

BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Win the Day!

By Pastor Bryan Clark

Message Title: A Guiding Light Pt. 1

Release Date: Wednesday, 1/22/20

All of us as people made in the image of God have within us this desire. It's a longing for something more—not just the longing for something different—it's a longing for something more. This isn't new. Go back two thousand years, the Greek philosophers used to talk about four central passions: desire, joy, fear, and greed. Desire was just what we were talking about. There is something common within us as humans, that seems to have this desire or longing for something more. Joy was basically those moments when people experience some degree of that, some glimpse of that—there's some kind of unexplainable joy that comes from that. C.S. Lewis, in his book *Surprised by Joy*, talks about that, as an atheist, what he was noticing was there were moments in life, where he experienced some kind of joy, which seemed to be connected to something beyond what his natural worldview could explain. It transcended his worldview and seemed to connect him with something more, which caused him to begin a journey, which ultimately ended in his decision to surrender his life to Christ.

The writer of Proverbs is also the writer of Ecclesiastes. In Ecclesiastes, he says, "God has put eternity in our hearts." It's basically saying the same thing: it feels like we were made for something more. There's kind of this homesick longing within our hearts that's common to us all. If that's true, then I do believe that creates a common language we speak, which can be a powerful language to introduce people to Christ. I think in times of great prosperity and security, and everything seems like it's clicking, it's maybe a language that isn't as powerful. But when people have a sense of dread, a sense of fear—a sense where it seems like things are kind of coming unraveled, such as our culture today—it's a very powerful language, because people feel it deeply.

We talked about creating pockets of *shalom*. "When we win the city," Proverbs 11 says, "*the city will rejoice.*" It's not a hostile takeover. We win the city by creating pockets of flourishing, that people respond to, because their souls say, "I think this is what my soul is longing for." And that gives us platforms from which we present the claims of Christ. So, the logical question would be, "But how do we do that?" If you have a Bible, turn with us to Proverbs, Chapter 12. Basically, I want to give you four very practical things to think about, in order to create flourishing, or *shalom*, in the areas of relationships in our lives.

The first one is: *we have to be teachable.*

Look at Verse 1:

**Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge,
But he who hates reproof is stupid. (*NASB, Proverbs 12:1)**

Look again at Verse 15.

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes,

But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.

To understand God's vision of *shalom*, is to understand that's God's reality. God has created moral laws, and social laws, and spiritual laws, and when my beliefs and behavior align with that, that's where life is found. But the fool—and this is our friend the "know-it-all" fool—thinks that somehow reality will change to accommodate his or her belief system. The know-it-all fool already knows everything, "I don't have to be taught; I don't have to be corrected; and I don't want to be judged because I am right." What the proverb says is, "If you think that reality is going to change to accommodate your belief system, you are a fool; you're just stupid." It doesn't work that way: reality is what you run into when you are wrong. At the end of the day, reality always wins. Therefore, the goal should be for me to keep changing my belief system and my behavior, to be in alignment with God's reality, because that's truth. That's where life is found. There's nobody in the room that has this figured out. There's nobody that's got it all right. I constantly have to be corrected, have to be taught, and have to make adjustments. There may be areas where I am a little off; there may be areas where I am way off. But if I'm serious about flourishing, and *shalom*, and serious about righteousness, then I have to be humbled, and surrendered, and know I have to be taught. I have to be corrected; at times I have to be reproved, in order to get in alignment with God's way. So that's the first one.

The second one is: *to have a Biblical view of work, a Biblical work ethic*. We talked about this just a little bit before, because it comes up quite a bit in the book of Proverbs. Work is good; work is noble; work gives life meaning and purpose. We work because we are people made in the image of God. We don't work because of *The Fall*. In Genesis 2, before there was ever sin, Adam and Eve worked. They tended to the garden. That was part of flourishing. If you read the last couple of chapters of the Bible, in the New Heaven and the New Earth, we will work, because work is good, and it's right, and it's noble. Genesis 3 tells us because of *The Fall*, work has become more difficult, but it's still good and right. But if you're numbered among the wicked—and again, according to Proverbs, the wicked aren't those who are out doing evil things; they're just those who are selfish, self-centered and greedy; everything is about "me"; I'm in it for myself—if that's you, then you move to one extreme or the other, when it relates to work.

