

Better a Little With the Fear of the Lord

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[0:00] Please turn with me in your Bibles to Proverbs 15. We live in a society, in a world that does its very best to make us think! That if we don't have the biggest and best, the latest, the newest, the newest, the most stylish, the most powerful, the most long-lasting, the most head-turning things, then we aren't really living.

It's a materialistic world that we live in. And when a world has been conditioned to think that way and to live that way, even if it means living beyond their means, spending money that they don't have, then a financial and economic crisis that's serious and looms large and causes fear, it seems even worse than it is.

If you're thinking the way the world wants you to think, oh no, we might not be able to have the biggest and baddest and latest and newest and fastest and most expensive things anymore. Oh no, the things that we do have, we might have to sell or they might be taken away from us. That's the sort of world that we live in. But what does it profit a man to gain great treasure and the highest standard of living and the best toys and yet forfeit his relationship with God and with other people?

I hope that you haven't bought into the spirit of the age that says you have to have things to be happy. And I hope that that in turn lessens the impact of the current troubled economic times.

[1:37] You've lived within your means. You can continue to do that. You focus on the things that really matter. But if you have bought into the marketing and the lie that says you have to have much in order to be happy, this economic downturn becomes much more devastating to you.

You see the commercials and you think, I have to have that. While you're watching the news that says you can't have that because your dollar is not worth as much as it used to be and you don't have as many of them as you used to have.

And there are other things that you have to spend them on. To be told that you must have something, but there's no way to have it is a devastating thing. So I hope you haven't bought into that mindset. I hope most of all, though, that we have a biblical mindset.

Not just the absence of a worldly one, but the presence of a biblical mindset towards this view of the world that says we have to have things. I'm beginning to learn this with my children.

That you can't just say, don't do this. Stop doing this. You have to tell them what they should have done instead of what they did. You have to show them what they should be doing and not just what they shouldn't do.

[2:48] It's not just don't do that. Stop it. Don't talk to your brother or your mother that way. You have to tell them what they should have said to their brother or mother. Now go and say it to them. Not just do not.

There's also do. And so I don't want to just say today, don't be materialistic. Don't buy into the world's view of money and things. I want to tell you from Scripture what our attitude should be towards great wealth and all that it can buy.

And what you should pursue instead of these things. And Proverbs helps us with that. Proverbs 15. Notice verses 16 and 17 with me. Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred.

The biblical viewpoint is that we don't need all of those things to be happy. We don't need great wealth. And so if we can have those things, that's fine, but it's not a big deal.

We have something far better. And so you can ignore both the commercials that are telling you need the things and the news that tells you you can't have them. All of the gloom and doom. We don't have to be troubled by either.

[4:05] You see, there are some things that are worth having. There are some things that are worth pursuing. Like the fear of the Lord. Love. A right relationship with God and a right relationship with men. And there are some things that are not worth pursuing.

Like great wealth or a fattened calf. Which is the great things that wealth can buy. And so that's what we want to see today. There are some things worth pursuing. And there are some things that are not.

And so what's worth pursuing? The first is the fear of the Lord. Better is a little with the fear of the Lord. The first of these things has to do with our relationship with God.

And we talk often about the fear of the Lord, but what is it? Well, it's the fear of judgment for violating the law of the Lord that we fear. It's reverential worship and awe for the Lord that we love and adore.

Someone who's marked by the fear of the Lord loves and keeps God's law. They guard their speech. They do good. They turn from evil. They seek peace. They remember that God's eye is on them.

[5:09] They follow His precepts. They receive His discipline. If they fear the Lord, you'll hate evil rather than envying sinners if you fear the Lord.

It's the beginning of wisdom and knowledge. And it comes with great benefits. You say, well, this says better a little with the fear of the Lord.

And so, is the little the great benefit that I get from fearing the Lord? Well, maybe. It's what God says you need that's the little. We'll talk about the little in a moment. But some of the benefits of fearing the Lord.

In Scripture, it can add length to your life sometimes. The one who fears God has a secure fortress, a refuge, a protection, is enabled to avoid evil. It can lead to life, honor, and even sometimes, the Proverbs tell us, to wealth.

Though that's not what's in view in our verse here. Jesus delights in those who fear the Lord. Fear of the Lord is the key to real treasure. Some people say, if I pursue everything the world has to offer, all the treasure, then that's not compatible with the fear of the Lord.

[6:15] That's right. The fear of the Lord is true treasure. Listen to Isaiah 33 and verse 6. He, and it's talking about the Lord, will be the sure foundation for your times.

