



WISDOM FOR LIFE: A COMMITTED WILL

Proverbs 16:3

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We began this series seeking God's wisdom, for that which would lead to a life filled with health, joy, and purpose. Specifically, we saw a cheerful heart is good medicine for all that ails us in the world, at least according to Proverbs. A heart filled with cheer at the daily tasks for life was the setting, the next deeper level could be found not so much in a taste of our favorite cake, but in sharing a whole slice with another. Finally, the greatest cheer was found in the good news of the Gospel which brings hope and confidence in all that we do.

This cheerful heart was about our emotions, how we feel about our life. But in today's world, there is often an overemphasis on how we feel about things. The Bible has a more balanced approach, since our emotions can often get the best of us. I would love to sit down and eat a whole chocolate cake. It would give me immense pleasure. But my will has to stand against it because, well, it would destroy my life. I have goals I have set for myself for not just a long life, but a long, healthy life and if we want to "live long and prosper" Proverbs teaches us we must commit these plans to God. If the first week was about our heart, our emotions, this week is about our mind, our will.

At first, hearing this verse from Proverbs sounds like pious claptrap. A beautiful-sounding notion, but one so broad that it could mean most anything.

We have all heard people, especially politicians, quote such verses to give an aura of religiosity to their actions in order to justify doing whatever it is they feel like.

But Proverbs has something very specific in mind and it is understood, most clearly, in the Hebrew. The root of the Hebrew word for commit means "to roll".

To commit our plans to God is to roll them over to God, for God's input, shaping, and approval. Committing is not the same as dedicating. It is not

simply executing them for God's glory. It is turning to God's Word and prayer to seek wisdom from the Lord.

Committing your plans to the Lord, rolling them to God, might be thought of as a divine tennis match. Your opening serve is not only the plan you make to win the point but your choice to lob it in, use a slice or top spin, aim down the line or in the corner. Once the ball is in God's court, the Lord's shot determines your next move. He can slow down the point by taking pace off, send it to the far corner thus completely changing the point, or blow it past you – saying this point, this plan needs to end; it's time to start over.

Imagine you decide to start a business selling widgets. That's your serve. You send it to God with prayers of thanksgiving. Perhaps God's return shot is to bless the business and you prosper.

You have several choices on your next move. Perhaps you reinvest some of the profits in the business and use some of it to offer more benefits to your employees. God is pleased with these choices and once again volleys back to you more profits.

On this return shot you choose to support several local non-profits while treating your family to a well-deserved vacation.

Obviously, this is a vastly overly simplified scenario. But it is what Proverbs teaches us. God will prosper our plans when we execute them with honesty, fidelity, hard work and grace. Certainly, Proverbs is not simply talking about careers but all aspects of our lives from where we live, to our choice of friends, and how we will spend our time.

We are told in Proverbs to acknowledge God in all our ways. This is another way of committing our will to God. If your efforts bring you prosperity, don't pat yourself on the back. Give thanks to God. If God prospers you financially, acknowledge God by giving back a portion. If God blesses you with

children, raise them in fear and love of the Lord. If God blesses you with a strong back and a long life, use it to serve the needs of others.

Proverbs teaches us that the Lord rewards the good and punishes the wicked. But alas we know life is not always that simple.

Imagine you're a car salesman. An elderly woman, who knows nothing about cars, wants to buy a new car. You can tell she has the money to buy whatever car she needs, but you can also tell she is completely inept when it comes to technology and finances. Your plan as a salesman is to make money. But, if you are going to commit your plan to the Lord, you cannot sell her more car than she can use or more than she needs.

Obviously, in so doing, you will make less money rather than more. You know the guy down the street is upselling every chance he gets. His children have nice clothes and go to a better school.

Ecclesiastes is the Biblical counterpoint to the prosperity gospel. That author asserts the exact opposite of Proverbs, voicing his frustration with the world and God's lack of action in a rather stark statement,

In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: the righteous perishing in their righteousness, and the wicked living long in their wickedness.

To begin to make sense of the tension between Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, we turn to Genesis and the story of Joseph.

He confronted this exact problem. After being enslaved by his brothers, he rose to a place of prominence in Potiphar's household by committing his plans to God. Obviously, Joseph's plan for his own life was a life of freedom after suffering the horror of slavery. But his freedom was threatened. Potiphar's wife wanted to have an affair, but Joseph refused to establish his plans for freedom at the expense of living a moral life. In committing his plans to the Lord, he knew he could not betray Potiphar. Potiphar's wife took her revenge by lying and Joseph found himself in prison. Joseph certainly knew the pain expressed in Ecclesiastes.

Joseph could have cried foul. He committed his plan to the Lord but, rather than prospering, he suffered for it, as does the honest salesman. But God's plans, in the midst of our plans, are not as straightforward as a return shot on the tennis court. They take a long path that we sometimes cannot see.

A book published in 1905, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*, addresses this problem:

We cannot understand the moral Universe. The arc is a long one, and our eyes reach but a little way; we cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; but we can divine it by conscience, and we surely know that it bends toward justice. Justice will not fail, though wickedness appears strong, and has on its side the armies and thrones of power, the riches and the glory of the world, and though poor men crouch down in despair. Justice will not fail and perish out from the world of men, nor will what is really wrong and contrary to God's real law of justice continually endure.

When we cannot see justice, we can quickly despair and, in this case, Proverbs has a simple but powerful instruction:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart

Not just trust, but trust *with everything you have*. Have the courage to do what is right, no matter what, and the Lord's justice will circle back. Either in this life or the next.

For Joseph, it circled back in this one. As you know, he eventually become second only to pharaoh in all of Egypt. And as he is reunited with his brothers he speaks some of the most heartening, tender, powerful words in all the Bible,

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.

This is how God's plans and ours intertwine for the ultimate justice and prospering for all. But to commit these plans to God requires a trust you may not think you can muster, but you can and you will – to the Glory of God. Amen.