

## I. The Value of Wisdom and Understanding

If you have your Bibles, let's go back to Proverbs chapter 3. That is where we have been working our way through this chapter, and it has been some great stuff. I told you when we started Proverbs that we were going to take our time and do it the way we needed to do it and lay it out in a fashion that you would get everything out of it, not only for you here but for future reference so that people will have the ability to grasp some things out of the Word of God.

Last week, we started at chapter 3 and looked at verses 13 through 20. In particular, we saw wisdom and understanding pictured in the Bible as silver and fine gold. We know now that this represents for us the aspect of God's wisdom through His redemption, the silver, and in His deity, the fact that He came down and died for you and for me. We talked about the aspect of the true riches, which are really found in Luke 16:11, versus the false counterfeit that we call fool's gold today that the world offers.

We have been talking about the aspect of merchandise and how to use that word and why God uses it to illustrate it. We talked about it Thursday night, and I think it has been incredible how the questions on Thursday night have all stemmed from something that we have said on Sunday before, but they all lead into where we are going and really help redefine things even better and then bring it on through to today.

We looked at the concept of the word merchandise, how we take the things that God gave us. We talked about how when you got saved, God gave you a measure of faith and a measure of grace, and then you take that and you invest them. Throughout your life, you do something with those two things. I gave you one of the single greatest principles that you find in the Bible anywhere, and it is certainly a great one in life because it literally will make you or break you: everything in life is a trade-off.

If God's people could just get that one simple little concept squared away in their mind, if your children could get that concept or you could get it to them, if you could get it, if I could get it across to this church or any pastor to any church, that everything in life is a trade-off, and everything we do, we simply will give up one thing for another. You simply cannot have, in the biblical sense, you certainly cannot have God and the world other than in your own mind. There are a lot of people that in their mind they think they can. But you always trade one for the other, and you certainly cannot have both.

*Amos 3:3 is a great verse that says,*

*Amos 3:3*

*Can two walk together, except they be agreed?*

Of course, the answer to that is you cannot. You take your life and you invest it one way or the other. I gave you a great story in Luke chapter 19 about the guys that the Lord gave a pound to,

and then He goes away, and they are supposed to invest that pound and bring a return. When He comes back, one guy brought back tenfold, one guy brought back five, the other guy did nothing with it. I showed you how that is a great picture in a spiritual sense of what God has given to us. He has always given us the same thing. Nobody gets more of God the moment you get saved than somebody else does, but it is what you do with it from that point on.

Now we know and understand that the greatest result of getting God's wisdom and understanding is that it gives us the ability to make good trades, good choices. It gives us the ability to look in life and see something when God is in it or when He is not, and that is really the key. The thing that will always get us in trouble is taking areas of our life and investing them in something that God has nothing to do with. The ability of having wisdom and understanding is the great result of having that ability to see when something is of God and when it is not.

## II. Counterfeiting and Deception

I have told you this many, many times, and most of you probably understand this: the devil's main attack today will always have been twofold. He counterfeits, and then he deceives. There can be no deception in somebody's life unless somebody counterfeits something, and the reason why people counterfeit something is so they can pull off a deception. The two go hand in hand. By these two, he will take an unsaved man, and by counterfeiting and deception, he will damn that man's soul to hell. But he will take God's people, and through the same two aspects, he will take in their life a counterfeit and a deception, and he will bring them back to a neutral status where they never really accomplish all that God has for them. Then, through the deception and the counterfeit, they will make bad choices. They will make bad decisions, they will make bad investments, and their life is virtually over as far as doing anything for God. That is why it is so important.

Having God's wisdom and understanding will always be what you use to make your investments by, to make your trades in life. I told you last week, a lot of things out there look good and they sound good, but when you take the Word of God and you look at those things, circumstances, people, and you X-ray them through the Word of God, the principles of God, that gives you the ability to see it for what it really is.

Now we make investments. God has given you something, and you are to invest that, and yet God gives you the ability to have the inside to know if this is a good investment or not. In the stock market world, that is called insider trading. It is called somebody getting some secret knowledge about a stock or a company. Somebody within the company calls them up and says, "Hey, we are going to do this, and the stock is going to go up; you need to buy it; you are going to make a lot of money." Or somebody calls somebody and says, "You need to dump whatever stock you have because we are going to do this, and you are going to lose your shirt." Remember the Martha Stewart situation? That is what she was accused of doing. She insider traded. Somebody on the inside told her to sell her stock or will tell somebody to buy some stock. In the real world, that is illegal; it is against the law. But in the Christian world, it is standing operational procedure for God. That is what God does. God wants to protect us in our investments. God wants to protect us, so He gives us insider information. He allows us to see

things the way they really are, not as they appear. He allows us to see circumstances without any deception and look through it.

Counterfeit and deception, if you want to take it in a practical sense for those of you people who work with people, you know that is the same thing you see in people's lives when they stop wanting to do what is right with God. The first thing they will do is put up a counterfeit. They will still come to church, they will still talk about God, they will still counterfeit it. But it is all for a deception because deep down inside, they are not the same person they were with God that they once were. Where once they loved the Word of God, the Word of God does not mean as much to them anymore. Where once they always were about getting all that God had, now something else has taken its place. Most people just do not have the wherewithal to simply say, "I am done." They always play it out in a counterfeit, and that counterfeit then leads to the next step that the devil always does, and that is a deception. The deception comes in because they have an ulterior motive in what they do.

The goofy thing about it is the thing that really never ceases to amaze me. I have been in scenarios like that all my life. I have seen people do that to me, other pastors, and religious scenarios all around my life. It has always been an amazement to me how they do not understand the biblical principle. You can fake a lot of things in life, folks. You can fake a lot of things in life, but you cannot fake being spiritual and loving God when you do not. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 8:3,

*1 Corinthians 8:3*

*But if any man love God, the same is known of him.*

I have always thought cameramen at weddings were the funniest thing to ever see. Every wedding I have ever done, the cameraman, he will come up and he will say, "Hi, I am the photographer, where would you like me to take your pictures?" I just tell them, "Take them wherever you want." Some pastors are very inclusive. They think that the little area up there where you are all at is holy, and you cannot get into that. I say, "Go wherever you want. Their wedding, they are paying for you to get some good pictures, just do not get in my face and block what I am doing or shoot your flashbulb off my eye so I cannot see what I am doing. Take whatever you want."

