

Guidance: All the Ways My Saviour Leads Me

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[0 : 00] So we're going to turn to our Bible reading, and Paul Brennan is continuing a brief look into some of the Proverbs. And so this evening we're going to read together Proverbs chapter 2.

Proverbs chapter 2, beginning verse 1. My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding, yes, if you call out for insights and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

For the Lord gives wisdom from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright. He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of saints.

Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path. For wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

Discretion will watch over you. Understanding will guard you, delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil.

[1 : 43] Men whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways. So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God.

For her house sinks down to death and her paths to the departed. None who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life.

So you will walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous. For the upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will remain in it.

But the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it. Amen. This is God's word, and we'll return to it again shortly.

Well, good evening, and good to be with you this evening. Please do have your Bibles open at Proverbs. We're going to be dipping in and out of various chapters.

[2 : 55] We are thinking through some themes in the book of Proverbs over these weeks. Last week, we're thinking about listening, who it is we listen to. And tonight, we're thinking about guidance.

And the question of guidance is perennial, isn't it? It's always of interest because we always have decisions to make, and making decisions can be stressful.

We want to make the right decision and not the wrong one. We also wrestle with our own sinful desires. And so we're always drawn inward and towards ourselves rather than towards God.

We're always facing that battle. And that makes decision-making, making plans difficult. And so we need to listen to what Proverbs would have us hear about the whole realm of guidance.

We're to listen to God's words, not the world's ways, because the world's ways, when it comes to making decisions and plans, is very much at odds with the Bible.

[4 : 04] Consider the theology of Disney. Here is what Disney is teaching us about making plans. If you want to know what to do with your life, look within.

Look to your own heart and be whatever you want to be. That's essentially Disney's worldview. Now, Moana, the 2016 film, is not a favor of mine, but Moana grossed almost a billion dollars worldwide when it was released.

It's a big film, lots of influence. And here is the verse from the key song in that film. I'm not going to sing it. I'll just read the words out.

And the call isn't out there at all. It's inside me. It's like the tide, always falling and rising. I will carry you here in my heart.

You'll remind me that come what may, I know the way. I am Moana. And that's very much the spirit of the age, isn't it? I am who I decide to be.

[5 : 11] And essentially, the message of the film is this. If you do what you want to do, it works out for everybody. You do exactly what you want to do, and everyone wins.

Now, can I suggest that as a message, that might run counter to the Bible and to the book of Proverbs. But you see, that message which runs through Moana and pretty much every Disney film you can think of, it does filter into our thinking, doesn't it?

It's all around us. Do what makes you feel good. Follow your heart. Throw off authority. Become who you are. That's the world's wisdom when it comes to making plans and deciding how you're going to live your life.

But there is a better way. Rather than listen to Disney, let's listen to the Lord and creator of the universe, the Lord of history.

Let's hear what he has to say about how we plan, how we make decisions. And three things to say tonight about guidance and making plans from the book of Proverbs. There's a lot more we could say, even from the book of Proverbs.

[6 : 21] There's a lot more we could think about from the Bible as a whole. But we're going to take some nuggets of wisdom from the book of Proverbs this evening. So here's three things. First, God always gets his way.

God always gets his way because God is sovereign. It's the first thing we need to realize when we're thinking about guidance. God is sovereign. That is the absolute foundational reality that we need to be clear about.

God is God. And he is sovereign. If you flick in your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 21, we'll look at the two bookends to chapter 21.

So we'll read verses 1 and 2, and then we'll read verses 30 and 31. So Proverbs 21, verse 1. The king's heart is a stream of water in the hands of the Lord.

He turns wherever he wills. Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart. Look on to verse 30.

[7 : 33] No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord. The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord.

See, even the king, even the most powerful man in a nation, a man who can direct who he wishes, who can call an army, who can summon any in his kingdom, even a man like that is subject to the Lord.

Verse 1, The king's heart is a stream of water in the hands of God. He turns it wherever he wills. The king's heart is under the sovereign control of the Lord. Bruce Waltke writes this, God's inscrutable mastery extends to kings.

