

# A Life Worth Living

Proverbs 3:1-12 CBC 9/13/09 a.m.

**Central Truth:** You can experience the blessing of having God direct your life as you obey the conditions God has laid down in Prov 3:1-12, which include: learning God's truth (3:1-4); obeying God's will (3:5-8), sharing God's blessings (3:9-10), and submitting to God's chastening (3:11-12). God keeps His promises when we obey His instructions because our obedience prepares us to receive and enjoy what He has planned for us.

**ENGAGE:** Last Sunday my father-in-law, **Marlin Rasmussen** was honored with a surprise 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration, honoring him for a life well-lived. **God has blessed Marlin with a long and fruitful life.** I have experienced one of the fruits of Marlin's life, in the joy of having been married to his youngest daughter, **Janel**, for what will be thirty years on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of this month. [SLIDES; first of Janel/her Dad; then of Marlin with grandchildren/spouse who were there and great grandchildren]

Marlin grew up on a farm in Nebraska; went to *Prairie Bible Institute* in Three Hills, Alberta, Canada, where he met, Janel's mother, **Mildred** (Whistler). He served as a pastor in Arkansas, Iowa and Nebraska for over twenty-five years. Then for the past thirty-two (or thirty-three) years he has served as a representative with Rio Grande Bible Institute, which is located in Edinburg, Texas. [Blank SLIDE].

Marlin, has experienced a long and fruitful life. Like all of us, he has had his share of trials. At the age of fifty-seven, Janel's mother, Mildred, had **lymphoma**. She underwent chemotherapy, and was in remission for thirteen years. Then ten years ago around the age of seventy Mildred passed away about four months after being diagnosed with bone cancer. Since that time Marlin married **Lonna**, a lady he had known from Rio Grande Bible Institute who had lost her husband five or six years previously. Marlin himself has battled colon cancer this past year, finishing chemo in late July. As you look at Marlin's life you see a man who with God's guidance has experienced a life worth living.

**FOCUS:** I want to look with me this morning at **four conditions for receiving God's guidance in our lives**. Four conditions that if we meet will help us experience a life worth living.

Life is a precious gift from God. How can you and I make sure we live life well? How can we experience earthly happiness combined with spiritual blessedness? A life in which God guides us and in which His favor rests upon us?

**SET THE STAGE BIBLICALLY:** Before we look at these four conditions for God's guidance in our lives it is important that we remember two points about interpreting proverbs.

**First, the book of Proverbs states general principles.** Solomon is not giving us a 100% guarantee. Remember the book of Proverbs is a collection of observations by a wise man as he views life around him. It is not a 100% guarantee.

For instance, when Prov. 15:1 says, "A soft answer turns away wrath," this is stating a general principle. This does not mean there will never be a time when a gentle response doesn't turn away wrath. But as a general principle, "a gentle response will turn away wrath."

**Second, the book of Proverbs was written to reinforce the Old Testament commandments to the Jews and the promises associated with the establishment of the covenant God made**

**with the nation of Israel.** One of the promises God made to the nation of Israel was that if they kept his law they would experience physical prosperity and good health (see Deut. 28:1-14 and ff.). God does not promise New Testament believers health and material prosperity today.

Paul left Trophimus, a fellow worker in the gospel [Acts 21:27-36], sick in Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20). Paul, himself, apparently had an eye infirmity (cf. Gal. 4:13-15; 6:11). Furthermore, Paul reminds us that God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith (James 2:5). **Thus as we look at these commands and promises today, see the promises as general principles, not absolute promises.**

**PREVIEW:** Let's consider then four conditions for God's guidance in our lives.

**ANNOUNCE the passage:** To see these four conditions for God's guidance in our lives, turn with me in your Bibles for the Scripture reading to Prov 3:1-12 [p. 561].

**Trans:** The first condition for receiving God's guidance is this:

### **Learn God's truth (Prov 3:1-4).**

God has revealed His will to us in His Word. **Learn God's Word so you can know God's will for your life.** Here in Prov 3:1-4 Solomon encourages us to learn and obey God's truth.

**Notice the command and promise Solomon gives to us in Prov 3:1-2:** "My son, do not forget my law, But let your heart keep my commands; [Solomon is telling us to heed God's truth and let God's instructions be part of our inner lives. Then in v. 2 he gives a promise or reason for this command:] **2** For length of days and long life And peace they will add to you" (Prov 3:1-2 NKJV). "Heed God's truth; let His instructions be part of your inner life," Solomon says, "because a life conformed to God's will tends to longevity, while many forms of sin do shorten people's lives."