But I have watched photographers, and it is the most hilarious thing in the world. There are 150 people at the wedding, okay? And the photographer is standing down there taking pictures, and they get them from the back, they get them from all angles, but when it really starts, the photographer gets his camera, and now he tiptoes. Tiptoeing makes you invisible. That is his mindset. I want to say, "Hold on a minute, walk right." But the illusion is if he tiptoes, you cannot see him. Is not that the goofiest thing you ever saw? Well, the only thing goofier than that is the child of God who is using all the things when he is not where he used to be anymore, and he is using counterfeit and deception, and yet he is still pretending he loves God. He is just as apparent as the tiptoeing photographer. There are some things in life about God you cannot hide.

The thing that changes immediately is your spirit. The Bible says that my spirit bears witness with your spirit. There is the problem. You can say, you know, somebody is always happy and bubbly, and then something changes, and you go up and you say, "Oh boy, it is a beautiful morning," and they look back and you say, "Hi, how do I blankety-blank?" You know what kind of good morning it is. Something is wrong. But that is, we have insider training to make our good investments.

### III. The Virtuous Woman and the Word of God

Right now, we are in the introduction to the book. But we have talked about the virtuous woman. We saw that. How she is the end result of where we all want to get. As we come through the book of Proverbs, I laid out the whole program for you, the first part, the second part, but it is the final part. I do not know how you like to read books. I always like to read the last chapter first. I can tell if the rest of the book is exciting or not by the last chapter. Many times I have thought about, I would love to preach Proverbs 31 first before we ever do the rest of the book. It is not exciting to me. Of course, I am not going to do that, but I really would like to do that because the virtuous woman in chapter 31 is the end result of where we all should be trying to get to. Everything else in the book is just a means to an end. The means to an end is that we end up like the virtuous woman in Proverbs chapter 31. Right now, we are in the introduction of it. We are getting the basics down of how to have a working relationship with God. We will build it as we go.

Now let us go back to the same text we were in last week, and we will read it again, but we are going to focus on starting with verse 16 in our study today. But to put it all in context, let us pick it up in verse 13.

*Proverbs 3:13-20*

*13 Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.*

*14 For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.*

*15 She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.*

*16 Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour.*

*17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.*

*18 She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.*

*19 The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens.*

*20 By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.*

Now Father, help us to understand the great importance of what we are going to talk about today. Lord, we have kind of beat around the bush here for the last couple of weeks talking about wisdom and understanding, and yet today we come down and see the fundamental concept that really we all have to understand today. In a lot of ways, we will go no farther with You. We will go no farther in our relationship in the book of Proverbs if we do not grasp the concept that we are going to talk about today. So help us, Lord. We come to You as a needy people. We thank You for the good folks in this church, and I love them very much. Lord, we just ask You now to bless us and give us all that we need. In Jesus' name, for His sake, we ask it. Amen.

The last time we ended at verse 15, and today we are going to look at verse 16. Here is what it says: "Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour." Now we are about to see probably one of the single greatest tremendous truths found anywhere in the Word of God in your own personal walk and building your relationship with God. It is the reason or the underlying reason why here at our church our total emphasis is on the Bible.

Most of you do not have much association with other churches. You know, you got saved out of the world, and probably many of you, this is the only church that you have ever been really associated with. Some of you have come from other Baptist churches. But if you would investigate a little bit, and if some of you were at one time from a Presbyterian church, you go to the Presbyterian church, you will find that the pulpit is on the side. They have a pulpit on this side and a pulpit on that side. When you go to the Lutheran church, you will find the same thing. When you go to an Episcopalian church or a Church of England or the church, you will find it is the same thing. Most people never think about it. Most people never, never, ever give it much thought. But when you go to a Baptist church, and this is true in every Baptist church, the problem is they do not understand why they do it. But if you go to a Baptist church, you will find that the pulpit is always in the middle.

Now there is a reason for that. It is a reason that goes back so far that most Baptist churches today whose brain cells died a long time ago do not ever understand why they do it. But the reason why the pulpit is in the middle is because Baptists traditionally never wanted to be associated with those other groups. They wanted everybody to know that the pulpit is in the middle because the center of that church has to be around the preaching of the Word of God. That is why it is there. In this church, I make no apology for it. I have no other goal in my mind. I have no other goal in my life. I have no other goal than to make sure that every Sunday and every Thursday, or when you come over to talk with me, or anytime that we are in the Bible together, that you get the truth of God's Word. You may not like what you hear, but it will be the truth what you need to hear. It will be the scriptures. You may like it, you may hate it, but it will be the truth.

You have to understand something. I want you to listen to me for a few moments here. Of all the investments, we talk about making investments of who you marry, and the investment with your kids, and the investment that you put into ministry, and all of that. It is all crucial, making good investments, making good choices. I understand all that. But of all the investments that you make in your life, the single greatest investment, and this is what we are going to talk about today in

verse 16, the single greatest investment of your life will be in the Word of God that God has given you. It will be the greatest single investment of your life.

The Bible has many things on many different levels. But the greatest attribute of the Word of God and you making an investment of your life in that book will simply be the preserving hand of God in your life. It will be the preserving hand of God for any country. I have taken you back many, many times in different aspects of history and showed you how because a country honored the Word of God, they believed it. Now there is no such thing as Christian nations. You understand that. There are only nations who believe God and believe His Word. But that does not make them a Christian nation. There has never been a Christian nation. Israel was not a Christian nation. Israel was a monarchy based on God as their king. Christianity today, there will be no Christian nations because the kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom. But there will be nations who believe the Bible is what it was. Our nation was that when it was founded. When a nation takes that position, you are going to find, as we see in our own nation up to about a hundred years ago, the hand of God preserving that nation.

