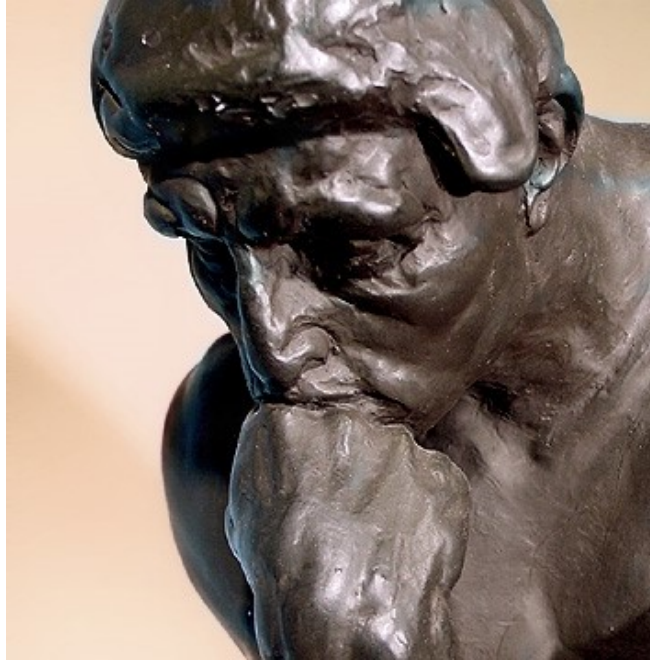


# Readings, Reflections, Prayers

June 2021



## Wisdom:

*God's guidance for normal people (like me)*

Dr. Bruce Martin  
First Baptist Church  
1614 – 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue S  
Lethbridge, AB  
T1J 0W3  
403-327-2082  
bruce@firstb.net  
www.firstb.net

## Monday, June 7: Genesis 2:15-17 and 3:1-13

Wisdom. Wisdom is one of those virtues about which people have many opinions:

- "Common-sense in an uncommon degree is what the world calls wisdom." (Samuel Taylor Coleridge)
- "Science is organized knowledge. Wisdom is organized life." (Immanuel Kant)
- "Wisdom is not a product of schooling but of the lifelong attempt to acquire it." (Albert Einstein)
- "You can have a lot of knowledge about anything and not know what to do with it. Wisdom is ability to use knowledge appropriately and well."

In the Bible, wisdom comes when we recognize we are God's people (created by Him) in His world (which is created by Him) – and we seek His guidance, meaning and purpose for our lives. "*Fear* (in the sense of reverent obedience, recognizing God is the King and All-Knowing One) *of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*" (Proverbs 1:7). Wisdom challenges us to think, "*How do I live as a person of God in this world.*"

The Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament), list 13 books as "Wisdom Books" – books that wrestle with the challenges of living as God's people in a world marred by sin and evil – including Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. This month we'll be reading from Psalms and Proverbs. Psalms may be familiar to us. Proverbs may be less so. Why? Proverbs directly says, "*This is what you should do ... (or not do)*" – we don't always like that. Additionally, much of Proverbs is made up of short one sentence/one verse sayings. It doesn't "read" in neat chapters or stories like the history books or gospels. But there is much wisdom we can learn. It will help us wrestle through the good – and the bad – of life.

Why do we need God's wisdom? We can figure out life for ourselves, right? After all, one of the principles of the Enlightenment – the philosophical movement has dominated the world of ideas since the 18<sup>th</sup> century – is the idea that we are all free to choose what we think is best. No authority that can tell us what is true. It's up to each of us to decide what is right and wrong – about life, ethics, God, Jesus, and everything else (note this kind of personal "freedom" is not biblical theology, it's Enlightenment ideology).

How did that work out for Adam and Eve? God is NOT being petty by asking them not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He is NOT setting them up by creating irresistible temptation. He IS asking them to honour His sovereignty, and to make wise choices, recognizing God the Creator knows best. God knows what is good and evil. He asks Adam and Eve to follow His wisdom, because He is the all-knowing Creator and all-powerful Caregiver. If they choose to obey God, they will be wise.

The alternative is to decide they know better than God. This is the choice both Eve and Adam make of their own free will. As the first "Enlightenment" thinkers, Adam and Eve decide to "eat the fruit," believing they get to choose what is good and evil for themselves. No authority that can tell them what is true.

The consequence of their pride, self-reliance, and rejection of God will be that God gives them exactly what they want – a life of self-reliance without God. They'll have to make it on their own. It will be SO much more difficult than if they'd chosen to listen to God and His wisdom in the first place.

The lesson of Adam and Eve – the lesson the authors of the wisdom literature want us to learn – is that true wisdom recognizes God **IS** God. He is the One who designed the universe, knows how it works best, continues to keep it going, and loves us. He knows best. If we are wise, we listen to what God says AND we follow His wisdom. If we are wise, we take to heart what He teaches AND we put it into practice. We put our faith and trust in Him AND we live out that faith and trust.

Faith, not lived out in practice, is just an opinion. Faith, lived out in how we live, is wisdom.

God is inviting us to be wise. He invites us to recognize He loves us. He invites us to put our faith in Him. He invites us to accept He does know what is good and evil. And He challenges us to live it out ... What might Jesus be saying to me?

*May the love of the Word-Made-Flesh enfold us.  
This world I live in, this town I live in  
this street I live in, this house I live in  
may each be the focus of my prayer.  
Those I live with, those I rub shoulders with,  
those I work with, those I don't get on with  
may each be the focus of my prayer.  
Those who laugh, those who cry,  
those who hurt, those who hide,  
may each be the focus of my prayer,  
Prayers centred less on self and more on others,  
less on my circumstances, more on the needs of others.  
May my life be likewise centred less on self and more on You  
and through You to the world in which I live and move.  
Amen*

## **Tuesday, June 8: Psalm 2**

One wise pundit says, "*Never mistake knowledge for wisdom. One helps you make a living; the other helps you make a life.*" Simply having more and more knowledge is not enough. We need to know how to use that knowledge in a way that builds a balanced, God-centered life. We live it out. That is wisdom.

I knew an English professor at UBC who taught English 231: The Bible as Literature. She knew the Bible well. Very well. Far better than I did at the time. But for her it was just a literature text no different from *Macbeth* or *Oliver Twist*. Her knowledge of the Bible didn't change what she believed or how she lived. She had knowledge, but not wisdom. I have known a few Christians over the years who can recite passage after passage of the Bible, but their actual lived lives are tragically inconsistent with what they knew intellectually. Their knowledge of the Bible doesn't change how they live. They have knowledge, but not wisdom.

Old Testament scholar, Derek Kidner, describes biblical wisdom like this: "*Wisdom (in the Bible) summons us to think hard as well as humbly; to keep our eyes open, to use our conscience and our common sense, and not to shirk the most disturbing questions.*"

- What do we need to "think hard as well as humbly" about in 2021?
- What are "the disturbing questions" that bother you, now and then?

Unfortunately, some Christians give the impression it's not OK to ask hard questions at church or among our Christian friends. They claim there are simple, straightforward answers for every possible question (there's not). They make us feel we're wrong to ask hard questions, search for deeper answers, and not just blindly accepting pat answers (these are GOOD things). We feel unsafe thinking hard and thinking humbly.

