

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

DATE

July 22, 2018

SPEAKER

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SERIES

The Good Life

PART

4

TITLE

Walking Uprightly

SCRIPTURE

Proverbs 10:9; 11:1; 14:2; 17:20; 20:7; 22:1



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Well, it's great to see you, Providence family. I hope that you've had a great week, and if you're new here with us, a guest, welcome. We're thrilled that you have joined us as well.

About 18 years ago, I had a very formative meeting. I didn't think it would be that way for me. I was hoping it'd be for someone else. I'm going to share just a little on that. There was this married couple here at Providence, and they asked to meet with me. Of course, I knew who they were. They were leader, and in fact, I knew so much about them in terms of what they knew and what they did that I just assumed that there could be no way that there's any crisis within their marriage, but they came. They walked in to the door, and we sat down. He began to speak, and she began to cry.

It was interesting to learn that day what has now been seen in my life and every life of every person that I've met since then over the last 18 years. What was true of this man was he was a genuine believer just like many of us, absolutely believed and put his faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of his sins. He was a leader who was really respected, even here throughout the church. He was nominated for places of leadership service here at church. He was grounded in the truth. He taught the Bible. He was wise. He was kind. He was deeply involved.

What I'm saying, the front of the stage was impeccable. When we talk about front-of-stage, of course, you'd know what a front-of-stage looks like. Most of the time, they're well-lit, they're clean, they're very designed. But then there's behind the curtain, and oftentimes, behind the curtain looks very different, and this was true of this man's life, for as we met and kept digging, what we found was that behind this curtain was a backup stage, which was an absolute mess. He was abusive. He was abrasive. He was critical. He was emotionally frozen. He was proud, and maybe above all things, he was protective of his good reputation.

As I sat there and marveled at the great distortion between the front of the house and the back of the house, the Lord really spoke to my life at that point in time and reminded me that I was very similar. In fact, every single one of us in this room is very similar. Many of us in this room have absolutely sincere faith, and yet, our life is fractured. There's parts that aren't simply straight. They're crooked. Every single one of us who know Christ, we're forgiven, and yet, many of us live totally fearful of being exposed to the very things that God's already forgiven us of.

We're all like this picture. We're all like a toddler who's stumbling in daddy's shoes as we run and chase this good life. The good news that we find right here in the Bible is that God still loves us, and He sent a rescuer, a savior, his name is Jesus Christ, to us, and He also gave us a compass in order to navigate this life. It's called wisdom, and the Book of Proverbs speaks a lot about wisdom.

If you brought a Bible, I want to ask you to turn with me to Proverbs 10. What we've looked at over the last several weeks is what wisdom is. Wisdom is the ability to know and to do the right thing, even when the Bible does not specifically address our situation, and the fact is, is that every single one of us who've walked with Christ for any amount of time knows that we find the majority of our life situations, there's not a verse that is directly written to address your situation at that time with those people.

Oh, there's lots of direction. That's what we've been looking at, but wisdom is that very thing that from the Scriptures that we get grounded. Within the Scriptures, we understand the heart of God, we understand He has said, and it contributes to the place that, in our life, we not only know what to do, but we have the skill to be able to do it, the right choice at the right time.

What's interesting is that there's a lot of people, when they look at the Proverbs and they say that, well, the Proverbs even says to us in chapter 1, verse 2, it says that this has been written in order to give us wisdom. We just assume that the Proverbs are going to help us make our wise choices. What's interesting about Proverbs is it spends less time telling us the choice to make and more time telling us the kind of person that we want to become because it's that kind of person that routinely makes wise choices.

One of those characteristics, one of those traits in a person who routinely makes wise choices is that they're a person of integrity, or they have an upright heart, and so we want to look at this idea of what does the Proverbs tell us about integrity and living an upright life.