The Lord rules even over the most free and powerful of human beings. Do you see what the writer was saying?

[8 : 41] Even a king, even the most powerful man in the world is subject to the Lord. And if that's true of a king, how much more so of you and I?

And that means, verse 30, that no wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord. No human power can stand against the purposes of God. Even in war, where you've taken every step to ensure victory, when the horse has been ready for the day of battle, the victory, if it comes your way, is not ultimately yours.

But look at verse 31, the Lord's victory. It belongs to him. Now clearly, this does not negate human wisdom, human planning, and preparation.

Not at all. But it does put all our efforts, all our plans, into right perspective. There is a greater unseen reality.

God reigns. He is sovereign. And his plans, his purposes, will come to fruition. And that is something Proverbs comes back to again and again.

[9 : 50] The Lord is sovereign. Flip back to chapter 19, just over the page, verse 21. chapter 19, verse 21. Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

Many are the plans of man, but the purpose of the Lord will stand. Flip back further to chapter 16, and verse 9. 16, verse 9.

The heart of a man plans his ways, but the Lord establishes his steps. You see, alongside our responsibility to plan and think and make preparations, alongside that reality, there is the reality of God's sovereignty.

The sense there in 16, verse 9, is I think one of good and wise planning. The proverb doesn't seem to suggest there's anything especially wrong at all with the plans, but even if those plans come to fruition, it's the Lord who establishes the steps.

These plans only succeed because the Lord makes it so. One writer says this, a man may plan his road to the last detail, but he cannot implement his planning unless it coincides with the Lord's will for him.

[11 : 20] He is deluded if he supposes he can have unfettered control, can impose his will in every situation in order to make his plan a reality. Our plans only succeed, only come into being if they align with the plans of God.

And we need to come to terms with that reality that Proverbs sets out for us here. The Lord is in control and he always gets his way.

It is what, if you want to use the theological name given to it, this is God's will of decree. Everything that comes to pass, everything comes to pass according to God's sovereign decree.

His will, his will cannot be thwarted. What God wills will happen. What happens is according to God's will.

Even the most heinous act of evil and justice that ever happened on this earth, the murder of the Son of God himself, that took place according to God's gracious and predetermined will.

[12 : 34] He is sovereign. He is in control. The Heidelberg Catechism, which our students, are they studying this term?

I'm not sure, but they study it every so often. The Heidelberg Catechism puts it this way. Providence is the almighty and ever-present power of God by which He upholds, as with His hand, heaven and earth and all creatures and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty, all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but from His fatherly hand.

nothing's by chance. It's in His hands. And so, that is a great comfort, isn't it, for us to know that the Lord of all things, the Lord of creation, the Lord of the universe has His plans.

He has His purposes for you and nothing, nothing can knock them. Nothing can stop what He has planned and purposed for you. And so, given this reality, given that He is sovereign and in control of all things, our response is to be one of trust.

We are to trust Him and we can trust Him because He is sovereign. There'd be no point trusting a God who wasn't. We can trust Him, we must trust Him.

[14 : 12] We must trust Him because He's sovereign. God's sovereignty is the fundamental reality that we must come to terms with as we think about guidance. God is sovereign.

Now, we've thought about God's will of decree, that is God's sovereignty in all matters. But alongside that is His decree of desire.

God has given us commands. And so, the second thing we must reckon with is this. Alongside God's sovereignty, what God has intended will come to be, the second thing we need to know is that God has revealed everything we need.

God has revealed everything we need. So first, God is sovereign. Second, is the sufficiency of Scripture. God has revealed everything we need.

Now, look back with me at chapter 2 which was read earlier. Proverbs 2 and especially verse 6 there. Proverbs 2 verse 6, For the Lord gives wisdom.

[15 : 16] from His mouth come understanding and knowledge. See, it's the Lord who gives wisdom.

It's not Solomon. It's not the king who is the source of wisdom and knowledge. It's the Lord alone who has access to wisdom. He is the source.

He is the one who gives wisdom. And what He has revealed to us as the whole Bible testifies is sufficient. What God has made known to us is enough for us.