**APPL:** The implication of this first verse of chapter 3 is that this father's instructions will be based upon the law of God. As parents your duty is to help your children apply the teaching of Scripture by the teaching and commands you give to your children.

**APPL:** When God warns us to NOT forget Him and His Word, the forgetting is not a mental lapse so much as a moral failure of feeling self-sufficient. Solomon reminds us that it is at our heart level that we need to experience God's life-changing work.

God's instructions and commands tend to provide the experience of positive blessing and freedom from negative harm and catastrophe. When Solomon tells us that heeding God's instructions leads to "length of days," this refers to a prolonged life. And "long life," signifies a long time full of life, **a life worth living. You can experience a long, fruitful life, a life worth living as you learn and take to heart God's instructions.**

**ILL:** As I think back on some of the ones I've know who experienced an early death, so many of them were due to people going their own way. I think of the three teens driving on a gravel road one afternoon near the little town of Savonburg, Kansas in which we lived. The three teens had been out drinking. The driver lost control and the car flipped over. As I recall, two of the three teens in the car, were thrown from the car and killed. Or I think about one of the teens from our youth group, who ended up joining the Marines, getting involved with PCP, a horse tranquilizer, that affected him emotionally, and who ended up committing suicide in his early 30's. **Positive**

**blessing and freedom from negative harm and catastrophe tend to come to those who heed God's Word.**

TRANS: Part of learning God's Word involves learning how God wants us to respond to one another. In vv. 3-4 Solomon encourages us to demonstrate true kindness and faithful love in our response to others. **Note Prov 3:3-4:** "Let not mercy and truth forsake you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart, **4** And so find favor and high esteem In the sight of God and man" (Prov 3:3-4 NKJV).

Solomon exhorts us that loyalty to our commitments combined with dependability should grace our lives like a neck chain, in other words loyalty to our commitments and dependability should be part of our lifestyle. And even more than that, loyalty to our commitments combined with dependability should be part of our very nature. Solomon tells us to write them on the tablet of our heart, that is, make loyal love and faithfulness part of your very nature.

**TRANS: Now the implication here in vv. 1-4 is that our instruction as parents to our children should reflect God's instructions to all of us.**

**APPL for Children:** These means for you children, God is encouraging you to listen to and obey your parent's instructions. Your parents' instructions help you learn to listen and obey God's instructions for your life.

Now what does Solomon mean when he says, "Let not mercy and truth forsake you?" (NKJV). It was enlightening to me to discover that the Hebrew word (*chesid*) translated mercy or loyal love here was translated by those who made the Greek translations of the Old Testament, as "good deeds." This same word is translated "alms" and "good deeds" in the New Testament. In other words, what the Greek translators understood Solomon to be saying was, **"By your lifestyle and your very nature remain a person who gives to the needs of others from a heart of love.** Also keep your commitments to God and people. And the result is that you will win the favor and success of God and people."

APPL: It isn't enough for you or me to carry the Bible in our hands; we must let the Holy Spirit write it on our hearts. **Obedience to the Word of God can add years to our lives and life to our years.** (Cf. Wiersbe.)

**Trans:** Now in vv. 5-8 Solomon gives us a second condition for having God direct our paths. Not only must we learn God's Word, we must also:

### **Obey God's will (Prov 3:5-8).**

We must learn God's Word, but then we also must obey God's will. Solomon observes that as we lean and rely upon the Lord, rather than relying upon our own understanding the Lord will direct our steps. Solomon calls us to a life of trust and obedience in which we see the Lord in every event and rely on Him. **Notice Prov 3:5-6:** "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; **6** In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths" (Prov 3:5-6 NKJV).

The word translated **"trust"** in v. 5 means to lean on, be confident of. Originally it meant to lay helplessly, face down, which gives the picture of **total, complete dependence—without reservations, conditions, or stipulations.** One of the signs that you are trusting the Lord is not worrying.

