

**BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Win the Day!**

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**Message Title: The Meaning of Life Pt. 1**

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Your view of God is going to dramatically affect your view of the Bible. If you have a view of God that's messed up, then maybe you view the Bible as just a book of rules. It's a book of restrictions. It's a book of judgment and condemnation, and because of that, you just don't pick it up and read it, and frankly, if that was my view of the Bible, I wouldn't pick it up and read it either. Who needs more of that? But what if that isn't correct?

When you're lost somewhere, and you pull out your Garmin, or your Google Maps, or whatever you use, and the voice comes on and tells you where to go, how do you react to that? Do you say, "Oh, that is *so* judgmental, so offensive! I wanted to turn right, and it told me to turn left. It's just so judgmental and restrictive." I don't think anybody responds that way. You find the words helpful. You're lost. Especially if you're lost, and you don't know where you're going, and you need to be somewhere, there's this sense of relief. "I need some help here." What if the Bible was more like that? What if it was God saying, "This is the way to find the path of life, which ultimately will give your soul what it's longing for"...what people often refer to as *the meaning of life*? Well, that's what we want to talk about. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Proverbs 13.

As you've picked up, the Proverbs are full of themes. There's a high level of repetition of kind of these big themes. It's really helpful to remember that the Proverbs are not promises; they're proverbs. It's saying, "This is the way it typically is, or normally is," but those themes are developed almost like kind of a building effect throughout the book. So, it says *this* about a theme, but then it goes on and says *more* about the theme, and *more* about the theme. And so basically, you can't just pull a proverb out and turn it into a promise, and say that's what it is, because there's this sense, this is the way it normally is, but because we live in a fallen world, it doesn't always work that way, and there's more to it, and that kind of develops throughout the book of Proverbs.

But there are also some themes that I would suggest are much more subtle. As a matter of fact, they're kind of these subtle themes throughout the Old Testament. One of those is this theme of *desire*, this idea that there's something deep in our souls that desires something, that longs for something not just different, but something more. In the book of Proverbs, for example, that theme is there, but it's harder to track, because the Hebrew word is translated different ways in different proverbs. So, you have a Hebrew word that is used well over fifty times just in the book of Proverbs, over seven hundred fifty times in the whole of the Old Testament, but it's really about the *core desire* of the soul. So sometimes it's translated *appetite*, sometimes *life*, sometimes *soul*, sometimes *desire*, because it's trying to capture this core inner sense, this appetite, this hunger within me for something more, for kind of what people refer to as *the meaning of life*.

What's unique about Chapter 13 is the high level of repetition of that term in this chapter alone. So that's what I want to dial in on in our time together, and I want to start in Verse 12. We're really going to jump around, but the core of the discussion is Verse 12.

**Hope deferred makes the heart sick,  
But desire (and there's our word) fulfilled is a tree of life.** (\*NASB, Proverbs 13:12)

When you have the contrast, then **hope** and **desire** would be basically poetically referring to the same thing. So, let's define the terms a little bit. Hope in the Bible can get confusing. So, for example, in the New Testament, *hope* is not like we use the word hope. It's not like, "I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow." Hope in the New Testament is always something guaranteed, something absolutely sure, but it's yet future, so it's the *hope of the return of Christ*. It's the *hope of The Gospel*. It's *the hope of The Resurrection*. That's not saying, "Well, I sure hope that happens." It's, "I know that will happen, but it's yet to come." In the Old Testament, for example, in this text, hope is much more consistent with how we use the word hope in English. It's kind of this idea of going from something bad to something good, from misfortune to fortune. There's kind of this progression from whatever it is, to something more, to something better.

The idea of **deferred** kind of has the sense in our ears of something that's delayed, but that's not what the word means at all. It's not something delayed; it's something unfulfilled. It's something that's not going to happen; it's never going to happen. So, it's this idea of there's this longing deep within my soul for something more. It's not just a desire for this and that, in everyday life. It's the core soul desire, that seems to drive life at a deep level, but this desire, this hope is never satisfied; it's never fulfilled. I can't figure out what ultimately will satisfy. This is the energy that by and large drives the culture. There's this restlessness. "There's something in me. I'm looking for something that will satisfy, something that gives meaning and purpose to life, and I can't quite figure it out. I know it's there, but I can't find that which satisfies."