One extreme would be you see work purely as a way of making money. It's about money; it's about title and power. It's about prestige, about trying to be significant. It's about trying to make my own way—about proving to somebody that I am somebody, that I matter—and I'll do that through my work. So, it's about how much money I can make—my house, my car, my stuff—it's about all of that. If that's your mindset, I guarantee you, you will consistently disadvantage the community to advantage yourself, because that is your worldview.

The other extreme from that would be those that basically don't care. They think work is just a necessary evil. "I work because I have to. I don't like it; I'll do as little as possible in order to get by, and if I can figure out a way to beat the system, and stay home, and have somebody else pay my bills, I will even do that." You are disadvantaging the community, in order to advantage yourself. The Bible numbers you among the wicked, if that's what you choose to do, because you are destroying *shalom*. You are destroying the ability to flourish together, to see your work as something that is good, noble, something that is purposeful. It's your part of tending to the garden, of making your contribution to help create *shalom* in the city.

Now again, remember that work is not just what you get paid for. It's a stay-at-home mom; it's coaching the little league team; it's serving in the community. It's all of that, but it certainly includes what you get paid for. If some of you think your work has no meaning or purpose, you just need to back up and think about: what is my contribution to *shalom*? Who are the lives I

touch? What are my interactions? What are my opportunities to be a light and demonstrate this Biblical work ethic? I would suggest to you, because the majority of people in our culture are either at one or the other of those two extremes that I mentioned, if you operate every day with a Biblical view of work, people will notice. It will create a light in the darkness. So, you have a few of those verses.

Verse 9:

**Better is he who is lightly esteemed and has a servant
Than he who honors himself and lacks bread.**

Basically, that proverb is saying the average person who just goes out there, works hard, does his part or her part, to contribute to *shalom*, and the flourishing of the city, and is responsible, and in this case has a servant, which wasn't reflective of being wealthy; it was just more reflective of being responsible. Maybe in today's language, we would say, to such a degree that you even have an employee; you take care of yourself and help take care of some others. Contrasted with that in the second part of Verse Nine, is someone who's in it to honor themselves, someone who's after their significance, trying to be a big shot. It's all about money, and power, and wealth, and houses, and cars, and credit cards, and debt and, at the end of the day, it's kind of a self-centered, greedy lifestyle, and they can't even pay their bills.

We have a similar contrast in Verse 11:

**He who tills his land will have plenty of bread,
But he who pursues worthless *things* lacks sense.**

So, the one who goes out, works hard, contributes to *shalom*, is contrasted with someone who is in it to get rich quick, to get the latest deal, in order to just get money. There is in no sense of the meaning and the purpose and the contribution to *shalom*. There are a couple of similar verses later in the proverb.

Verse 24:

**The hands of the diligent will rule,
But the slack *hand* (or the lazy) will be put to forced labor.**

And again, in Verse 27:

**A lazy man does not roast his prey,
But the precious possession of a man *is* diligence.**

Verse 27 is creating a metaphor. The lazy person, at the end of the day, has nothing to roast over the fire, because he didn't go out and get anything. So, you have nothing, versus the diligent person, that has basically everything that he or she needs. So that is the consistent message in the book of Proverbs and it's a very practical way every day that we can contribute to creating *shalom*.

Basically, I want to give you four very practical things to think about, in order to create flourishing, or *shalom*, in the areas of relationships in our lives. The third is *true compassion and justice*. We hear a lot today about compassion; we hear a lot today about social justice. But I am talking about *true compassion* and *true justice*.

Look at Verse 2:

**A good man will obtain favor from the LORD,
But he will condemn a man who devises evil.
A man will not be established by wickedness,
But the roots of the righteous will not be moved.** (Vs. 2-3)

(Verse 5):

