

# A Strategy for 2012

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[0:00] Well, this is day one. Day one, 2012. I don't know how many of you were up to see 2012 come in.

! I was not. Preachers kind of like to go to bed a little early on Sunday. Saturday night, you know, because Sunday's a busy day. I need my strength. And so I went to bed.

I don't remember when. I think it was around 11. So I got close. But I would honestly tell you that even before 11, I was kind of dozing off a few times. So I didn't get to see the year come in.

But as of 12 midnight last night, of course, 2011 was put in the history books, wasn't it? Nothing that can be done to change it. It is what it is. And what a year it was, really, when you go back and think about it. And some of you probably have either watched on TV as maybe the news broadcasters have given kind of a year in review. Maybe some of you looked on the Internet just out of curiosity to see what all took place in the year 2011.

Quite a number of things did. And it really was quite a year. And many of the things that occurred in 2011, some of those big events are still going on.

[1:38] That is, the ramifications of them and the seriousness of some of them is ongoing, of course. And that's indicative of news events and world affairs because they don't necessarily follow a calendar, do they?

And so when the new year came, some of those things continued. But think back over 2011 and think about what a year it was. And I'd like to just highlight some of the major news events of the year just in case you haven't considered them, maybe haven't gone back to look at them.

But January 8th was an important day, significant day, when 23-year-old Jared Lee Loner, do you remember that guy? Some of you might be able to picture the pictures that we saw on the news of this very disturbed young man.

Because it was on that day that he walked on to a Safeway grocery store parking lot. And opened fire on a group of people who had gathered there for a political rally.

You remember now? And he killed six people. Wounded another 13, including a U.S. representative by the name of Gabriel Giffords.

[2:58] So now you remember that. That was just a few days after 2011 began. Kind of set the tone, in a sense, for a troubling year.

January 2011 also marked the beginning of what some have called Arab Spring. And we've been kind of watching that in the news, haven't we?

It began with demonstrations in Tunisia, which led to the toppling of that government. Albeit, I would agree, a corrupt government.

And on the 25th of January, demonstrations erupted in Egypt, remember? Just near the beginning of the year.

And there was an uprising, of course, against the present government, specifically the president slash dictator, depending on your perspective, Hosni Mubarak.

[4:01] And he's been around so long that we just can't hardly remember a time when he was not ruling in that country. After 18 days of protest, Mubarak, of course, resigned.

And that ended his 30-year reign, in a sense, or autocratic rule of that country. What a year 2011 was. And then the spread of this so-called Arab Spring.

It spread like wildfire. January 26th, the very next day that it started in Egypt, the protests were sparked in Syria. And, of course, that's still going on, isn't it?

Now, today, with a lot of bloodshed since. Then Yemen on February 3rd. See, we're just barely into 2011. And then Libya on February 15th.

That eventually led to the death, brutal, violent death, of longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi. All this in 2011.

[5:06] It's almost a dream, isn't it, when we think back on these events. Then March 11th, very far into the year, strong earthquake, remember, struck Japan, which set off a chain of events, of course.

The tsunami being a major event that affected that country. And that, of course, led to a series of nuclear meltdowns there in Japan.

Then April 25th, an extremely large and violent tornado outbreak swept across the southern part of our country, the Midwestern and also northeastern United States, leaving, of course, catastrophic destruction in its wake.

And especially across the state of Alabama. It was known as the super outbreak of 2011. 353 tornadoes were recorded or confirmed by the National Weather Service in 21 different states. Remember that? In 2011. May 1st, the infamous Al-Qaeda leader by the name of Osama bin Laden, remember, was killed in a firefight with U.S. forces in Pakistan, ending a nearly 10-year worldwide hunt for the mastermind of the September 11 attacks.

[6:39] Major event in 2011. Wouldn't you agree? May 22nd. May 22nd. A deadly tornado hits the city of Joplin, Joplin, Missouri, killing 159 people.

Amazing. When you go back and consider all of these events, all this happening in one year. Well, we're not finished yet. August 5th. I think a major news story.

Standard & Poor downgrades the United States credit rating from AAA to AA+. Major event in our history. Of course, that, of course, highlights the economic troubles of our nation.

And we could talk about some of the news events that occurred in the world, in Europe and in other parts of the world. All of those dealing with financial and economic difficulties in our world.

September 17th marked the beginning of, quote, what's called Occupy Wall Street. That occurred in 2011, September 17th.

