

A Path Worth Following Proverbs 3:13-18

Besides the primaries that have been taking place this year, there has been a lot of focus in the news these days about the devastating tornados that have wreaked havoc in recent weeks. As of last week, there have been 183 confirmed tornadoes so far this year with 49 fatalities in the U.S. and an estimated cost of \$31.5 million in damages. Those of you around at the time will remember the Flint tornado of 1953. It is the 10th deadliest tornado in U.S. history.

The path of a tornado, especially of the F4 and F5 categories, are extremely powerful and very destructive. In 2004, an F4 tornado sited in Nebraska was 2 ½ miles wide at the base. Last year the Joplin, MO tornado had a destructive path worth \$2.8 billion dollars in damages.

The wise person will do whatever it takes to get out of the path of a tornado.

Proverbs is all about paths. Take the path of wisdom and it leads to life. Avoiding that path and taking the path of the foolish leads to certain destruction. That's what I find in our passage today found in **Proverbs 3:13-18**. Remember we are pursuing ancient wisdom for modern times. Let's look at three ideas from our passage.

Wisdom's profit is beyond comparison – v. 14-15

Wisdom's path is peaceful – v. 16-17

Wisdom pursued brings true happiness – v. 13, 18

I. WISDOM'S PROFIT IS BEYOND COMPARISON – v. 14-15

Sutter's Mill in Coloma, CA was the site where gold was discovered in 1848 by James Marshall. The California gold rush brought 300,000 people across land and sea. They came from Latin America, Europe, Australia, China and of course the east coast of the U.S. They endured substantial

hardships to arrive in California followed by the daunting obstacles of finding what they hoped would bring them instant financial wealth. At first the gold was so plentiful that it could just be picked up off the ground. Then they moved to river beds and streams where they had to pan for it. Soon more sophisticated methods were necessary which required a certain amount of financing to extract the nuggets. In all, gold worth tens of billions of today's dollars was recovered, which led to great wealth for a few. However, many returned home with little more than they had started with.

Wisdom, personified here as a woman, is portrayed by the father to his son as being of far greater value than that of silver and that its yield has better returns than gold.

I don't know if you are into investing these days. With the value of the dollar shrinking there is more talk about investing in gold which has a better international market value and the returns are more favorable and better guaranteed. In case you are interested let me give you some market prices for some of the precious metals.

Gold - \$1,700 per troy ounce

Silver - \$33 per troy ounce

Platinum - \$1,620 per troy ounce

Palladium - \$690 per troy ounce (This is a rare and lustrous silver/white precious metal that is used in catalytic converters to help convert auto exhaust into less harmful substances like nitrogen, carbon dioxide and water vapor. It is also used in dentistry and medicine as well as in ground water treatment.)

Rhodium - \$1,475 (This is another precious metal also of a silver/white metallic element that is highly resistant to corrosion and that is extremely reflective. It is used to finish jewelry, mirror backs and search lights. It is also found in electronic connections and alloyed with platinum for aircraft turbine engines and used as well in the auto industry combined with platinum and palladium for controlling exhaust emissions.)

How many of you are ready to go and buy a couple pounds of these commodities?

Investors in the market or in business look closely at what they call ROI or Return on Investment. It's a performance measure used to evaluate the efficiency of an investment or to compare the efficiency of a number of different investments. To calculate ROI you simply take the benefit or the return of the investment and divide it by the cost of the investment.

If you decide you want to make these bug catchers you have to decide if the profit you will make will be greater than the investment or cost of materials, machinery and labor. That's your ROI. It is a way of determining whether or not you want to go into the business of making bug catchers.

Solomon is telling his son that the ROI of wisdom is far more profitable than any tangible commodity you might pursue. As a matter of fact there isn't anything that can compare with its value.