**The thoughts of the righteous are just,
But the counsels of the wicked are deceitful.**

In Verse 5, that word **just** is the Hebrew word *mishpat*. It's a very important word in the Book of Proverbs. It basically means giving someone what they rightly have coming, their rightful due, regardless of race, socioeconomics or gender. It's *true* justice. Now, what you notice in Verses 2, 3, and 5, is ultimately God is the judge, and God ultimately is in charge of justice, which implies, at the end of the day, there is a standard. God's justice does not waver to accommodate everyone's belief system. There is an absolute, so there are absolute truths. There are moral laws and social laws and spiritual laws, and, at the end of the day, those don't change. So, here's the deal: for all the talk in our culture about compassion and justice, it is virtually impossible to have true compassion and true justice, without absolute truth. Otherwise, everyone is making up their own definition of right and wrong. Everyone is making up their own definition of what is moral and what is not moral, what's good and evil. We are all making up our own definitions of what is just and what is unjust. I think there are thousands upon thousands of people in our communities, and they genuinely, sincerely want justice. They see things happening in our culture that deeply concern them. I think they are very sincere about that. But the truth is, we are not even getting close to that value. Why is that? It's because we have dismissed absolute truth; therefore, we have dismissed moral laws. As long as that prevails, there is virtually no chance for justice. There has to be a common understanding, "This is truth"; "This is morally right"; "This is morally wrong"; "These are social laws that we all agree to," in order to actually have justice, in order for there to be true compassion.

Look at Verse 10:

**A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal,
But even the compassion of the wicked is cruel.**

In the ancient world, animals weren't like pets. It's not talking about your dog or your cat. Animals were either there to be consumed or to give wool, or to do work, something like that. There were no animal rights people in the ancient world. You could do anything you wanted to your animal, and people did. In the 1 Samuel series, I asked the question, "If you could get away with anything, what would you do?" This is very much in that same vein, because in the ancient world, they could do whatever they wanted to their animals and no one would say anything. What Verse 10 is saying, is someone who truly desires *shalom*, that's what is in his or her heart; that is what they want. They want flourishing in the city. There's such a genuine heart of compassion, that even the animals are treated with compassion. That's contrasted in Verse 10, with even the best attempt at compassion by the wicked ends up being cruel. Now what does the proverb mean by that? Again, the **wicked** is not talking about those that are out there doing evil things. It's talking about those that are selfish, those that are self-centered, those that are in it for themselves—those that are ultimately going to disadvantage the

community if necessary, in order to advantage themselves. Their compassion isn't really true compassion. They are just too self-centered for that. Their compassion is wanting for themselves—a feeling—I want to feel better about myself. I want people to think better of me. At the end of the day, their acts of compassion are more about themselves than they actually are about the people who need help. I think this is very common in our culture. I think you have lots of people that want to feel better about themselves. They want that good feeling. They want people around them to think, "I'm really a good person," so they find themselves some area where they can reach out with a level of compassion, in order to get that feeling. But it's limited and restricted, because once I get that feeling, that's all I'm looking for. To have genuine compassion for people in need is hard, and it's messy, and it's a huge commitment. That's why the proverb says, **even the compassion of the wicked is ultimately cruel**, because if I'm ultimately doing that, in order to somehow advantage myself, I'm actually using, disadvantaging, the most needy among us, to somehow advantage myself, and that is, ultimately, an act of cruelty.

So how do we go about creating at least pockets of flourishing in the environments where God has us? Well, we're going to talk about four practical things, and in this proverb, we were reintroduced to our friend, the know-it-all fool. That's the fool that's just unteachable. I think about the late Dallas Willard, who famously said, "Reality is what you run into when you're wrong." It's just the know-it-all fool, who's unwilling to listen, unwilling to change his ways, but he still ends up running into reality, and makes a mess of his life. So, the first thing that proverb taught us, is *we need to be teachable*. We've talked about this a lot in Proverbs. We need to listen. We need to be teachable. We need to grow.

The second thing we talked about is to, again, *have a Biblical view of work*. It's just such a significant part of our lives. And we need to view it strategically, and how it can impact *shalom* in our community. One of the things that I think is really interesting to think about, is we're going to work in the New Heaven and the New Earth, but work won't be restricted to just what we get paid for. So, think about if you could pursue your passion, which would somehow contribute to the flourishing of others, but you didn't need to get paid for it, so things like art, and music, and beauty, and nature, and creativity. You know, that's the way it will be one day. But for now, we think about, well what is it I do every day for work, and how does that contribute to the flourishing of the community? So, what would that look like for you? When I was younger growing up, I was always involved in sports, and one of the things I remember vividly is, I didn't like sitting on the bench. I don't like sitting there watching the game. I wanted to get on the field and make my contribution. And that's how I view *shalom*. I don't want to sit and watch someone else do it. I want to get on the field, and I want to make my contribution. *So, we need to be teachable, changing and growing, and we need to think about our work, what we do, and why does it matter?* And then we'll continue more of this conversation from Proverbs 12 tomorrow.