A rich store of gold, silver, money? No. A rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge.

The fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure. If you want real treasure, salvation, wisdom, knowledge, the key to that is the fear of the Lord. Isaiah 33, 6.

That's the real treasure, and the way to have it is through fearing God. And the danger of neglecting the fear of the Lord? Well, that's the way that leads to death. It's to not acknowledge God and to incur His wrath and judgment.

Proverbs 16, verse 8 puts it in terms of righteousness and injustice. Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice. To fear God, to be walking in step with Him, to be keeping His commands, to be obeying Him, might seem to the world like the height of folly.

[7:19] You could have so much more instead of putting yourself under these strict rules that limit your freedom, that take away it. You're crazy to cast your lot with those people. No, to fear God is to be in the right, to be in the most secure place you can be.

It's righteousness itself. To turn your back on God would be the foolish thing. To pursue injustice. If you're fearing God, you're trusting Christ.

Your sins are forgiven. Eternal life is your eternal treasure that never fades. That's something that's worth pursuing. You go out and you ask anybody that doesn't believe in Christ, that doesn't believe God's Word, what's worth having in this world?

The first thing they say, I guarantee you, will not be the fear of the Lord. But Proverbs says, that's better than everything the world has to offer in comparison. If your relationship with God isn't right, all the things the world offers won't satisfy you.

If you don't have the fear of the Lord, you're a poor person. You see, God made the world. And everyone in it. And if you're not right with the Maker, then you won't be right with everyone else around you.

[8:27] You're going to have problems with everyone that He's made and everything that He's made. And so, maybe you'll have all these riches, but you'll have strife and turmoil and trouble to go with them. So better to pursue the fear of the Lord.

Also, and that's the right relationship with God. Also, better to pursue love. In verse 17, better a meal of vegetables where there is love. A good relationship with others, with the people all around you.

There's something I talk about with the high schoolers when we go through a class on relationships. If your relationship to God isn't right, then your relationship with everybody else isn't going to be right either. This is the most important one.

And so this one is right. These ones won't be. But if you're pursuing the fear of the Lord, and this person over here is pursuing the fear of the Lord, you've got the same goal. You've got a common bond. You're pursuing the same thing.

And so your desires and their desires won't conflict. They'll be the same. The goal is to fear the Lord. And we both share that. And that will enable you to love one another rightly. Better to have love than all sorts of prosperity with hatred.

[9:28] What a sad thing it would be to be the most wealthy person in the world and not have any friends to share it with. To have alienated your family because your home was one full of strife and turmoil.

To have no one with which to share your joys and sorrows. No one to bear your burdens with you. No family. No friend. It's true that money cannot buy you happiness. So better just a little.

Better even a dish of vegetables than great wealth. A fattened calf to eat. Seems that some of the most unsatisfied, sad families are those with the most money.

Sometimes it doesn't have to be that way. But often it is. And some of the most joyful, loving families are those with the least. They don't have to buy their kids happiness with toys and things. The man doesn't have to buy his wife's happiness with a new piece of diamond jewelry for every anniversary event.

Now there's nothing wrong with buying your children toys. Or buying a diamond for your wife.

Gentlemen. But if that's where you're hoping to get your happiness, and if you think that will make them love you, then you're missing it.

[10:38] It's better to have none of these things. And rather to make sure the foundation of your family relationships is the fear of the Lord and true love for one another. Same with your friendships.

I hope you don't base your friendships on what you can get out of them. What's that person going to be able to do for me? I got lots of money. Maybe they'll give me some stuff. Maybe they'll let me use their whatever, their Xbox, or I don't know.

I hope your friendship is based on more than things and what your friends have. That it's based on the fear of God and love. It's far better than the alternative of strife and hatred.

Now, these things, pursuing the fear of the Lord and love, might not leave you with very much in the world's eyes. Like the wise man says, better a little. Better a dish of veggies than all of this great wealth.

You might have very little. But it's what God wants you to have. Charles Bridges says, if it be only little, it is not from lack of his Father's care and love, but because his wisdom knows what he really needs.

[11:48] And that all beyond would be a temptation and snare. God knows what you need. And if it's a little bit, then he'll just give you a little. And you can thank and praise him for it. Better that little bit than to be right with God than the great riches.

It's possible it could bring great wealth. Proverbs speak of that. It will be different for different people. But if it brings you little, then you accept it with a glad hand and a thankful heart.

It might mean that all you have to eat is vegetables. Better that with love than a rich feast and hatred with it. Maybe that verse is hard for some of you kids to follow or to believe.