You see it in families. The greatest investment of you making the Word of God, the investment of your life, the preserving hand of God in your family is unbelievable. It will be true in your own individual life. It will be true of churches. No matter what you do, whatever God calls you to do in your life, when the single greatest investment of your life becomes the Word of God, when the single greatest thing that you invest your life in and you put and make the right decisions about is you learning the Word of God and getting the Word of God, the greatest single attribute that comes out of that after salvation and all this stuff, the greatest single thing that comes out of it is the bottom line is that God's hand of preservation. You must understand that. You must grasp that.

#### IV. Personal Testimony of Contentment

Now I cannot speak for any of you on what I am about to say. I only speak for me, and I would not presume to speak for you. So I want you to understand very carefully what I am saying. I am 63 years old. I love the little girl at the Hy-Vee last night when I went there to get something to eat because they have a senior citizen discount, and she made me show my ID to prove I was a senior citizen. I love that girl. I want to bring her home and adopt her. Most places just take it for granted. They just give it to me. I do not want it. But she said, "Are you a senior citizen?" And I said, "Yes, I am." She said, "Well, I am going to have to check your ID." I love that. But I am 63 years old. I do not know if that makes me a senior citizen or not. I am a citizen, and I do not feel very senior.

I have had my issues in life just like everybody else has. I am no different than you. Sometimes people look at a pastor and they think, "Well, he is above everything else." No, that is not true. I am human just like you are. I have struggles just like you do. I have made my mistakes in life just like you have. That is why I will never look down at anybody. I told them in people ministry yesterday, I never judge a man by his successes in life. I never do. I never judge a man by his successes. I always judge the measure of a man by how many times he has fallen down and still

gets up. To me, that is the measure of a man. But I am no different than you. I am just like everybody else.

I was saved when I got right with God when I was 20 years old. Most of you did about the same thing. I started to do what was right. So did you. God put a man in my life just like God put me in many of your lives. I got married when I was around 25 or so, just like some of you have done. God called me and gave me a book. At that point in time, God says, "Bob, here is your pound." It is that simple. God called me into the ministry. I do not deserve to be in the ministry. I do not deserve it any more than any of you deserve it. But He called me into the ministry. He gave it to me. I have made my share of mistakes in ministry. I mean, I get up here and preach on things that other people do and things like that and lay out things. But hey, I have made my share of mistakes in the ministry just like anybody else. I have always tried to learn from my mistakes and the dumb things that I have done and tried to better myself. But I am no different than you. I had kids and raised a family. In every way, I am just like you.

But I must tell you something. At 63 years of age, having been down this road for a while now, I want to tell you, I am the most happy, fulfilled, content person that you will ever meet on this planet. I will never let nothing get to me long term. We all do not like surprises in life, and we all get sucker punched every once in a while. That is not going to, it is how you respond to that. God has given me in my life, in spite of me, in spite of my stupidity, He has honestly given me the desires of my heart. I am totally satisfied and content. There is nothing in the world that I want. Nothing that I need. Nothing that I aspire to have. You are looking at the guy who is the most content person on this planet.

A couple of reasons why, first of all, let me walk through these here with you.

1. God has given me as a man, the greatest church on the planet. If somebody called me up tomorrow and offered me a church of 2,000 people or 500 people and said, "We will give you a salary of \$100,000 a week," and give you all this and give you all that, you could not entice me away from this place for all the money and all the people in the world. Because I am content. Most pastors use churches as a ladder of success of stepping up and going higher. I have never been into that game. I recognize what I have here. I recognize, you see, some of you do not look at it that way. I look at it that way. I look at the big picture. I look at every one of you as unique that God has brought in. You all have different backgrounds. You all have different personalities. You all do not like to do the same thing. You do not like to eat the same thing. You do not like the same movies. You do not like the same this. You do not like the same that. You are not about that. God has given me the best church on the planet.
2. He has given me the best people. The majority of which the people God has brought in here, they understand what we are trying to do. They understand what my heart is in the ministry. Those people have invested their life and their families in this church just as I have and my family has. Now I say that. I fully understand. You always have people in any church that make absolutely no investment. We talked to one of them a couple of weeks ago. They will take everything, but they never give anything back. They never get any ministry. They never care about what goes on. It does not matter where you would go. If somebody said, "Bob, you need to take a church of a thousand." One of the main reasons why I would not do that is

because you would have a whole different higher level of people who do not want to do anything. You never get away from it. There is no perfect church. There is no perfect pastor. There is no perfect Christian. I gave up looking for a perfect church and being a perfect pastor and looking for perfect Christians 25, 30 years ago. I decided just to find a real one. That is all I am concerned about. I have some real people. I really do. I try to be a real pastor. I really do. People do not always like what I have to do or like what I have to say. But you know what? They did not like what Paul had to say either. Sometime he got so frustrated and he says, "Why do you make me your enemy just because I tell you the truth?" That is just the way it has to be.

You are always going to have people in any church that make absolutely no investment. They are in and then they are out. Sometimes they are in and out. They are in and out. They are in and out. There is no real investment. There is no real commitment because there is no real investment. How many times in the course of my 45 years have some tragedy in their life? A death, a sickness, a divorce. They are in the hospital with some terribly sick disease. Oh, how they need you then. But after the storm is over, they just look and get a better deal. Now, I never focus on that. Some of you do. The reason why you do is because you are not content.

