

Dr. August Konkell, Proverbs, Session 12,

The Tree of Life, Proverbs 10-15

Podcast Audio Overview

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Hey everyone, welcome to another Deep Dive. Today we're going to be looking at the Tree of Life. Okay.

Specifically, how it's used in Proverbs chapters 10 through 15. All right. Now, to help us unpack all this, we've got an awesome lecture by Dr. August Konkell, who is a scholar of Proverbs.

Right. And he brings in all these cool perspectives from the Bible itself. Yeah.

To, like, archaeology and even personal stories. It's really cool how much you can pull out of those ancient texts sometimes. Oh, absolutely.

So, one of the things that I found really interesting is that the whole Tree of Life thing, it's not just some random biblical image. It actually has roots in the wider cultural landscape of the time. Oh, you're totally right.

Like, think about the Asherah. Yeah. Like that sacred tree associated with the god Baal.

Right. You know, it was super prominent in lots of ancient Near Eastern cultures, and it represented all kinds of things like life, fertility, and divine power. Okay.

But there's even like archaeological evidence that shows how different groups adapted this concept. Yeah. Like there's this pottery shard that was found at Kültepe, which depicts an Asherah.

Okay. But it's alongside all these symbols of life, like lions and ibexes. And get this, it's actually referred to as an Asherah of Yahweh.

So, it's like they're taking this existing idea and kind of making it their own. Exactly. It's like they're saying, hey, we get this concept of a life-giving tree, but for us, it's connected to Yahweh.

That's super interesting. So, when we read about the tree of life in Proverbs, we're actually tapping into, like, this much broader cultural understanding. It's like a whole concept, not just a symbol.

Yeah. You got it. But how does Proverbs use this concept? What's the main takeaway for us today? Well, one of the key connections Proverbs makes is between the tree of life and righteousness.

Okay. You know, Proverbs 11.30 says, "The fruit of righteousness is a tree of life, and the one who saves souls is wise. All right.

That sounds pretty profound. But like, what does it actually mean for someone like me, you know, living in the 21st century? Break it down for me. Okay.

Sure. So, think about it this way. Just as a tree bears fruit that nourishes and sustains life, right? Mm-hmm.

A righteous person's actions, their integrity, their wisdom, it all has a positive impact on the people around them. So, it's not just about being good in some abstract way, but about actually living in a way that benefits others. Exactly.

You hit the nail on the head. Okay. I like that.

And then there's that second part of the verse, and the one who saves souls is wise. Now, when we hear soul today, we often think of the spiritual side of things. Yeah.

Is that what it means here? It's a little bit different, actually. The word soul in this context is more about the whole person. You know, their mind, their heart, their very being.

So, saving souls is more about guiding people towards a good life, helping them make wise choices. Yeah. That's a good way to put it.

Okay. So, I can see how that ties into the whole tree of life metaphor. It's about nurturing and protecting life in all its forms.

Precisely. You're getting it. Awesome.

And this whole idea of saving souls has been interpreted in different ways throughout history. Even Tyndale, when he translated the Bible, phrased it as, he who saves souls is wise, which kind of adds a more explicitly Christian layer to the proverb. Uh-huh.

It's fascinating how a single proverb can have so many layers of meaning, right? It really is. It really makes you think about how we might be saving souls in our own lives without even realizing it. Absolutely.

Like, maybe it's a kind word to a friend who's struggling or standing up for someone who's being treated unfairly. Those are perfect examples. It just shows how timeless the wisdom of proverbs really is.

It really does. So, we've got righteousness as a tree of life, but Proverbs also connects this powerful image to something else that's crucial for a good life. What's that? Hope.

You're right. Proverbs 13.1 states that hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life. This proverb really dives into the powerful emotions connected to our hopes and dreams.

Yeah, we all have things we long for, dreams we chase. And when those hopes are fulfilled, it truly feels life-giving, doesn't it? Absolutely. And Dr. Konkel actually shares this really heartwarming story about falling for his wife, Esther, and how the fulfillment of that hope brought him immense joy.

It's a beautiful reminder of how powerful hope can be. But the proverb also acknowledges the painful reality of, like, hope deferred. Right.

When our dreams are delayed or even shattered, it can feel like a real punch in the gut. It can, and that leads to a crucial question. What happens when hope is completely lost? Oh, wow.

Dr. Konkle suggests that someone with no hope, with nothing left to lose, can become reckless, even dangerous. Oh, that's... It emphasizes how vital hope is for both individuals and communities to thrive. It's almost like hope itself is a tree of life.

Yeah. And without it, we wither, and our capacity for good diminishes. I think that's a really powerful way to put it.

And, you know, it's not just our actions that matter. Yeah. But also our words.

Proverbs highlights how words, too, can be like a tree of life, either offering nourishment or inflicting harm. That's so true. And speaking of words, Dr. Konkle has this hilarious anecdote about a parking lot incident.

Tell me about it. So he accidentally, like, bumped into someone's car. Oh, no.

And the other driver was, like, you know, pretty upset. Yeah, I can imagine. But instead of getting all defensive, Dr. Konkle just used a soft answer.

Right. And totally de-escalated the whole thing. Like Proverbs 15.1 style.

Exactly. It's like a real-life example of that proverb in action. Wow, that's awesome.

And then there's Proverbs 15.2. Right. Which talks about the contrast between a wise tongue that imparts knowledge and the foolish babbling of, you know, fools. Yeah.

But here's the thing. Dr. Konkel makes this interesting point that fools aren't always, like, unintelligent people. Oh, really? They might actually be pretty smart.

Okay. The problem is their words lack wisdom and understanding. So someone could be, like, super intelligent and articulate.