That it's better to just have a dish of veggies than to have all the wealth in the world if you've got love to go with it. For me, when I was a kid, wouldn't have bought it.

I hated veggies. Not a veggie eater. You can ask my mom next time she's here. I mean, I really, really, really didn't like vegetables. And so, but I had to eat them. I was made to eat them.

[12:48] Good job, mom and dad. But, I would leave them for last. They would be the last thing on my plate. You know what happens when you leave the veggies for last? They get cold. And they get even worse than they were before.

And then I really didn't like them. But I still really had to eat them. And the worst of all, for me, was lima beans. Some of you too.

Alright, that's good. I like vegetables much better now than I used to. But lima beans, I mean, we're talking like gag reflex. Like, just can't handle it, lima beans.

And, and it eventually, I disliked them so much that, that my mom finally, bought onto it. And that was the one vegetable that I didn't have to eat. But anyway, even for me as a kid, it would have been better only to ever have, not just veggies, but to only ever have lima beans.

That's it. That's hard for me to fathom. But it would be better to have only that. And to have a loving family and friends. Than to have some of my favorite fruits.

[13:57] And man, I like food. And when I was a kid, I liked food and snacks and sweets. And all sorts of things. Better to not have any of that with a loving family. Than to have all of that, but to have broken relationships to go with it.

And what a blessing I had when I was a kid. To have a family that loved me. And a family that I loved. And still love. We weren't perfect. But love was there.

And when we didn't have much, I wouldn't have traded all of our little. At least I wouldn't now. I wouldn't trade all of our little and our veggies if it meant we wouldn't have had such a blessed family.

Love for one another. It's not worth all the gold in the world to lose that. So, if all you have is a little, if all you have is a dish of lima beans, and God has given you a loving family, and a right relationship with Him, then you've got all you need in the world.

And we can be content with that. May God make us content with that. You remember Daniel and his three friends taking off to Babylon. And they decline eating the king's rich food.

[15:08] They say, we'll have vegetables. And water. And did things turn out well for Daniel and his three friends? Sure they did. He says his three friends got tossed in the furnace.

That was a different issue. And guess what happened when they got tossed in? The Son of God was there with them walking around in the fire and brought them out without having been burned. They feared God and they ate vegetables and it went well with them.

God blessed them. And so some things, dear people, are worth pursuing. The fear of the Lord is worth pursuing. Love is worth pursuing. A right relationship with God and right relationship with men.

But there are things that are not worth pursuing. And the first is great treasure. Great treasure with turmoil. Some people make it their goal in life to be pursuing wealth.

That's all they think about. It's all they care about. It's all they work for. It's all they do. And again, it's not wrong to have and to spend money. But if that is your sole desiring goal, if it's causing you to neglect the fear of the Lord and your family, if it's causing you to pursue unjust gain, then it is a waste.

[16:17] And this is a huge treasure we're talking about. The word can be used for a storehouse for treasure. There's lots of treasure. From all indicators in this life, man, if you look at commercials and you look around at what people have and what they tell you you should have, that's worth pursuing.

A storehouse full of treasure. That's a good plan from the world's perspective. But to think that way is to be earthly-minded. Think about it from God's perspective. Would you rather have what one commentator calls wealth with worry?

There's turmoil. There's hatred. There's all that. Wealth with worry. Or 1 Timothy 6.6. But godliness with contentment is great gain. There's true wealth.

You be content and you have the fear of the Lord. That's true wealth. True contentment. God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. You will provide exactly what you need in this life and grant such abundant blessing in the next life that you can't even begin to fathom it.

I can't begin to fathom it. And so what's a little storehouse of treasure on the earth? It's like a little like a little I don't know a little I've been playing Legos with my son.

[17:28] It's like a little Lego thing we would build. A little Lego house say. Oh that's something special. It's remarkable. Guys it's a little Lego house. But it can't compare to a real house. A mansion. It's like and so here we are amassing wealth in this life and trying to save up a storehouse full of wealth and compared to the eternal glory that's waiting for us it's insignificant.

It's not even there. You can take those Legos and you can crush them. They crumble right in your hands. And so we're all little storehouses of wealth. It's like they could just be brushed aside like they were nothing in comparison with what's waiting for us.

We're not to be laying up treasure on earth anyway but in heaven. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world if he forfeits his soul? A reward and inheritance is not earthly prosperity but eternal glory.

And so if we don't spend our days in the unbridled pursuit of money or in worrying about problems that will only be temporary we'll do well. Rather in looking to those things that are unseen and eternal we find great treasure.