Luke 12:13-21 (the word there is to hoard)

Luke 16:19-31

Luke 9:23-25

Matthew 13:44-46

In these passages Jesus illustrated clearly that the Kingdom of heaven is of far greater value and worth pursuing than pursuing anything down here on this earth. Compare anything of value that is in this world that is here today and gone tomorrow and that cannot do anything for your eternal soul vs. pursuing what God has to offer. In the same sense that is what this father is telling his son. At the end of the day, son, there isn't anything you can pursue that will compare in value to wisdom. I was watching Fox news a few weeks ago. They were interviewing a couple of doomsdayers who were describing the efforts they are going through to prepare for a cataclysmic event. They showed a video clip of the woman at home filling big totes

with dried and canned goods. There were literally hundreds of these totes all filled with goods she felt her family would need to survive a world catastrophe. Folks, you can own a whole chain of grocery stores, but in the end, after it's all said and done they won't be of any value when you stand before God. He wants to know if you pursued Him and found Him.

Chuck Swindoll writes in his book *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity* "If some corporate position (insert any pursuit here) is the god of your life, then something terrible occurs within when it is no longer a future possibility. If your career, however, is simply a part of God's plan and you keep it in proper perspective, you can handle a demotion just as well as you can handle a promotion. It all depends on who's first and what's first.

Breaking the magnet that draws things ahead of God is a lengthy and sometimes painful process. There is a line found in the Jewish Talmud that puts it well: "Man is born with his hands clenched; he dies with them wide open. Entering life, he desires to grasp everything; leaving the world, all he possessed has slipped away."...

Just remember, he concludes: Whatever is in first place, if it isn't Christ alone, it is in the wrong place."

What is the real intrinsic value of what you are pursuing? Now, please don't misunderstand. **Having goals and pursuing them are important, but are they consuming you? What's your priority?** Wisdom is the greater pursuit. Wisdom is not only a practical understanding and application of matters relating to this life, it is also, and in the highest sense of the word, what **Merrill Unger says as being "practical acceptance of divine revelation."**

According to **James 1:5** God wants us to have His wisdom which consists in knowing Him and His will. And we can't know true divine wisdom apart from knowing God or His Word.

Proverbs 4:5-7 “Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.”

Proverbs 16:16 “How much better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding rather than silver!”

Proverbs 17:16 “Of what use is money in the hand of a fool, since he has no desire to get wisdom?”

I was just getting out of traction the other day when I got in a conversation with one of the therapists. I am on a bed strapped in to a machine that literally pulls me. He asked how I felt. I told him a little taller. He then was telling me about a procedure that literally makes you taller. It costs around \$85k and how it works is they go in and break your legs and insert some rods. Then each day for seven minutes they turn it one millimeter. They can go up to 6” at a time. People with average build and regular jobs are getting this done because they think they’ll be more acceptable, a better success **How much is it worth to pursue what you want in this life? Are you willing to sell your soul for it?**

Wisdom is of infinitely greater value than anything we might pursue, even gain, in this life, especially, as Jesus said, if we forfeit what is eternal. Wealth will never bring genuine happiness. But wisdom will bring greater holiness. Wealth does not have a higher ROI than wisdom.

Job 28

If we really want to know the value of wisdom, then pursue a life of folly and you’ll look back at the real cost of what was given up. John Phillips notes “A man who inherits a fortune but who has no sense soon finds that his money grows wings and flies away. (“A fool and his money are soon parted.”) A wise man can acquire wealth, but he avoids the

pitfalls that imperil those who make haste to be rich. He knows that happiness is not to be found in them.” That is Solomon’s thought to his son.

Wisdom’s profit is beyond comparison.
Wisdom’s path is peaceful.

II. WISDOM’S PATH IS PEACEFUL – v. 16-17

When I was in High school, I worked on the water front at Camp as a lifeguard. When it was time to head to the swimming area from our home that was near the end of the lake I would put on my running shoes and run there. I did that just about every day. It was maybe a quarter mile or so, but I would run as fast as I could leaping over fallen trees, sprinting past grazing deer, unconcerned about the big fish that just jumped out of the water.