[7:51] A movement that, of course, quickly spread around our country into about nearly every major city and even some of the not-so-major cities of our nation.

October 21st. October 21st. President Obama announced that all U.S. troops would be withdrawn from Iraq by the end of the year. Effectively, officially, technically, ending the Iraq war.

October 31st. November 21st. The world's population reached 7 billion. Or at least it would report it on that day. 7 billion.

And counting. We're over 7 billion now, of course. It's always begged the question, how do they know? Just how many people there are in the world.

November 4th. November 4th. Jerry Sandusky indicted on 40 counts of sex crimes. And you remember that, don't you?

[8:51] December 17th. North Korean dictator Kim Jong-il dies of heart failure at the age of 69. And, of course, that story is ongoing.

And the implications of his death and the new leader and his son. Time will tell, won't it? And these are just some of the major highlights of the year.

Many, many other things occurred in 2011. But I think you would agree, what a year it was. 2011. Now, what will 2012 be like? What will it be?

What will it bring us in the natural world? Will there be earthquakes and tornadoes and hurricanes and other natural disasters, as they are called?

Who knows? How about in the political world? What will 2012 bring there? Major election in our country. The election of a new president.

[9:51] Or a re-election of the current president. And others will be elected to office. What will 2012 bring us politically? And some of those changes, what will that bring to us as a nation?

I don't know. How about in the cultural world? What will 2012 bring us culturally? I'm afraid to find out, actually.

For now, I don't know how many years our country has been sliding morally. Not just sliding in a slow, gradual way, but in the last several years, of course, dramatic changes.

Culturally and socially. How about in the world of economics and finances? Polls say that there is somewhat an uptick on expectations.

And maybe it will be better this year. Maybe it won't. Who knows? I don't know. How about in the world of religion? I don't know.

[10:55] What will 2012 bring us? I don't know. And neither do you. I guess if we knew, we could make some definite plans and maybe profit from them.

I don't know. But we don't know what 2012 is going to bring. It's going to have its events, its catastrophes, no doubt.

And there will be positive things. Hopefully, that will take place in 2012. But here's what I do know. And this is not something unusual for 2012.

I could make the same observation, give the same admonitions for any new year. But this I know. For us, for believers, we need to develop a strategy for 2012. And that's how I like to put it here.

[11:52] We need to develop a strategy for this new year. And it is a strategy that will work regardless of what happens.

Now, you don't know what's going to happen. What events are going to take place? Not only on the world stage. You don't know about our own country. You don't even know what this new year is going to bring for your family and for you individually.

And yet, I guarantee you that we need a strategy for it. And a strategy that will work regardless of what this year will bring us.

Now, it has to be a strategy sanctioned by God. Right? I mean, it won't work otherwise. And that's very important that it be sanctioned by God.

And, of course, our strategy will have to come from the Word of God in order for it to be sanctioned by God. And where shall we go in the Word of God to find our strategy, to develop our strategy?

[12:54] Well, we could go a number of places, actually. In fact, just pick about any place in Scripture and just begin there. And God will give His instruction. But there are specific places we could go that will lay out for us a sound, certainly biblical, one sanctioned by God, a strategy for this new year.

The place I want to go is Proverbs. And that would be a good place to find a strategy. So, just take your Bibles and open to Proverbs chapter 3.

All the Proverbs are organized under chapters. We're thankful for that. That way I can help you find exactly where I am. But these are a list of Proverbs.

There aren't any breaks in them in the sense that Solomon, who wrote Proverbs, said, Well, here's a group in this chapter. They're just Proverbs.

But I want us to go specifically to chapter 3. And we're going to be looking here in just a moment at the first 12 Proverbs that appear in Proverbs chapter 3.

[14:15] Now, Proverbs, if you've done any studying of Proverbs, you know that Proverbs, in a very strict sense, is a father speaking to his son.

Now, that doesn't exclude mother speaking. And it doesn't exclude, you know, the value of the Proverbs if you are a daughter.

It doesn't exclude that at all. But strictly speaking, this is a father speaking to his son, giving him instructions for life. And I might just remind you the opening words of this great book that is called Proverbs begins this way, that these Proverbs are given for gaining wisdom and being instructed, for understanding insightful sayings, for receiving wise instruction in righteousness, justice, integrity, for teaching shrewdness to the inexperienced knowledge and discretion to a young man.

That's how the Proverbs begin. And so this is a father giving instructions to his son. And so then the implication is that this is our father, our heavenly father, giving his children, his sons and daughters, instruction on how to live.