Now, before we do that I want to back up just a second because as we walk through Proverbs, one thing that I want to make sure that we do is I want to give you enough tools so that you can go home and you can study Proverbs on your own. There's a few things that is really helpful that you understand about the Book of Proverbs. It's written so that the first nine chapters, there's a lot of narrative in there where one verse connects to the next verse which connects to the next verse, but once you get to chapter 10, that's not the case anymore. Once you get to chapter 10, there's a lot of sentences that seem to be thrown together randomly. Sometimes they're random, sometimes they're not, but it's important for us to know how it's built. The very word Proverb comes from two Latin words, "pro" and "verba." Pro means for or in place of, verba means words, in other words, which is sort of funny, is Proverbs literally means in place of words.

Now, if you look down at the Bible in your hand right now, you go, "But Brian, all I see is words. It's all words." It's true, and yet, each one of these Proverbs, what it does is it compresses a life experience the size of a mountain down to the size of a pebble, or if you're a little bit more into the flavor of things, a Jelly Belly.

Now, Jelly Bellies are amazing candy to me. You take this little orange one over here that you probably can't see very well, but this little orange one, it literally taste like an orange. What they've done ... Now, there's no value in terms of nutrition or anything like that. It's still candy; however ... Even on the popcorn one that's right there. It's crazy, and butter popcorn. Whatever.

But they take what you and I know, the taste of an orange, and they compress it to this, but if you actually think about it, if you expanded this out, you would not only get to an orange, you would also get to an orchard, and you might even get to the state of Florida. It gets bigger and bigger the longer that you actually think about it, the longer that you chew on it.

This is the case of the Proverbs. You see, the Proverbs are much like a bag of Jelly Bellies. You're not supposed to eat them in mass consumption. It's best not to reach and grab a handful and throw them all down at once. The reason is because you get a little bit of orange, a little bit of popcorn, a little bit of peanut butter, a little bit jelly, and everything comes together, and you're like, "It just tastes like stuff."

However, if we'll be wise enough and actually be slow in our study of the Proverbs ... In fact, if there's one way that I would encourage you as you think about how you study Proverbs, it would be that. It would be slow, where you take a Proverb, and you think about it. You separate it from the rest, and you chew on it. What'll happen is it'll begin to expand, and then it'll make you wise. It's interesting that most of the Proverbs, they're built in couplets, meaning two sentences or two ideas, and they're formed into one sentence; however, how they're formed, they're formed in three different ways, and it's really important to recognize how each one is formed. There's three different purposes, and there's clues that I'm going to give you right now so that you can study them really well.

The first way that they join together is to make a contrast. They do this with the word "but." You see, Proverbs 15:1, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Two thoughts. They're connected. The word "but" says this one's different than this one, so we're supposed to think about what's different in both of them. We're supposed to add color. We're supposed to add water to the sponge so that it expands, and we can see this principle played out in our relationships and our responsibilities in these direct context, and so first is contrast.

The second is to complete. This is where the two thoughts are joined by the word "and." For example, Proverbs 11:25 says, "A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends." What he's doing here is he's saying there's two different ways to use the tongue in really negative ways that destroy relationships. They're not contrasting. One's completing the other, and it makes us wise, and we think about how each one of those adds fuel to the fire. In already-broken relationships.

Then there's a third way, and the third way is as they seek to compare. As they compare, they normally use two words, and it's either "like" and "so" or "better" and "than." For example, in Proverbs 17:1, he says, "Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife." There's a comparison between one and the other. Now, if you think about that Proverb, "Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife," and you actually give it thought, you chew on it, what happens is you can see things at a distance, which really create an amount of wisdom in our life.

Watch this. The second [inaudible 00:10:56] says, “A house full of feasting with strife,” so now we’re in house, and you think about a house of feasting, I think of Thanksgiving. I think of it’s a little cool outside. There’s a fireplace going. There’s a dog by the fireplace. The whole table was full of food, and it’s just immaculate, people are all around; however, that’s all a wonderful thing unless everyone’s fighting at the table, unless someone slammed their fork down and left and spilled everything, and everyone’s like, “Well, now what do we do? Should we just keep eating or ... “

This is what he’s saying. He’s saying it’s actually better, if you notice, he says, “Better is a dry morsel with quiet.” What that actually means is this. This person doesn’t even have a house. It’s better to hangout with three friends eating a Saltine together who are getting along than it is to have a house and all kinds of wealth and all kinds of food and the house to be so full of strife.