Later on after moving away I would once again return to the same path but instead of running I would walk. Sometimes I would stop by a birch tree and look at the giant holes made by a pileated wood pecker or observe the turtles sunning themselves on a log that jutted out just above the water line. A patch of wild blueberries or winter green would catch my eye and bending over I might pick a few berries or snap off a few leaves of wintergreen, rub them between my fingers, smell the fresh aroma, and then pop them in my mouth and chew them to tingle my taste buds. Sometimes the water’s edge and the path would meet and I would pause and look into the pool at a blue gill gracefully gliding over a rocky nest. Coming to a bench I would sit near the lake and just watch the waves or I would gaze up into the pine and oak trees and watch them move with the afternoon breeze. Occasionally there would be a deer grazing among the ferns to watch. There was no hurry, no urgent call to get back to where I had begun. It was a peaceful time of reflection and wonder at God’s marvelous creation. No matter what my world was like, no matter what issues were pressing in on me it was a time of peacefulness as His presence and

promises sustained me during those times of seeking Him, of seeking His wisdom in those matters.

The beauty of wisdom is seen here extending out both hands in a show of generosity. She keeps back nothing from the individual who would seek what she has to offer. There is a willingness on her part to give what will prolong life and what will provide in life. Her path is not destructive but rather pleasant and peaceful. It is the best path to follow.

After assuming the crown and responsibility for the kingdom, Solomon went to Gibeon to worship God. You will remember that it was the people from Gibeon who tricked Joshua and the Israelites into signing a treaty of protection. They became subservient to the Israelites. Once the land was conquered and the land portions divided up, towns were selected throughout Israel where Levites would live. The city of Gibeon became the inheritance of Benjamin and became one of the cities given to the Levites. After Shiloh was destroyed by the Philistines during the times of the Judges, Gibeon became the place where the tabernacle and the bronze altar were set up. It was only a few miles from Jerusalem and so on this particular day Solomon paid a visit to the tabernacle to worship. Pick up the story with me in **I Kings 3:4-14; 4:29**.

God's promise of old age and bountiful provisions was given to His covenant people if they would but seek Him with their whole heart and not deviate from His commandments. Wisdom offers a quality of life that is not found on the foolish path. There is a contentment that is found internally through obedience to God when he recognizes that all he has belongs to Him vs. the pursuit of contentment through things that will never be found or lasting. **Psalms 23:1-6**

Did you notice the peaceful and pleasant places that the shepherd took his sheep?

They were places where the sheep's needs could be satisfied.

They were pleasant pastures.

They were quiet waters.

They were places where the soul could be restored.

They were along paths where righteousness prevailed.

They were along paths where there might be cause for alarm and fear, but his presence was calming.

There were even along paths where enemies lurked but there was nothing to fear because the shepherd was present. It was even safe enough to eat.

It was even along a path that eventually led to an eternal home.

You can buy a lot of things with wealth, but wealth can't bring you peace.

Being in the presence of the Lord is truly peaceful.

Are you in such a place today, or because you are following your own understanding are you anxious and fearful? Following the path of wisdom is both pleasant and peaceful, no matter what turmoil is surrounding you.

Is your path lonely?

Is your path dark and foreboding?

Is your path bringing fear or anxiety?

Is your path stripping you of peace?

Are you trying to fill these with things?

Your lonely path may be from others who seek to harm you in some way, to damage your reputation.

Your dark path may be some illness.

Your anxious path may be concerning finances.

God's wisdom is there to help navigate those paths.

Notice from these passages the path of those who are foolish and compare their destination with the path of wisdom.

Isaiah 59:7-8 "Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned

them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace.”

Compare that to the way of wisdom whose path leads down a road of trusting God in all things. He will not make roads crooked, but will make them straight.

Proverbs 2:12-15 vs. 2:20

I would encourage you in such times to seek comfort through the Psalms.

Psalm 27:1 “The Lord is my light and my salvation- whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?”

Psalm 56:3-4 “When I am afraid. I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?”

Psalm 91:1-6 “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’ Surely He will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.”

Follow wisdom. Her profit is beyond comparison and her path is peaceful. Because it is peaceful wisdom pursued brings true happiness.

III. WISDOM PURSUED BRINGS TRUE HAPPINESS – v. 13, 18

A. Wisdom Brings Inner Contentment

Notice that the passage begins and ends with happiness, being blessed. **“Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding ...those who lay hold of her will be blessed.”**

It literally means “oh the blessedness.” It is a short cry of joy like saying “You happy man.” It often expresses the reason for happiness based on some fact. The passage gives the reason for such happiness. It is because he has found wisdom. The word **“finds”** speaks of something that is sought after with great diligence until it was found. Happiness comes in pursuing and finding what is right – godly wisdom and godly character.

