

Consequences

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Date: 09 August 2026

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[0:00] All right, hey, again, welcome to City Grace. My name's Elliot. We are, in fact, in the book of Proverbs. And what we've been doing the last couple of weeks, as you go through Proverbs, there are some really big picture themes and ideas, which is a big part of Proverbs and kind of the quest to gain wisdom.

And that's a big part of it. But Proverbs is also full of a lot of what we might call down-to-earth wisdom. Just phrases that kind of seem to speak into the gritty areas of life and the day-to-day interactions we have.

And once you get past about chapter nine in Proverbs, it kind of takes this turn from these grand pronouncements about wisdom to what, at first glance, seem to be just like groups of pithy sayings that kind of resemble something you might get from a fortune cookie, right?

And if you read it devotionally, that can be a bit of a problem because, you know, you sit down with your Bible and you're like, okay, God, what do you want me to know today from Proverbs chapter 10?

And then you read it and you're like, 74 things. That's what you want me to know this morning is 74 different things that seem to be all over the map because the verses change topic almost verse to verse.

[1:17] But if you keep reading throughout the entire book of Proverbs, what you start to see emerge are a few patterns. So like, again, if you think back to like the fortune cookie anatomy or analogy, if we threw them all out on the table, right, they might look random, but if you started to say, okay, let's start sorting these, you would start grouping them and find out, okay, these 10 kind of talk about the same thing, these 12 kind of talk about the same thing.

And it's no different in Proverbs. As you start to look at them, you start to see there are themes of like, what do you do with your tongue? Does your speech matter? What do you do with your finances?

What about friendships and relationships and marriage? And you can kind of start to see these patterns unfold. And so over the next several weeks, that's what we're gonna kind of do is to try to get again into those sort of gritty areas where it's much more practical wisdom for life.

And so today, we're gonna kind of start looking at an entire subset here. And I think that one of the first things that emerges as you read the book of Proverbs is that it seems like many of them, if not most of them, can be summed up in one simple idea, which is actions have consequences.

You can't really go far in Proverbs without stumbling across that. Like, let's read a few. Proverbs 10, four. A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

[2:50] Not hard to understand, right? If you choose the path of ease and you refuse to get to work, it is likely you will not have any gain in life. Proverbs 10, 12.

Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses. Hatred tends to make things worse. If you move into a situation with hatred, you will likely not get a good outcome.

But if you move into a situation with love, it is a powerful tool for dealing with hard situations.

Proverbs 10, 17. Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof will lead others astray.

Humility and listening to others tends to help you avoid mistakes. It's a way of not having to pay the dumb tax in life, right? You can learn from someone else, but a prideful disposition will not only lead you astray, you will wind up dragging other people into that with you.

Proverbs 11, 25. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered. You reap what you sow.

[4:05] If you refresh others, you will be refreshed. Proverbs 12, 11. Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.

Same thing of diligence. Are you wasting time on worthless things, or are you about the business of things that will bring flourishing and plenty? In Proverbs 15, 1.

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Self-explanatory. See also every podcast where people abandon honest discourse and just start calling each other names.

And you certainly don't have to be a purveyor of scripture to discover some of these realities in life. They're not restricted to those who are Jesus followers.

Like most people in life have encountered themes like, if you choose to take a shortcut now, it might lead to pain later. If you make hard choices now, it might make your life easier later.

[5:08] And so what you might say is, why is this even necessary in scripture? Because I come to scripture to learn something about God, and man, this stuff just kind of seems like common sense.

I was really hoping for something deeper than that. Well, the first thing I would say is, things seem like common sense unless it's something you don't know. Well, everything seems like common sense until it's not, right?

So if you're not from here, you will learn really quickly there are about four or five spots in town where when some nor'easter or other storm comes through, it is going to blow water over the road, right?

And if you are of no experience, you may look at that and go, it's fine. I can go through that in my Honda Civic. You cannot. And anybody that would live here would say, man, what a stupid, foolish thing to do.

