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**My son, do not lose sight of these – keep sound wisdom and discretion, and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck. Then you will walk on your way securely, and your foot will not stumble. If you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden terror or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes, for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught. Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.**

**Do not say to your neighbour, “Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it” – when you have it with you. Do not plan evil against your neighbour, who dwells trustingly beside you. Do not contend with a man for no reason, when he has done you no harm. Do not envy a man of violence and do not choose any of his ways, for the devious person is an abomination to the LORD, but the upright are in his confidence. The LORD’s curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous. Toward the scorers he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favour. The wise will inherit honour, but fools get disgrace.**

**(Proverbs 3:21–35)**

## Introduction

Having seen some of the promises that attend the wisdom of trusting God (vv. 1–12), and having observed what should be the norm for every Christian – blessedness, happiness (vv. 13–20) – we now complete our study of Proverbs 3 with a look at more benefits that attend the life of wisdom; blessings that accompany the life lived within the boundaries of God’s rules (vv. 21–35).

Again, this should be the desire of every parent for their child; it should be the desire for every child of God. This is what our Father wants for us.

## The Connection

We have noted that vv. 19–20 may serve as a hinge. According to exegetical experts, this is the case, for the “these” of v. 21 most likely refers to the wisdom, understanding and knowledge of God mentioned in vv. 19–20.

In other words, “My son, do not lose sight of God’s wisdom, understanding and knowledge. Rather, hang on to these that you might exercise sound judgement and discretion as you make your way through life. As you do so, you will be godly and lots of good will flow from this. In fact, this godliness will grace your life as a beautiful necklace graces the one wearing

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it. My son, wear wisdom well.” In New Testament language, put on Christ. Live what you are; live out your graciously given identity.

## Wearing Wisdom

We must keep before us that wisdom speaks ultimately of Jesus Christ. Brady helpfully comments, “To hold on to ‘sound judgment and discernment’ is to hold on to faith in Christ, the true wisdom and insight that comes from God alone.” In the words of the apostle, we are to put on Christ and keep him on. And when we do, we will manifest his graciously attractive qualities. In our text, there are at least eight qualities that we will manifest if we cling to “sound wisdom and discernment.”

## Bold and Beautiful

First, like Jesus, we will be bold and beautiful: “My son, do not lose sight of these – keep sound wisdom and discretion, and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck. Then you will walk on your way securely, and your foot will not stumble” (vv. 21–23).

As noted, if we seek to preserve, by guarding, divinely given wisdom (vv. 1314), we will live a life that is attractive – an adornment for your neck. It will promote a life of beauty, a life increasingly like that of our Lord. We will be resourceful, able to fruitfully face the predicaments of life. We will beautifully and boldly walk in in the way.

But it will also provide us with boldness *as* we walk in in the way. We will walk “securely” and “not stumble” – concepts that speak of boldness. Wisdom produces boldness. As Longman says, “Wise behavior creates a safe environment, which breeds confidence.”

Another proverb states, “The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion” (28:1). The boldness of which we are speaking is not belligerence (remember, it is beautiful), but confident trust – like Jesus in the face of opposition, like Paul in the face of suffering. It is what Peter meant when he wrote, “In your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

## Safe and Sound

Second, like Jesus, we will be safe and sound: “If you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet” (v. 24). This verse reminds us of Jesus in Mark 4:35–41: asleep at the foot of the boat while the disciples were panicking in the storm. Because he walked in wisdom, and trusted his Father, he was able to sleep soundly while others panicked.

David knew what it was to sleep sweetly even as he fled from his son Absalom (Psalm 3:1–5). And in Psalm 4, he wrote, “In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety” (v. 8). Peter slept in prison and required an angelic nudge in the ribs to wake him up (Acts 12). Daniel found himself repeatedly safe as he honoured God by defying a godless king – as did his three friends.

“It’s all a matter of confidence, not in self, weapons and security systems, *but in the Lord, who laid the earth’s foundations*” (Lane).

## Confident and Composed

Third, like Jesus, we will be confident and composed: “Do not be afraid of sudden terror or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes, for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught” (vv. 25–26).

The word translated “ruin” literally speaks of a storm. Not only can we feel safe and secure in our bed, but we can be confident and composed in the wider world – in all the storms of life. This perhaps refers to our experience of living in a world that is under the wrath of God (Romans 1:18ff).

We can live confidently in the face of tribulations because Christ has overcome the world (John 16:33). Peter had the promise of Jesus that he had prayed for him not to fail in the face of adversity (Luke 22:32), and we can face our trials with the same confidence. After all, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Jesus faced his oppressors with great confidence (see John 18:1–9), and if we wear wisdom well, we can be confident that God is on our side. With this confidence, we can, when faced with trials, bear them well.

## Honourable and Helpful

Fourth, like Jesus, we will be honourable and helpful: “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbour, ‘Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it’ – when you have it with you” (vv. 27–28).

