

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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How To Have A Good Look

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Fashion, it is an outward expression that says a little bit about us. It is an indicator of personality, influences, confidence, even characteristics that we might have. Now some of you know right away that this is a classic hip hop fashion. Some of you are very confused but I'll break this down in just a minute, but this comes from the 80s. There was a group called Run-D.M.C. that some of you may have heard of. There's another artist called LL Cool J who is not just an actor on TV, he was actually a hip hop artists. But speaking of hip hop two weeks ago I preached the message in this same series paralleling the Proverbs to hip hop because it really reminded me a lot of hip hop and in case you miss it, you can catch it on video, but I'll just kinda summarize it just real quick; four quick parallels that I made.

- Number one the Proverbs are poetic in nature and just like hip hop is poetic as it relates to music.
- Secondly the Proverbs are communal in nature. It really was a reflection of the wisdom of the community, just like hip hop, which would have been started by a guy named DJ Kool Herc really became the wisdom of the black community and people of the streets.
- And then thirdly Proverbs really would kind of reflect the messiness and the mundanity of life and I think hip hop in the same way would have been the same way. How do we navigate through these everyday things that are related to love and life and struggle and survival?
- And then fourthly the Proverbs would have been written in a post exilic period. That would've been a time when Israel would have been exiled away from their land where they belonged and I believe that hip hop is similar in the way that you had a black community that's really trying to figure out how to live a life that is surrounded at times by oppression and maybe being in this country but not feeling as though they're accepted by this country.

So this week we continue this series called, 'Get Wisdom' and I actually want to continue this hip hop metaphor or theme from a couple of weeks ago and I want to do that leveraging this little phrase that's repeated a few different times within Proverbs and also within other books of the Old Testament.

But before we get to that, let me just explain what I'm wearing cause some of y'all are like, well let me see what this is about. This is kinda like my red carpet moment where, you know, they explained, you know, what's going on and what you're wearing and what it means and all that sort of stuff, right. But before we get to that, I just got to say, you know, I just, I love black culture because we are very expressive people, just in case you didn't know. I mean like it's in our food, it's in our hair, it's in the colors we wear it's in our language and nomenclature. And by the way, I may use some terms that you might not be familiar with, so we'll pop it up on the screen so you can or you can refer to the hip hop dictionary. But, a big part of how the black community expresses themselves is through dress, it's a big part. So back in the day I grew up in the emergence of hip hop culture and they would have been wearing like big chains like this, like

the big ropes, you know, like so, I'm living out, kind of like my little childhood dreams right now because I could never afford this stuff and this is fake but, I could never afford that jewelry. I could never like afford {inaudible} my parents would never buy that stuff for me. But you had like the thick ropes, you know, and you had a, this is called a Cuban link; you had the Cuban link chain. And then at some point, like, things would move to being iced out like this, just a little bit of ice, you know, and it's like diamonds, you know? You had herring bone chains, which I couldn't find one, so I don't have one on. But you know, it's just an expression of how you roll, you know, like that's really all it was. So, like maybe you had that kind of dough, you had that kind of Cheddar, you know what I'm saying? That's just what, or it was kinda like, just flossing, you know, not this thing right here, you know. But, nevertheless, you had to look the part, right. You know, so like, even the glasses, you know, like these look like Cassel glasses that I wanted back in the day. And I mean the hat, you know, just reflecting your heritage or your favorite team or your hood or any of those sorts of things. Then you had like, you had the sweat suits, you know, like just the classic sweat suits and the hoodies and the shirts and the kicks, you know, that means shoes. And you had classic brands like Adidas, you know FILA and Nike and Puma and Kangol, you know, I wish I had a Kangol I could wear.

But nevertheless, like all of those things were symbols that meant something and you were definitely making a statement by what you were wearing. Even today, the clothes that we wear are making a statement, whether it's intentional or unintentional. And that statement is a symbolic expression of who we are and gives insight into who we are but it doesn't necessarily the entire story of who we are. We might be able to discern that someone is maybe simple or edgy or trendy, but it's hard to confirm deep down who that person is or what that actually means. And so I thought about this as I was pondering this one little phrase or variation of a phrase that was repeated a few different times in Proverbs and it's just this reflection of this kind of inward, outward kind of thing. And anytime anything is repeated in scripture, it is pretty important. And not only is this repeated in Proverbs, but it's also repeated in Exodus and in Deuteronomy.