But if you don't know, you don't know, right? I, like most people, when I went to college, took out a student loan, right? Because I needed to go to college and I needed money. And it's easy enough to sit back and say, like, why would you do some fool thing like taking out a loan that has this inflating interest rate?

[6:19] Well, it's what you were told to do and just so you know, it wasn't like I didn't know what I was doing. I mean, I studied engineering, right? So it's like, I know physics and I know math and I know like all that stuff.

But you don't know what you don't know until I got out of college and I was like, man, this thing is the devil. I am literally going to put all the money I have at this until it goes away.

Part of what Proverbs wants you to know about the world is very simply, understanding consequences is a part of wisdom. Now, some consequences out there, it's really not complicated. They just need to be understood. It's part of how God made the world that you can seek out and learn how to navigate it. Often quoted and sometimes misused gem from Proverbs 14.4, where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come from the strength of an ox. not as relevant to maybe most of our lives today, but maybe the common, the more today version would be where there are no children, the house is clean. Prior to me having children, the chances of there being marker or crayon on the wall was about zero percent.

[7:38] It was approaching zero. It is a virtual certainty now that things will get messed up. If you want children and you want the blessing of it and you want the legacy of it and you want to join God in what he is doing and filling the earth, man, there is great blessing in it, but you're going to have a dirty house.

If you want the blessing of the work of an oxen, you don't have this nice, clean manger. Oxen do what oxen do. But if you want the crops, you got to have the oxen.

Proverbs 19.4, wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend. Again, feels like common sense unless you don't know it.

If you're rich or famous, you're going to have a lot of friends. And by the way, that's not intended to be a statement of morality and it is not a prescription for how to live your life.

It's really a lot more like your grandpa sitting you down after you've won the lottery or you've just come into a big inheritance to prepare you for all the people who are going to show up on your door now that it's known you're wealthy.

[8:50] And we certainly shouldn't look down on or simply gloss over that God took the trouble to include these types of things in Scripture. Don't despise the simple things.

It tells me that God is not just about grand movements in history. He cares about the details of you living your life. But, the reality of actions having consequences doesn't always tell you what you

might think it does about God.

It might tell you something about life and what happens as you live it, but it doesn't necessarily tell you what you might think it does about God. And I think in fact Scripture and Proverbs shows us at least three misconceptions or misunderstandings about consequences that we have to look out for. The first is this. A seemingly consequence-filled life doesn't inherently imply a lack of God's favor. In Genesis 4 we read the story of two brothers who bring an offering to the Lord that elicits very different responses.

It says, In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of the fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.

[10 : 23] So Cain was very angry and his face fell and the Lord said to Cain why are you angry and why is your face fallen? If you do well will you not be accepted and if you do not well sin is crouching at the door.

Its desire is for you and you must rule over it. The passage doesn't specifically flesh out every detail of why Cain's offer is rejected but the overarching point is really really clear.

Cain did not offer God his best he did wrong and he was told he did wrong and instead of accepting the correction he stewed in it.

He was mad that he got a consequence. And you see this pattern between God and his people Israel repeated over and over. Israel complains God you have abandoned us you are not with us and God is like well let's talk about this molek stuff over here.

Are you not doing evil things? If you want me if you return to me with all your heart I will not cease to be with you and if you just stop doing these evil things the consequences will stop and sometimes they do and sometimes they don't.

[11 : 43] Kind of hearkening back to some of what Kirk showed us last week harsh consequences have a way of bringing about a temporary course correction but if it isn't accompanied by a heart change you will just go right back to where you were.

So now hear me I say this with no smugness no air of superiority because every one of us in here I promise you has at some point in our life pursued a wrong course that wound up costing us more than we wanted it to.

But it is really important if that's you that you don't get stuck there. If there is pain and consequence in your life and it is of your own doing it is actually not wrong to lament that.

You can be sad about the consequences your choices have wrought and you certainly don't have to live in shame. Like there is no value for shame in scripture for the child of God but listen Proverbs tells you you can't be consumed with being a victim of your consequences or your actions.

Having a consequence having a life full of consequences doesn't mean God doesn't love you or isn't for you or isn't trying to bless you.