Psalms, Proverbs and the other wisdom books invite us to eavesdrop on others who have asked tough questions. It is OK – it's essential – to ask tough questions. We live in challenging, "unprecedented" times.

Psalm 2 reminds us God is the King of Kings. He is the Master of the universe. He is not afraid of our disturbing questions. He can deal with our problems. He can handle our doubts, fears, and struggles.

God may not give us the answers we want to hear, of course. Or there may not be a simple answer. We may have to live with some ambiguity and mystery. But we can have confidence in His goodness, greatness, and power. And we can depend on His unconditional, unending, gracious love.

Author, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, writes, "*To think is easy. To act is difficult. To act as one thinks is the most difficult.*" To act as one thinks – as people who love Jesus – is the essence of biblical wisdom. How is Jesus speaking to me?

*Awake in the morning, and the first thing you do?  
 Thank God for it.  
 Even if you don't feel particularly happy about the day which is to come.  
 Come to God again with two convictions:  
 The one is that you are God's own.  
 The other is that this day is also God's own.  
 This day is absolutely new, absolutely fresh.  
 This day is blessed by God, it is God's own,  
 and now let us go into it.  
 You walk in this day as God's own messenger.  
 Whomever you meet, you meet in God's own way.  
 Amen*

Anthony Bloom

### Wednesday, June 9: Psalm 3

Do bad things happen to good people? Yes. You know that. I know that. However, some Christian people suggest that, if a person loves Jesus, life should be a bed of roses. We forget, for instance, that all Jesus' apostles suffered intensely for their faith; 11 of 12 died violent deaths. We focus on feel-good texts in Paul's letters (1 Corinthians 13, the "love" chapter) and forget how he suffered (2 Corinthians 11:16-33).

The author of Psalm 3, David, is a good person in general (he is a "man after God's own heart"). Life should go well for him. But David goes through hellish experiences. Now, Absalom, one of David's sons, is leading a coup d'état against his father. David is on the run for his life, hunted by his own son (the subtitle gives us this context: this is one of 14 psalms for which we know the specific occasion of their writing).

- Have you been betrayed by someone you love or trust? (vs. 1 and 6)
- Has some close to you ever disappointed you? (vs. 1 and 6)
- Does it ever feel like God has abandoned you? (vs. 2)

One aspect of God's wisdom in Scripture is that when people ask the "**Why?**" question ("**Why** is this happening to me?" or "**Why** do bad things happen to good people?") there is rarely a neat answer. God hardly ever reveals clear "why"s. The "why" may simply be that bad things happen in a fallen world marred by human sin. God has given people, like Absalom, freedom to choose. Their choices hurt others. God isn't causing this. Other people are making poor choices that affect us. Bad things just happen.

In the wisdom book of Job, the main character, Job, spends 37 chapters asking "Why?" In Job 38-41, God responds, but does not answer Job's question. Maybe "**Why?**" is the wrong question to ask ...

What the wisdom books in the Bible help us think through is the "**How?**" issue – "**Bad things are happening (why doesn't matter), HOW then do I go on?**" or "**There is so much evil in the world, HOW then do I live?**"

How does David respond to the (incredibly serious) challenges he is facing? How is this wisdom? How can I learn from him?

*O Lord, I need your help today.  
 I want to care for those you've sent into my life,  
 to help them develop the special gifts you've given them.  
 But I also want to free them to follow their own paths and to bring their loving wisdom to the world.  
 Help me to embrace them without clutching,  
 to support them without suffocating,  
 to correct them without crushing.  
 And help me to live joyfully and playfully, myself,  
 so they can see your life in me and find their way to you.  
 Amen.*

## Thursday, June 10: Psalm 4

As we have struggled through Covid for the past 16 months, life has been hard. Very hard. We have all struggled practically, emotionally, and spiritually. Thankfully, God's word, especially the wisdom literature, is refreshingly honest about tough times. Psalm 4 frankly acknowledges we all face real challenges.

This is another psalm written by David. The specific circumstances are not identified (as they were in Psalm 3). Absalom's revolt was not David's only crisis. In fact, if you read his story in 1 and 2 Samuel, you discover his life seems to lurch from crisis to crisis. His is rarely a smooth journey. This is worth noting: when some person tells you that being a Christian is all blessing, prosperity, sweetness, and light, know that the Bible never promises anything like that. Life sometimes – often – hurts. Just ask David.

But David, through his faith in God, makes it through. And he offers us some practical wisdom:

- In 4:2-3, David talks to us who may doubt God and put our trust in other things (including money, people, trying to "get away from it all," other religions, alternative therapies, etc.). Only God is the One who can truly hear you and save you. No one and nothing else can get you through.
- In 4:4-5, David is speaking to us who get angry and lash out. Getting angry and frustrated accomplishes nothing. We need to be still. We need to trust in God. *"Don't sin by letting anger control you. Think about it overnight and remain silent"* (4:4) is fantastic advice.
- In 4:6-7, David counsels us who have given up and see no hope. We need to have faith in God again. Despair is not the answer. There is hope. We can count our blessings: *"You have given me greater joy than those who have abundant harvests of grain and new wine"* (7:7).
- 4:8 is a wonderful prayer: *"I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety."*

How about you?

- Do you ever doubt God – His love, power, or goodness?
- Do you ever get angry – at God, other people, your situation, yourself?
- Have you just given up – do you think there is no hope? No joy? No future?

Pray David's prayer: *"I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety."*

Pray it every night – over and over – if you need to ... trusting your heart, mind, soul, and body to God.

Wisdom includes choosing to be thankful and putting our trust in Jesus.

*Lord Jesus, I need your special care.  
Like your earthly father, Joseph, I want to do God's will,  
even if I may not always understand.  
Make me gentle and selfless in the care of my family and children or of those around me;  
help me guide them in the toils and troubles,  
the happiness and wonders of this life.  
Like my Father in heaven, make me strong in love and forgiveness for those you entrust to my care.  
No one can do these things rightly, Lord,  
without your constant help and boundless mercy.  
Be with me always, and may I come to you in heaven, and all my family with me.  
Amen.*

## Friday, June 11: Psalm 5

Winston Churchill said, *"Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never – in nothing, great or small, large or petty – never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to evil; never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy."* In the context of the Battle of Britain, Churchill's words were inspirational. But what about in 2021? What about our situation? With Covid? Where good and evil are murky? Where we all have "freedom" to choose right/wrong for ourselves?

One of the big themes in the wisdom writings is that good and evil DO exist. There is a stark contrast between evil and holiness – good and bad – sin and righteousness – light and darkness.

It is true, that in many areas of life there are shades of grey. Some emerging challenges in biomedical research, the use of new technologies, and scientific enquiry are not clear cut. But in many areas of everyday life, there are clear biblical principles. Wisdom, godly wisdom, helps us navigate those waters. Psalms (and Proverbs) help us see that, if we love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, we can make good ethical choices. Where there are clear biblical guidelines, our moral decisions may not be easy. They may be costly. But we are called to be people of integrity, holiness, and justice.