The dictionary implies that happiness comes by chance or luck or from circumstances.

I’m happy because we won the game.

I’m happy because I’ll get a refund on my taxes.

I’m happy because it didn’t snow.

I’m happy because I didn’t get a speeding ticket.

I’m happy because...

The man who seeks and finds wisdom is truly blessed because it comes from the Lord. His happiness is not contingent on luck or chance or circumstances. This wisdom gives him contentment.

B. Wisdom Makes Right Choices

Psalm 1:1-6

This passage implies that wisdom is in the background, that wisdom has been guiding the traveler along the path of life. Wisdom is the reason he avoids close association with those who choose to do wrong. It is a path he does not want to make. It implies that the traveler has made up his mind about what to do before he finds himself in places that may lead him down a wrong path.

I read of a businessman who frequently traveled and knowing the temptation of the television would

place a blanket over it as soon as he entered the room so that he wouldn't be tempted to watch what was inappropriate.

The traveler is happy because his decisions are formed through the foundation of God's Word. It is in the Word of God that helps him make right choices. **If you find yourself in places or with people where there may be the temptation to join in, what plans have you made with wisdom to stay strong?** Wisdom suggests that if your roots are planted firmly in the Word of God you will not be blown over, but if your roots are shallow, like a Midwest tornado uprooting trees, you'll blow over when facing temptation. The deeper the roots, the more secure the tree.

Wisdom makes right choices.
Wisdom takes bold courage.

C. Wisdom Requires Bold Courage

Daniel 1:3-20 (20)

Daniel could have gone along with the crowd, he could have pointed to any number of reasons to follow the new rules if he wanted to survive. But survival was the last thing on his mind. He would rather die with godly integrity than to compromise his beliefs and character. In the end we see that God not only gave him wisdom, but he was also given long life and prosperity.

Wisdom requires bold courage to do what is right. Following wisdom he chooses to do right in the first place, or if he sees that a wrong choice was made before he acknowledges that corrective measures are necessary. The person with wisdom is **“strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.” (Eph. 6:10)**

Wisdom requires bold courage.
Wisdom results in necessary change.

D. Wisdom Results in Necessary Change

II Chronicles 34:1-8, 14, 19

Josiah could have followed the ways of his wicked grandfather Manasseh and continued in idolatry. Yet he chose to do what was right, consequently there were many things that had to change. He purposed in his heart to follow God. He purged Judah of idolatry. He purified the temple and prepared it for worship. He pointed people back to God by observing the Passover.

The person who would diligently seek after wisdom will recognize when change is necessary and take whatever steps required to do what is right, to pursue godly character.

Wisdom brings inner contentment.
Wisdom makes right choices.
Wisdom requires bold courage.
Wisdom results in necessary change.
Wisdom provides secure confidence.

E. Wisdom Provides Secure Confidence

Notice what it says in **verse 18**.

“She (wisdom) is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed.”

The tree of life is mentioned both in the beginning and in the end of Scripture. Because of their sin of disobedience, God had to drive Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden. If they had eaten of that tree after having eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, mankind would have been forever sealed in his sinful condition. It would have perpetuated physical life in sin. Summarily the tree was lost during the flood. We read of it here and then it shows up again in Revelation 22 where it is found in the celestial city. Next to the river of life that flows from the throne of God will be the tree of life. That tree symbolizes that which gives eternal

life. It was promised to the righteous in **Revelation 2:7** by the Lord Himself.

In Proverbs it symbolizes health and long life, success and happiness and expresses a blessing to those who figuratively eat from wisdom. Just as the tree of life is the source of eternal life, so wisdom is a source of life in this present world we journey in.

Wisdom is a tree of life that gives us happiness in life now. Nothing else we pursue will give us contentment now or eternal life later. The person who desires wisdom seeks after God and the eternal life that only He can provide through His Son's death on the cross. The cross has become the tree of life for us.

I Peter 2:24 "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed."

Which path are you on today? One path will lead to eternal destruction; the other will lead to eternal life.

Wisdom's profit is beyond comparison.
Wisdom's path is peaceful.
Wisdom pursued brings true happiness.