“The danger, of course, is that we lean on our own understanding and thereby miss God’s will. This warning doesn’t suggest that we turn off our brains and ignore our intelligence and common sense. Common sense is a gift from God; but the command is to put our reasoning beneath the will of God. Solomon cautions us not to depend on our own wisdom and experience or the wisdom and experience of others. Abraham did this when he went to Egypt (Gen 12:12-20) and so did Joshua when he attacked the little town of Ai (Josh 7). When we become wise in [our] own eyes” (Prov 3:7), then we’re heading for trouble.” [Warren Wierbse, *Be Skillful* on Prov 3]

ILL [cf. D. Jeremiah, *Principles from Proverbs*]: Author **Ben Patterson**, in his book titled *Waiting*, tells a scary story of being stranded on an icy ledge while mountain climbing with friends. When one of the more experienced climbers was giving him directions on how to traverse the ledge to a place of safety, the instructions went totally against logic: **“Don’t lean against the face of the cliff or your feet may slip out from under you. Lean slightly away from the cliff to keep more weight on your feet and keep them anchored.”** Of course, leaning away from the cliff moved him in the direction of the sheer drop-off below, which didn’t seem logical to him. But he decided to believe what his experienced friend told him instead of what his fears told him—and soon made it to safety.

**Psalm 146:3** (NET) says, “Do not trust in princes, or in human beings, who cannot deliver!” It is only those with perfect knowledge who deserve our trust in moments of crisis. Just as we might put our trust in the advice of an experienced mountain climber because that is his domain of expertise, so we **turn to God who alone has expertise in the infinite number of decisions we face in life.** And sometimes He may lead us to do things that are the opposite of our inclination or feelings. **When your feelings and the Word of God conflict, it takes discipline to obey the Word of God.** You must not get up from your position of having all your “weight” leaning on God—and that is a conscious choice you must make.

APPL: If I were to ask for a show of hands of how many of you ever felt, “This marriage is too difficult . . . I want out,” many of you no doubt would raise your hands. Yet for many of you, as you’ve obeyed the Word of God, you’ve experienced the blessing of obedience.

APPL: Keep your trust completely in God, and not in your own efforts. God wants us to have a childlike trust in the Lord.

ILL: Many years ago we had a big black rubber spider that would show up every now and then around our house. Once, when my son Jonathan was very young (perhaps two or three) he put this large black rubber spider on a table and tried to scare me with it. I then took the spider and moved it around toward him. Now the rubber spider was quite realistic looking and even felt “spidery.” Jonathan became frightened, and it took some coaxing, before he would touch it again. But eventually he did, because **he trusted my word** that it wouldn’t hurt him, even though his senses left them in doubt.

As you and I keep God and His ways before us, trusting Him rather than our own understanding, we will experience a smoother life, generally speaking, than those who do not. God will remove obstacles, making for a smoother life, and even more than that, bringing you to the appointed goal He has for you.

God will direct our paths, God will make the way smooth for us as we trust and obey Him in all things. Life tends to go better as we walk in obedience to the Lord and keep our trust in Him.

**In vv. 7-8** Solomon warns us to not be wise in our own estimation: *“Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil. 8 It will be health to your flesh, And strength to your bones”* (Prov 3:7-8 NKJV). A reverential fear of the Lord, that awareness that the Lord sees me at all times and that I’m accountable to Him helps me to turn away from evil. If you fear the Lord and turn away from evil, then you are depending on the Lord and are not wise in your own eyes. There is a higher source of wisdom than our human insight.

**Solomon promises in v. 8 that if you trust in the Lord and fear Him (vv. 5–7), God will bless you (v. 8).** Just as a drink of water brings physical refreshment to your body, so trusting in God and turning away from evil will bring emotional refreshment to your soul.

**Trans:** How can you experience God’s guidance in your life? Learn God’s truth (3:1-4) and obey God’s will (3:5-8). Now in vv. 9-10 we see a third condition we must meet if we want God to direct our paths.

## **Share God’s blessing (Prov 3:9-10).**

Everything you and I have comes from God and belongs to God. The OT Jews brought the Lord the first offspring of their flocks (Exod 13:1-2) along with the first portion of their harvest (Lev 23:9-14). In this way they acknowledged God’s goodness to them. **Notice the command Solomon gives in vv. 9-10:** *“Honor the Lord with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; 10 So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine”* (Prov 3:9-10 NKJV).

As we have noted previously the book of Proverbs was written to reinforce the Old Testament commandments to the Jews and the promises associated with the establishment of the Mosaic covenant God made with the nation of Israel. One of the promises God made to the nation of Israel was that if they kept His law they would experience physical prosperity and good health (see Deut. 28:1-14 and ff.). God does not promise New Testament believers health and material prosperity today.