Now, if you’ll think about each of these, what it’ll do is this, is it’ll place you in front of three very specific questions. These are the three that you have to ask any time you’re in a Proverb. The first question is, how is the Proverb written? Is it seeking to compare something, to contrast something, or to complete something, just to help me in my understanding. The second question is what experience is being described? You’re supposed to think about it. Think about Thanksgiving. Think about that blowing up in a relationship or in the ... Think about what that could mean. Add water. Make it expand. The third question is this, is what kind of person is being extolled? What kind of person are we reading about there that says, “Oh, this is the kind of person,” because that is the kind of person that routine makes wise choices, that routinely chases a life that is actually good.

What we’re going to do, I’m going to read a few of these, but before we do that, I want to pray for us and ask the Lord to give us wisdom.

Father in Heaven, we love You. We thank You that You have given us Your word, and as we look now at this idea of integrity, as we look at these sporadic Proverbs in these different chapters that all address the same idea, I pray, Father, that You would help us to have a fuller understanding, and not only a fuller understanding, but that You would incline our heart to want to become a person of integrity and uprightness. We pray in Christ name, amen.

Proverbs 10:9 says, “Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.” Then Proverbs 11:1, “A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight.” In Proverbs 12:19, “Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment.” Proverbs 14:2, “Whoever walks in uprightness fears the Lord, but he who is devious in his ways despises him.” The last one, Proverbs 20:7, he says, “The righteous who walks in his integrity, blessed are his children after him.”

What do we learn from these Proverbs? Starting in Proverbs 10:9, we learn that integrity is a lifestyle marked by wholeness. Wholeness. He says, “Whoever walks in integrity,” integrity actually comes from the same word in Latin for integer. An integer in mathematics is not a fraction. It’s a whole number. In Scripture, the word integrity or uprightness, it describes a life that is marked by wholeness instead of fractions, a life that speaks the whole truth instead of half the truth or third-quarters of a truth, life who acts and talks the same with this audience as it does with this audience if these audiences weren’t together, a life whose back-of-stage reflects their front-of-stage.

We have to ask the question, well, why is this good? Why is this the good life? Well, I think there’s three reasons that we just read of. First is this, is that wholeness or integrity removes the fear of being exposed. It removes the fear of being exposed. He says, “Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.” Every single one of us knows the fear of being exposed. We all know the fear of being caught in a lie. We know when we’ve done something, and we’re ashamed of that something, and we hope that nobody finds out, and if someone asks us question that we think are even related to that, we can get defensive, even if they don’t know anything about it.

Proverbs 28:1, it says, “The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.” This means that a lack of integrity, it leads to fear. You see, integrity, however, allows us to look at the mirror without any shame. It allows us to receive a question from someone else and not immediately respond with being defensive, allows us to lay our head down at the end of the day without worry of being exposed the next day. You see, in this, you have to understand, is a good life. It’s a good life when you don’t have to live in fear of what people are going to find. This is possible, friends, because of Jesus.

The second benefit that we see here in terms of integrity, it says that wholeness, it infuses our relationships with trust. See, trust is being so convinced that you can rely on the strength and integrity and the character of another person that you place yourself in their care. Trust is that relational quality that it allows us to rest in someone’s presence and absence. There’s no trust without integrity. There’s no trust if people know that you’re lying to them. This is why Proverbs 12:19, we read it earlier, it says, “Truth lips endures forever, but a lying tongue is for a moment.” In other words, our trust and our relationships will only be momentary if we routinely lie, if we give a half truth. You see, integrity is what gives trust its endurance.