[13 : 08] sometimes you reap what you sow and even that is a blessing from the Lord. But with that being said you also need to watch out for a second trap here which is a seemingly consequence free life doesn't inherently imply God's blessing either.

In Job 21 we read of a man who protests his condition in life. Job says this why do the wicked live reach old age and grow mighty in power their offspring are established in their presence and their descendants before their eyes their houses are safe from fear and no rod of God falls upon them their bulls breed without fail and their calves do not miscarry they send out their little boys like a flock and their children dance they sing to the tambourine and the lyre and rejoice to the sound of the pipe they spend their days in prosperity and in peace they go down to Sheol the grave they say to God depart from us we do not desire the knowledge of your ways what is the almighty that we should serve him and what profit do we get if we pray to him and behold is there not prosperity in their hand the counsel of the wicked is far from me how often is it that the lamp of the wicked is actually put out that their calamity comes upon them that God distributes pains in his anger that they are straw like straw before the wind and like chaff before a storm now you say

God stores up their iniquity for their children let him pay it out to them that they may know let their own eyes see destruction let them drink the wrath of the almighty for what do they care that their houses after them when the number of their months is cut off will any teach God knowledge seeing that he judges who are on high one dies in full vigor being holy at ease and secure his pails full of milk!

bones moist and another dies in bitterness of soul never having tasted of prosperity now in fairness to Job he's having a rough year I would caution you never to judge somebody by their very worst moment but his protest is common and familiar to us hey those people over there don't seem to care anything about God and they're doing just fine they keep on doing wicked they say to God's face you're nothing you don't exist this is foolishness and the good times keep on rolling even his friends who show up kind of rebuff Job because again they've kind of ingested this idea that no if you do good you get good that's how it works and so their argument appears to be because they can't deny the reality in life either that sometimes it seems like the wicked aren't really getting what they deserve so they come up with well you know maybe he'll pour it out on their children to which Job's response is what good is that going to do let the pain be on them their kids didn't do anything they don't care about something that happens in a future generation and frankly I think we've all seen that someone who we know is a cheat or a liar or an abuser and seems to keep on doing them things and it just seems!

[17:00] to keep coming because they're wealthy or they're attractive or they're powerful or they're just charismatic but it seems like actions have consequences doesn't apply to them Proverbs wants you to know that it is a trap to think you can tell everything about a situation by only looking at the consequences partly because there may be a little bit of like Instagram syndrome here right where you know Job says hey everything's great for them and you might think that you look at a life and it's like man they're just out eating good food every night and posting it online and my life is so hard but you know and I know a lot of those people if you said man your life is fantastic they would say miserable but also because you can never tell in the short term what God is working in the long term you can't tell by the consequences you see right now how the play is going to end maybe made a little closer to home for a church crowd that can actually hold true for a church as well

I mean if you are a people that is faithful and filled with humility and filled with God's spirit and shining the light of the gospel holding out Jesus it wouldn't be shocking for people to be attracted to that Jesus draws people to himself it wouldn't be unexpected that God might give you a little more because you've been faithful with a little but a church can grow really big with a pastor who's doing wicked things in secret a church can have a lot of influence with a culture that abuses people and Jesus can even be gracious and do what he always does save people restore lives in a community that's largely broken and I think that's really important because again many of you in church world know that oftentimes results growth baptisms influences buildings money are held out as this is the stamp of God's approval like if there was wickedness here as you said how would

God do this people are coming to be saved surely there's no way the pastor can be doing anything evil but it's a trap consequences or lack of consequences tell you something but they don't tell you everything so what would it make of that because if you're discerning you're like hey you just told me consequences might tell you something and they might not thanks so does that mean we're just hopelessly blind does any of this matter like how would I move forward in that and thankfully the Proverbs gives us more than a simple lifeline because it teaches us that actions may have consequences but God is still on his throne you know both Christians and non Christians have a version of actions have consequences is all that's really going on in this world for the non Christian it's pretty straightforward it's we see a world of cause and effect it's just simple math it's everything you see looks like it's something detailed but it's just a complex chemical equation playing itself out and we can like look into the future and declare like I know what's going to happen to our son a billion years from now right it's set in stone like these things are going to happen these motions are going to happen if you play that out over time and we may not have all the details but if I could know everything about physics and chemistry I would know how your life was going to go it's just cause and effect Christians have a different version their version looks like this if you just live like the book says you're going to get good things it's going to go well for you or maybe it's cousin if you follow the rules in the book that will make you a good person and God will love you Proverbs has got something else to say about that