Deuteronomy chapter 29 verse 29 says this, The secret things belong to the Lord our God. But the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever that we may do all the words of the law.

You see, the Bible doesn't pretend to reveal everything to us. There are some things that belong to the Lord and only to Him. But there are other things that He has revealed to us and they belong to us so that we may do all the words of His law.

[16 : 35] And what God reveals to us, what He has given to us, He expects us to take heed of and to do. And what He has revealed is sufficient, is enough.

It may not satisfy our desires to know everything. And often it's the case, isn't it, the things that we want to know, the things we want to plan about and have control over, things we yearn to know about, they are the things that fall into that category of the secret things, things that only God knows.

And we want to know them, don't we? In our sinfulness, our desire to be like God, we want to know those things. But those things are things that we cannot know. We're not meant to know.

but God has made known enough to us. 2 Timothy 3, 16, but as for you, writes the Apostle Paul, as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you've learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for proof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

[18 : 07] Do you see what Paul is saying in that foundational piece of Scripture? What Paul is saying is not primarily about Scripture's authority, although it certainly is saying that, the main thing he's saying here is the sufficiency of Scripture.

And he's emphasizing the Scripture's sufficiencies in two ways. One, it is sufficient for salvation. He says the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation.

That's the first thing. And secondly, they are sufficient for every good work. All Scripture is breathed out by God that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

So the Apostle Paul is saying that all we need for eternity, for our salvation, and for here and now, is contained in the Scriptures. All we need for salvation, and for a life that pleases God, is here, is contained in what he has revealed to us.

And so rather than worrying about all the things that fall into the category of the secret things, we ought to be much more concerned with the things that fall into the category of the revealed things.

[19 : 28] Don't worry about what's not been told to us. We ought to concern ourselves what is in our Bibles. This is what God has given to us for life, for eternity.

It's here. And so we ought to give ourselves to reading it, understanding it, meditating on it. We need to believe it and follow it, obey his commands, which are for our good, for our eternal good. And as we immerse ourselves in his word, we will bit by bit be transformed so that we love his ways, so that we have an instinct for what is right and wise and good and for what is wrong and foolish.

We will be transformed as we meditate on God's word. Now listen to these words from John Newton in a letter he wrote on divine guidance.

Here's what he said, how then may the Lord's guidance be expected? In general, he guides and directs his people by affording them in answer to prayer the light of his Holy Spirit which enables them to understand and to love the scriptures.

[20 : 48] The word of God is not to be used as a lottery, nor is it designed to instruct us by shreds and scrapes which detach from their proper places have no determinate import, but it is to furnish us with just principle, right apprehensions, to regulate our judgments and affections and thereby to influence and direct our conduct.

They who study the scriptures in a humble dependence upon divine teaching are convinced of their own weaknesses, are taught to make a true estimate of everything around them and are gradually formed into a spirit of submission to the will of God.

The word of God dwells richly in them. is a preservative from error, a light to their feet, and a spring of strength and consolation. By treasuring up doctrines, precepts, promises, examples, and exhortations of scripture in their minds, and daily comparing themselves with the rule by which they walk, they grow into a habitual frame of spiritual wisdom and acquire a gracious taste which enables them to judge of right and wrong with a degree of readiness and certainty.

As a musical ear judges of sounds, and they're seldom mistaken because they are influenced by the love of Christ which rules in their hearts and a regard for the glory of God which is the great

object they have in view.

Well, that's a rich section, isn't it? But that is what happens to those who dwell on God's words, who treasure his words, who learn to distinguish right from wrong, who learn to know wisdom and have a sense for it.

[22 : 38] So do you want to know how to live your life well and wisely? Do you want to make good choices? Do you want to live in a way that pleases your heavenly father and brings him honor and glory?

glory? Then heed those words from John Newton. Love the scriptures. They are sufficient for life and godliness.

For everything that truly matters in this life, the scriptures are sufficient. For everything that matters for eternity, the scriptures are sufficient.

Do not neglect them. Do not neglect the word of God. It is our heavenly father's gracious gift to us. And here the last sentence from that letter from John Newton.

