that no one can get near, then we find that a man of a person of understanding with the grace and wisdom of understanding can draw that out in people.

That's a great thing. It means that we can take time with other people. It means that we're willing to hear both sides of a story and draw out the deep waters in someone's experience.

It means we can stand in people's shoes and under how many problems are caused by the friction in life when we're unwilling to stand in someone else's shoes, to not understand them, to not draw out the motives and the reasons for why they do what they do.

So often we judge other people by using our own lives as a point of reference, don't we? We say, oh, I would never do that.

That is not the kind of thing I would do. And we use ourselves as a standard and the point of reference for the way we judge others. But the person of understanding with God's grace is someone who's willing to consider and think about why someone has done what they've done and maybe why they haven't expressed and explained why they've done what they've done.

[13 : 29] We don't make assumptions. We develop trust in relationships and openness. So we understand others. That's the third thing. Poor thing is that we also understand ourselves.

Understand ourselves. That is something that we seek by God's grace and it's something we pray for. These things are given to us as God's common sense, God's book of wisdom, and they're there so that we can say, yeah, that is good.

I would really like that. I would like to live, I would like this. These are the proverbs that really describe the way Jesus lived on earth.

This is the kind of person he was. He was someone who understood others, someone who was faithful, someone who was righteous. And of course, he understood himself in a different way from the way we understand ourselves.

But we are to understand ourselves and God's grace enables us to understand ourselves, self understanding. Isn't that hugely important?

[14 : 31] That we know who we are. Verse nine says, who can say, I have kept my heart pure. I am clean and without sin. Verse 24 says, a man's steps are directed by the Lord.

How then can anyone understand his own way? I think that the common sense that comes through these proverbs is that to understand ourselves, we need to do that in the light of who God is and what God has done for us and why God is and why we are.

It's important if we understand ourselves to understand our sinful nature. In verse nine, you know, who can say, I have kept my heart pure, I am clean without sin. Does anyone want to put their hand up tonight?

That we would say that? Are we willing to say that? I hope not in our lives because there is a general reality there that we are looking to understand.

In other words, as we see who we are, we're less likely to be casting aspersions or judgment on who other people are and less likely to be shocked by what other people do or say.

[15 : 50] So that rather than molding our lives around wagging our finger and judging everyone else because we are the standard, we have by grace a good understanding of ourselves, which is that we are people who haven't kept our hearts pure, are not clean without sin, but we have a great high priest.

We've got a great redeemer. We've got a great Lord and he loves us and he has brought us back and we have his help. Jesus was very clear in that dimension with the woman caught in adultery, wasn't he?

And he said to the Pharisees, you know, okay, she's done wrong, but which of you is able to cast a first stone if they haven't sinned themselves?

Classic, absolute classic, classic awareness of the hearts of human beings and of the need that we need, the need that we have to allow God to be in the throne and us to be in the dock rather than what often we do is we put other people in the dock and sometimes God in the dock and ourselves on the throne.

It makes such a massive difference to our day to day living if we understand ourselves in the light of what God has done for us and who we are by grace in our relationships so much changes.

[17 : 32] It's that path of self-awareness and dependence on him. Okay, one last slide, the fifth one. Proverbs, they're short and pithy and so is the sermon because that's the nature of these Proverbs, okay?

Oh, yeah, okay, fine, I forgot that one. The fifth one is understanding life, fifth virtue. There's more in this passage, there's more in these Proverbs, but I chose five vices and five virtues.

In verse 11, even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right and in verse 29, the glory of young men is their strength, gray hair is the splendor of the old.

And these Proverbs, it may be fairly loosely, but they reflect a direction that works right through the book of Proverbs, which gives a real clear understanding that God appreciates the different stages that are in life and the different issues that are in the different stages of life.

And it speaks, Proverbs speak a lot about childhood and they speak a lot about youth and it speaks a lot about old age. Not so sure if it speaks about middle age, but I don't know why that is.

[18 : 51] I think basically the Bible thinks that you're a youth until you're old. So there's youth and then there's old age. So I'm still in the youth. No, probably I'm not actually.

Neil's probably still in the youth and I'm probably in old age. So that's how it cuts, that's what happens. But we recognize the Proverbs of God remind us of these different stages and the different attitudes that we're to have in the different stages of life.

I mean in Proverbs 22 and verse 6, at very famous verse, train up a child in the way that they should go and when they're old they will not turn from it.