Proverbs 16:1 says the plans of the heart belong to a man but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord Proverbs 16:9 the heart of a man plans his way but the Lord establishes his steps Proverbs 19:21 many are the plans in the mind of a man but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand this thought is all throughout scripture what you do matters but God is in control and every time you read that there's going to be a piece of it that confounds you because it doesn't seem like it can be true right and it leads you to this place of okay so God's in control I mean he's going to do whatever

right no the whole of Proverbs is in large part here to remind you play stupid games win stupid prizes but also it wants you to know that cause and effect are not the only players on the board there is will intention in this world we live in that is not bound by the laws of physics and so the big question I think you should ask there is not a philosophic or an academic one I think the question you should ask is okay what is

[23:08] God trying to teach me in that tension what does he want me to know and I think at the very least you could derive this from it the person who wants to be wise must necessarily live a life of both faith and action how do I know when I really need to act when it's all going to go sideways and how do I know when to release it that this is just something that is the will of God you know I can't really prove this so this isn't gospel but I do feel like in a lot of ways we really aren't creatures that are made for the digital age and what I mean by that is your mind your body your soul is not meant to see and consume all of the problems in the world that you see every day you are not made to handle the weight of all the pain and all the sorrow and all the brokenness and when you look out over it you rightly think nothing can be done no one can fix all that and yes your shoulders are not broad enough to bear that

God never intended you to take up all of that you could rightly say not every problem in the world is one that God has given you to solve but there are things and all of us know this there are problems you're going to run into that maybe not every problem is mine to solve but this one if I don't step into it nobody will this is my burden to bear how do you find that line you walk daily with the Lord that actually works for understanding scripture as well how do I know we just read verses that seem to say consequences have actions but it's not the whole show like I see that all throughout scripture how do I know which verse to apply because in point of fact it does seem like everybody in this world has a verse to justify their way of thinking or their political persuasion or more often than not just what they want to do here's what I want to do here's the verse that supports it how do I know what to do the one who is wise attends their heart to scripture and also walks daily with the Lord it's a whole of life community study prayer and you do it over and over and over so that the texture of your body and your soul is shaped so that it is in tune with what the spirit wants to do that's what we mean by being a disciple it's a person who trusts God who doesn't look out at all the unbearable things in the world and say we're doomed but also a person who acts who isn't resigned to see suffering and do nothing about it it's a person who reads the Bible and then puts it into practice who sits with other people to understand it and then moves out in faith it's a person who teaches other people that actions do have consequences but also a person when they see wicked flourishing doesn't despair because they know that's not the whole play they know there's still a judge and I don't have to the whole world is not mine to fix and I believe it's really important for a follower of Jesus to live in that place because if you want to be like Jesus if you really want to be his disciple there is one other thing that you're going to need to do when it comes to consequences and that's don't let the reality of consequences shut the door to mercy it is really important and Proverbs wants you to know that it's important that actions have consequences it is important to teach it to your children it is important to learn it from those in front of you and then to turn around and mentor and give it to those behind you but oddly enough you get what you deserve isn't the primary message of the Bible because at the center of this entire grand narrative from Genesis to Revelation is an act that specifically saves you from the consequences of your actions the key message of the gospel is not you get your just desserts the thing that defines the core of the gospel is mercy in Luke 6 verse 32

Jesus says if you love those who love you what benefit is that to you for even sinners love those who love them and if you do good to those who do good to you what benefit is that to you even sinners do the same and if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive back what credit is that to you even sinners lend to other sinners and expect to get back the same amount but love your enemies and do good and lend and expect nothing in return and your reward will be great and you will be sons of the most high for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil be merciful even as your father is merciful it is worth asking why Jesus would ask us to act like that why would he ask us to act in a way that seems to make us enablers of bad behavior