In human terms, the righteous do not always get ahead – financially, career-wise, in popularity, power, or prestige. In the Bible, many, many faithful people had hard lives, suffered desperately, had little in terms of material possessions, and died hard deaths (think of the prophets, the apostles, and even Jesus Himself).

But in spiritual terms, the righteous know the peace, joy, hope, and love that come from a pure relationship with Jesus. Godly people have a profound sense of knowing God. That divine presence and power provides riches – in terms of God’s presence, a pure conscience, good relationships, and a joyful heart – that is far more valuable than all the gold and silver in the world. What is Jesus saying to you?

*O Christ, our Morning Star, Splendour of Light Eternal,  
shining with the glory of the rainbow,  
waken us from the greyness of our apathy.  
Renew in us your gift of hope.  
Open wide the door of my heart  
and illumine it with the grace of the Holy Spirit.  
May I seek what is pleasing to your will.  
Guide my thoughts and my heart.  
Lead my life in the way of your commandments,  
May I always seek to fulfill them.  
And may I grasp the eternal joys of the heavenly life.  
Amen.*

Bede (672-735)

## **Saturday, June 12: Psalm 6**

Prayers and tears. As we learn God’s wisdom by getting to know Him, we can come before God with all our emotions, fears, pain, and struggles – even when they are not particularly noble or pretty. Seven of the psalms, including this one, are categorized as “penitential psalms.” The author repents. He feels guilt, shame, and embarrassment over his sin. He cries out to God for forgiveness and mercy.

Unresolved guilt cripples us. We feel guilt and shame. We have no peace. If we have hurt someone, we are too ashamed to admit it; we avoid the person and lose the joy of that relationship. Guilt can destroy our relationship with God, too: we can avoid God. Theologian Paul Tillich’s favourite paraphrase of “sin” is “alienation” – sin alienates us from one another. Sin alienates us from God. It destroys our lives.

The wisdom of this psalm is simply this: deal with it. Admit it. Get it over with. Determine to begin again, living differently. Do your best. And get on with your life. That is wisdom.

When we do that, “*The LORD hears my cry for mercy; the LORD accepts my prayer.*” When we deal with our failures with honesty and integrity, God forgives us. We know the joy, confidence, and peace that come from a right relationship with God. We can hold up our heads again. Our relationship with Him is restored. We can be open and honest with Him. Life is good again.

If our issue is with another person, the best advice is to deal with it. Admit it. Get it over with. In many

cases, we can restore that broken relationship with that person. The past is now the past and we can move on. It is a beautiful thing when that happens. Sometimes the other person isn't willing to accept our confession. That's OK. We've done our part. Our conscience can be clear.

- What do you need to say to God? Do it. Deal with it. Begin to live again.
- Do you need to confess something to a particular person? Do it. Be Free. Live again.

*Almighty Father,  
You know the secrets of my heart.  
I surrender my heart to You in submission to Your will.  
Holy Spirit, let the eyes of my heart be open to see the many wonders of God,  
and fill my heart with praise and thanksgiving for the faithfulness of our God.  
I dedicate myself to serve others as Jesus taught us to serve.  
Send me out to love and serve family, friends and even strangers.  
Allow me to see others through Your eyes.  
Please fill my heart with Your love, Your compassion, Your mercy, Your forgiveness  
so I may pass these on to those around me.  
Holy Spirit, fill me with the gifts I need to be of service to others.  
Let me see their need and fill it with the gifts You have blessed me with.  
Amen*

### **Sunday, June 13: Psalm 7**

I believe in God – so why is life so hard? Why do things seem so difficult for me, when my neighbour – who has nothing to do with God – seems to have such a charmed life? It's just not fair.

In another wisdom book, Solomon complains, *"The same destiny ultimately awaits everyone, whether righteous or wicked, good or bad, ceremonially clean or unclean, religious or irreligious. Good people receive the same treatment as sinners, and people who make promises to God are treated like people who don't"* (Ecclesiastes 9:1-2). It's just not fair.

Many Christian media moguls – the TV, in print, and online "superstars" – love to tell us that if we just put our faith in God, if we just believed more, if we just had more of the Spirit, if we just gave their ministry more money, then God MUST bless us. After all God wants to bless us spiritually and materially, right?

When we read Scripture, the promises of wealth, health, success, fame, ease, comfort, happiness, and a good life just are not there. In fact, many people who are closest to God – people *"after God's own heart"* (a phrase used to describe David) – endure a lot of hardship, suffering, and pain. Think of the prophets and the apostles. Read Hebrews 11, a who's-who of "heroes" of the faith, most of whom did not have a comfortable life but went through very difficult circumstances. Think of Jesus, Himself.

For much of his life, David (the author of Psalm 7) was on the run from King Saul (who was trying to kill him) and was fighting off foreign invaders. His personal life was a mess (thank, in much part, to his poor choices). He had some great victories but also some despicable failures.

Despite all his problems – many self-inflicted – David believed God would get him through. And God did. David can see God's hand at work in his life, even when times are very tough. That is wisdom.

The good news of Psalm 7 is this: God never leaves us. Even when our problems are our own fault, God is beside us. He can help us through. It may not be easy. It may be painful. Things may not go the way we want them to. But God is faithful. Always.

What do you need to pray about?

*Almighty God, who gives strength to the weak and upholds those who fall,  
give me courage to do what is right,  
for those that trust in you have no need to fear.  
Make me brave to face any danger on my journey.  
Give me the help that you have promised to those who ask it,  
that I may overcome my fears and go bravely forward.  
Fill me with courage, that nothing which is my duty to do, may be too hard for me.  
Let me put my trust in your power and goodness.  
Thank you, my Lord.  
Amen*

## **Monday, June 14: Psalm 116**

The psalms (and other wisdom literature) help us find the words to express ourselves to God. Psalm 116 is the personal diary of someone who was close to death – perhaps because of an illness, accident, or attack. But they were saved by God's mercy. This person prayed to God and their prayer was answered.

This is what did NOT happen: the person was in a tough spot and the Lord guided him through the minefield safely without any pain or suffering. NO. This person was on the verge of death – suffering tremendously, experiencing real pain and hardship. In that situation – desperate suffering – the person called out to God (the verb tense means he didn't just call out once but called out again and again). At some point – who knows how long it took? – God delivered him. We don't know the timeline: maybe it was sooner rather than later, but perhaps it took a long time of calling out again and again before God answered.

Does God always protect us from tough times? NO. But He will help us get through them ...

How does the person respond? With thanksgiving and praise.

*"How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me?"* (116:12). How would you answer that question?

There is nothing we can give the Lord that He needs. The best we can do is *"lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord"* (116:13). Two thoughts:

1. *Accept the gift of salvation God offers.* God help us in many ways. Too often I forget to give Him credit. I think I made it through by my own wits. Or I write it off as good luck. God wants me to appreciate He is the One who has cared for me. He wants me to *"lift up the cup of salvation"* and genuinely invite Him to be Lord of my life – the Lord of this moment and every moment in my life.
2. *"Call upon the name of the Lord."* More than just acknowledging "Jesus is my Saviour and Lord," I need to choose to live that way. This is the way of wisdom. So, I need to seek His wisdom and His will. I need to keep close to Him, get to know Him more and more, and become more and more like Him. Then I need to choose to live like that. The greatest gift I can give Jesus is my obedience.