Yet the principle of honoring the Lord from our wealth still applies to us under Christ’s commands of the NT. The apostle Paul instructed us to be generous and kind in the use of our wealth. Paul instructs Timothy: SLIDE(S): *“Command those who are rich in this world’s goods not to be haughty or to set their hope on riches, which are uncertain, but on God who richly provides us with all things for our enjoyment. 6:18 Tell them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to be generous givers, sharing with others. 6:19 In this way they will save up a treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the future and so lay hold of what is truly life”* (1 Tim 6:17-19 NET). [BLANK SLIDE]

God must be first, not money or possessions. Our giving back a portion of our income to the Lord, reminds us that ALL we have ultimately comes from God.

**ILL:** There was a knock on the door of his hut. Answering, the missionary found one of the native boys holding a large fish in his hands. The boy said, *“You taught us what tithing is, so here—I’ve brought you my tithe.”* As the missionary gratefully took the fish, he asked the young lad, **“If this is your tithe, where are the other nine fish?”** At this, the young boy beamed and said, **“Oh, they’re still in the river. I’m going back to catch them now.”**

Solomon here instructs in Prov 3:9: *“Honor the Lord from your wealth”* (Prov 3:9 NET). To honor God means to give him the rightful place of authority by rendering to Him gifts of tribute.

**One way for you and me to acknowledge God in our ways (v. 6) is to honor him with our wealth (v. 9).**

As we give back a portion to God we are acknowledging God and His help. In return God promises to fill the barns with grain, and the vats with freshly squeezed grape juice. **In general it is true that godliness results in gain, that piety brings prosperity** (Deut. 28:1-14; Matt. 6:33). The apostle Paul exhorts Timothy: “Train yourself for godliness. <sup>4:8</sup> For “physical exercise has some value, but **godliness is valuable in every way. It holds promise for the present life and for the life to come**” (1 Tim. 4:7b-8 NET). But this kind of generalization does not disallow God from making exceptions. Otherwise God is invested in, rather than honored. Proverbs 3:10 is well balanced by verses 11-12 that tell us that God disciplines those He loves.

**The principle we see in Scripture is that those who sow generously reap generously.**

Ultimately this reaping will be fully fulfilled in the coming kingdom, as we receive our eternal rewards.

**One of the ways we show that we really trust the Lord then is by our giving.** If we don't faithfully give to the Lord, we don't really trust the Lord. Now our tithes and offerings are not “payments” to the Lord for His blessing. Rather, our tithes and offerings are evidence of our faith and obedience. **R. G. LeTourneau** used to say, “If you give because it pays, it won't pay.” Giving is heart preparation for what God wants to say to us and do for us. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:21 NET). [Cf. Wierbse, 39]

ILL: At a church meeting a very wealthy man rose to tell the rest of those present about his Christian faith. “I'm a millionaire,” he said, “and I attribute it all to the rich blessings of God in my life. I remember the turning point in my faith. I had just earned my first dollar and I went to a church meeting that night. The speaker was a missionary who told about his work. I knew that I only had a dollar bill and had to either give it all to God's work or nothing at all. So at that moment I decided to give my whole dollar to God. I believe that God blessed that decision, and that is why I am a rich man today.” He finished and there was an **awed silence** at his testimony as he moved toward his seat. As he sat down a little old lady sitting in the same pew leaned over and said to him: “**I DARE you to DO it again.**”

REIT/TRANS: How can you receive God's guidance in your life? Learn God's truth; Obey God's will; Share God's blessing. Our fourth responsibility to receive God's guidance is to:

**Submit to God's chastening (Prov 3:11-12).**

**Notice Solomon's instruction in vv. 11-12:** “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor detest His correction; **12** For whom the Lord loves He corrects, Just as a father the son *in whom he delights*” (Prov 3:11-12 NKJV).

Chastening (or discipline) is part of God's plan to help us as God's children mature in godly character (cf. Heb 12:1-11). Solomon warns us to not despise the Lord's chastening. Our common response to suffering is to loathe it. However, God wants you and me to understand that suffering refines our moral character. Suffering is a means God uses to make you and me more mature.