And so Proverbs 3. And I'm going to begin. I'll just go ahead and read these first 12. This is where we'll be focusing this morning. And this is how it begins.

[15:54] My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands. For length of days and long life and peace they will add to you.

Let not mercy and truth forsake you. Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart. And so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and men and man.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes.

Fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones. Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first fruits of all your increase.

So your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine. My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction.

[17:01] For whom the Lord loves, He corrects. As a father, the son in whom He delights. Those are pretty good instructions. And some of what I've read here just a moment ago, you're familiar with, especially verses 5 and 6.

And I'll just go ahead and tell you those verses I memorized years and years ago when I was just a kid. These are great instructions. And I maintain that what we have here would comprise a great strategy for 2012.

One that we need to adapt to our own lives. Apply to our own lives. One that we need to live out. Not just here on day one, but every day throughout this year.

It's a strategy for living. And it's a biblical strategy for 2012 and beyond. Starting day one. That's today.

Day one, 2012. And this is what I want us to learn today from these Proverbs, the first 12 here in chapter 3.

[18:10] We could just put it kind of in a nutshell here for us this morning. Living biblically. This is what we have here. Living biblically.

Will not only see you through this new year. But it will bring a great reward or great rewards that will bless your life here and now.

All throughout this year. And on into eternity. That's a pretty powerful statement, really, when you think about it. And you're thinking, what you just read here, Pastor, that if I will apply these Proverbs to my life, that all what you just said will come about in my life?

Well, I say yes. Definitely. You will apply this strategy to your life. And I want to give it to you. It's a five-fold strategy for 2012.

And you can jot them down as I go along. Because each of... And I'll say that each point of the strategy, these five, come right out of the text.

[19:22] In fact, I probably shouldn't say this, but you don't even need a preacher to tell you these things this morning. You can read these Proverbs for yourself. And you say, well, it's just right there, just plain as anyone could ever hope for.

But I'm going to go ahead and preach it anyway. Because, you know, maybe that will kind of spur you on and help you to get started. And, by the way, I would recommend that after this morning, after my time, take some time this week and just look back over each of these.

And consider them. Meditate upon them. And allow the Holy Spirit to further apply them to your life. So that they'll begin to be worked out in your life.

Because my desire here this morning is not just to inform you. To give you some kind of structure here. And to have you say, well, that's interesting.

My desire here this morning is for you to apply these to your life. Starting today. And on throughout this year. All right. So a five-fold strategy.

[20:35] And with each one, of course, there's a blessing attached. All right. Jot these down. Here's number one. Number one for day one. Live biblically.

Isn't that profound? Live biblically. That's where we began. And really it is the overarching strategy that really covers all of them.

It doesn't. To live biblically. And we see that kind of laid out before us in the first four verses. And I read them a moment ago. And let me define it this way.

And with each of these strategies, I'm going to give you two things. First, the life principle that we learn here in this particular strategy. And then the general rule or the blessing that will follow as a result.

All right. So I'm going to give you these two things for each of the five strategies. All right. The life principle and the general rule, the blessing. And I might as well go ahead and tell you that really these proverbs are not promises in the strictest sense of the word.

[21:47] Do you understand that about proverbs? They're not promises in the sense that if you'll do this, God is honor bound to bless you with this. And that will become clear as we go along.

And so I would rather call them general rules or blessings that you can hope for and trust God with as you obey these principles or these life principles.

All right. Here's the life principle under strategy number one, which is live biblically. And it's clear in the text, heart obedience to God's word.

That's the life principle. Heart obedience. You ought to put it down just like that because the word heart appears twice in these four verses. Heart obedience. Here's the principle.

Heart obedience to God's word. Look again at verse one. My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands.

[22:46] All right. So heart obedience to God's word. That's the principle, the life principle that needs to be applied to your life. That's the strategy. Now, here's the general rule or blessing.

And it appears there in verse two. And then it is again another phase of it. We see there in verse four. And here's the general rule. And it is longevity of life, peace, and favor with God and man.

That's a big one, isn't it? Let me say it again. It's kind of threefold. Longevity of life. Here's the general rule. If you will live biblically, God will bless you with longevity of life, peace in your life, and favor with both God and man.

That's the general rule. Now, let's look at it closer here. We're talking about living biblically. That's a good strategy for 2012. In fact, it's one that you cannot avoid, cannot subtract out of your life if you're going to live for the Lord.

You must live biblically. All right, I said that the general principle or the life principle is heart obedience to God. Heart obedience to God.