*"Calling upon the name of the Lord"* is not a one-time thing. Throughout this psalm the verb-form used means continuing action – we do it again and again and again. Paul expresses the same sentiments when he writes, *"Rejoice **always**, pray **continually**, give thanks in **all** circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus"* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Walking with Jesus is a moment-by-moment choice I make. And I must make that choice in every circumstance, again, and again, and again.

The psalmist affirms – twice – *"I will fulfill my vows to the Lord."* He is going to try to live a life of faithful obedience to the Lord. He is not just going to be thankful once then do his own thing. Essential to his thankfulness is offering himself back to God in faithful, holy, godly living.

How can you be faithful to Jesus right now? And later? And again? And again? And again?



*Lord Jesus,  
I pray that I may be wholly committed to you all the days of my life.  
I pray that I may not turn away from the path of righteousness.  
I pray that my reliance in you may grow deeper today.  
I pray that my assurance in you may grow wider.  
I pray that my faith in you may grow stronger.  
I pray that my zeal for you may grow bigger.  
I pray that I may continue to rely on your wisdom.  
I pray that I will no longer lean on my own understanding.  
I pray that I may yield to your wisdom at all times.  
I pray that I may make you first in all I do.  
Amen.*

## **Tuesday, June 15: Psalm 100**

Wisdom invites me to be a thankful person. As I appreciate the grace of God in my life – the undeserved mercy He has given me – I can give thanks. And as a thankful person, I discover joy. Have you ever noticed that thankful people tend to be joyful people? Critical people, on the other hand, tend to be grumpy, miserable, self-centered, and are not much fun to be around. What can I be thankful for ...?

- I can thank Him for small things: the beauty of the flowers, bird songs, the blue sky, the thoughtfulness of a friend, a call from a distant relative.
- I can be thankful for important things: the love of my family, the income that allows me to pay my bills, my church community, my home, my health, the safety and blessing I enjoy as a Canadian.
- And I can be thankful for the most significant things of all: God loves me. Jesus died for me that my sins might be forgiven. The kingdom of God has come; God's new life is in me and around me through the Holy Spirit. I can make a difference for God, today and every day.

What are you thankful for?

- What small things?
- What important things?
- What most significant things?

How do I respond? With joyful worship? Worship is more than just singing songs to the Lord – it involves giving our entire beings – our lives, bodies, dreams, goals, decisions, finances – to Him: *"Give yourselves to God because of all he has done for you. Let your life be a living and holy sacrifice – the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him"* (Romans 12:1).

As we are thankful for Jesus' love and sacrifice, as we celebrate that all that we have comes from God's magnificent grace, we want to bless others. As those blessed by God – and thankful for it – we want to use our blessings for His Kingdom. We want to bless others. How can you bless someone else, today?

*O Lord, help me this day,  
to follow you devoutly  
and to serve the world lovingly.  
May I do my work wisely.  
May I give help secretly.  
May I go to my meal thankfully  
and enjoy my blessings moderately.  
May I go to bed merrily and sleep soundly.  
In the joy of Jesus Christ my Lord,  
Amen.*

Sulpicius Severus (363-425)

### **Wednesday, June 16: Psalm 118**

"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever ..." This psalm is a **community** celebration of thankfulness. Traditionally, Psalm 118 is used at Passover celebrations in Jerusalem. Passover is the annual celebration of the deliverance of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land (remember the plagues, Moses, the blood of an unblemished lamb, etc.?).

Much of the Passover imagery is carried forward to celebrate Jesus – the pure Lamb of God who delivers us from slavery to sin and gives us freedom as His forgiven people. In fact, our communion celebrations are a reinterpretation of the traditional Passover Meal (during his final meal with his disciples, Jesus took the Passover meal and explained how He had come to offer us complete and everlasting deliverance).

Every year – for thousands of years now – Jewish people retell the story of Passover – to remember, be thankful, and stay faithful. It is wise to remember the lessons of the past; it is foolish to forget them (as philosopher George Santayana said, "*Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it*").

Very regularly I need to retell/relisten-to the story of His crucifixion and resurrection. I need to remember God's gift of eternal life through Jesus. I need to remember God's faithful love. I need to celebrate His mercy. I need to call myself back to thankfulness and worship. And I need to recommit myself to living faithfully as God's person – putting His Word into practice in my life every day. Wisdom requires me to remember and learn from the past.

One of the lessons the Jewish people had to learn was they were called to be a blessing to nations beyond themselves. They were, in fact, to be a missionary people. God blessed Abraham and called him and his descendants to be a blessing to all nations. We are called to be a blessing to others, too.

How can we share God's blessings with others in our community? Beyond ourselves? "*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever ...*"

*Who can tell what a day may bring forth?  
Cause me, therefore, gracious God, to live every day as if it were to be my last,  
for I know not but that it may be such.  
Cause me to live now as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.  
Amen*

Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471)

### **Thursday, June 17: Psalm 92**

I read the news this morning. I can find lots to complain about. I can see lots to worry about. There are so many problems in the world. There are so many people to criticize. Wisdom challenges me to look deeper than my complaints or criticisms. Can I be thankful? Can I see good things that the Lord has given to me? Can I rejoice in His blessings?

"*It is good to praise the Lord ...*" Can you praise God today? Try NOT complaining, seeing problems, worrying, or finding fault today. Try to focus ONLY on the positive things in your life and in the world. What GOOD things is God doing? How is His Spirit alive and active in our community? In our church? In your life? Jesus IS among us and at work in our lives (if we choose to recognize His presence).

One interesting passage to reflect on is 92:12-15: "*The godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon ... Even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green. They will declare, 'The Lord is just. He is my rock. There is no evil in him.'*" Sometimes we think that, as we age, we can "retire" from serving God. One person once told me, "*I've done my time, now others need to step up*" ("I've done my time" – what a horrible expression – sounds like prison.).

In fact, there is no retirement plan in the Kingdom of God. God still has many, many things that people in "old age" (God used that term – not me.) can do – praying, mentoring, encouraging, calling, serving, volunteering, visiting. People who are no longer working at paid employment are often key volunteers in church and the community – they have expertise, wisdom, and time. As one of our First B folks wisely said to me, "*What retired people need to do is 'buzz' around the church like bees, looking for things to do.*"

God expects us to use our gifts, talents, abilities, and resources for His Kingdom at every stage of our lives – even more as we have more "free" time.

Count your blessings. Be thankful for are the opportunities God gives you to do something meaningful in the Kingdom of God: call and encourage someone, pray for/with a person going through a hard time (even just over the phone), help a family with children, volunteer in the community. You have so much to offer at whatever stage you are at in life – experience, skills, insight, love, talents, encouragement. You can make an incredible difference for God's Kingdom through **rejoicing** in the opportunities He gives you to pray, serve, encourage, help with acts of kindness – AND **making the most of them**.