Here's what he finishes with. And though there be seasons where faith languishes and self too much prevails, the Lord whom they serve does not disappoint their expectations.

[23 : 45] He leads them by a right way, preserves them from a thousand snares and satisfies them that he is and will be their guide even unto death. You see, God has revealed already everything we need for life and for godliness and for our deaths.

His word is sufficient. I think the reason why so many Christians go searching after guidance in all sorts of strange places is because they lack confidence.

in the sufficiency of the scriptures. They don't think it's enough. They want something more. They want something more than the God of the universe has revealed for their good.

It's a distrust of him, isn't it, to go searching elsewhere. All we have is here. The scriptures are sufficient. Don't go anywhere else. So having clarity on that, having clarity on the sufficiency of the scriptures will save you a lot of heartache down the line.

If you hear and heed the words contained in the scriptures, it will save you many heartaches. So first, God always gets his way.

[25 : 08] Second, God has already revealed everything we need. And third, this is our final point, in his goodness and grace, God has given us one another.

He's given us each other. He's given us the fellowship of believers. Now the Christian life is not to be a solitary one. We are not lone Christians.

The Bible always assumes that believers are in fellowship with other believers and most of the Bible is addressed, after all, to the corporate body, to the gathering of believers.

So it's not the case that if we are to seek the Lord's guidance on whatever matter, the answer is not that we hunker down on our own with our Bibles and work it out by ourselves.

That's not the answer. It's not to say we don't read our Bibles, of course we do. Of course we immerse ourselves in the Word, crucially as we gather together Sunday by Sunday, but also in our homes as we read the Word.

[26 : 09] But we don't stop at reading the Bible by ourselves. We are, Proverbs insists, over and over, Proverbs insists that we are to seek wise counsel from others.

Let me show you some of those verses. Turn to 12, 15, Proverbs 12, verse 15. The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

Look on to 15, verse 22. Without counsel, plans fail, but with many advisors they succeed.

Look on to 19, verse 20. Listen to advice and accept instruction that you may gain wisdom for the future.

And one more, chapter 20, verse 18. Plans are established by counsel, by wise guidance, wage, war. Now, two strands to tease out with these proverbs.

[27 : 26] First, in relation to our posture, and second, in relation to outcomes. First, our posture is to be one of self-awareness. Now, it's not the same thing as introspection, navel-gazing, self-obsession.

No, it's being self-aware in the sense that we need to know our own strengths and our own weaknesses. We need to realize that we don't, on our own, have enough perspective and objectivity just to crack on with navigating life without seeking wise counsel from others.

The way of the fool is right in his own eyes. But a wise man, what does a wise man do? Well, Proverbs tells us he listens to advice.

And he does so because he realizes he needs it. He needs advice. our default, because we are by nature sinful and self-obsessed, our default is sometimes to assume that we're right and everybody else is wrong.

Our default is to think that we've got life together and everyone else just needs to be a bit more like me. We elevate ourselves sometimes, don't we, above everybody else, and we look down on people.

[28 : 38] And so if we do that, if that's our posture, why would we ever seek their advice? If they're just not quite at my level, why would we seek their advice?

Well, no, warns Proverbs, a fool, a fool is right in his own eyes. And of course, being steeped in the Bible, as we thought about, will constantly be forcing us to have a realistic estimation of ourselves, won't it?

We are, the Bible affirms, over and over, sinful and fallen. We are not as great as we think we are. We are desperate sinners in need of a savior. And a right assessment of ourselves will turn us towards God, seeking his face.

But also, it will turn us towards others. So we'll bring our plans to the Lord in prayer. And, we'll also bring our plans to others, seeking their wisdom and their counsel.

And this listening to advice presupposes something we considered last week about who we listen to. It's important we listen to the right people, not the wrong people. It's no good seeking advice from someone who's clearly a fool.

[30 : 00] It's no good seeking advice from someone on parenting. I'm in that bracket at the moment, so I'm not putting myself up here. But it's no good seeking advice from someone on parenting whose children clearly do not respect authority and are unruly.