It’s interesting that trust is built not with one grand deluge of water. It’s more like a garden. It needs routine, systematic, small installments of choices made, promises made, and promises kept. When I started a Providence, I worked with our singles at Providence, which really was one of the greatest joys of my life, are just people of integrity. I was so grateful for that privilege, but the reality is, is as a married person, it was something that was very important for me, obviously, is to maintain integrity, not just as a church, but with my family, with my wife, and also with the fact is that more than a half of our single adults, and there was hundreds at the time, were single.

Instead of one grand deluge of water or one trustworthy moment, what it meant was that there needed to be a lot of small decisions made, and so there was a lot of small decisions made and small decisions, things like I just made it a point to say, you know what, I'll only meet with a single woman in my office during office hours with the door open, and someone either has to be in with us or right outside the door. There was several of them. The second one though was that any time I would meet with a single adult woman, inside the rules of that first what I just said, is I would call Ta beforehand and just let her know. I wanted her to know every time I was meeting with somebody who wasn't a guy so that if she didn't know what I was doing that day, she would assume, "He's not meeting with a girl. He's not seeking to help somebody in the way."

About seven or eight years in, I call her as I normally would, and I just say, "Hey, I just want you to know that I'm going to be meeting with so-and-so at some time," and she said, "You don't need to do this anymore." Now, that was a significant win, but it was also the fruit of seven years of intentionality, of small choices being made. I said, "This is exactly why I want to continue to do it." I still do it to this day. Why? Because integrity is like a garden. It's not built by one deluge of water one time, but by the daily and momentary installments of promises, little promises made and little promises kept. You have to understand this, when your relationships are marked with trust, you're living a really good life.

The third benefit that we found here in these Proverbs about integrity, and it's being marked by wholeness is that wholeness allows us to pass on noble legacy. You see, one day, you are going to die, and so am I. For the great majority of us, someone has our name. Someone's connected to us, and we're going to leave a legacy in the way that we live our life, and those who inherit a name known for integrity are blessed people.

This is what we've read in Proverbs 20:7. He says, "The righteous who walks in his integrity, blessed are his children after him." After him means he's dead, she's dead, they're gone, and yet there are people who are left, who are tied to this person who's now gone, and the Bible says, "Do you want to know someone who's ultimately blessed, who's really blessed, who lives a really good life? It's from the person who went before them lived the life of integrity." Lived a whole life, not a fraction a life. Their life behind the curtain and in front of the curtain, it was the same. That's a blessed life. It's a good life, and so we see that integrity is a lifestyle that's marked by wholeness, but then the second thing is, it's so important, and it's this, integrity is a delight to the Lord. It is a delight to the Lord.

This it ultimately what Proverbs is all about. God is there. He is here. The point of Proverbs is to condense all of life and every life decision into two diverging paths that are separated by the fear of God. One path faces God, the other does not. One path acknowledges the justice and the mercy and the kindness and the cross of God, and the other path, it doesn't.

Proverbs 14:2, we read this earlier. It says, “Whoever walks in uprightness or integrity fears the Lord.” You see what it’s saying? He’s saying if there’s two diverging paths that are separated by the fear of the Lord, the person who’s walking in integrity is fearing the Lord, but he who is devious in his ways despises him.

Now, this is amazing to me. What this is saying is that not only is that God is the ultimate pleasure in the motivation of the person of integrity, but God is the ultimate victim of our deception. You say, “What do you mean?” It says there, it says that he who is devious in his ways despises Him. You may lie to me, but He’s the victim. Why? Because this is His world. It’s not our world, it’s His world. We’re traveling in His world. We’re living in His world, and He is the ultimate authority and standard bearer of integrity.

2 Timothy 2:13 says that, “God is faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.” What that means is this, is that God always, always tells us. He does what He says. He says what He’s about to do, and in both what He says and what He does, they both flow out of who He is. In other words, with God, the front-of-stage is identical to the back-of-stage. There’s a perfection and holiness that passes through, that what we can see of God and what we can’t see of God, they’re both the same. He never gives you half the truth, that everything of who He is comes out of His mouth, and everything that comes out of His mouth and who He is, it aligns with what He does.