[24:06] Look what he says in verse one. My son, do not forget my law. That's the first thing he says. Don't forget it. Now, what is this law? It's God's word.

That's equivalent to say, do not forget my word. We're talking about, or he's talking here about something far more than just the Ten Commandments. Though if you would live those Ten Commandments and all the implication of the Ten Commandments, you would be obedient to all of God's word.

But they are equivalent. That is, God's law, God's word. And so he says, do not forget my law. Don't forget it.

Now, the word forget, of course, suggests that God's word is something you ought to know. You must know. And really, it goes further than that.

It is suggesting that we need to memorize it. We need to know it. Don't forget it. And you have to have something in your brain in order to forget it.

[25:10] All right, so the implication is get God's word into your mind, into your brain. Know it. Know it. Memorize it. Now, some would say or think that, well, that's a tall order, and if you can do that, then that's enough.

But this is not enough. It's not enough just to know God's word. That is, in the sense of increasing your fund of knowledge.

That your brain, intellectually, has God's word in it. It's not enough. And we know that because of what he says next.

But, translation, but that's not enough. But let your heart keep my commands.

This is amazing. We don't generally conceptualize it in this sense that we are obeying with the heart.

[26:13] When it comes to obedience, we think of doing things. Obedience with the hands or obedience with the feet or obedience with the mouth.

It's activity. And it certainly is that. But the proverb says, heart, let your heart keep my commands. See, it's interesting that the Jewish people memorized God's word. They thought that this was paramount, supreme to everything that they did.

They would memorize God's word. Not just simply read it and know the gist of it, but they would memorize it word for word for word. And that's a good thing. And there's nothing wrong with that. But they would go even a step further. They would put Scripture on their doorposts. Inside and out. So that when they went out of the house, they were faced with Scripture.

[27:16] And particular Scriptures that would question them, analyze them, or cause them to analyze their own hearts. Where are you going? And what are you going to do? And how are you going to do it?

And it would remind them that when they went out of their house, they were to live according to God's word. And so they had the Scripture put in their mind so that they would remember it and be faced with it every day when they went out of their house.

But they also had the Scripture on the outside of the doorpost so that when they came home, those Scriptures would ask them, where have you been? And what have you been doing? And have you been living for me?

And have you been obedient to my precepts and my laws? Now, that sounds like a pretty good idea, doesn't it? And I'm not saying that this is wrong. In fact, the proverb begins that way. Do not forget my law. But just simply putting the Scriptures on your doorpost inside and outside and simply memorizing it so that you know it verbatim and word for word is not enough.

[28 : 19] In fact, the Jews went a step further. They used what were called phylacteries. Have you ever heard of the phylacteries? Sometimes there would be a little box or a little container and they would sometimes put them on their heads, their foreheads, and they would have Scriptures in there that would remind them, specific Scriptures.

Or they would put them around their arm. There were phylacteries. And it was kind of ritualistic in that sense. And so that everywhere they went and everything they did, they were confronted by the Scripture.

And they had the Scripture always before them. It was attached to their forehead, attached to their arms and other places on their body. They would have it on their doorposts, inside and outside. And they were taught the Scriptures and they memorized the Scriptures verbatim and on and on and on. Anything wrong with any of that? No. Not really.

Not in and of itself. But the Proverbs says, if I might paraphrase, don't just simply get it into your head. But get it into your heart.

[29 : 29] This is heart obedience to God's Word. Where one, of course, focuses on the intellect. Your capacity to remember things and not forget them.

And we need to exercise that and be involved in that. We ought to remember and memorize Scripture. But that just simply engages the mind.

What the Proverbs is telling us, if you're going to live biblically, and that's a good strategy for this new year, then engage the heart when it comes to God's Word. In fact, he repeats that again there in verse 5.

Let not mercy and truth. These are kind of parallel thoughts here in the Proverbs. Let not mercy and truth forsake you or love and truth forsake you. Bind them around your neck.

Write them on the tablet of your heart. What does that mean? That sounds kind of like the phylacteries in one sense. We just kind of strap Scripture around our neck.

[30 : 37] No, this is not talking in that literal sense. For the Jewish mind, the neck, the throat, was equal to life itself.

And we're to bind God's Word around our lives. Every context of life. And then the all-important point made here.

Write them on the tablet of your heart. Your heart. Heart obedience. See, think of it in this way. When it comes to obeying God's Word. Living out His Word. If you just engage the mind, then you are obeying because you ought to.