So what I want to do is for the rest of our time, I just want to examine the phrase, this variation of this phrase. There are three different Proverbs that I'm going to read, not the entire one, but just three different instances starting in Proverbs 3:3. It says,

³ *Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.*

Then Proverbs 3:21 through 22, it says,

²¹ *My son, do not let wisdom and understanding out of your sight, preserve sound judgment and discretion;*

²² *they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck.*

Proverbs 6:20 through 21

²⁰ *My son, keep your father's command and do not forsake your mother's teaching.*

²¹ *Bind them always on your heart; fasten them around your neck.*

We see these phrases and these words repeated in similar fashion and connotation in these verses that I just read. And I think that there are two specific things that we can take from these phrases that I want to just drill down for us this weekend. And if you're taking notes, I want to just tag my thoughts with this little title this weekend, "How To Have A Good Look", How To Have A Good Look". And speaking of, let me just take this off and put my real glasses on. Y'all excuse me and take this hat off cause if I know this is distracting me it's distracting y'all.

As we have been exploring the Proverbs and focusing on getting wisdom, we see these small bite size axioms that are intended to help us navigate the everyday course of our lives. And I think another way that we can say this is the Proverbs are actually trying to help us have or maintain a good look. Now when I say a good look, hopefully you know that I'm not talking about our external appearance or talking about fashion because the Proverbs is not talking to us about types of fabric that we should wear and colors and all of those sorts of things. But a good look is a broader reference to our behavior and how we live.

I'm the father of four kids and my two oldest girls, Jaylah and Joslyn, I'm always talking to them about how they are to be considerate of the other and how they are to be people of service. And so me telling them, hey, always look to serve whenever you can. I know that that's a good look, not just to make them look good, but it's actually a value that I'm trying to teach them, that I want them to live out in their life. Now, I also know that we know plenty of examples in life or maybe in our own lives that that's not a good look. I can remember one time when I was in school Ms. Thompson my counselor called my mother because I was making fun of this kid named Javier in my class, and I was teasing him and my mother came up to the school. Now I don't know about you, but when I grew up, when your mother came up to the school, that ain't a good look especially if it wasn't for an appointment and she had a certain look on her face like you are going to have to explain that to your friends the next day. So that was not a good look. But, the Proverbs is full of these kinds of good look pointers which is really focused on a higher level of holiness. Now I know that that's a word that you guys don't maybe hear a lot of, we don't talk and preach a lot about holiness specifically, but basically it just means that we are set apart in our dedication to God and this set apartness is not about us being better than anyone else. It's basically about not living beneath the standard that God has set for us.

And so we often need reminders of what that standard is and how we are to live up to that. And I don't know about you but my parents were pretty good reminders. There were things that they wanted me to remember and learn and they would repeat them over and over and they would say these things over and over again. So much so that, that I would even hear my parents in moments when I didn't want to, when I had other ideas of things that I wanted to do. But, it was because they wanted those things to be in me and they wanted me to remember them and I still remember some of those to this day.

So we have this repeated phrase or this combination of words that that are related *bind* and *neck* and *heart* and it says, bind them around your neck, talking about these teachings or this wisdom, write it on the tablet of your heart, make it an ornament to grace around your neck, bind them

always on your heart and fastened them around your neck. I think those phrases are really related to two ideas that I want to share with you this weekend.

The first of which is I think that these phrases are talking to us about outward adornment or outward expression. Now binding and fastening around the neck or an ornament gracing your neck, I mean it's like wearing a necklace like you saw me wearing and it's an outward expression. Now the history of necklaces and why we wear necklaces aside from the fact that maybe it's fashionable and that it matches, you know our outfit or something. But, there were deeper reasons why we would wear necklaces and one maybe it's something that we value, you know, it's a value to us because someone gave it to us or it represents a family member or a family value, or maybe it is expensive and it was given to us as a gift so it has a value.

The second thing or maybe a second reason would be it serves as a reminder of something. It is seeing it or touching it reminds us of, I don't know maybe a virtue or a teaching goal or something that we want to be held accountable to.

And then thirdly, maybe it represents an identity who we are or who we belong to or what we represent. Now, we may not be carrying or wearing something as an expression of wisdom, right? But, let me just ask you this. When people look at you and observe you, when they observe your behavior and your decisions and your interactions, what do they see? What is it that is being reflected in that moment because wisdom should be an outward identifier that is tangible and visible. But here's the challenge for us, we tend to focus on this outward expression or this outward adornment in the wrong way. Ways that that are maybe easier for us to kind of check a box. So, it looks as if, or we can easily say we did that, or we are doing that, but there's no real depth to it or ways that feed our ego. All right, so that we can get a boost by it. So, we're outwardly doing these things but the reason behind it or there's a lack of depth to it. And we're engulfed in a world that is diligent in box checking and ego boosting. And the wisdom of this day, it is all about having a good look, but the good look doesn't necessarily have a lot of depth to it and the good look is usually only momentary.