Let’s look at this in a case study in the marketplace. That’s where most of us spend most of our time, a job. Proverbs 11:1, we read it says that, “A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight.” Let’s chew on this for just a moment. Let’s expand it out, see. Let’s add water to this Proverb and let it expand for us.

Let’s just say that we’re all merchants in the Old Testament. We sell wheat. You have a little store. You got a little booth, and you got your little bags of wheat. You have a scale up front. Someone comes up and goes, “I’d like five pounds of wheat.” “Absolutely.” Pull our scale. There’s two little buckets, or two bowls. In one, we reach over, and you say, “You said five pounds, right?” “Yeah, five pounds.” “Okay, hold on.” You grab a rock, and it was common knowledge how big a five-pound rock was, and you place that five-pound rock on one side, and the scale goes down. Then we grab our wheat. We start pouring in the other side until the scale was level. You may even throw in a few extra pieces because you’re so generous. Then you hand them their wheat, and they’d hand you the money.

Now, let’s just supposed though that bills were tight. You think, “Man ... “ One night, you hatch an idea in your mind. “You know what I could do? I could take an awl, and I could begin to work that five-pound rock and make a little hole in it, start to hallow out just a little bit of a section of it.” All of a sudden, you think, “Wow, that’s a little bigger.” Then all of a sudden, then you cover it with the same color of wax as the rock so that it looks like a five-pound rock.

It's still your five-pound rock, and yet it weighs four and a half pounds. Now your five-pound rock is four and a half pounds, but it looks like five pounds, so you can charge five pounds. Now on every transaction, you're making an additional 10%, so at the end of the day, you'd have one more portion of grain in order to be able to give away to sell, and you get to make a little bit extra money, and God says, "This is an abomination to me."

That's strong words, isn't it? You say, "Well, it's a good thing we don't live in the Old Testament, we're not wheat salesman." It's true, but selling a car that you know to be a lemon without full disclosure is an abomination to the Lord. Filing an insurance claim and lying about the extent of the damages is an abomination to the Lord. Why? Because he says that just weight is His delight. Well, why is it His delight?

Well, Proverbs 16:11 says this. He says, "The just balance and scales are the Lord's, and all the weights in the bag are His work." You know what it means? When God sat down and said, "Oh, I'm going to create some rocks that weigh five pounds," he made them five pounds. When we manipulate his five-pound rock and pass it off as five pounds when it's four and a half, we're despising Him, but when we take that five-pound rock, and we say, "This is a five-pound rock," and we're people of integrity, He says that this is a delight to Him because it recognizes that we live in His world. You see, God delights in our just and honest dealings because these dealings made God honoring faith visible to the world.

What do we do at this Providence? Two things. Application before we sing. The first is I want to encourage us is let's look to Jesus for hope. Why hope? Because nobody here is a person of perfect integrity. There is nobody here that would prefer for their life story to be shown on that screen for the rest of us. There's only one person in the history of the world that's ever walked this earth in perfect integrity, and his name is Jesus.

You see, when we read his story, it's called the Bible, we keep finding liars and manipulators throughout. They're very much like us, and then we keep reading the Scriptures, we see how God intervenes in their life to change them, and it speaks hope in our life that God can change us. You see, the story features this one man, Jesus, who's perfect in his integrity. He's totally upright. He never lies. 1 Peter 2:22 says, "He committed no sin, and neither was the deceit found in his mouth." It's amazing to me that when Peter wants to emphasize the sinlessness of Jesus, he talks about lying. Why? Because it's the one sin you need no resource. You just stay alive. You just keep breathing and lie. You don't have to have money for it. You don't have to have energy for it. Nothing. You can just lie.

He says, "This is how sinless Jesus was." He never lied. He was completely transparent about who he was. "I am the way, the truth, and the life," completely transparent about where he came from, "I came from the Father," John 16:28, completely transparent about what he came to do, "I came to seek and to save that and those who are lost," and then he came, and he did it. He not only made the promise, he fulfilled the promise, and he did it by dying on a cross for our lack of integrity.