I have got to point to all this. So just allow me to, you do not have to get so stoic this morning. I mean, you can smile, and you know, if I think of a good joke right now, I will tell you one, but I missed Joel Osteen this morning, so I did not get a chance to get one. I never focus on that. Some of you do. I never do. There will always be people in any church that will never make any investment in anything but themselves. But you see, I know what God has given me here. I can see what God is doing here and the impact this church has and continues to have. I understand that God will preserve and take care of this church for one reason. It is one reason only. It is not the pastor. It is not the fact that you are good people. There is only one reason that the preserving hand of God will take care of this church no matter who likes it and who does not. It is the book. If you do not leave here with any other thing today, leave here with this: God honors His Word. When you make this book the number one investment in your life above all other investments, the preserving hand of God will take care of you because God will always honor His Word.

Now I have got to tell you something else. Verse 16 says, "Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour." I am the most content person and satisfied man you will ever find on this planet. I thank God for the family God has given me. I really do. I cannot speak for you this morning. I am not trying to speak for you this morning. I am trying to make my point here. The Word of God has preserved my hand. Hey, I have been in ministries all down my life and seen churches all my life where the pastor's kids were like the black as a side of the bottomless pit. Most of them, these pastors I have been associated with down through my years, their kids do not go to church anywhere. They are out of church. They saw the phoniness of what their dad was doing. Maybe they could not see it at the time, but they look back on it. They want nothing to do with it. Most of those pastors never believed this book one day in their life. The difference is simply in your family is when you make the investment of this book, number one in your life, God preserves your family.

My family is not perfect. I have had to kick them in the rear end more than once. I am not perfect. They have had to kick me in the rear end more than once. But I am telling you, when you make the investment. We have had our issues in our family just like any other family. We are no different. People tend to think, "Well, Bob's family is without any..." No, we are not. We are not. We are not at all. We have had our struggles. We have had our issues. Next time you come over to the house, come on in. I will show you the hole I kicked in the bathroom door about 35 years ago. I never fixed the door, so I always remember what an ass I was that day. You say, "Well, I do not like the word ass." Stick around. You are going to like it less before I get through this morning. God will preserve your family.

Now those of you who know me, you know one thing about me, whether it is good or it is bad. There is one thing about me. I never do anything halfway. I am either all in or I am all out. I never have to... I have seen some people when they have been out and buy a car. It took them nine weeks just to decide if they should buy it or not. Not me. I see it. Buy it. I am in or I am out. Nah, I do not like it. I like it. I have always been that way in my life. For me, when it came to the book, when I got the book, the book was everything. I am in. I am in. I cannot speak for you this morning. I believe this book more than I believe anything else on planet earth this morning. For me, I got to the place where in this world nothing could compare with the book that God gave me. I could go home to heaven tomorrow and be the happiest man alive.

I thank God for the really good close friends that God has given me. You know, I tell you all the time that there are not very many people you can trust in life, and that is a true statement. Some of you know that by being burned. That is a true statement. But I have got to tell you, if friends are money, I am the richest man in the world today. Because I do have friends that I know I can trust. I think that I have got more than most pastors ever had in their life. I do not believe that just because of my shining, wonderful, dogmatic personality, though it probably has a lot to do with it. It is because of a book that God gave us. It is because you love it as much as I do. It is because you put up with me and my stupidity because of the book, much like I put up with your stupidity because of the book. But at the end of the day, there is a spirit, there is a common ground that pulls us together that not only preserves your family and preserves our church, but preserves our friendship. I am thankful for those things. But I am not foolish in my thankfulness. I know those things go back because of a book that God gave me. The quicker you learn that, the quicker and the better off you are going to be.

I tell my young couples and I tell you, there is no greater blessing and comfort or satisfying feeling in the world than your family ministering by your side. Right now, I see many of you getting that concept down with your kids, many of you. I am telling you, God will always honor His word. But I want you to know, just because you are trying to do that, do not get discouraged if your kids are like wild Indians sometimes. Preservation never means problem free. I do not know where we got the idea that we thought if a guy is really a Christian or really a Christian family, that the kids would just grow up perfect. A lot of them do, but a lot of them do not. A lot of them have struggles. You never judge one family by another family. You always look beyond that and see what the real attitude is toward, hey, I look at that book.

I told you, I guess it was Thursday night. I told you, when God preserved this book, God preserved this book through some of the most tumultuous times on this planet earth. It went through the dark ages. It went through the persecution of the church. They hated it. They made it a capital offense for a Christian to have this book. They killed them by the hundreds of thousands, by the millions. They tried to stamp out this book. God just did not preserve His book and put it down here, and then the Bible just walked its way through life with everybody loving it. That was the most horrendous time on the history of this world, all because God's preservation never means problem free. You will have some problems in life. I have had problems in life. It is how you come out of those problems that make the difference. That is the difference.

## V. Ministry Focus: Building People, Not Buildings

Now, I am thankful for what the people, for God putting me in the ministry. I do not know anything else I do better than what I do. I thank God every day of my life for putting me in the ministry. I know I do not deserve it. I know I do not belong to be here. I know that God obviously saw something in me that I never saw in myself, but I am thankful for what God has given me in my love for people. My life is people. My life is people. Because the ministry is people. My goal in life is not to build a big building, obviously. You all are sitting right now where one time 1932 Ford and Studebakers were parked. You are leaning up against the wall where somebody's antique mall was. I am not interested in cathedrals. I am not interested in building big buildings to the monument of man. I am interested in building people to the glory of God. You do not need a building to do that. All you need is a book to do that.

I am thankful that God allowed me to see that. I do not know why He did. I do not know why I got it and nobody's the next guy did not. I do not know why they were not in a 60 million dollar building program. I am squeezing you every dime because I am telling you that we build a big building better than the building up here and better than First Baptist and better than this one and better than that one and better than this one. People will come to us because we are bigger than better. You know what happens? Somebody else just builds one bigger than better. So then you have got to put on an addition to be bigger and better than the other bigger and better. I thank God God saved me from that. I do not know why He did, but I am thankful today. I am thankful God did not give me a big building. God gave me a really big book.