*Even though I clutch my blanket and growl when the alarm rings each morning,  
thank you, Lord, that I can hear.  
There are many who are deaf.  
Even though I keep my eyes tightly closed against the morning light as long as possible,  
thank you Lord, that I can see.  
There are many who are blind.  
Even though I huddle in my bed and put off the effort of rising,  
thank you, Lord that I have the strength to rise.  
There are many who are bedridden.  
Even though the first hour of my day is hectic, when socks are lost, toast is burned, and tempers are short,  
thank you, Lord, for my family.  
There are many who are lonely.  
Even though our breakfast table never looks like the pictures in magazines  
and the menu is at times unbalanced,  
thank you, Lord for the food we have.  
There are many who have no job.  
Even though I grumble and bemoan my fate from day to day  
and wish my circumstances were not so modest,  
thank you, Lord, for the gift of life with you.  
New life in you is the most precious gift of all. Thank you.  
Amen*

### **Friday, June 18: Psalm 56**

Anne Lamott is a novelist, non-fiction writer, and author of essays. Her first published novel, *Hard Laughter*, was written for her father after his diagnosis of brain cancer. She writes, "*Courage is fear that has said its prayers.*" David's Psalms, in particular, model courage that has said its prayers.

Note the subtitle to Psalm 56. This is written by David when he fled to Gath to escape his enemies in Israel. However, David has been seized by the Philistines in Gath. The Philistines are David's/Israel's enemies. Goliath, whom David killed, was a Philistine from Gath. Gath was not a great "safe haven" to choose.

The "promise" of God's wisdom is that, in general, life goes well for us when we follow God's principles and guidelines. But not always. Life is often difficult, both for those who love God and for those who don't. Sometimes we feel like David – under attack by the world around us.

We who believe in God know that we don't face the Philistines in our lives (whatever threats those that might be) – alone. God is with us. He is with us – always ( "*Be sure of this: I am with you always, even to*

*the end of the age*" – Matthew 28:20).

How does David respond in 56:10-13?

David is committed to "*fulfill my vows to you, O God. I will offer a sacrifice of thanks for your help*" (56:12). Does this surprise you? He is committed to honouring, worshipping, and giving thanks to the Lord even under tremendous personal strain, even when he is in mortal danger. How can we honour, worship, and give thanks to the Lord during our difficult, challenging times?

Many people in our community – at work, school, neighbours, relatives – do not have that assurance of God's love that we find comforting and empowering. Pray for them. Come alongside them in Jesus' name.

*Lord, teach me your way of treating others –  
sinners, children, Pharisees, Pilates and Herods, and John the Baptists.  
Teach me your way of eating and drinking.  
Teach me how to act when I'm tired from work and need rest.  
Teach me compassion for the suffering, the poor, the blind, and the lame.  
You who shed tears, show me how to live my deepest emotions.  
Teach me your way of looking at people:  
the way you glanced at Peter after his denial,  
the way you touched the heart of the rich young man and the hearts of your disciples.  
I would like to meet you as you really are, since you change those who really know you.  
If only I could hear you speak as when you spoke on the Mount of Beatitudes.  
Give me grace to live my life, within and without, the way you lived your life, O Lord.  
Amen*

Pedro Arrupe

### **Saturday, June 19: Psalm 30**

All of us struggle to live out God's wisdom in our lives. We try to do what's right. But we often fail. As Charlie Brown says, "*Sometimes I lie awake at night, and ask, 'Where have I gone wrong?' Then a voice says to me, 'This is going to take more than one night.'*"

Some part of us just wants to go our own way and rebel against God. We find ourselves resenting reading – or just forgetting to read – His Word. We don't want – or just get too busy – to pray. We make excuses for skipping church once (or not coming back) ... and it become easier and easier as weeks go by. We compromise our integrity just once ... and having crossed that line the first time, it becomes so much easier. We give into temptation just once ... and then again, and again, and again.

Paul writes, "*I know the law but still can't keep it, and the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions; I obviously need help. I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time. It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge.*"

*"I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question? The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different."* (Romans 7:17-25 *The Message Translation*)

There is good news – God, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit – can give us the inner strength we need to live rightly. This is the wisdom of which Psalm 30 reminds us. When we call out to the Lord for help – He hears – and He does give the strength we need to change, and to stand strong against temptation. Who do you

know who needs encouragement, today? Can you come alongside someone who is struggling and encourage them?

*Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my whole will.  
All that I am and all that I possess You have given me.  
I surrender it all to You to be disposed of according to Your will.  
Give me only Your love and Your grace.  
With these I will be rich enough and will desire nothing more.  
O my God, teach me to be generous.  
To serve you as you deserve to be served.  
To give without counting the cost.  
To fight without fear of being wounded.  
To work without seeking rest.  
To spend myself without expecting any reward,  
except for the knowledge that I am doing your holy will.  
Amen*

Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556)

### **Sunday, June 20 (Father's Day): Psalm 95**

It's June. We're enjoying the fact that the weather is warmer. We can get outside. We can enjoy God's glorious creation. Godly wisdom appreciates this is our Father's world.

This is a wonderful psalm celebrating the God of creation. Read 95:1-7 as your call to praise and worship Him today.

95:8-11 mark an abrupt change of focus. Now we are recalling how the Israelites forgot God, His goodness, and His power during the exodus from Egypt. In Exodus 17, the Israelites complained that they were stuck in the desert with no water. They believed God had abandoned them and left them to die. God, of course, was very much with them, and miraculously provided water (Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:1-13): "*Moses named the place Massah (which means 'test') and Meribah (which means 'arguing') because the people of Israel argued with Moses and tested the LORD by saying, 'Is the LORD here with us or not?'*" (Exodus 17:7). God brought them miraculously out of Egypt and across the Red Sea. They should have known better.

The God who holds the depths of the earth and the mountain peaks in His hand (Psalm 95:4) is your loving Father, your Saviour, and your shepherd. Find your confidence in that powerful truth. Pray about your fears, doubts, and struggles. Name (at least) one way in which you know God is good, today.

*Those who practice a sport grow better at it.  
Those who use their brains grow brighter.  
Those who are good to others develop habits of generosity.  
What are you telling me, Lord?  
That by praying I come to know about prayer;  
that I should use everything I have, both in possessions and in talents, and not let them lie fallow.  
It is in giving that we receive.  
It is in giving that we grow.  
O Lord, give us a mind that is humble, quiet, peaceable, patient and charitable,  
and a taste of your Holy Spirit in all our thoughts, words, and deeds.  
O Lord, give us a lively faith, a firm hope, a fervent charity, a love of you.  
Take from us all lukewarm-ness in meditation and all dullness in prayer.  
Give us fervor and delight in thinking of you, your grace, and your tender compassion toward us.  
Give us, good Lord, the grace to work for the things we pray for.  
Amen*

Thomas More (1478-1535)

## Monday, June 21: Psalm 24

This world is God's glorious creation. The created world – including us – all belong to Him. We are His. *"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him. For he laid the earth's foundation on the seas and built it on the ocean depths."*

The truth that the Earth – and we, ourselves – belong to God is annoying to some people. We may ignore it. We may fight it. If you want to do what you like, as you like, when you like, you would rather not be reminded you belong to God. And if you are willing to sacrifice other people, the environment, justice, or truth for your own gain, you don't want to know other people, the world, ethics, and values are from God.