Now, you're still obeying. And so we could maybe argue that, well, if that's all you could do, then that's enough. And I guess in a sense that's true.

[31 : 38] But if you just engage the mind, then you are obeying because you ought to. But then if you engage the will, the will, that is what you're determined to do, then you are obeying because you have to.

And again, we might argue, well, that's enough. That's all you do. You engage the mind. You just do it because you ought to. And if you engage your will, that is your decision-making process, then you are just obeying because you have to.

But if you engage the heart, then you obey because you want to. There's a big difference, isn't there?

It brings in, and He's already said it, let not love and truth forsake you. We then obey out of love. Not because we ought to. Not just because we have to. But because we want to.

[32 : 52] This is a strategy, a great strategy for living. It's a biblical strategy. It's to live biblically. And here's the truth. Heart obedience to God's Word.

That's the life principle here. And then what about this general rule? I said it was threefold, and it is. It's longevity of life.

Look at what He said. Verse 2, For the length of days and long life and peace they will add to you. This is a blessing that will come as a result of obeying the principle, the precept that we find there in verse 1.

Do you remember way over there in the New Testament in Ephesians chapter 2, or chapter 6 rather, 6 and verse 2, where Paul is speaking of the fifth commandment, honor your father and your mother, and he said it's the first commandment with promise.

And he's referring back there to when the commandments were given and the fifth commandment did have a blessing, a promise attached to it.

[34 : 09] And it was that your days shall be long upon the earth. Now, if you will apply that to the context here of Proverbs, that this is a father speaking to his son, and the father is saying to his son, obey God's Word, and if that son will honor his father and obey all of God's precepts, all of God's Word, then he will be honoring his father and it comes attached with a blessing.

Your days will be long upon the earth. Does it happen every time that way? No, there are children who die early, die young.

So this is not a promise per se. It is a general rule. One that we ought to look forward to and ought to be, in a sense, a motivation for obeying God's principle that long life is attached to obedience to God's Word.

And not just longevity, but there's also peace. There is the general rule or blessing of peace in your life and also favor with both God and man.

And you can look again over to the New Testament in Luke chapter 2 and verse 52 where the Bible is describing the life of Jesus as a young man.

[35 : 50] And you remember the story when Mary and Joseph left Jerusalem and somehow they got away without Jesus and He was nowhere to be found.

And so they had to return to Jerusalem. And where did they find Him? They found Him there in the temple. He was conversing with the great minds, religious minds of the day. And He was able to hold His own there.

In fact, they were quite amazed, weren't they? And so then Jesus returns with His mom and dad back to their home. And then it says this about Him.

It says that He was subject to them. And He grew in favor with both God and man.

See, Jesus is exemplifying the blessing that goes along with that fifth commandment to honor father and mother. And even Jesus obeyed, placed Himself in subjection to His authority, His mother and father.

[36 : 51] And God blessed His life as a child. As an example to us. And so it brings, as a general rule, this blessing.

That is, if you will live biblically, then longevity of life and quality of life and peace and favor, certainly with God, that is almost a given, but also with man.

Live biblically. Strategy number two for day one. It's not strategy number two for day two. We need to apply all these strategies to day one and following.

But here's strategy number two. Live faithfully. Live faithfully. And we find this taught us in verses five and six.

My favorite passages in all of the Old Testament, really in all the Bible, have a fondness toward this passage because it was one of the first verses of Scripture that I memorized as a child.

[37 : 53] Trust in the Lord in all thy ways and lean not on thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths.

That's kind of the King James rendering of it. What a principle. And I am grouping it under this thought. Live faithfully.

Now here's the life principle and it's pretty clear. Trust God with all and for all. Trust God with all things and for all things.

That is, with all things, He is the provider of everything that we need. We trust Him with it. And to trust Him for all things, everything we might face, every decision we might need to make, every step we take, every difficulty we encounter.

Trust Him for all of that and we're to trust Him in a threefold way. Heart, mind, and life.

[38 : 58] We'll get back to that in just a minute. Let me mention or define for you the general rule here. The blessing. It's really quite amazing. Though it doesn't come out in this particular rendering of the text, and I'll explain that here in just a minute, but here's the general rule.

Smooth and straight, a smooth and straight journey through life. And that's what we want. Smooth, straight, journey through life.

That's the general rule, the blessing that comes from the life principle. Live faithfully. Look at verse 5 again. And I said a moment ago that really the life principle is threefold.