From this point, the father provides a series of “do nots.” This, of course, is as important in biblically effective parenting as is “do this.” Though, in one sense, these are negatives, if viewed properly, they are very much positives as well. We see this clearly in all of these “do nots” (vv. 27–35). And, as we will see, each of these has to do with our relationship with our neighbours – both “good” and “bad” neighbours.

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In the first set, the father instructs the son that the person who wears wisdom well will treat his neighbour in a way that is both honourable and helpful. We can expand this and say that the wise person is caring and compassionate.

The word “due” in v. 27 could be translated “owner.” In other words, the wise person handles the property of their neighbour with integrity.

How do you handle the things that you borrow from others: books, tools, appliances, dishes, etc.? Do you pay fair and timeous wages to those you employ? Do you pay taxes (Romans 13:6–8a). (Remember, Jesus paid taxes!) What about your tithes? Have you considered that, if you do not give as God requires, the needs of others – missionaries, ministries, the needy in the church – will go unmet?

Verse 28 carries the thought of v. 27 further. And it may even be saying that the person who wears wisdom well will be caring and compassionate. “We disprove our claim to faith by ungenerosity as much as by dishonesty” (Lane). If someone is in need, meet it. Jesus did so.

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

(1 John 3:16–18)

## Trustworthy and Trusted

Fifth, like Jesus, we will be trustworthy and trusted: “Do not plan evil against your neighbour, who dwells trustingly beside you” (v. 29).

The person who wears wisdom well will not take advantage of others. Rather, they will give of themselves that their neighbours might be safe and sound (v. 24). Newheiser observes, “People who live together in a community need to be able to trust one another. We ought to be careful to pursue the good of our neighbours.”

Ross says, “Malice is a crime; it ruins community.” The person who wears wisdom well will guard others, rather than seeking to destroy them. They will be a place of refuge, not a person who ruins.

How do you handle confidences? Are you two-faced? (If so, repent!) How do you handle friendships with those more prosperous than you? In fact, is this the only kind of friendship you seek? Be a giver, not a taker – just like Jesus. “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

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## Peaceful and Peaceable

Sixth, like Jesus, we will be peaceful and peaceable: “Do not contend with a man for no reason, when he has done you no harm” (v. 30).

The person who wears wisdom well, who manifests the wisdom of Jesus, is not quarrelsome. She does not look for a fight. She is careful about social media! The reason is because, like Jesus, she is secure. And people who are secure in their Father have no need to win. They have already won!

Paul urged us, inasmuch as is possible, to live peaceably with everyone (Romans 12:18). Think carefully before assuming that someone has done you wrong. Be sure that you are not carrying a chip on your shoulder. It will get knocked off – probably by you!

Unhappy people are often prone to quarrel. So, be happy in the Lord (vv. 13, 18). Learn from the Hippocratic oath and “do no harm.”

## Contented and a Confidante

Seventh, like Jesus, we will be contented and a confidante: “Do not envy a man of violence and do not choose any of his ways, for the devious person is an abomination to the LORD, but the upright are in his confidence” (vv. 31–32).

Like Abraham, the person who wears wisdom well will be a friend of God (James 2:23). We face the temptation to be envious of those who seem to be better off – even those who reject God. Perhaps especially those who reject God. Longman notes, “This proverb recognizes that there is a surface attraction to those who use power to get that they want.”

The wise person will be taken into God’s council. He will have a close relationship with the Lord. “As an upright person you have something far better than power over others; you have an intimate relationship with the ruler of the universe, who takes you into his confidence” (Lane). You are in his inner circle.

Paul told Timothy that “godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6). Jesus had little but was content. And he was the wisest person who ever lived. Note his deep relationship with the Lord. Follow in his steps. Seek God’s approval, not his abhorrence. Apply this in the workplace, in the halls of education, as you read the news, and as you are tempted to idolise godless athletes and celebrities.

## Blessed and a Blessing

Eighth, and finally, like Jesus, we will be blessed and a blessing: “The LORD’s curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous. Toward the scorners

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he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favour. The wise will inherit honour, but fools get disgrace" (vv. 33–35).

In these closing verses, we come upon one (v. 34) that is quoted twice in the New Testament (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). The teaching is clear: If we want God's grace, favour or blessing on our lives and on our homes then we must get wisdom – put it on and wear it well.

The father may be preparing his son for the day when he will establish his own home. If it will be blessed (v. 33), he needs to be righteous – not necessarily materially, but in ways that matter far more. In other words, if his home will be a blessing, he needs God's blessing of a right relationship with him. Your home can be an oasis, if it is godly. But you must start early to have a godly home. Wear wisdom well. Put on Christ Jesus the Lord!

## Conclusion

Jesus was a blessing because he had God's favour. He humbled himself and was honoured. We celebrate this in a special way at Easter time. Paul wrote succinctly and powerfully of this:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

(Philippians 2:5–11)

The gospel is the ultimate display of God's wisdom. Believe it and wear it well. When you live in the power of the gospel of God you will be bold and beautiful, safe and sound, confident and a confidante, honourable and helpful, trustworthy and trusted, peaceful and peaceable, content and a confidante, and blessed to be a blessing.

AMEN