But for those of us who take time to reflect upon this truth, it is incredibly empowering and liberating. We are not, ultimately, in control of our destinies – we are God's – we are in His hands. We do not have to struggle to figure out ethics, justice, and truth all on our own – God has given us that wisdom as He created the world. Our responsibility is to get to know God, and thus His wisdom.

We are called to live with integrity, honesty, and faithfulness before the Lord – to have *"pure hands and hearts ... who do not worship idols and never tell lies"* (24:4). We are called to live as people who know *"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him."* we live accordingly – according to the principles, directions, guidelines, and wisdom of our Creator. Life, in general, goes well when we live God's way. Life, in general, becomes very complicated and much more problematic when we go our own way – that's just the way it goes. Pray for God's wisdom. Deal with those areas of your life you know need to be brought into line with God's will.

Name (at least) one way in which you know God is good, today.

*Thank you, Lord, for this story.  
I can feel for the impetuous boy who said 'No';  
he had made his plans for the day and hated having to change them.  
But his heart was in the right place, and he turned up to help his father.  
Part of me is in the second son, trying to please,  
making promises and resolutions that seemed to satisfy his demanding dad,  
but were soon revealed as empty.  
I want to be like the first boy, Lord.  
If I cannot be gracious, let me at least do what I should do.  
Amen.*

## Tuesday, June 22: Psalm 19

Wisdom appreciates that ALL of creation worships and praises God. When we realize that, we treat and relate to the world differently.

Did you know that the sky worships God? God did not have to create a world in which sunsets happen, the sky is blue, or clouds come in all sorts of curious shapes and sizes. God could have created the world in black-and-white. Even if He chose to work in colour, He could have made every daisy pink and every rose red. There really is no logical point to some of the wonders God created. But He delighted in artistic extravagance, using more colours than we can possibly imagine or name in his design. (Aside: Have you ever wondered who comes up with names for all the colours on those paint chips at the paint store? What a job. God has created infinitely more colours than we can ever name. Those paint-chip-namers are amazing).

Worship is not just a "human" thing. All of creation worships God – not as you and I do, of course, but in their own unique ways. Simply by being the Northern Lights, or a gentle rain, or a colourful angel fish, or a solid mountain, creation worships God. Does this seem strange to you?

Perhaps it may seem odd because our human worship is planned, active, and self-conscious. **We** sing songs, pray prayers, read Scripture, listen to teaching, etc. These are all good things. They are important ways we consciously worship God. But as human beings, we can begin to think worship is something **we** do – for God’s benefit, or to attract people to our church, or to minister to people’s needs. It’s planned and purposeful. Psalm 19 reminds us we are simply called to worship **God**. Just because.

Worship is simply God’s creation (including us) coming giving Him honour and glory. It is celebrating that “God is good” today and every day. Yes, we regularly worship with others, but the focus is on giving **God** the thanks, praise, and adoration He is due. Someone may see us worshipping sincerely and be drawn to God – great ... but that is an unintended consequence; it is not the purpose of worship. Some of us in pain or struggling may feel genuinely blessed – great ... but that is also a secondary result. The primary purpose of worship is simply to glorify **God**. All creation is created to worship the King (see Psalm 148).

This week we have been naming ways in which you know God is good. Make that a daily discipline.

Reflect on verses 7-11. What is God saying to you?

Think about verses 12-14. What do you need to bring before Him for forgiveness? How do you need to live more purely? What will you do today to make that happen?

*Stay with me, and then shall I begin to shine as you shine;  
so to shine as to be a light to others;  
the light, O Jesus, will be all yours; none of it will be mine;  
it will be you, shining on others through me.  
Let me thus praise you in the way you love best, by shining on those around me.  
Let me preach you without preaching, not by words but by my example,  
by the influence of what I do; the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to you.  
Amen.*

Mother Teresa

### **Wednesday, June 23: Proverbs 1:1-7**

Psalm 19:7-10 reads: *"The instructions of the Lord are perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The commandments of the Lord are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are clear, giving insight for living. Reverence for the Lord is pure, lasting forever. The laws of the Lord are true; each one is fair. They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold. They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb."*

God’s wisdom and truth have tangible benefits: refreshing the soul, making wise the simple, giving joy to the heart and light to the eyes ... The truth is that God, as the Creator, knows how our world works and He know how our lives are supposed to work; if we follow His instructions and principles, it will (in general) go well with us). God’s ethics and guidelines are like an owner’s manual for our lives – if we follow them, things will go nicely most of the time. If we don’t, we will most likely have problems.

The Book of Proverbs is a treasure house of wisdom written by Solomon and other wise. It was written to help Jewish people apply God’s principles and truths to their lives. Then they would create a society that was ordered in ways that honour God. In its cultural context, Proverbs was specifically written for **men** who were actively in or being groomed as family, community, political, and military leaders. Thus, some of the speeches are addressed to *"My son ..."* and men are warned against adulteresses. In our context, where both women and men are active contributors in society, these principles can be applied to all of us.

Over the next couple of months, we’ll look through Proverbs to learn how we can live wisely and well as God’s people. It simply makes sense that we get to know the truths our Creator God has given us to help our lives go well. In general, if we follow God’s guidance, wisdom, and insight, we will find life full and meaningful, and life will go well with us. If we don’t listen to God’s direction, in general, we may find life is

more complicated, problematic, and difficult.

These seven verses introduce us to theme of the book. There are different nuances to each word Solomon chooses: wisdom, instruction, understanding, prudence, learning, and wise counsel. Together they form a comprehensive worldview/mindset/approach-to-life. And together they help us live disciplined and successful lives, to help us do what is right, just, and fair (v.3).

*"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge ..."* **"Fear,"** in this sense, does not mean terror. It means "reverence," "awe," "honour," "respect" and "obedience." Because we believe God is the Creator; because we know He is the One who knows what is right, true, and best; and because we love Him, we choose to honour and obey Him with reverence. We not only believe right things about God, we live out our faith by following His commands and principles.

David Hubbard writes, *"Although 'the fear of the Lord' includes worship, it does not end there. It radiates out from our adoration and devotion to our everyday conduct that sees each moment as the Lord's time, each relationship as the Lord's opportunity, each duty as the Lord's command, and each blessing as the Lord's gift. It is a new way of looking at life and seeing what it is meant to be when viewed from God's perspective."* (Proverbs, p. 48)

Being honest with myself, in what ways do I think I know better than God? In what areas of my life do I struggle to obey His commands? Lord, help me desire Your wisdom, understanding, and knowledge ...