It involves, just like the first principle in regard to living biblically involves three things, so also living faithfully involves three things.

Mind or heart, mind, and life. Look at how he describes it here. Verse 5, trust in the Lord with all your heart.

[40 : 10] There's the word heart again. How do we trust him with the heart? What's the heart? Well, the heart is the seat of emotion. It's the seat of affections.

Not affection in the sense that you're affectionate, like you would be affectionate toward your wife, fellas, or affectionate toward your husband, ladies, or affectionate toward your cat, you know, whatever.

But affections in the sense of what you value most in life. Your affections. And that's what he's talking about here when he uses the word heart.

We're to trust the Lord with all of our affections. that is, all of our loves, all of our desires, are to be wrapped up in our affection, our desire for the Lord.

And that anything that we might desire, or have affection toward, or seek for, or desire to grasp, if any of that is contrary to the person and character of God, then they are wrong affections.

[41 : 28] And we have placed our trust, our affections in the wrong thing. This is a strategy for the year.

Apply it to your life. Trust Him with your heart, your affections. But not only that, but also with the mind. The very next thing he says, lean not on your own understanding, your mind, your intellect, your way of thinking, your own reasoning skills and rationalism and so forth as a human creature. God has gifted us with these abilities, of course. And if they're sanctified, if we allow God to superintend the way our mind thinks and so forth, then they are sanctified.

Then that will work. And that's not leaning on your own way of thinking, but leaning upon the Lord. His way of thinking. His mind.

Putting it in other terms would be to have the mind of Christ. And so, you see, everything's engaged here. The heart, the mind, and then also the will is here.

[42 : 49] The life, the will. Look at what he said next. In all your ways, acknowledge him. All your ways. That is, your way of life, your journey of life, every step you take, every day you live, the plans you make, the decisions that you make each day along the way, your aspirations, your goals, the places you go and places you don't go, and so forth.

All of it wrapped up your entire life. the will as you move along, you're to trust him with that. See, this is to live faithfully so that really your life is immersed, totally immersed in God and in his will, his direction and desire for your life.

Live faithfully. And if you will do that, then the general rule is a smooth and straight journey through life. Now, in this particular translation, it's put this way, in these terms, he shall direct your paths.

Some of you have a King James. You may have the word make straight, or if not in the text, it's in the footnotes. And that's the idea, to make smooth, straight.

Now, believe me, in this Old Testament world, it was pretty important to have your path made straight. You didn't want to travel zigzag fashion.

[44 : 24] You didn't want to waste steps because, after all, you know, we might, in our day, hop in the car and just kind of wander, meander around the town just for a little drive on a Sunday afternoon.

But when we want to get somewhere, we want to get there straightway. We want to get there the fastest way, the most direct route. It's really uncanny how we as drivers are able somehow to eventually find the best paths to get to where we're going.

We don't want to go out of our way. If we're walking, we certainly don't want to have a crooked path. This was very important, very meaningful to the Son that this proverb was given to.

A straight path, a smooth path. We don't want any detours. Now, sometimes God leads us on detours because, well, He needs to correct us, or He needs to teach us something, or there's some discipline involved.

And sometimes the indirect route is the best route. But that's in the wisdom and knowledge of God. But our desire, though, is to go the straightest way, the most direct route, the one that has very few obstacles.



[45 : 39] And this is the general rule, the blessing for those who will follow this precept, to live life in this way, to live faithfully, to trust God with all and for all, and engaging not only the heart and the mind, but the life in its entirety.

Our will. The second strategy, strategy number two, or three, rather, for day one, live morally.

Uh-oh. Live morally. And we find this in verses seven and eight. Do not be wise in your own eyes, fear the Lord, and depart from evil.

It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones. Now, here's the life principle. Depart from all evil. That's not very original.

Well, it's not. It's right out of the text. Depart from all evil. Then here is the blessing, or the general rule.

[46 : 54] Healthy life. Healthy life. Now, this is given in the physical sense, rather, but it would include every aspect of a healthy life, emotionally, physically, even spiritually.

So, this is what we have here. The life principle, depart from all evil. Look at what he says there. Do not be wise in your own eyes. Now, the context is moral living.

And the idea behind this phrase, do not be wise in your own eyes, is don't rationalize things. don't just simply go on human reasoning that is oftentimes faulty.

You know, we make a lot of decisions in life on a daily basis. Decisions about moral character. Moral, certain moral activity.