I think the success of ministry, and I say this to you, I think the success of ministry is to stay focused on your task of building people. That has always been my goal. I have never had any other goal. There will always be issues that the devil will bring in to get you off task. It does not matter if you are pastoring a church or you are trying to be disciplined, you are trying to be in a people ministry, you are just trying to do what is right. The devil will always bring things to get you off task. This is why I have told you, and this is the basic fundamental reason why I can tell you, I never take anything personal. I never do. My family takes things much more personal for me than I do. My friends do sometimes, but I do not. You see, after 45 years of seeing all this stuff, you pretty much have seen it all. I would hope that somewhere along the line, just by rubbing shoulders with the Word of God a few times, that some wisdom and understanding

would brush off on me. But after 45 years and seeing what I have seen, there are not a lot of surprises left. I have learned that it is never what man is doing, it is always what God is doing.

Some of God's people get pulled off task so easily. Every little shudder of wind, every little issue, you just fold up and blow away and lose your focus off task. I have learned that that comes in as there is a value in that. I told you Thursday night, I think it was in Judges 3:1, Israel just comes through the great battles in Joshua. They are fighting nations on the northern flank and the southern flank, they are struggling all through to fight through this thing. Finally, when they break out and they get over to Jordan, and now they are in the land that God promised them, they are in the Judges, and they are starting to set up the monarchy that God wanted them to have, and they are getting them solidified, there it is in chapter 3 verse 1, God clearly tells you that He did not take away all the nations, did He? It says that He left some other nations around that they would have to fight. The reason why He did that, He tells you in the verse, because He wanted to prove Israel by these nations.

There is never going to be a time in your life you do not have to deal with some issue. Never going to be a time in your life you do not have to deal with some struggle. There is never going to be a time in your life when somebody is not going to hurt you or talk about you or say something about you or some situation, you know what? God leaves those things in your life to prove you. He will let your job get a little shaky. He will let your relationships get a little shaky. He will put somebody in your life that will rattle your cage. You know why He does that? He does that to see if you are going to cut or run or you are going to stay with the stuff. He proved you by it. It is just that simple.

Some of you develop attitudes toward the other Christians. Yeah, you do. You harbor resentment. You get angry at them. Sometimes it even goes into hatred in your hearts toward them. I understand. Some of you, if you are not careful, you get bitter toward them. Bitterness is a terrible thing. Bitterness is a lot like you drinking poison and thinking it is going to kill your enemy. Did you get that one? I understand. I am glad God did not really reveal to me the aspect of ministry till way after I was in it over my head because if I had seen all this thing, I am not sure I would have got in it just for being weak and being afraid. But I understand. I watch some of you try to help people. I understand. I have watched some of you help people through a time of need. I have watched you take their tragedy and make it your tragedy. I have watched you invest your life with them. I have watched you go through some great tragedy unfolding in their lives. Here you are today, and somewhere along the line when they got feeling better, they just threw you under the bus, did not they? If you are not careful, it pulls you off task.

Let me ask you a question. Who are you working for? Who are you doing this for? You are doing it for yourself? Is it for your honor and glory or for God's honor and glory? Who are you working for? Why would you take something like that and when it unfolds in your life and let it pull you off task? I remember back there in 1 Samuel in chapter 8 when Samuel is all excited because of the fact that he tells Israel that God is going to give him a king. They flat rejected. They say, "We do not want a king that God gives us. We want to be like all the other nations." He says, "Hey, you are not supposed to be like all the other nations." They said, "We do not care. Give us a king that we want, and we do not want the one you have got." Well, how many times have somebody

dumped on you like that? So Samuel, he is human. He might be a prophet of God, but the same red blood runs through his veins, runs through ours. He got discouraged. He is moping around in his house over there, and God comes down and He says, "Well, what are you moping about?" He says, "Well," he says, "You know what? I went to them, and I gave them the truth, and I have been through all kinds of things with them, and I have tried to help them, and I have been there in their need, and when they whine and complain, I always help them, and I went down there and told them about a father king that You wanted to give them, and they just flat rejected me, and I am just upset about it." He says, "Well, you sniveling snot punk. What are you? They did not reject you. They rejected Me." Sometimes if you are not careful and make this book the number one investment in your life, the rejection of God, you take it like as a rejection of you. I am not going through life that way. That is all God has given me, man. What a life.

You see, I expect you to lie to me. It is okay. I expect you to try to deceive me. Go behind my back. I expect you to use me and this church to take from us and then walk out the door. It does not bother me because it is not my church. It is His church. It is His ministry. I do not take it personal.

*Psalms 119:165*

*Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.*

Some of you develop bad attitudes toward those people. I do not have that luxury. I do not have the luxury to develop a bad attitude about those kinds of people, and really neither do you. That will definitely sidetrack you and get you off your assigned task, and that is exactly what the devil designed it to do. But all this is not about me or you. This is not your work or my work, or even though we are responsible for it. This is not your church or my church, even though I am the pastor and here it is. We pay the bills. But it is God's. If you think for a moment I will let some snot-nosed, whiny, baby, self-centered Christian take that book and what I have, the joy, the happiness, the contentment from me because you are an idiot. Listen, folks. I cannot speak for you. I am speaking for me. I got it. I really do. After what God took for me on the cross and all the abuse that He took, the lies that He had to sustain, the ridicule that was dumped on Him, the harshness, the betrayal, the deceit, all of His friends forsaking Him that He went there and did that for me. When I understand all of that and I realize it is not about me and it is not about you, but it is about the truth that God has given us to preach, I do not take it personal. I count it as an honor and a privilege to be used and abused for His cause by God's people.