So, what happens? The proverb says, "**Hope deferred makes the heart sick.**" Now remember, the heart in the Old Testament is not limited to just emotions. In the ancient world, they had no real concept of the brain and brainwaves and what the brain did. In their world, everything flowed out of the heart. Mind, emotions, will, how I think, how I feel, even physically, it all flowed out of this concept of heart. So, when it says, it **makes the heart sick**, it's saying, it starts to affect the way I think. It starts to affect the way I see reality. It affects my mind. It affects my emotions, and what I feel. It can even begin to have an effect on me physically.

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Now there are lots of studies that would indicate the tremendous power of hope. You read these stories of people in POW camps in Vietnam, or Korea, or World War II, and they had this hope, and it was a powerful force that kept them alive through the most horrific circumstances. It's extremely powerful! But those studies also tell us that when hope is lost, it is absolutely devastating. As a matter of fact, it begins this, what I call a death spiral, that begins to take us down, and it can take us down very quickly. So, I have within me this longing, but I keep trying to satisfy it, and nothing works. I try money; I try stuff; I try pleasure; I try whatever I can think of. It's kind of what drives a lot of addiction—drugs and alcohol and pornography. It's what drives materialism; it's what drives greed; it's what drives a workaholic. It shows up in all kinds of different ways, but there's something within me that's driven, because I can't figure out what satisfies.

But what happens is, eventually I start to get desperate. I go from deep disappointment—I hope - and I'm disappointed again and again and again. You can only hope so many times, and be disappointed so many times, before your “hope-r” starts to wear out, and then there's this sense of desperation. "I don't know what to do." Imagine someone in the ocean drowning. It becomes more and more desperate. There's no moment where that person is thinking about helping someone else, thinking about doing a good deed. They're not thinking about anything but survival. They're going down, and it's getting more and more desperate. That's kind of the idea.

Now think about that in the context of the book of Proverbs that we've talked about. The wicked are described in the book of Proverbs. They're not those that are out doing evil things. They're just simply those that are selfish, those that now are so autonomous. "I've decided to be my own god. I want to define my own truth. I want to define my own morality. I want to define my own path." They're people that now have become so independent, but also so selfish and greedy and self-centered that, "If necessary, I will disadvantage the community to advantage myself." Now imagine as hope is deferred, and there's more disappointment, and there's more desperation, that just becomes more and more true, and now all of a sudden I am in this death spiral, because now I am doing things that are destroying the *shalom*, the flourishing around me. I'm not only messing up myself; I'm messing up the people around me. We've talked about this a lot. You ultimately live in the culture you create. The culture's getting worse, and it's just causing more disappointment, more desperation, so that's kind of this death spiral.

Look at the second half of Verse 2.

**But the desire of the treacherous is violence.** (Vs. 2b)

So, this is our same word **desire**. The **treacherous** in Proverbs is simply talking about those that are unfaithful. This particular proverb, like many of them, is really organized around kind of this metaphor of a father sitting down with his son to talk to him about the meaning of life. “This is the path to travel that will ultimately deliver life.” But what about the son that doesn't want to listen? "I don't want to hear it. I want to be my own god. I want to define my own path. I want to go my own way." The Proverbs refer to that person as the treacherous, the unfaithful. "I don't want to do what you're telling me. I want to go my own way."

So then look again what the proverb is saying. The actual desire of that person—so this would be the person who has **hope deferred**; they can't find what they're looking for on that path—is violence. Now most of the time in the book of Proverbs, it's not really talking about going into the street and shedding blood. While it may lead to that, it's much more about this idea of violence to *shalom*. It's this idea that life is found when there is mutual flourishing, when there is what the Hebrews called *shalom*. We're all in this together, and we've talked a lot about that. But once I become so desperate and so selfish and so self-centered, and all I'm thinking about is myself, and I'll disadvantage whoever I need to, in order to get whatever I think I need, now my actual desire is to do the very things that are unravelling the fabric of *shalom*.

Again, I'm not only destroying myself but the people around me, which is making me more disappointed, which is making me more desperate, and you can see how now, I actually desire the very things that will destroy me and us together, and this is creating this downward death spiral that can be very difficult to get out of. If you've ever looked at people and thought, "I think this person is determined to destroy himself" - you know we say things like, "I wonder when they'll hit bottom," and, "Where's bottom?" and, "Why would they do this?" - none of that makes sense. But the problem is, that this person is now so desperate, so confused, that their heart is so

sick, their thinking is messed up; their feeling is messed up; even physically they are messed up. They're now in this spiral down.