Great treasure that's not worth pursuing. The fattened calf everything that your money can buy the really good food that you can put on the table the really nice things in your house and in your garage and in your entertainment center.

[18:45] Maybe the fattened calf doesn't sound that appealing to you. You think of your favorite food your favorite toy your favorite big thing that money can buy. Better to live without that than to have love than to have that thing and to have hatred with it.

Some people live for this life and the things their money can buy but it's not food it's not things that bring happiness. Look at the verse just before this verse 15 the cheerful heart has a continual feast. The cheerful heart comes from fearing the Lord from love that's the thing that we're fed on a cheerful heart not the things the world has to offer. And you know what a lot of times you give yourself to pursuing all these things that seem so big and important and significant to us but in reality are not that big of a deal often they bring with them turmoil and hatred.

turmoil trouble strife the things that often attend wealth it's an unhealthy state to live in you've had moments of turmoil fear panic is even included in this word without God much of our life would be this way and all the storehouses of wealth wouldn't change it but rather add to it and if we have great food but we hate the people we're eating it with and we don't have much do we?

Proverbs 10 and verse 12 hatred stirs up distension there's those two things together hatred and turmoil but love covers over all wrongs I hope you take love in a bowl of lima beans people around the table forgiving each other overlooking each other's faults because they love each other rather than a great feast and to have hatred and strife and turmoil to go with it Proverbs 17 better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting with strife there's examples of this through scripture people that pursued the wrong thing people that missed it you think of Jacob and Esau Esau is willing to sell his birthright for a bowl of stew!

[20:46] and Jacob is willing to lie and cheat and deceive to gain a bigger inheritance and what does Jacob get for it? Happy home? Jacob and Esau pretty tight their whole life?

Good family relationship come from all of Jacob's pursuit of wealth? No he's got to leave because his brother is going to kill him and then when years later he comes back he's still afraid of his brother he's not excited to see him he's terrified what kind of reward is that for all of his efforts to gain wealth?

It's no reward at all you think of the rich young ruler he amassed this great wealth and he comes to Jesus and he wants to follow him Jesus says you've got to be willing to let go of that wealth and he goes away happy that he's got everything the world has to offer why does he go away?

He goes away sad because he doesn't have anything and turn with me to Luke 12 and hear about the rich fool almost seems like Jesus has this proverb in mind when he tells this story the man with bigger barns his love of money his lack of the fear of God what does it get him?

Notice beginning in verse 13 of Luke 12 someone in the crowd said to him teacher tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me well what's that guy pursuing? he pursuing love to his brother?

[22:14] is he pursuing the right thing? no he wants it he wants a piece of the pie he wants money he didn't read the proverb or if he did he didn't pay attention to it tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me Jesus replied man who appointed me a judge or arbiter between you?

then he said to them watch out be on your guard against all kinds of greed a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions sound like the proverb we just read?

better a little with the fear of the Lord than great wealth and turmoil with it your existence is not your possessions and then he says in verse 16 and he told them this parable the ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop fattened calf he thought to himself what shall I do?

I have no place to store my crops and you notice he thought to himself he doesn't have anybody to talk to he's got no family he's got no friends everything he does everything he says everything he

thinks is to himself notice that as we continue here then he said this is what I'll do I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones and there I will store all my grain and my goods and I'll say to myself you have plenty of good things laid up for many years take life easy eat drink and be merry but God said to him you fool isn't that the language of Proverbs wise man and the fool you fool this very night your life will be demanded of you then who will get what you have prepared for yourself this is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God hear that language of the fear of the Lord you're not rich towards God only concerned with your own things what a sad story this man he's got a good crop doesn't have any place to build some bigger barns he says to himself and then he says to himself got many good things for many good years he doesn't and you have to wonder if at some point this man if he had alienated everyone around him in his pursuit of wealth because he's got nobody he talks to himself wouldn't it be better for him just to have a little bit and to have love to have someone to love and somebody that loves him than all of this wealth he has and what does it get him well he dies that night it gets him nothing and so will the pursuit of wealth end badly for those who seek it above all else and so the question today is what's your pursuit what's most important to you there's a treasure worth pursuing