Hebrews 13 says that you and I are to bear His reproach and the shame without the camp. I do not know what to tell you. God's people will be, wherever you go, whatever you do, you are not going to change it. It is set in stone. It is the way it is. They get it to Him, and they will do it to you. But did He ever lose His focus? All the way to the end He went, all the way to the cross, and in the midst of everybody doing what they did to Him, saying about Him, He never lost sight, and His statement is, "I am about My Father's business." It was never with Him about who did what to Him or who said what about Him or who forsook Him, and they all did. He had 12 apostles who were the closest at Him of anybody, 12 apostles. One of them was a rank betrayal. One of them was a satanic implant that had by design to betray Him. Did it work? Where did he

wind up versus where God shone the one He wanted to betray wound up. All the rest of them, His apostles, the inner three, Peter, he is there with a beer in one hand cussing Him out at the fire. "I had not been part of that blankety-blank guy." James running off naked down the road when they tried to catch him. All the rest of them forsook Him when they saw that His back was against the wall, when they saw what was going to happen to them that was going to happen to Him, every one of them left Him, every one of them, every one of them except John. One out of 12. Now, when after the resurrection, when they all got better again, did He have a grudge against them? Did He develop a bad attitude because they forsook Him in His hour of need after all that He had done for them? Did He really? You see, it is the book, folks. When you make your investment in that book in your life, then all that matters is what you get done for Him, not what people do to you.

But I understand. Zechariah 13:6, what a great prophetic chapter that is. It is a prophetic chapter of somebody coming up and asking the Lord a question. In Zechariah 13:6, somebody comes up and says, "What are these wounds in thy hands?" And He says, "These are the wounds I received in the house of My friends." Your friends wounding you is always tougher than the world wounding you. You give your life to, you go through great trials with great tragedy, some death, something that you walk them through, and they turn around and they throw you under the bus. Those are the worst kind in the world. If you do not have your anchor holding in that book, it is going to pull you off task. It is going to pull you off task.

Now, I am no fool. I take all that I just said and go right back to the source of it all. God honors His Word. Never losing your goal, never losing your purpose, never losing your perspective, never letting people who do not do right pull you off task. It is that book. Now, all your investment in one single book. You see, in the world when you make investments, they want you to diversify. Diversify means that you do not put all your money in one stock. You spread it around so one stock goes down, you still make some money or you do not lose it all. When it comes to Christianity, you have got to diversify. You put it all in this book. This is all you have got. The wisdom, which is silver redemption, the understanding, which is gold, God's knowledge and the ability to see it as it really is, not as it appears by the counterfeit and the deception. The source of, and I cannot speak for you this morning, the source of my contentment and satisfaction in the midst of this putrid Christianity, and all the games that go on, is simply a book that God gave me that I had the sense enough, and thank God for it, in my stupidity to make it the number one investment in my life. I stand before you this morning, no matter what happens, no matter what, no matter it does not matter to me, I will never get pulled off task because I will never let those things get inside because you will never take what God gave me no matter what you do to me. The Word of God, it is better than all the things of this world that you can compare it to. When you make that investment in the Word of God in your life, the preserving hand of God will be in every aspect and everything that you do.

You see, pastors make a fatal mistake. They put their trust in people. People make a fatal mistake. They put their trust in a pastor. When the truth of the matter is we put our trust in the Word of God. We do not build our relationships around the Word of God. We build our relationship through the Word of God, and those are the ones that last. But you have got to have

one to do that. The source of your peace, the source of your rest, the source of your contentment and happiness will simply be what God has given you from that relationship that you have with Him through His Word, not people. Nothing else will ever matter. People will come and go. They always have. They always will. People will come and go. But the book stays. That is the key. Those who love the book will stay. Those who do not care about it will not stay. It is okay.

## VI. The Open Bible: Source of Preservation and Peace

Now, I say all that based on what I am about to say in verse 16. That is my personal take on the Bible and ministry. Again, I cannot speak for you, but I wanted to give you an understanding where I come from before I show you the real source of it because this is a great verse. Now I say in verse 16 it says, "Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour." Now, you know what that is? Do you know what you have got there? That is your open Bible. That is you holding your Bible open with your right hand and your left hand because there is the truth. There is everything that you need. That is why this church will always preach the Bible. The ones that love it will stay. The ones who do not love it will leave. Life is so simple. Your open Bible in your lap, clasped by your right hand and your left hand, will be the single source of God's preserving hand through wisdom and understanding. He says in your left hand and your right hand, "Length of days in your right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour."

I told you when I laid out Proverbs 2:10-11, another great verse, it says,

*Proverbs 2:10-11*

*10 When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul;*

*11 Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee:*

When you love that book above all else, then it says discretion shall preserve thee and understanding shall keep thee in your left hand and in your right hand. It is how you open up that book and hold it when you read it. It is the only way God gives you the truth that is in His Word. This is where the rest, the peace, the contentment, the joy, the fulfillment comes from everything in life, from a book that is bigger and better than anything or any person on this planet. Make your investment there, and you will have length of days. You will have the fulfillment of God's plan in your life, the unbroken chain in your family of ministry. You will have in your other hand riches and honor, the contentment of God in your life and all the sufficiency in all things, the true riches, not the fool's gold.

Now look at verse 17, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." We as God's people should solve problems, not cause problems. That is just a mark of spiritual maturity. There will always be issues that come up in any scenario, situation. People and understanding based on the relationship with the Bible will always seek to resolve those problems, not inflame them, not keep them going.