I remember growing up and my parents always had chores for us to do and they would tether those chores to things that I wanted to do. So, if there was stuff that I wanted to do I had to make sure that I got those chores done. And so there were plenty of times where I wasn't on top of my game and I would say to my mom, hey, I want to go do this. And she would say, Oh, well are your chores done? And I would quickly say, oh yeah, my chores are done. But upon further investigation because my mother would do things like this, you know, I would try to wipe down the counter because if I had to do the kitchen, you know, she had taught me how to, she would lift up the toaster and just put her finger underneath and say, you see that? I see like, man. But it was because I was just trying to show quickly that I had done what she asked me to do, but I didn't do it thoroughly.

I have a friend his name is Jesse Kano and Jesse is a builder and he's just a master craftsman. And so Jesse showed me some of the properties that he's been working on. And I was just amazed that just the level of detail and how smooth the walls were and just how the baseboards aligned and just all of these little details. And I have a couple of other friends who are on the other side of real estate. And so I walked through a couple of homes with them and it looks good

and then you walk up on it and then you see like smudges or you see things that are just out of order. And so I asked Jesse, I said, you have spoiled me, like you've shown me like what things are supposed to be, now I cannot ever unsee that. And so I asked him, I said, so explain to me like why there's such a disparity. He said, it's because people either haven't been taught or they're not taking their time. And see, here's the thing, we neglect depth because it takes too long. We neglect the effort that it really takes to really invest because we know it's going..., so we try to quickly get it done or we try to accumulate breath to make it look like we have depth. But here's the thing, when we face storms in our lives the true test of our character is the depth of wisdom that will help us stand firm because we haven't wasted our efforts just trying to stand out. And if the truth be told, when it's all said and done, standing firm will lead to standing out. We're often too busy trying to have a good look by adorning ourselves with the right degrees and the right networks and the right jobs and living in the right neighborhoods. Here's the thing, it's adorning ourselves with wisdom that does more for us than just having a good look externally. It helps us live good, learn good, love good.

So let me ask you, in what tangible and visible ways are you and are we adorning wisdom? Are we wearing wisdom? What does it look like? I'm even going to ask myself the question, am I in the company of wisdom? Am I seeking to sit at the feet of wisdom? And sometimes, you know, we don't necessarily want to do those things because maybe wisdom will tell us what we don't want to hear. And so sitting at the feet of our peers and sitting at the feet of people maybe who don't have as much is a little bit easier for us. Am I building habits and routines around getting and practicing wisdom?

You know that there are approximately 26 verses talking about clothing ourselves with good things. And the idea here is that there is a certain kind of outward expression that God desires for us. So first if we're going to have a good look, the Proverbs is talking to us about this idea of what our outward expression looks like. But then secondly, I think these phrases that we read are also talking about inward governance so, an outward expression, but also an inward governance. Listen, it says write them, the them would be wisdom or these teachings on the tablet of your heart, bind them always on your heart.

I think this is a pretty clear reference to wisdom being an internal influence but what really intrigued me the most as I really dug deep and studied this is this combination of bind and heart. See writing on our heart, I mean that's an easy translation. We write songs about that, we've written love letters and notes and cards about that, but the word bind is a little bit more complex. Qashar is the Hebrew word for buying in and the etymology here is about tying physically like girding or confining or tying mentally like in love. But the thing that really intrigued me was that there's another word or another definition for the same word and it's conspire, right? Doesn't seem to match the word conspire doesn't, it seems to be misaligned here, but it is the most frequent translation of this word in Hebrew. And I think the idea here is that when we conspire, that comes from a depth in our heart, right? That's the stuff we're not really talking to people about. That's the stuff that we're not necessarily verbalizing is deep down.

Now, you know, we notice some of this play itself out in little kids. I'm around little kids and you know like a kid just have a little look, might not say anything but you know something is up and you know you better investigate or there's going to be problems, right? And so that little thing, it

never leaves us as we grow. We all have these things deep down in our hearts. It's the things in our heart that we think about that we meditate about. And here's the thing, it's those things that are usually behind or influencing our decision making. And that's what governance is all about, that's what inward governance is, is all about the stuff inside of us that's actually governing us. And we often think about the word conspired in negative terms, but it doesn't have to be, it's just an indication or a reflection of what's in our hearts. And so the point that I want to illuminate here is binding and writing wisdom on our hearts is about the things that secretly drive us. It's like a rudder beneath the water that we can't see, but it's definitely giving direction to the ship.

Here's the thing, I think there's a reason why there are over 750 references to the heart in scripture. Now, that depends on which version you read, but that's a lot of references to the heart. You think that's kind of important? Now the Proverbs are only second to Psalms in terms of the mentioning of the heart, I just want to read about three of them for you;

Proverbs 4:23 it says *Above all else, guard the heart, for everything you do flows from it.*

I think this is the reason why we need to bind wisdom in our hearts because whatever is in your heart is if it's not checked, is going to have influence or whatever you put in your heart that's what's gonna come out of us, right?