So, Verse 4:

**The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, (Vs. 4a)**

That word **soul** is our word *desire*. Like I said, it's capturing the core desire, and so it's saying, "Now because of this spiral, **the soul of the sluggard craves.**" The sluggard in Proverbs is *the lazy*, but it's also the person that's just given up. "I can't really hope anymore. I'm tired of being disappointed. **Hope deferred makes the heart sick.** I'm just giving up on life." And so, they have these deep cravings, but they'll never be satisfied. They're just rolling over. They're giving up. That's the idea there in Verse [4].

Look at verse 13:

**The one who despises the word will be in debt to it, (Vs. 13a)**

**The word** is a reference to the Scripture, to the Proverbs, the teaching of Proverbs, and the whole of Scripture. The idea is **the one who despises** that, "I don't want to hear it," - now their thinking is so messed up - the one who doesn't want instruction; they don't want to be told what to do. They don't want to be told that they are wrong, so they despise the Word. They see the Word of God as a book just of rules and restrictions and condemnation and judgment, and, "I don't want to hear it." But what the text says, is they end up **in debt to it**, meaning, *you will pay a price*.

The road to life is basically the road that lines up with God's morality. There is an absolute. Therefore, there has to be absolute truth, which leads to moral laws and social laws and spiritual laws, and the essence of life is aligning our beliefs and behaviors with what is true. You can't just decide to believe, and think, and do your own thing, and expect reality to adjust to that. So that's what the proverb is saying. There is a price to be paid when I choose to go my own way, but it's not just me myself that pays the debt. We create the culture that we live in. We all either flourish or go down together.

So, look at what it says in Verse 23. It's a very interesting proverb.

**Abundant food is in the fallow ground of the poor,  
But it is swept away by injustice.**

**The fallow ground** was basically that ground that was left for the poor. It wasn't farmed; it wasn't plowed; it wasn't taken care of. But the poor could have at it, and they could plant their seeds, and they could grow more than enough for the poor to have plenty to live on. So, the question is: then why were there people starving to death? The answer is in the second part of the proverb. Because **it is swept away by injustice**, because selfish people, in it for themselves, take what the poor need to survive, in order to keep it, or sell it to make a profit.

In essence, what this proverb is saying, is that God has created the Earth in such a way, that there is plenty of food for everyone. People look at starving children in the world, and they want to blame God. "If God is so good..." What the proverb is saying, is God has created the Earth in such a way, there is more than enough food for everyone. Then why are there starving children?

Because of injustice, because of wicked, greedy people around the world, who are determined to disadvantage the community to advantage themselves, and these people ultimately take it for themselves, and there is a consequence. The community doesn't flourish; the community suffers.

So, imagine a culture, where people are by and large in that death spiral, where they're going their own way; they are traveling their own path; their hope is deferred. It's one disappointment after another. It becomes more desperate, which means they become more selfish; they become greedier; they become more self-centered. It becomes more the law of the jungle, and everyone's in it for themselves. Now the very thing they desire, is the thing that's going to destroy us all, and it creates this death spiral, that drives the culture deeper and deeper and deeper into its misery.

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I would suggest to you, that everyone has a deep longing within his or her soul, for life the way God intended it to be. And a big part of that, is trying to find meaning in life. So how do you find it? Well, the big question the Bible wrestles with, from Genesis to Revelation, is whether we're going to try to find it our way or God's way.

There's a story that I've often shared with teenagers. It has to do with a dog I used to have by the name of Jacob. Jacob was a golden retriever, and I had got Jacob to the point where he was extremely obedient, to the degree that I could take him anywhere, literally anywhere, and never had a leash. He just always stayed at my side, always did what he was told. And when I'd walk around the neighborhood, I'd walk with Jacob, and we would encounter endless dogs tied to trees, tied to porches, tied to dog houses, in kennels. And they would run, and they would bark, and they would pull on their leashes. And essentially, it looked like all of them wanted what Jacob had. But it was clear they wanted that on their terms. What I mean by that is, as soon as you took the chain off, they were going to run. They wanted freedom, but on their terms; Jacob submitted to me on my terms, and as a result he got all the freedom he wanted. I've shared that with a lot of teenagers, because that's what parenting is all about. I've told the kids, the more you rebel against your parents, the more they're going to tie you to a tree. That's just the way it works.

So one of the core questions that comes up all the way back to Genesis Chapter Three is, will I surrender to God as God, and find life on His path? Or am I going to insist on being my own god, only to be disappointed again and again? It's up to you. But the proverb seems very clear, that *the only path that's going to lead to the tree of life, is God's path*. I pray that's the path you choose to take.