*O Lord, teach me to seek you, and reveal yourself to me when I seek you.  
For I cannot seek you unless you first teach me,  
nor find you unless you first reveal yourself to me.  
Let me seek you in longing, and long for you in seeking.  
Let me find you in love, and love you in finding.  
Amen*

Ambrose of Milan (c. 340-397)

#### **Thursday, June 24: Psalm 14**

Fear – reverence, awe, honour, respect, obedience – of God is the beginning of knowledge. The wisdom of God in Proverbs is in stark contrast with foolishness that comes from saying in your heart, *"There is no God."*

In Proverbs (and Psalms and other books in Scripture) authors often use terms like the "wise person" and the "fool." We may think of a "fool" as a joker or a clown. In biblical terms, a "fool" is someone who deliberately and consciously rejects God. He is a fool because he does not use his eyes to see or his ears to hear the evidence of God all around him. He refuses to listen to God's wisdom. Instead, he says – *"in HIS heart"* – in his innermost being – there is no God. The fool firmly believes this. And he lives that out.

Consequences come from this decision. With no "fear of Lord," this person does not follow God's truth, commands, or principles. Psalm 14 is a sad description of the morality (or lack thereof) of a person who honestly believes there is no God (for ethical issues for such a person, read Psalm 10). It is not surprising that someone who does not have a "reverent obedience" for God would also not respect God's ethics, standards, or values. This reverent obedience is what creates the framework for godly morality.

With no "fear of the Lord" a person is also without hope: *"There they are, overwhelmed with dread ..."* *"Terror will grip them"* (Psalm 14:5). Dread of what? Perhaps the moral vacuum they create because they do not fear God and thus do not value His ethics? Maybe a world in which they – along with everyone else – are not safe? Possibly suffering? Death? What do you think?

In contrast note that *"God is with those who obey him ... the Lord will protect his people"* (14:5). These people are not overwhelmed with dread. They have hope. They know their lives – now and forever – are safe in God's hands.



"The assertion, 'There is no God,'" writes Old Testament scholar, Derek Kidner, "is treated in Scripture not as a sincere if misguided conviction, but as an irresponsible gesture of defiance. In the context of Psalm 10:4 it is expounded as a gamble against moral sanctions; in Job 21:7-15 as impatience with authority; in Romans 1:18-32 as intellectual and moral suicide ... The last word on atheism is said in Romans 1:22: 'Claiming to be wise, they became fools'; a judgment vindicated in the sequence 'What can be known about God is plain to them (19) ... And ... they did not see fit to acknowledge God'" (Psalms 1-72, pp.78-79).

Thank God our lives are safe in His hands – now and forever. Pray for the wisdom to see His hand at work, guiding and directing your life today.

*O Creator past all telling,  
you have appointed from your wisdom the hierarchies of angels.  
You have beautifully set out all parts of the universe.  
You are the true fount of wisdom and the origin of all things.  
Lord, please shed the beam of your light on the darkness of my mind:  
dispel my ignorance and sin.  
You make eloquent the tongues of children:  
please guide my speech and touch my lips with graciousness.  
Make me keen to understand, quick to learn, able to remember.  
Make me wise to interpret and ready to speak.  
Guide my going in and going forward, my coming home and my going out.  
Amen*

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

### **Friday, June 25: Proverbs 3:1-12**

If you've read Proverbs before, you will know it is not written in a linear, organized way like one of the gospels or Paul's letters. It is a collection of wisdom sayings, more-or-less in random order. This makes it a very different "read" than one of the gospels or one of Paul's letters. You could think of Proverbs as a *Bathroom Reader*-type compendium of

- Instructions for life
- Wisdom speeches about specific issues
- Short, one-line sayings – proverbs to live by.

They are not really organized in any logical framework. So we'll be jumping around a bit over the next few weeks trying to read them in some sort of topical order. This week we're looking at what wisdom looks like.

Proverbs 3:1-12 is a "wisdom speech" – Solomon gives us a mini-sermon on what it means to live wisely, "*in the fear of Lord*" – out of reverent obedience to God. This is what he says:

1. Keep the Lord's commandments (3:1-2)
2. Live with love and faithfulness/truth/commitment (3:3-4)
3. Trust the Lord's guidance (3:5-6)
4. Don't rely on your own wits (3:7-8)
5. Honour the Lord's provision (3:9-10)
6. Accept the Lord's correction (3:11-12)

In each case Solomon adds a "*So that ...*" comment. He gives us some motivation to do these things. We can expect that if we desire to "*love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength*" – as Solomon is encouraging us to do here – life will tend to go fairly well for us. These are not ironclad guarantees. God is not a celestial slot machine who must respond to our input with a specific output. But, in general, we can expect good things to follow for those who love Him and obey Him.

Read through Proverbs 3:1-12 a couple of times. Which verses speak to you? Reflect on them. How can you apply them to your life today?

*Dear Jesus, help me to spread Your fragrance everywhere I go.  
Flood my soul with Your Spirit and love.  
Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly  
that all my life may only be a radiance of Your own.  
Shine through me and be so much in me that every soul I meet  
may feel Your presence in my soul.  
Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus.  
Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as You shine,  
so to shine as to be a light to others.  
Amen*

Mother Teresa

### **Saturday, June 26: Proverbs 3:13-26**

Philosopher Immanuel Kant once said, "*Science is organized knowledge; wisdom is organized life.*" Proverbs challenges us to take God's principles and commands and organize our lives accordingly. Rather than living randomly – dealing with each new circumstance as we feel led at that moment – we cultivate our minds, hearts, souls, and spirits, so they are ordered in godly wisdom. Then, naturally, we live our belief in and love for God in practice, no matter what the circumstances.

Nurturing a "God-shaped mind" is one of Proverbs goals. God's wisdom will pervade our thinking, dreaming, praying, speaking and living to such an extent that we become fully integrated people. Our lives are shaped by our faith in *every* facet and *every* circumstance.

Proverbs 3:13-18 is a poem about the practical benefits of living by God's wisdom. It is a "beatitude" – a description of the "blessed" life, similar to those in Matthew 5 ("*Blessed are the poor in spirit ... Blessed are those who mourn*" etc (5:3)). (The word, "*beatitude*," is from the Latin word "*beatitudo*" literally meaning "*happiness*" or "*blessing*." In the Latin version of the Bible, each verse in Matthew 3:5-10 begins, "*Beati ..*" – "*Blessed are ...*" or "*Happy are ...*")

Is God's wisdom trustworthy? Can we trust Him if we let Him shape our decisions and values? Dare we allow His commands and wisdom to have that much influence in our lives? That's a bit radical, isn't it? Solomon reminds us that "*By wisdom the Lord founded the earth; by understanding he created the heavens. By his knowledge the deep fountains of the earth burst forth, and the dew settles beneath the night sky*" (3:19-20). If God is great enough to create and manage creation, we can trust Him with our lives, too.

Therefore, Solomon says, be wise (3:21-26). You will not regret it. In general, life will go better for you. Try it. Ask God to be with you and guide you in every decision, conversation, event of your life today. Consciously pray for wisdom as you move through your day. See what a difference this makes ...

*O Lord, we bring before you the distress and dangers of peoples and nations,  
the pleas of the imprisoned and the captive,  
the need of the refugee,  
the weariness of the despondent,  
and the diminishment of the aging.  
O Lord, stay close to them all.  
We bring before you our stresses and struggles,  
our worries and our fears,  
our hopes and our dreams.  
O Lord, stay close to us all.  
Amen*

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)

## Sunday, June 27: Proverbs 3:27-35

Charles Spurgeon, a famous preacher of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, said, *"Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom."*

Proverbs is about this kind of applied knowledge. Knowing how to use the knowledge we have, in practical ways, is true wisdom. For instance, we KNOW the two great commands, *"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind,"* and *"Love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matthew 22:36-40). But how do we use that knowledge?