Proverbs 16:23 *The hearts of the wise make their mouths prudent, and their lips promote instruction.*

When you speak is wisdom flowing from your lips and what we speak is connected to our hearts.

Proverbs 28:26 *Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe.*

What the wisdom of the Proverbs is showing us is if we want to have a good look, I mean we better have the right internal governance. If we want to be anchored in the right way, we better give attention to what's in our hearts and taking inventory of that. And let me just help you out here. One of the ways that we can help ourselves is to give somebody else permission to check our hearts. Now, I know we ain't bout that because we don't really want to give other people permission to check us in that way cause we want to check us. But if we're giving someone else permission it's because there's some stuff that we're going to see, or some stuff that we would justify that is not right. Where there's a lack of accountability, which is what I'm talking about, where there's a lack of accountability, selfish ambition will run rampant. Jesus, I'm sorry, James, the brother of Jesus, he says, and wherever you find that you will find every evil practice.

So wisdom serves as this internal compass for us, a guide to govern how we live, to help us maintain this holiness and this godly standard, which was the original intention of the Proverbs for a displaced people in Israel who didn't have the structure of their homeland in place so they needed this anchor to help them navigate life.

Let me close with this. One of my favorite books that I've read over the last couple of years is a book called The Other Wes Moore. If you haven't read it, highly recommend it. But it's a story of

two black boys growing up in similar neighborhoods in Baltimore, Maryland and they're both products of single parent homes for two completely different reasons. But what they were both headed down the similar path but from different directions and both had a close proximity to the wisdom of the streets. And they also both had dramatic turning points right around similar points of their lives that actually changed the trajectory of their lives. One of them goes on to become a Rhodes Scholar from Johns Hopkins University. I would say that's a pretty good look for anybody. The other gets life in prison with no possibility of parole. I don't need to tell you that that ain't a good look. And I won't tell you the whole story because I would love for you to read it. But the difference came down to the intervention of wisdom and it wasn't wisdom that these young men possess on their own. It was their proximity to it and their choice to practice it.

Now remember the Proverbs are largely a byproduct of communal wisdom. So the the Rhodes Scholar Wes Moore who authored the book, he comes to the realization that it is the presence of the communal wisdom that recognizes that he is not on the right path and gives him a chance to choose a different practice, a chance to shift his outward expression and his internal governance. But the choice was ultimately up to him just like the choice is ultimately up to us.

This reminds me of the parable in Matthew seven where Jesus is talking about the wise and the foolish builder. He says, the wise builder is the one who hears my words and puts them into practice. It's like building a house on the rock that's what a life of wisdom is all about. But then he says there's a foolish builder who hears my words but does not put them into practice, it's like building a house on the sand and that is what a life is like that is not following wisdom or putting it into practice. Because here's the thing, Jesus goes on to say that the rain and the wind comes and I think you know that rain will come into our life, I think you know that wind will come into our life and those things will expose us. Just like when we were in homes and it begins to rain hard or the wind begins to blow we often sometimes see leaks or all we see trees that are blown down because it will expose us and at that point it doesn't matter how good it looks, it matters how deeply rooted it is.

So if you're asking me to summarize how to have a good look in life, the wisdom of the Proverbs say one, we need to have the right kind of outward expression. Our habits and our practices need to reflect wisdom. Secondly, we need to have the right kind of internal governance the condition of our hearts has to be tethered to wisdom. But I should make this one final point because we can't necessarily do those things on our own because if those two things are going to operate in concert in our lives, it has to be in the relationship with the One that says treasures of wisdom are hidden as Paul to us and that will be Jesus. And so outside of a relationship with Jesus, we cannot lead and guide ourselves in the way that we should go and the wisdom that we're seeking is found in a relationship with Jesus. And so we can get smarter and we can get more experience but it's wisdom that shows us how to use those things. We can also look good and we can dress some stuff up but if our internal compass, if our internal governance isn't matching up with those things at some point we will be exposed and we will go down a road that God never intends for us to go. So the wisdom of the Proverbs is showing us how we can get a good look or live the life that God intends for us to live.

Let's pray. God, we thank you so much for who you are, thank you for how much you love us, how much you care for us. God, we thank you for the wisdom of the Proverbs that is talking to

us about these everyday things in our lives that we need to navigate through, how to love, how to live, how to learn, how to apply. But God, just like Jesus addressed us in Matthew seven through the parable of the wise and foolish builder, God help us to apply because it's not accumulation is application. And so God help us to apply these wisdom principles and also help us to diligently seek you so that we can go in the way that you called us to go. These things we asked in your son Jesus' name. Amen.