*Romans 12:18*

*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*

Now he says, "if it be possible," that is a great statement in that verse because if you have been around very long in dealing with people in the ministry, sometimes that is not possible. There will be occasions when somebody wants a problem not to be fixed. You will come across that. There will be occasions when somebody wants a problem to stay a problem. They do not want it to get fixed. The reason why they do not want it to get fixed is so they need to have a reason, you see, to justify their deception and their counterfeit. They have to have a reason to justify what they really want to do. Now you know and I know, and I do not think it is any great revelation to anybody today, there is always a biblical process to solve every issue. Would you not agree? Then why do not we do it? You see, when a, this is 101, when a person will not do that, when a person will not use the Bible and what they know to solve a problem, then there is always a counterfeit and a deception behind that. The reason is simple. I have seen people pretend there was an issue when there never was an issue. All my life I have had people make up trumped-up problems that were never there. The reason why they had those problems, wanted to make those up, is because they used that as the tipping point of what they really wanted to do. "Well, I am not going to be there anymore because of this." When you investigate it, this was not even an error. All my life I have found dishonest people, Christians. You say you think there are different, dishonest, unsaved people? I do not know. I cannot wade through all the dishonest Christians to get to them. I have seen them lie about an issue that was never really there. I mean there is an issue when there really is not an issue. It is because of the fact that we have got to have a problem. You find a Christian, if it is anybody sitting in this room, anybody you meet in life, you find a Christian who says, "Here is an issue," but they will not solve that issue, you have got a deception going. There is something wrong because there is a clear biblical process, and I did not see anybody's name excluding them from it. It has to work for me, has to work for you.

Now what he is saying is a simple rule to follow here with people and situations. He says you live it peacefully with all men the best you can. You do the best you can, but you will find in some situations that you cannot. So just make sure that you do biblically what is right even if they do not. If you get used into practice, if you get abused into practice, praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. You see, my job as your job, there is no difference between us. I am not a pastor, and because I am, I have to do all the principles, and you are not a pastor, so you can pick and choose the ones you want to do. My job is to do what is right. Your job is to do what is right. It is God's job to deal with them. It is God's job to figure out where they are at because if you do not, it will pull you off task because you will develop a bad attitude every time.

There have been times in my life, and there will be times in yours, when you have helped people through the toughest times in their life, some tragic times in their life. At some point later on down the line when they get feeling better and the crisis is over, you know, they just get a better deal. In those cases, you just let it go. You look back and you know that you did what God wanted you to do. You do not focus on the fact that they hosed you. You do not focus on the fact that you put out all this energy, and they just stuck you in the eye with a sharp stick. You do not go there. You simply do not take it personal. You simply realize that they did it to Him. They are going to do it to you, and count and wear it as a badge of honor that you are bearing His reproach. Just always make sure you are able to look back and say, "I did everything I should have done."

## VII. The Tree of Life and God's Power

Look at verse 18. "She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her." Now you will remember that the "her" here is wisdom and understanding. Now it is likened to the tree of life. In the Bible, the tree of life is a great study. It is found in Genesis chapter 3 and again in Revelation chapter 22. You will note verse 18 does not say that you will be a tree of life. You have got to read it correctly. But rather the wisdom and understanding you get will be the tree of life. In Revelation chapter 22, when you begin to lay it out and study it, and we are not going to do that this morning, that is not our purpose, but just to give you a short synopsis of it, in Revelation chapter 22, you will find the tree of life bearing 12 manner of fruit. If you read a little bit on there, it will tell you that that fruit is used at that particular point in the healing of the nations after the destruction of the second coming of Christ. Now we know that that is the doctrinal application, but there is a spiritual application to it.

When you get God's wisdom and understanding, when I get God's wisdom and understanding, and you get that silver and gold, and that silver and gold begins to bear fruit, that fruit of the Holy Spirit of God that God gives you and the wisdom and the understanding God gives you will be for the healing of people. It will be for the healing of problems. It will be for the healing of issues. The greatest aspect that you do not have the wisdom and understanding is not taking the fruit of that and helping heal scenarios. You just continue to hurt them. You fan the fire. You keep it going. You will not do what biblically you need to do to put an end to it. You have a deception, and you have a counterfeit going, and the truth cannot be anywhere within a hundred miles proximity of it for you to pull it off. That is how you effectively minister. You get into the book. You make it the number one thing in your life. You invest everything you have and everything you are in the book that God gave you. That is your main investment. You do not diversify. You put everything you have got in the book. You put everything in that book, and that book becomes the source of everything in your life. God gives you His wisdom. God gives you His understanding. Now the wisdom and understanding is like that tree of life, and as the tree of life bore twelve manners of fruit that heal the nations, you bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit of God that heal people. Situations, circumstances, issues. The mark of a true mature child of God is someone who understands that. The mark of a true mature child of God is someone that does that every day of their life. I do not hold myself to any standard any higher than I hold you. We do not have the luxury not to do what is right. We who claim to believe the Bible and claim to love the Bible, we do not have the luxury to do whatever we want to do. We do not have the luxury to develop bad attitudes toward people. We do not have the luxury to write them off. They may write us off, and they may do everything despicable and just take everything you have got and everything and throw you under the bus so fast you do not want to hit you. You know what? That is between them and God. You do what you are supposed to do as a child of God and keep your emotions out of it.

Now he says, "She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her." I have read a few commentaries on Proverbs in that particular verse, and a lot of people want to take and use that. You can lose your salvation. You take the thing there that you make sure you retain it. Of course, any third grader can realize that the retaining here has nothing

to do with salvation. The retaining here has to do with wisdom and understanding. But I do not want to ruin her day. What he is saying here is this, "Happy is every one that retaineth her." When you get wisdom and understanding, keep it. Do not trade it for anything. Do not trade it for anything. When you get it and you begin to get the Bible down, do not let some bozo come into your life and trade you out of it. Do not let some girl trade you out of it. Do not let some rotten snotty-nosed Christian that has got an attitude toward God and the Word of God pull you aside and pull you off task and let them trade you out of it. Smarter than the problem. Smarter than the problem. Use the principles involved to see what you are dealing with. Let the X-ray machine like the airport when you go through, find out if they have got any bombs on them or contraband. When you really get it, this new life and the wisdom and understanding that it brings, it will only lead to the completeness, the happiness, the contentment of a life based on the promises that God gave you. Do not trade it away. Do not let anything, anybody, if you are going to get into ministry, if you are going to work with people, it will be the number one source of thing you have got to fight all your life because people, you will get your emotions involved. They will not do what is right. You will feel betrayed. You will feel hurt. The next thing you know, you are just like they are. You are off task. You cannot go there.

