

## **“How Is Your Hearing?”**

### **Proverbs 3:1-4**

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor  
Smoke Rise Baptist Church  
Stone Mountain, Georgia  
October 16, 2005

George Burns said that by the time you are eighty, you have learned everything. You just don't remember it!

I'm not eighty, but I am already forgetting things. This is why I am a list maker. As we grow older, our memory is not the only thing to leave us. Mobility, patience, hearing and eyesight walk out the door, too. I'm not sure the Golden Years are accurately labeled.

According to Solomon, there are two things we never need to lose regardless of how old we live to be. They are far too valuable to us and those around us.

“My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. **Let love and faithfulness never leave you.** Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will find favor and a good name in the sight of God and man” Proverbs 3:1-4.

“Let love and faithfulness never leave you.” I like this kind of succinct advice. At least I can remember it!

What does he mean by “love and faithfulness?” Why are they so important? Why do we need to be loving and faithful all our lives? How can we hold on to them? Ponder these questions with me this morning.

**What did Solomon mean by love and faithfulness?** Love is the willingness to hold on to others even at their worst. Faithfulness is the willingness to hold on to integrity even when the price is high. Let me explain.

The word for love that Solomon uses means “steadfast love.” It is that rich Old Testament word, “Hesed.” It is the love God had for the Israelites even though they frustrated and disappointed Him. It is the love that David referred to in his stirring confession in Psalm 51, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to your unfailing love.”

It is carried over into the New Testament as well. It is the love that the father of the Prodigal Son had for his wayward boy, always waiting and watching for him to come home, celebrating when he did.

It is a love that will not let go. It is a love for others at their best or worst; when they are lovely or unlovely. It is a love for those that help or hurt us because grace knows that our enemies, not our friends, will test love. The love that Solomon spoke of will pass those tests because it is tenacious, resilient and persistent.

On the other hand, Solomon characterizes faithfulness as rock-solid integrity, trustworthiness and reliability. It is a commitment to do right, keep promises, and be dependable at all costs.

Moses said of God that “He is the Rock. His works are perfect and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He” Deuteronomy 32:4.

Of Jesus, Paul wrote, “And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” Philippians, 2:8.

My study of Solomon's advice leads me to believe that love is something we give others unconditionally. Faithfulness is what we do for them because we love them.

**Why is it so important that we be loving and faithful all our lives?** These are the foundation stones upon which good lives and stable communities are built.

Solomon told his readers that if they were loving and faithful, they would "win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man."

A good name in a community had an important place in the teachings of Israel's sages. Wicked people were nameless after a period of time. It was as if they never existed. Good people, however, lived on in the memories of those that remained. Their legacy made them immortal.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler allude to this in their new book, Life Lessons. "In watching people deal with death you will notice much symbolism. At first, you will see people taking lots of photos of themselves as if to say, 'I was here.' Then as their disease progresses, they often come to a new level and quit taking so many pictures. They realize that even the photo will not last. In the best scenarios, the pictures will be handed down to people that never knew them. They find that what matters more is their own hearts and the hearts of their loved ones. They find that part of loss that we can transcend. We can find the genuine parts of ourselves and loved ones that do not get lost. We can even learn that what really matters is eternal and ours forever. The love that you have felt and the love that you have given cannot be lost."

Solomon knew that unconditional and unfailing love along with integrity would not only last, but also bring out the best in people. They would make homes, neighborhoods and nations better places to live. And this, Solomon knew, was the mission of God's people, a mission from which only death could release them.

I like Kenneth Aitken's perspective on this part of our text and others in Proverbs that promote integrity. He believes that the poorest of people who are loving and trustworthy make a far greater contribution to life in a community than any liar, however wealthy or powerful. No community will flourish where people deceive each other or exploit one another for personal gain. Instead it will turn into a bloody jungle in which only the strongest survive.

Listen to the words of the eighth century prophet Hosea, the only prophet to come from the northern kingdom of Israel. "Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land. **There is no faithfulness, no love and no acknowledgment of God in the land.** There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery. They break all bounds and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land mourns and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying" Hosea 4:1-3.

Surely you sense how important love and faithfulness are to a civil society, beginning in the home and extending into the community. Without them, anarchy reigns and death prevails.

**How do you remain loving and faithful all your life?** How do you keep from growing weary or succumbing to the temptation to be indifferent, hateful or greedy?

What did Solomon encourage his readers to do? "Let love and faithfulness never leave you. Bind them around your neck and write them on the tablet of your heart" Proverbs 3:3.

He laid the burden on the shoulders of his readers. Each person was responsible for remembering this challenge and maintaining this lifestyle. Every decision he or she made must pass through these two filters, love and faithfulness. If it did not meet these criteria, it must be reconsidered.

Jacob Shenk was a businessman in Virginia during the Great Depression. He devised a plan to give the poor farmers around him a job while enabling him to take care of his family. He distributed fertilized eggs and grain to the farmers. After the chicks hatched and grew, he bought them from the farmers and made them available to grocery stores. Within a few years, his trucks were crisscrossing Virginia, making thousands of dollars. He became wealthy beyond his dreams.

He had always been a generous man, some years giving away as much as ninety percent of his profits to charitable causes during our country's most challenging economic times. One year, he even divided his windfall with all the farmers that worked for him, mailing them sizable checks. He wanted them to know how much he appreciated their hard work.

When Jacob Shenk died in 1950, people from all across Virginia, from every stratum of life, celebrated his generosity and goodness. They came to honor his good name and let his family know how much they appreciated his love and faithfulness.

"Let love and faithfulness never leave you," Solomon wrote. I appreciate those that were loving and faithful all their lives. They made our world better and so can we. Let's ask God to help us follow their lead.