Whether it is something we do with our own bodies, something we set our eyes on, TV programs that we watch, movies we go and see, books we read, activities we involve ourselves in, and quite frankly, we're pretty good about rationalizing.

[48 : 23] saying, well, I can watch this certain movie. I know it has blasphemous language in it.

I know it has immoral images in it. I might even know that God's Word prohibits that, but I'm above that.

Spiritually, I'm strong. Those things won't affect me. Amazing how we rationalize things, and when we watch a certain movie, we don't even realize how bad it was.

Language and such. Until we sit down with somebody else and say, you know, this is a really great movie, and there's not hardly any bad language in it, you know.

And then we sit down with this friend of ours or a family member, and we are appalled that nearly every sentence has bad language in it. Or there are scenes and suggestions and even overt things that are immoral.

[49 : 34] See, we rationalize, we just think, well, you know, this is just simply entertainment. It doesn't affect me. But the Proverbs says, if we're going to live morally, way, then we should not be wise in our own understanding.

And so, where does the wisdom come from then? Or should come from? To make wise choices. It comes from God.

That's the implication. And so then, every activity we might desire to engage ourselves in or be tempted to participate in, whether it's just something with the eyes or something with the mouth or the ears or lifestyle issue, that all of that is filtered through God's Word.

So that we're looking not through the eyes of our own wisdom or understanding, but through the eyes of God. In every activity, everything we do.

That's what it means to live morally. And so then we're able to depart from evil. But he says to fear God, doesn't he?

[50 : 52] He says, fear the Lord and depart from evil. This is the right decision. Not rationalizing through our own eyes, but rather fearing God before every decision is made in life.

What do you mean fear God? Well, certainly respect him. I guess we've made so much of that that we think that's all it means to fear God.

We respect him. We certainly understand we're not to be quaking in our boots or shoes at God or be terrified and cower down because of him.

No, the Bible suggests it's a different kind of relationship with him. A close and loving and wonderful relationship. So we know that fearing the Lord does not mean that.

And so it must just simply mean to respect him. Well, it does mean that. And so we then fear his disrespect, but it's more than that.

[51 : 59] We also fear his dishonor. that we might somehow dishonor our Lord, not just our creator, but our loving Savior, that we might dishonor him in the activities we engage in, even the

conversations we involve ourselves in, even what we allow our ears to take in willingly.

what we place our eyes upon. I know it's a quaint way of putting it.

It worked when I was a kid. It ought to work when I'm an adult, but if you can sit down and watch a certain movie, and it would be okay with you if Jesus was sitting there with you, and you're probably watching it pretty good now.

to do otherwise would be rationalistic. We're to fear God. Fear certainly disrespecting him, but fear dishonoring him.

That anything that we do would dishonor our Lord. We would fear that. And not just that, but fear his discipline. Have you ever thought of it in those terms?

[53 : 20] That you would actually fear the discipline of the Lord. Now a little bit later we're going to see we're to respect his discipline. And we are. We're to welcome it. But a certain aspect of his discipline, discipline that is directed toward overt sin, we ought to fear that.

Now it does work for our good, and God is gracious to discipline us as sinners, and if he did not do that, then we would be illegitimate. We ought to love it in that sense.

But we ought to fear that aspect of his discipline so much that we would not want to sin, that we would not want to disobey his word, so that we would not have to experience his discipline.

And then, of course, the general blessing is a healthy life. life. Now, I guess we could talk at great lengths about the health that comes from clean, moral living.

And it's just proven fact, even proven among those who are unbelievers of God's word. There's evil activity that shortens our life physically. Obviously, and we know that, don't we?

[54 : 39] Certain habits that we might succumb to, certain activities that we might engage in, that bring shorter life to us.

And we ought not to go that route. That's what it means to live morally. And so there is just an automatic blessing that comes with certain aspects of moral living.

Be it alcoholism, or drug addiction, or cigarette smoking, or any other kind of, even eating. God help me, I had to mention that.

There's health that comes, but there's health in a spiritual sense as well. We realize that when we engage in certain activities that are immoral, evil, dishonoring to the Lord and to His word, that it affects us not only spiritually, but through the spiritually it affects us emotionally, and through the emotional aspect, it affects us physically.

They're all tied together. that you can actually become sick, physically, when you engage in certain moral, immoral activities.

[55 : 55] So it's a promise. It's a general rule of blessing. And then strategy number five, very quickly, because I'm running out of time, live generously. Boy, I would like to spend a lot of time on this.

prayer. But you know, the first Sunday of the year is probably not a wise thing for a pastor to preach on tithing. Maybe it is a good idea.