Yeah. But if their words aren't grounded in wisdom, they can still do a lot of harm. Exactly.

And I think we've all been guilty of that at some point. For sure. It's, like, easy to fall into the trap of thinking we're always right just because we happen to be smart.

It is. And Proverbs 15.3 reminds us that even our unspoken thoughts are known to God. Oh, wow.

And then 15.4 highlights the fact that a truthful tongue can be healing. Right. While deceit can be, like, incredibly destructive.

It really drives home the point that our words have a huge impact, either building others up or tearing them down. It's like that tree of life metaphor again. Right.

Our words can be, like, nourishing fruit. Yeah. You know, offering encouragement and truth.

Mm-hmm. Or they can be like thorns that cause pain and damage relationships. So we've seen how Proverbs connects the tree of life to righteousness, hope, and the power of words.

Right. But how do we take all this ancient wisdom and make it, like, relevant today? That's where things get even more interesting. OK.

We start to see how Proverbs moves from these general principles to more specific guidance on, like, how to cultivate a life aligned with wisdom and righteousness. So it's not just about knowing what's right. Mm-hmm.

But about actually putting it into practice. But does that mean Proverbs is, like, a recipe for success? Well... Like, do this get that? Not quite. You're picking up on a really important point.

OK. Dr. Konkle emphasizes that Proverbs isn't about guaranteeing specific outcomes. Right.

It's not, like, a formula or anything. It's more about the journey. Yeah.

It's about developing the right character and values. Mm-hmm. It's about becoming the kind of person who naturally, like, bears good fruit.

I like that. So it's more about, like, personal growth and transformation... Exactly. ...rather than a guaranteed destination.

Right. It's about aligning your life with wisdom and righteousness... OK. ...and trusting that that path will ultimately lead to a good life... Mm-hmm.

...even though, you know, there will be challenges and setbacks along the way. That makes sense. So for someone listening, what are some of the benefits of living this way? Well, Proverbs highlights several benefits.

OK. Like, for one, there's the promise of honor and a good reputation. Right.

Proverbs 11.18 says, The wicked earn deceptive wages, but one who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward. Mm-hmm. And Proverbs 11.31 adds that if the righteous receive their due on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner.

So living righteously, it's not just about some feel-good spiritual thing. It actually, like, has practical benefits in how others see you and treat you. Absolutely.

And then there's also, like, a sense of inner security... Right. ...that comes from knowing you're living in alignment with your values. Exactly.

Proverbs 11.28 says, Those who trust in their riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf. That's so true. True security comes not from, like, external wealth or possessions... Mm-hmm.

...but from that inner strength that comes from living a righteous life. Yeah, it's like you're building your house on solid ground. Exactly.

And let's not forget the positive impact on the community. Right. Proverbs talks a lot about how righteousness benefits the city or the nation.

It does. Proverbs 11.1 says, and Proverbs 14.34 adds that it's not just about individual well-being. No.

It's about creating a flourishing society... Right. ...where justice, integrity, and compassion are valued. Exactly.

It's like planting a tree that not only provides you with shade... but also benefits the whole ecosystem around it. I love that. And Dr. Konkle actually shares this powerful story about this.

Oh, yeah. He talks about reading Open Doors... which shares stories of persecuted Christians all over the world.

Right. And he was so struck by their resilience and joy. It's really remarkable.

Even in the face of, like, incredible hardship. It speaks to how a righteous life can cultivate this deep inner peace and strength... Yeah. ...that helps you, like, weather any storm.

Even when facing outward persecution... their spirits are anchored in something deeper. Yeah.

Something that sustains them. It's like their tree of life has deep roots that can't be shaken... Right. ...no matter what challenges they face.

And that brings us back to, like, the core message of Proverbs. Yeah. It's not about following rules to, like, get what you want.

It's about an internal transformation... Right. ...that leads to a life of blessing for yourself and for those around you. It's about becoming a source of life.

Ah. A tree of life that bears good fruit for everyone. That's a beautiful way to put it.

So, as we wrap up our deep dive into the tree of life in Proverbs, what's the key takeaway for our listeners? It feels like we've covered so much ground already. Like, what's the one thing we want them to walk away with? I think the most important takeaway is that the tree of life is, like, this beautiful metaphor for what it means to live a righteous life. It's about nurturing those qualities like wisdom, integrity, compassion, and hope.

And these qualities not only benefit you personally... Right. ...but they also have this ripple effect... Uh-huh. ...enriching your relationships and your community.

It's like you're planting a seed that grows into something much bigger than yourself. Exactly. Something that provides shade and sustenance for others.

You know, Dr. Konkle's lecture ends with this really thought-provoking question. Oh, yeah. And I'd love to pose it to our listeners today.

Okay, hit me. If you were to plant your own tree of life... Mm-hmm. ...what values would you nurture to make sure it bears good fruit? Wow.

What qualities do you want to cultivate in yourself... Yeah. ...to become a source of life and blessing for those around you? That's a powerful image to consider. Right.

It reminds us that this ancient wisdom found in Proverbs... Mm-hmm. ...it's not just some dusty relic of the past. Oh.

It's like a living, breathing guide for navigating the complexities of life today. Absolutely. And creating a world where goodness flourishes.

It really is. So take some time to reflect on that question. Dive into the book of Proverbs.

Explore it for yourself. Yeah. You might be amazed by the insights you discover... and how they can empower you to live a richer, more meaningful life. And who knows? Maybe you'll even inspire others to plant their own trees of life. Yeah.

And together we can create a whole forest of goodness that spreads far and wide. That's a beautiful vision. And on that note, we'll leave you to contemplate the wisdom of Proverbs until our next deep dive.

Keep seeking, keep growing, and keep spreading those seeds of a good life.