And there's this knowledge of children and of their need for training, their need for guidance and the need for loving and gracious discipline that is important for us as people to understand that that's God's model and it's grace at work.

It's grace at work when they're able to mold and guide and train and teach and share with them truth and pass that on because children recognize and know and see, most of all by example.

[20 : 09] So maybe just kind of say in the church for example, what message do we give the children that come down and sit at the front in the morning? What do they think of the church here, this church?

Do people, you know, do we have time for them? Do we know their names? Do we know, do we understand what their little lives are like? Do we understand how different it is from my middle aged life or someone else's youthful life or old age?

It's just, they're in their own little world and they need guided and trained and loved and supported and named and dealt with patiently and they're their family too.

Some of you here anyway have stood up and you've made vows when they've been baptized. You pray for them, that you'll be mums and dads to them, that you'll bear responsibility for them, that you'll guide them when you can, that you love them.

And that's part of what it is to be in the family and it's part of understanding life. You say, I can't have bothered with kids, can't have bothered with the maturity and the mess they make and everything else.

[21 : 15] But the Bible knows about that. God says they need trained and led and loved and cared for and it has lots to say about children. It also has lots to say about youth and the Proverbs say a lot about youth and the glory of young men is their strength and it reminds us of this whole age and stage thing which by grace we understand that we treat young people, you young students and young people at work and young people at the cusp of life.

God knows and understands your needs and he knows and appreciates this great sense of strength that you have and this great passion for life and this great energy and the frustrations you feel of old people not understanding and children just getting in the way.

This is when you're strong, isn't it? This is such an important part of your life, your energy and your brain power and all that you are is just as zenith when you're young and the Bible recognises it's a glorious time, it's a glorious period.

You know, read the end of Ecclesiastes where I read this morning about remembering your Creator and the days of youth.

Read the other bit of that where it goes on. In most beautiful illustrative language speak about what it's like to get old. Your eyesight fails, your memory goes, you can't hear as well and desire goes and all these wonderful pictures and it's wonderful but frightening because a picture of growing older and weaker and yet this is a picture of strength and you are young and your strength is strong and I plead with you to harness that energy under grace and for Christ and to serve Him with all the energy and strength that you have and that we as a congregation would understand that work and the effort that we expend with our young people when they are like wild horses needing to be tamed and needing to be guided and needing to be led in the right way that spiritually you would understand and have patience with us as we seek to welcome them into our homes and be hospitable and to mentor them and to teach them and to lead them, to guide them and may you as young people recognise that and take that also and channel your strength and make it something that is truly glorious for Jesus Christ.

[24 : 07] And then lastly old age as we understand life. Grey hair is the splendour of the old and the Bible has a lot to say about old age and about grey heads and what that represents and what that means, a symbol of respect, symbol of honour, of experience, of wisdom, of value, something that in many ways society today belittles and populist society ridicules the growing old process and all the cost that it means to society and the worthlessness of old age.

You know worth anything past 35 or 40 in so many circles today and yet there is this recognition of glory and splendour in the grey heads, in those who are older, those who have gone through life, those who have lost loved ones, those who are facing eternity, those who feel their best days are behind them yet have a wealth of maturity and life experience and knowledge that we can never have.

I was always amazed in my previous congregation in Raskin when visiting lovely old ladies or old men, sometimes married couples, how they would just seem to be just wee old ladies or wee old men and you just think they made scones and made cups of tea and that's what they did and yet these were people who had been through waters.

Some had been in concentration camps, some had lost their loved ones and families in ways that we could never have, our generation could never appreciate.

Depth of, can I go right back to the beginning of faithfulness, faithfulness through years and years and years of brutality or difficulty or poverty.

[26 : 21] We have no concept of these things today, of genuine poverty or genuine loss and the reality of the kind of war that many of these older saints live through.

So we, with grace and understanding life, appreciate the different stages and we don't believe in belittle and we don't ignore either the youngest or the oldest or even the middle aged and that we give young people their freedoms and their energy and their strength to fly for Christ and not just to be like what we were but better and more Christ like in all that they do.

We will understand these seasons in life and we will recognise that each time in life has a pain and a loneliness and an angst and a joy and a celebration and as we seek by God's grace to understand life and understand ourselves and understand others and be righteous and be faithful then we will be blessed because it's what makes us dependent on Him.

Amen.