No, you observe the families who you know and think whose children are generally well behaved, obedient. Perhaps those are the parents I ought to go and seek advice from in terms of parenting. don't assume because someone talks a good game or because their Instagram post portrays family perfection that they're the people to go to. No, you observe them in their homes, see how they live life.

Are they ones to go and seek advice from parenting on? Seek out the whys. It runs the other way as well. In that older parents ought to be giving advice to younger.

Just think about the Apostle Paul's instruction to Titus there on Crete. It says, older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine.

[31 : 11] They are to teach what is good and so train the young women to love their husbands and children. So older women have something to offer to the younger. So if you have a younger mum and you're an older mum and they come to you, well, you're welcome.

They're seeking advice. Don't say, oh, I couldn't possibly advise you. You have lots to give, lots to offer. So be one to pass on advice and wisdom as well as look to get it.

So there's one example. Another might be you're seeking advice on financial matters. It's no good seeking advice from somebody on financial matters if they don't have a handle themselves in terms of their finances, if they spend more than they earn, if they're not generous, if they don't work hard, if they've got no savings, then perhaps don't go to them for financial advice.

No, you look at someone who evidently has managed the resources God has given them well and wisely. And that's not to do with quantity.

Each is given differently, but for somebody who manages what they have well and wisely, maybe that's somebody to go and talk to. Go and ask their wisdom on finances. Or we could go on, couldn't we?

[32 : 29] Pick all sorts of topics. But look at somebody who walks the walk, not just talks the talk. Is there evidently fruit of wise living in their life? If so, go and speak to them.

Listen to the right people. So we've got to be realistic. That's the first thing. We've got to be realistic in our estimation of ourselves. A humble posture which pushes us to seek the wisdom of wise people around us.

We are God's gift to each other. Let's make use of one another in that realm. That's the first thing those verses point out. Second is to do with the outcome.

Now remember a key thing with the book of Proverbs is that these sayings are not a magic formula which automatically delivers results. These sayings are not guarantees.

But they are general truths. Most of the time these things are true. And so the outcome of seeking wise counsel according to Proverbs is generally speaking success in our plans.

[33 : 34] So one of the Proverbs said without counsel plans fail. But with many advisors they succeed. It is generally true that plans are more likely to succeed if you seek counsel.

Your plans are more likely to fail if you don't. That is generally true. And so if you find yourself needing to make a decision, perhaps a big one, you're making some significant plans.

Well if you want things to go well, seek counsel. Seek advice. Seek wise advice. And don't just shop around until you get the one you want to hear.

Seek a wise person and ask what they think. it's not the only thing that matters. But it is one of the key ways in which God provides for us.

It's one of the ways that he has given us to guide us through life as Proverbs attest to. It's one of those key things we see over and over. Seeking wise guidance from those around us.

[34 : 40] Well there's an awful lot more we could say. We could read through Proverbs and pull out all sorts of things about plans, about guidance. There's a whole lot more in the Bible as a whole. But these are three key things.

Three things we must have firmly in our minds as we think about guidance, making decisions and making plans. God always gets his way. Remember he's sovereign.

And so the implication for us is to trust him. So are you truly trusting him? Are you trusting the Lord of creation with your life for tomorrow and for the rest of your days?

Are you trusting him? Second, God has revealed everything we need. The Bible is sufficient. And so the implication is that we are to follow his ways.

So are you being obedient to what he's revealed? And third, God has given us each other. The gift of the fellowship of believers.

[35 : 45] So consult wise Christians. Seek out those who are wise. Well, there's three things. And let's pray for our God's help, shall we, as we think about this matter.

Let's pray. Our Father God, we thank you that you are such a gracious and a good God.

You do not leave us alone to stumble through life, but rather you have provided abundantly for all that we need. And so help us not to neglect the means by which you have given us to guide us through life, which so often is hard and perplexing.

It's often a mystery to us. But Lord, help us to trust you. Help us to trust you, the great sovereign Lord of all things, and remind us that we are mere creatures in your creation.

So help us. And help us to be those who live by faith, trusting you, and not living by worldly wisdom. Help us, we ask in Jesus' name.

[36 : 58] Amen. Amen. about his name? Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.