Last Sunday, I introduced a new sermon series for this Summer, “Life Lessons from Proverbs through Disney’s Magic.” These messages focus on learning life-giving lessons from the Book of Proverbs, such as wisdom, justice, foolishness, pride, friendship, diligence, humility, patience, kindness, honesty, and more. As we draw these life lessons from Proverbs and Disney movies, today, we focus on the topic of The Path of Righteousness.

This is a very personal topic for me. I shared before about a time in my ministry when I faced injustices from some individuals who acted selfishly. This period, though dark, allowed me to learn essential lessons about character. I was tempted to retaliate, but my love for the church and its people stopped me from causing further harm. Instead, I remained patient and allowed God to restore justice. And he did.

This experience taught me a crucial lesson about righteousness: Choosing what is right over what is convenient or self-serving. I realized that I didn’t want to become like those who wronged me. Instead, I chose to uphold my values, remain fair and just, and honor God in my actions. I was driven to do the right thing because I loved God and wanted to honor him. This is what helped me navigate through the storms and come out stronger.

It is such righteousness, driven by love, which I would like us to explore today through the teachings of the Book of Proverbs and the story of Mulan.

But before we get into the subject, let me speak about what righteousness is not. Many people equate “righteousness” with being perfect or never making mistakes. This belief can lead to legalism, self-righteousness, and a judgmental attitude toward others. But that is not what we are discussing or what the Bible teaches. So, let’s look at what the Book of Proverbs says about this subject. Here are some key teachings about righteousness from the Book of Proverbs.

First, the path of righteousness leads us to life,

Proverbs 12:28 says, “In the way of righteousness there is life; along that path is immortality.”

Proverbs 21:21 says, “Whoever pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor.”

These verses emphasize that righteousness is the path to life and peace, even eternal life. They highlight the belief that a life lived in righteousness, in accordance with God’s laws and teachings, leads not only to a fulfilling and meaningful earthly life but also eternal life. They also portray righteousness as a principle that governs moral and ethical decisions by contrasting the life of the righteous with the life of the wicked. For instance, Proverbs 10:6 states, “Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked.” The implication is that those who lead a righteous life will find a meaningful and fulfilling life, while those who lead a life of violence are self-destructing and perish.

I am a witness that pursuing a life of righteousness leads to life, prosperity, and honor. God knows I am far from perfect and the many mistakes I have made along the way in my ministry. But by pursuing what is good and right, God has led me to meet wonderful people and serve in places of honor. I have seen and experienced life-giving blessings not because I know something others don’t or I am without issues but because my heart’s primary concern is honoring God. That is righteousness, pursuing what is right despite our shortcomings and missteps. That is the path that leads to life.

Second, the path of righteousness delivers us (shields us) from evil and death,

Proverbs 10:2, “Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death.”

This means that while the wicked may rejoice in their earthly treasures for a time, they are imprisoned by their own greed and evil schemes and ultimately experience a great loss—even their souls. The Book of Proverbs contrasts this by highlighting righteousness’s protective and liberating nature as a shield against evil and death. This means that righteousness is a powerful safeguard that protects us against behaviors that lead to death, even spiritual eternal death.

For example, as a parent, this is close to my heart. I have taught my sons to be mindful of what they see and hear both at school and online. My concern is with them having the discernment and tools to know what is good and bad for them and choose what is good. Why? Because I want them to have a fulfilling, healthy life.

Proverbs 22:6 speaks to this, “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.” This verse implies that righteousness is a shield against evident evil but also more subtle things that lead to death. This is something that we should be very concerned about with our young people as they are exposed to ideas and behaviors that lead to violence and self-harm that destroy their minds, hearts, bodies, and souls. Children rely on adults to help them make sense of the world. So, adults, are we teaching children in the right way, or are we projecting our ignorance, fears, and harmful behaviors onto them? If children are the reflection of their environment and the adults in their lives, it should not be a mystery to figure out why they are struggling so much today.

Think of it this way: If we are modeling, teaching, and learning what is good and right, we won’t even have time to think about what is bad and wrong, much less to do things that harm us or others. This is one of the most effective ways to keep behaviors, attitudes, and conversations to keep deathly behaviors away from us, particularly in our children and young people.

Third, the path of righteousness guards our integrity,

Proverbs 13:6, “Righteousness guards the person of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner.”

This verse suggests that righteousness acts as a protective shield for those who walk in integrity. Righteousness, in this context, refers to honesty, strong moral principles, and consistency in one’s actions, values, methods, measures, and principles. To me, what this means is that when a person has integrity, it leads them to live righteously, which in turn aligns them with God’s protective blessings.

Having integrity is not always going to be easy. But what a wonderful blessing we experience after the storm passes and we know we did the right thing. For this reason, integrity and righteousness go hand-in-hand. It is doing what is right even when no one is watching. And the blessings that come from righteousness and integrity are priceless. As Psalms 1:3 says, “They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.”

Can we agree that the path of righteousness is a good path that leads to a good life, delivers us from evil, and guards our integrity? But where does this come from? How can I lead a righteous life? Let’s look at the story of Mulan and see what she can teach about righteousness.

If you have not had a chance to watch the movie in the last 25 years, here is a spoiler for you: “Mulan” is a Disney film centered on a young Chinese woman, Mulan, who takes her ailing father’s place in the Imperial Army to combat an invading army. She takes her father’s armor and sword, disguising herself as a man to fight in his place. Here is the scene where she takes her father’s place in the battle, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZgJt7w0G6c>

Did you catch what Mulan’s father say, “I will die doing what is right”? This is the kind of man who raised such a brave daughter. No surprise that Mulan’s story underscores themes of honor and bravery. She did what she thought was right to protect her father too. But why? Mulan’s decision to take her father’s place in the Imperial Army was driven by her deep love for her family, especially her aging and ailing father. She chose to do what was right, even if it meant breaking some social norms and rules and lying about her identity for a time. However, her love-driven righteousness ultimately led her to save her father and the entire nation. And at the end, she was greatly rewarded, as seen in this scene, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80ck5zXFhLQ>

This scene reminds me of Proverbs 21:21, “Whoever pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor.”

My friends, the teachings of Proverbs are self-fulling because they are the Word of God. God wants us to know these things and to live by these values and tenets because they will lead us to a good life.

So, I invite you all to reflect upon your path in life. Let’s remember that righteousness stems from love and not from perfection or the absence of making mistakes. Like Mulan, who was driven by love to do what was right, we should also strive to lead a life that reflects our love for God and others. It is this love that compels us to make morally and ethically sound decisions about ourselves, our family, and our community and to act with integrity and honesty in what we do.

But remember, it won’t always be easy. There will be moments when we will face injustice or adversity, and it might be tempting to act in self-interest. In such moments, let’s recall the teachings of Proverbs and remember that righteousness acts as a protective shield, guarding our integrity and leading us to life. And as we navigate our life’s journey, let’s seek to pursue righteousness in our thoughts, words, and actions, and may God guide us and grant us wisdom along the way.

May our love for God and each other guide us on this righteous path today and always. Amen.