The one with integrity died for those without it, and then he rose from the dead, and he says that if you will believe in Him and trust Him as your Savior, He will forgive you of all of your sin. He'll give you His righteousness and then He'll place His Spirit and allow it to abide within you so that you have power to shrink the gap throughout the rest of your life between the back-of-stage and the front-of-stage.

See, a heart full of Jesus has no room for deceit. The whole of Proverbs simply says, "Look to him. Keep looking to him." If you've never looked to him, you can look to him today for the very first time and be forgiven of your sin, and if you have looked at him so many years, keep looking. Just keep looking, Providence.

The second last is this, is let's take pains to keep a clear conscience. Let's take pains to keep a clear conscience. You see, when we look to God and see how much He loves integrity, it leaves within us who love Him a desire to be a people of integrity. This is what Paul said. Paul says in Act 24:16, he says, "So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man." To take pains means to receive pain. It means to do something that may be painful to you in order that your conscience can be clear before God and man.

What are those things that we can do? I want to just give you a few of them. First is you can remind yourself, you can take pains to remember the justification that's by faith alone. Why is that so important? Because you're going to fail tomorrow. You're going to fail today. You may have already failed while you're sitting here. You see, when we fail, it's really easy for us to think that our righteousness, it's like a moving scale with God, and when we have our good days and our bad days, but this is what justification of faith means. It means to become someone else perform perfectly on our behalf, and we trusted that person that his righteousness accrues to us. What that means is there's absolutely nothing you could do today to diminish your righteous standing before God, and there's nothing you could do today to improve upon it.

You see, if you don't take pains to remember that you're justified by faith, you might think that going out and aiming and striving and white-knuckling integrity is going to increase your standing with God, and it's not. Integrity doesn't increase our standing. Integrity is simply response to our right-standing because someone else accomplished something for us, and it's Jesus. It's what he did for us. What a difference it makes to be assured in the darkness of our imperfection that we have a righteousness outside of ourself.

The second thing we can do is confess. I said earlier that integrity removes the fear of being exposed. If you are not lying to people, then you don't have to worry about your lie being exposed, but do you know what else takes away the fear of being exposed? Confessing your sin. You can tell people what's behind the curtain, and then not have to fear if they find it because you've already told them.

In Proverbs 28:13 says, “Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find mercy.” We confess them to God. We find a friend, a trusted friend. We confess our sin to them, say, “This is what I’m doing, this is what I’ve done. Would you pray for me? Would you ask God to give me strength. He’s already forgiven me, but would you ... “ That confession to one another, it adds strength, it adds steel to our integrity.

The third thing we can do is obey. We can be people of integrity. We can tell the truth today. Now, our righteousness isn’t Christ alone, but humbly walking with God leads to a noble life and a quiet conscience that honors the Lord and allows us to sleep at night, and yet the fact is that every single one of us are going to be tempted to lie, to deceive, to maybe put forth an image. Social media is not quite who we really are. What are we going to do?

Well, if we vividly imagine the gain from lying and deception, we likely will, but, however, if we could simply imagine this afternoon God’s observance of our conversations and Jesus glory in our honesty and love and trust being grown and developed in our relationships, then we’re going to be motivated towards integrity in that moment of decision.

Let’s imagine Jesus being glorified through our integrity in every single part of our lives. 2 Corinthians 5:9, Paul pleads, “We make it our aim to please Him.” May the Lord grant us strength and courage to do just that. Let’s pray together.

Father in Heaven, we thank You that You love us, and we thank you Jesus that you came to this earth, and you were the person of integrity. We thank you for that. We thank you that you and your integrity died for our lack of integrity, and I pray Father that You would forgive us. I pray that you would strengthen us as a church family. I pray, God, that You would help us to be a place where being transparent about what’s not behind the curtain or what is behind that curtain is okay. I pray that You would develop trust. I pray that You would help us, God, really. I’m praying, God, that would You help us to face towards You and to see Jesus Christ, be overwhelmed with his integrity and his life and his death and his resurrection, and it would change the rest of our life. Amen.



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