Now what follows in verse 19 and 20 is a passage on the power of God you get when you get wisdom and understanding. I think this is pretty neat here. He says, "The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew." Now there are two great things here. First, if you want to get the inside on God's creation, and we are not going to get into this a lot today, but it is not our point, but if you want to get to the inside on God's creation, then you get His wisdom and understanding on it. A key book for that will be Job, not Genesis. You see, Genesis may be the first book in your Bible, but Job is the oldest book in your Bible. Job is going to have all the details and all the understanding and all the wisdom about God's creation. Moses wrote Genesis probably way, way, way, way, way, way, way, way, way, way, way after the fact, probably about 2500 B.C. But Job wrote, Job was written around Genesis 18 or 19, way before Moses was ever born. So you are going to get it. You are going to get it in Job.

Now the second thing, this is my point, this is the best yet. This passage on creation illustrates how powerful God's wisdom and God's understanding really is. I know you do not know it today. Some of you may. It is hard to comprehend, I agree. But you have inside you today in that book that you have invested your life with when you do invest it to get God's wisdom and understanding, you have the exact same power that God has had when He created everything in Genesis 1:2. Now if you have the wisdom and the power that God had to create everything in Genesis 1, why cannot you get past your little problems today? Boy, this is a stark point here.

*Psalms 33:6-9*

*6 By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.*

*7 He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses.*

*8 Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.*

*9 For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.*

God, when He created it all, literally spoke the universe into existence with the same Word of God that you hold in your left hand and your right hand today. The power of His Word. Is that awesome?

*John 1:1*

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

Now one little verse in Job here that shows you this, and I think probably in a great magazine, Job chapter 38. Job 38:1-7 is creation morning. It says,

*Job 38:1-7*

*1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,*

*2 Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?*

*3 Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.*

*4 Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.*

*5 Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?*

*6 Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;*

*7 When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?*

What a day that must have been. What an incredible creation morning that must have been. The power of Almighty God, the Word of God, speaking the universes into existence, and yet that same power is in you and me to do all that God wants you to do. You know the great untapped resources that we have in us through the power of the Word of God living in us.

## VIII. Transformed Power and Avoiding Dependency

I have been in the Bible way too long. I look at everything and try to find some spiritual application to it, and fortunately, most times I find it. I have always been intrigued with telephone poles, wooden telephone poles. They are always in the shape of a cross, and there is tremendous power on that pole. I do not drive down the street that I do not see the old-fashioned wooden telephone poles, I do not think about power on a pole. Now you probably already know this, but you do not run a line off your telephone pole, power on a pole, into your house. If you did that and ran it straight in and then turned everything on in your fuse box, your house would explode and blow up and burn to the ground because that raw power off there is too much for your appliances and everything in life to hold. If you look in your backyard, you will probably find one of those little green boxes, or if you do not have one of those, you will go down to where the nearest pole is where the line is coming in, you will find one of those big old round things. They are called transformers, and what a transformer does is take raw power off the pole and transform it into workable power in your house. In a Christian sense, that raw power of God

that is in you right now the day you got saved, that has to go through a transformer, and that is the transformer of Jesus Christ. In your life, you take God's power off the pole in the raw, and it gets transformed in you and through you that you can accomplish all things for Him.

*Romans 12:1-2*

*1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

*2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

You see, God takes that raw power that God created all with, and when you build a relationship with the Word of God and Jesus Christ, then He transforms that power from the raw power, puts it into your body and your ability then to do it just like it runs everything in your house, it will run everything in your life to do what God wants you to do. It is just that simple.

One more thing, and I am done. In America, we have an energy crisis. In some parts of this country, gas is almost five dollars a gallon. It has been almost four dollars here at times. It goes up and down based on the market and what a barrel of oil costs. In America, we have made a tragic mistake, I think. I have written the president several times and never got an answer. He does not listen to me. But we have made a terrible mistake by developing a dependency on foreign oil because our foreign oil we get for the most part is from countries who like our money but hate us. One of the great weapons that they have to use against us, they just have not played the card yet, is to simply shut off our oil. That is why we have a fleet out in the Persian Gulf. That is why we protect the Suez Canal because not only is it a waterway that all kinds of shipping go through, but it is a waterway where we get our oil from. But we do not do that. And yet when you look at the facts, America has more underground oil on this continent offshore than all the Middle East nations combined. But because of bad government, because of liberals in the government, tree huggers, and the deceptive motives, we will not use what we have, but we become dependent on foreign oil, and sooner or later when push comes to shove with Israel, it will mark it down. It will be to our destruction.

Yet I see and ask the question, why do so many of you who have the power of Almighty God's Holy Spirit right under the surface, why do you allow yourself to be dependent on foreign oil? Why do you allow the things of this world to be your dependence? Why do not you just dig and cultivate right where you are at? You have everything you need to be everything God wants you to be and to accomplish everything that God wants you to accomplish. But we as God's people will never tap into it and will become dependent on other things just like America and her oil crisis will be dependent on other nations, and in both cases, it will lead to your destruction. It is the book, my friend. It is the book. It is the Word of God. God always honors His Word at the end of the day when all the alibis and all the excuses and all the blame games have been played. The Word of God is what will always separate the real from the phony. It is the wisdom of God and the understanding of God through the building of an investment in a relationship with the greatest book this world has ever seen. This book here has riches and honor in your left hand and glory in your right hand. This open book will be the source of everything that you need the rest

of your life. I cannot speak for you today. You can only speak for me. I believe what it is. I believe what it is, and when you put it into your life, the preserving hand of God will come down and preserve every facet of your life, your family, our ministry, this church, and what we have here. People come and go. The book stays, and it is so easy to get sidetracked with this and with that and lose sight of the fact that it never really matters. All that matters today is only one thing. It is not really who is here and who is not because that was their own conscious choice. The only thing that matters today is we have the book. Everything else will take care of itself. Every head bowed and every eye closed.