I mean if they don't feel the consequences of their actions how will they ever repent the bible very clearly tells you here's what you've earned the wages of sin is death the consequence that every one of us has earned deserves is destruction that would be what actions have consequences look like taken to its full extent all of us separated forever and just like if you owe a debt God just can't

forgive it in the sense of God can forgive it and no one pays I mean if you think about it if someone owes you money or has stolen money from you and can't pay it back you can forgive the debt you can say I forgive you but what that just means is you paid for it

[30:19] Bible teaches that the weight of the consequence of all sin is the same and even if you feel like can't you just say you're forgiven I would say even you know that's intrinsically not true when someone is killed or raped or betrayed or abused it is not justice it would not be justice to simply say you know it's totally fine you're forgiven go about your business forgiveness that's not how forgiveness works when you forgive you absorb the consequence and the very heart of the gospel is us not paying the consequence it is God coming to earth as a man and saying I will pay it I will pay the debt there is a consequence and I will take it and so Proverbs is proven true and also not the most true thing actions do have consequences but the sacrifice of Jesus matters more and what that drives us to is it means as followers of Jesus our ultimate hope for everyone around us shouldn't ultimately be that they get what's coming to them and by the way that applies to both the large and the familiar that applies to how you feel when you see someone online or on

TV and they are saying destructive or mean things or they are talking about tearing down the things that are most precious to you and you just want to see them get it it also applies to the co-worker who you know is trying to tear you down so they can be built up to the family member who's just mean and causes division doesn't mean that those things don't hurt or that evil doesn't matter but hear me your hope as a follower of Jesus can't be man I hope they really get what they deserve one day they may consequences have actions they may get what their hands have wrought but my hope is that they don't not what they deserve but what they don't deserve Jesus took what I deserved so that I get what I didn't deserve and it should be that that is our hope that they get the same gift that

God bought for us God give us the grace to live like that amen as the band comes up a few ways we can respond today if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus again I don't think I have to tell you that life does have consequences you don't have to live long to figure that out what the Bible is trying to point us to is that that matters in an ultimate sense as well like there is a consequence to saying God I don't want you and I want to be my own God but that doesn't have to be your fate we we come to church and we sing things that seem strange like Jesus paid it all and we sing that because it's exactly what we mean we want you to know that the reason we gather as a church isn't to tell you hey you better straighten up and fly right or you're going to find out the reason we come together is because we want you to know as someone once told us that the consequences of sins are great but the love of Jesus is greater that's the only gift we have to give and if you want it it can be yours today there'll be a prayer on the screen that might be a way you can express that or if you want to come up and talk to me or someone in the prayer team afterward we'd love to do that if you are a follower of Jesus these are just good moments to kind of take stock just to ask the spirit like the spirit's conviction again is never a bad thing it's just a an opportunity to say

I'm going to walk a different way today maybe you've fallen in those traps of either just stewing over your consequences like you're just trapped in the fact that my life's bad and I feel bad about it maybe you've fallen in the trap of saying following Jesus doesn't mean anything because the wicked still flourish or maybe you've just fallen in this trap of sort of subtly in the back of your mind man I hope they get what's coming to them man that's a wicked thing they said I hope they find out you're never going to find out because Jesus paid it all it's a good morning to ask him for that heart and then for those who are followers Jesus we have this moment of communion once you've taken some time with him you can come to the table take that back and partake of it again it's it's such a powerful symbol right it's a reminder now my body my blood should have been yours but it wasn't Jesus doesn't say that to lord it over you he says it to draw you back in over and over again to that fellowship of the spirit we will never be separated because I paid it all father we give you this moment holy spirit I pray you will do in the hearts of people what only you can do God help us somehow to have the heart that Jesus did to come into a world that spit at him and hated him and put him on a cross and yet look out and say I forgive them my greatest desire is to see them restored to the father God somehow help us to have that heart I ask in Jesus name you you you you you you