Jesus compares it to a treasure that was hidden in a field and a man finds it and man it's worth pursuing he goes and he sells everything that he has so he can buy that field and have that treasure and that's what the fear of the Lord is the kingdom of heaven was the treasure in that field it's as citizens of the kingdom that you find the fear of the Lord and true love have you found it are you pursuing the thing that really matters the one thing that really matters if not you can maybe you have some wealth some happiness by the world standards or you think that that's where happiness is if you don't see it now eventually you'll see it that all of that comes with a price the broken relationships the knowledge that God is going to punish you all of that will come to weigh on you you'll see that you've lived your life for nothing if you pursued these things but you can leave those things behind right now right where you sit say you know what Lord forgive me for putting those things before you and you can come to Christ for forgiveness for a realignment of your perspective to see what's really important do you have true treasure today if you don't have Christ you don't if you're not fearing the Lord you've got nothing you're amassing this little this fabulous group of friends and clothes and accessories and things and you've got all these nice things and you think you've got it but you know what you can't take any of that with you it'll all be gone in an instant but God is not going anywhere and if you fear Him you'll have security a home in heaven well we may say we believe this but when the rubber meets the road how are we living what are you parents pursuing for your children what's most important for you for your children to have you're leaving them a great financial inheritance that's good that's fine preparing for their college education that's good that's important but there's something far greater there's a great spiritual inheritance that you could be leaving them so what's your goal is your goal that your kids would keep up with the other kids or that they would know Christ which is more important which do you give your time and effort and energy to if we were to ask your kids what do your mom and dad want most in this life for you what would they say a good life good job good college education would they say

[27 : 27] I know right now without a doubt that the thing my mom and dad want most for me is for me to know the Lord I trust that most of your kids would be able to say that but what are you seeking for them what are you pursuing for them Charles Bridges I love this he says parents do you seek the solid happiness of your children and isn't that what we want we want our children to be happy do you seek the solid happiness of your children then lead them to expect little from the world everything from God is that what you're teaching your children are you teaching them by what you pursue for them and by your own example that what the world has to offer really is something and they should be pursuing it what about you children what are you concerned with most what are you concerned with if I don't get this for Christmas I just won't be happy well

I'm going to tell you that even if you do get it for Christmas you won't be happy you'll get bored with it it'll break it'll go out of style but that will never be the case with God he doesn't break he doesn't fail you and he's the same yesterday today and forever so he never goes out of style he's the one thing worth pursuing what are we adults pursuing for ourselves we consume with making money and therefore neglecting our family the family God has given us and we can expect turmoil and hatred got a lot of single young people excited to see college and career group growing and developing and friendships forming I have to ask you who are you looking to marry would you marry somebody because they can provide a good life for you are you looking to marry only in the Lord

and for love you're both pursuing a right relationship with God and therefore your relationship with one another will be great if it's the former if you're looking to see what you can get out of it nice house a nice easy life then you can expect turmoil and hatred in your home but if you're both pursuing the Lord even if you only have a dish of veggies on your table that will be better better by far so the question for all of us today is are you wasting your life ask yourself honestly which you would rather have a little bit and to be right with God and to have friends and family that love you or would you rather have great riches great wealth even if it cost you some broken relationships and led you not all the way away from God but just a little bit if those things were a little bit more important if that's the case with you your priorities need to be realigned if things are more important to you than the fear of the Lord then we need to repent and beg God to straighten out our priorities and so may God help us in Christ he's given us everything that we need everything that we need in Christ and so even if we didn't have a little even if we had nothing on our plate we would be okay because in him we have all that we need for this life and for the next and so let's be satisfied with Christ let's seek first his kingdom and all of these things will be added unto us the economy in the toilet that's fine even if you lose everything you can't lose the Lord if he is your savior let me rephrase that he can't lose you you'll never be snatched out of his hand of all that God has given to the son he won't lose one of them so if you're a child of God today even if you lose everything you have in this world he's not going to lose you and that knowledge is better than all the wealth the world has to offer so better today is a little with the fear of the Lord than great wealth and turmoil with it better a dish of vegetables where love is than a fattened calf and hatred with it may God make that the attitude of our hearts toward all the world has to offer let's pray together Father we thank you that we have found it true by your grace that blessed is the man that fears the Lord we thank you for your blessings that you have poured out upon us blessings in abundance far more than we deserve certainly more than we could ask or think you've been faithful to us and we give you thanks we pray that you would forgive us when we begin to turn astray and we start to pursue after the things the world offers us and tempts us with and dangles before us may we see right through those things and see that they can't hold a candle to the glorious Lord of heaven and earth who's made us who's provided all that we need and who sustains us may our hope and trust be in him in him alone we pray that some here today that are living only for the things of the world might have their eyes open to the emptiness of it all the vanity of it that there's nothing under the sun that can satisfy send them running to Christ this day may they find their all in him we ask it in Jesus name amen