God chastens us, not as a judge punishes a criminal, but as a parent disciplines a child. [Cf. Deut 8:5 NET: “Just as a parent disciplines his child, the Lord your God disciplines you.”] God acts in love. God disciplines us for our benefit, that we may share his holiness (Heb 12:10).

ILL: The Bible says, ‘Whom the Lord loves He chastens.’ If life were all easy, wouldn’t we become flabby? When a ship’s carpenter needed timber to make a mast for a sailing vessel, he did not cut it in the valley, but up on the mountainside where the trees had been buffeted by the winds. These trees, he knew, were the strongest of all. Hardship is not our choice; but if we face it bravely, it can toughen the fiber of our souls.

“God does not discipline us to subdue us, but to condition us for a life of usefulness and blessedness. In [God’s] wisdom, He knows that an uncontrolled life is an unhappy life, so He puts reins on our wayward souls that they may be directed into the paths of righteousness.” [Cf. *The Billy Graham Christian Worker’s Handbook*, (World Wide Publications, Minneapolis, MN, 1984), pp. 53-54.]

Sometimes God chastens because we have rebelled and need to repent. Other times, God disciplines us to keep us from sinning and to prepare us for His special blessing. God always disciplines us in love.

“Physical punishment and verbal correction are hard to accept but they demonstrate God’s loving concern. The same is true of a parent’s discipline of his [or her] children (cf. Deut. 8:15). Loathing such discipline—thinking that God disciplines because He enjoys pain—overlooks the benefits that come from such correction.” [Cf. Sid S. Buzzell, BKC:OT)

**Do you recognize God’s correction as good and ask God to do good to you? The psalmist did.** [SLIDE:] “Before I was afflicted I used to stray off, but now I keep your instructions.... It was good for me to suffer, so that I might learn your statutes” (Ps 119:67, 71 NET). [BLANK SLIDE]

**APPL: The Lord disciplines those he loves.** This promise balances the others. It will not be all roses when you follow the Lord. But the trials you experience are designed to conform you to the image of Christ (cf. Rom. 8:28-29; 2 Cor. 12:7-10).

## Conclusion

The Scriptures are filled with images that impress upon our hearts and minds our need to receive direction from God and walk in His path. We make plans but God directs in the events of that plan as they are worked out (Proverbs 16:9). God teaches sinners the right way to live (Psalm 25:8). He promises to instruct and teach us about how we should live (Psalm 32:8), and speak a word of guidance to our hearts (Isaiah 30:21). He is the One who says, “‘I am the Lord your God, who teaches you how to succeed, who leads you in the way you should go’” (Isaiah 48:17 NET).

**We are not adrift on a sea of uncertainty. We have Almighty God promising to direct our paths.** Not everything you or I want in our lives may be God’s best for us. God wants to direct your steps, my steps.

**God keeps His promises as we obey the conditions God has laid down for us.** Let’s purpose to meet the conditions God lays down to receive His guidance. Let’s **learn God’s truth** (Prov 3:1-4). Let’s purpose to **obey God’s will** (Prov 3:5-8). Let’s **share God’s blessing** (Prov 3:9-10), and finally let’s **submit to God’s chastening** (Prov 3:11-12).

**SALVATION: God has a plan and purpose for your life which can ONLY be found through Jesus Christ.** Have you met God’s condition to receive eternal life? In John 3:16 we are reminded of the extent and manner of God’s love for us: “For this is the way God loved the

world: **He GAVE** his one and only Son, **so that everyone who BELIEVES in him** will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). **You have two choices**, you can refuse to believe in Jesus, and the result will be that you will perish, you will be separated from God forever in hell because of your sin; or you can put your faith in Christ, and be forgiven of your sins and given eternal life as a free gift. **What is your choice? Would you like to trust in Christ as your Savior?**

I’m going to lead us in a prayer of salvation as we close you can use to express to God that you are trusting in Christ. Please understand that saying a prayer has never saved anyone. *Prayer is only the means by which you tell God that you are trusting Jesus Christ as your Savior.*

“Dear God, I know that I am a sinner. Nothing that I am or do makes me deserving of heaven. I believe Jesus Christ died for me and rose from the grave. Right now I trust Jesus Christ alone as my Savior. I am not trusting in my good life, my best efforts, my baptism, or my church membership to take me to heaven. **I am trusting Christ alone to save me.** Thank you for the forgiveness and everlasting life I now have. Help me to live a life from this day forward that says “thank you” for what You have just given me. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”