And it's not just simply tithing, but look at what he says in verses 9 and 10. Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first fruits of all your increase, so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine.

So it's pretty easy to pick out the life principle here, and it is to honor God with your possessions, all of your possessions, everything that God has blessed you with, you're to honor him with it.

And it goes beyond just simply using it in the right way, but it also includes, obviously, the giving of it in a generous sense. And that's the idea here.

[56 : 58] That's the life principle. And then the general rule or blessing that is attached to it, God always out gives your generosity. Have you discovered that? You cannot out give God as it has been put for time and memorial.

And it's true. It's not some old cliché. You can't out give him. And this is the general rule, the blessing that's attached here.

God always out gives your generosity. He always will. Always will. God. And look at verse 9 again. Honor the Lord with your possessions.

Honor him. How do you honor him? Give it to him. And with the first fruits of all your increase. May I remind you real quickly and then we'll move on to that famous passage in Malachi chapter 3.

And I would begin with verse 8. Will a man rob God? The prophet asks.

[58:07] Really it's God asking because he responds, yet you have robbed me. And then there's our objection. But you say, in what way have we robbed you, God?

And his response in tithes and offerings. tithes is a tenth. That's what it means, a tenth of all that God has blessed you with, you to give.

It's the one area of life, our spiritual life, by the way, where we can obey 100%. There's no gray area here. It's a tenth. But he also adds offerings, so that's over and above that.

And you have robbed me of these things. I have clearly commanded that you give a tenth. And I have led you, guided you by my spirit to give me special offerings as God directs you.

And you have not, and you've robbed me of these things. And so you're cursed with a curse. For you have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.

[59:15] And try me now in this. Prove me, says the Lord of hosts. If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.

That's what the proverb is saying to us as well, albeit a shorter version. When he blesses, so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine.

Give or live generously. And then one more. Live respectfully. Live respectfully. That's strategy number five for day one.

Verses 11 and 12, my son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest his correction. For whom the Lord loves, he corrects, just as a father, the son in whom he delights.

Now that's a familiar passage, isn't it? It's repeated in Hebrews. And it's a tremendous truth.

[60:27] The Lord corrects us, doesn't he? Disciplines us. And so the life principle here is, in a sense, to delight in it.

Delight in God's manifold disciplines of your life. And the general blessing is, you'll know the love of God. You'll know his love.

In a deeper, more profound way. A knowledge of his love that you will miss if you despise his correction.

Now God corrects us or disciplines us for a number of reasons. It's not all always attached to sin, isn't it? Sometimes God corrects us because we have sin.

Or we might use this term, he spans us, disciplines us, chastises us. And he does so because he's a loving father. He says, I would discipline my own children because I love them.

[61:30] And so sometimes this discipline comes in the form of correction because we've sinned. Sometimes, though, it comes in the form of protection. And God allows discipline to come into our lives or obstacles to come into our lives or hardships that may come in our lives that send us in a different direction, maybe in an unwanted direction because he's protecting us from the direction we've been going.

Because he knows what we do not know. Sometimes he disciplines us not just for correction and protection but for perfection.

Because he knows that the discipline, his discipline in our lives will mature us and make us better spiritually and allow us to grow in our knowledge of God.

And hence, then, the general rule or blessing, we will know the love of God like we have not known it before. That's what he says. For whom the Lord loves, he corrects.

Just as a father to the son in whom he delights. He delights. And so here is the principle. Don't despise the chastening of the Lord.

[62:47] By the way, the word despise means to see it as evil. That's actually God's hand in your life that you would look at it and instead of embracing it and thanking him for it, you see it as something evil from the hand of God.

God. And not only that, but he says, nor detest his correction. And the word detest there means to see it as a curse. How?

What a hellish view of God. That we would see his activity in our life. Some of it we like, some of it we don't care for.

But to see it as not only an evil, that God would be doing something evil to us, but also to view it as something to be cursed. This is how to put together a strategy for 2012.

We need to live biblically. We need to live faithfully. Trusting God for all and with all. Live morally.

[63:57] Make some new decisions about where you are engaging your life and mind and eyes and ears for this new year. Live morally. Live generously.

Give and give. You can never out give God. And live respectfully. Seeing everything in your life, because you belong to him, to see everything in your life as the hand of God.

Not an evil. Not something to be cursed. Something to be embraced. Do you trust God that much? I hope you do.

Thank you.