Solomon spells out something or what it means, in practice, to *"love your neighbour as yourself"* in these verses. He frames it negatively, *"Do not ..."* You can turn each phrase around, however, and make it a positive command:

- *Do good to those who deserve it when it's in your power to help them.*
- *If you can help your neighbor now, don't say, 'Come back tomorrow, and then I'll help you.'*
- *Always seek the best for your neighbor, for those who live nearby trust you.*
- *Speak well of people and tell the truth about the person who has done you no harm.*
- *Find good examples of peaceful, godly people and copy their ways.*

There is great practical advice – godly wisdom – here.

The wisdom celebrated in the poem in Proverbs 3:13-18 should lead us to living differently in the world (*"Joyful is the person who finds wisdom, the one who gains understanding. For wisdom is more profitable than silver, and her wages are better than gold ..."*). Proverbs challenges us to think through what wisdom means in our relationships.

Pray about a relationship in your life you are less than satisfied with. Ask for God's wisdom to know how to handle it wisely and well. Be prepared to act on the direction that He will give you ...

*Lord, your light is the only light I need  
as I travel through life's mystery.  
Your word the only voice I hear;  
that still small voice that leads me  
to the place where I should be.  
Your presence is the only company I need  
as I walk this narrow road.  
Your fellowship the warmth I crave  
to help me on my way.  
Amen*

## Monday, June 28: Psalm 34

Pastor and author, Francis Chan, writes, *"Our greatest fear should not be of failure but of succeeding at things in life that don't really matter."* God wants us to know that our lives matter. What we do matters. How we live matters. Wisdom literature, like Psalms and Proverbs, help us know what does really matter.

This Psalm, written by David (Solomon's father), echoes the themes we have been reading in Proverbs.

- *"Fear of the Lord"* (in terms of reverent obedience) is the key to a godly life (34:9 and 11).
- When we fear the Lord in this way, we find the strength, encouragement, and wisdom we need to face the challenges of life.
- God gets us through. The Lord of Creation can get us through anything and everything.

- Godly wisdom shapes how we live in relationship with other people.
- If we choose to live without this reverent obedience to God, there may be serious consequences.

Notice where the psalm begins – in glorious praise of God. It is because we believe in our great God that we trust His wisdom, His care, and His protection. We can put our faith in Him.

Also note that, while in general, things do go better for those who live in reverent obedience of God, difficult times happen. David's life is a testimony to the fact that even a person who can be described as "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14) can have a very, very challenging life.

David's commitment to God and belief in God's goodness give him hope. And sure enough, God gets him through difficulty after difficulty.

What verse or idea from this Psalm speaks to you today? Why? What is God saying to you? Spend a few moments reflecting on God's wisdom for you, today. How are you going to live this out today?

*May all I do today begin with you, O Lord.  
 Plant dreams and hopes within my soul.  
 Revive my tired spirit.  
 Be with me today.  
 May all I do today continue with your help, O Lord.  
 Be at my side and walk with me.  
 Be my support today.  
 May all I do today reach far and wide, O Lord.  
 My thoughts, my work, my life: make them blessings for your kingdom.  
 Today is new, unlike any other day, for God makes each day different.  
 Today God's grace falls on my soul like seed, though I may hardly see it.  
 Today is one of those days Jesus promised to be with me, a companion on my journey,  
 And my life today, if I trust him, can bear fruit I may never see.  
 In Jesus, my life has purpose.  
 Amen*

## **Tuesday, June 29: Colossians 1:1-14**

At the beginning of most of Paul's letters he prays for the people in the church to whom he is writing. Often he prays for them to have God's wisdom. Remember Paul is well-educated in the Jewish Scriptures (our Old Testament): he is praying that they would have the wisdom described in Proverbs and Psalms.

What is Paul praying for? "*We ask God to give you complete **knowledge** of his will, spiritual **wisdom** and **understanding***" (1:9) – this is exactly what Proverbs and Psalms have been talking about. Paul desires that we would have this reverent obedience for God so that we allow His truth and commands to shape every aspect of our daily lives. Then, "*the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit*" and "*all the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better*" (1:10). God's wisdom changes how we live. We live differently because we are God's people.

Following up on Psalm 34, Paul knows very well that life does not always go smoothly for those who love God. Even though, generally, life goes much, much better when we live God-shaped lives, bad things still happen to good people. In a world in which sin and evil happens, we are not immune to accidents, disease, and host of other nasty things. But, as David testifies in Psalm 34, when we believe in God's goodness and power, He does get us through. So Paul writes, "*We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy, always thanking the Father*" (1:11-12).

Why can we have this confidence in God? As people who know Jesus' love, shown through the cross and

resurrection, we know *"He has enabled us to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light. For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins"*(1:12-14).

May this be our prayer today: *"Because He lives, I can face tomorrow, Because He lives, all fear is gone; Because I know He holds the future, And life is worth the living, Just because He lives."*

*Lord Jesus Christ,  
I know that I have sinned and done things that have hurt you.  
I am willing to turn away from what is wrong in my life.  
I want to go where you lead in the future.  
Thank you for dying on the cross so that I might be forgiven.  
Come into my life this day;  
Come in as my Saviour and Lord:  
Come in to be with me for ever.  
Thank you, Lord Jesus.  
Amen.*

### **Wednesday, June 30: Proverbs 1:8-19**

Friends. Friends are powerful influences on our lives. Few friendships are neutral: whether we like it or not the people we spend time with affect the way we think, act, and relate. An old Russian proverb says, *"Tell me who's your friend and I will tell you who you are."*

In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, 11-year-old Harry arrives at residential school. One character, Draco Malfoy – a nasty, cruel, self-absorbed boy – says, *"You will soon find out that certain families are better than others, Potter. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort. I can help you there."* And he reaches out his hand to Harry. It's a pivotal moment in the story. If Harry chooses to befriend Malfoy, his life will move down dark paths. However, if Harry chooses to walk away from the "dark side" and make friends with some of the other – good – kids, his life will move in a very different direction. Fortunately, Harry chooses wisely. That one choice shapes the entire trajectory of his life.

Solomon is giving us the same insight in Proverbs – who you spend time with will influence you. Tragically Solomon, himself, fell prey to this same temptation: *"Now King Solomon loved many foreign women. Besides Pharaoh's daughter, he married women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and from among the Hittites. The LORD had clearly instructed the people of Israel, 'You must not marry them, because they will turn your hearts to their gods.' Yet Solomon insisted on loving them anyway. He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. And in fact, they did turn his heart away from the LORD. In Solomon's old age, **they turned his heart to worship other gods instead of being completely faithful to the LORD his God, as his father, David, had been.**"(1 Kings 11:1-4).*

A couple of other short, pithy proverbs echo the same sentiments:

- *"Don't befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people, or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul."*(22:24-25);
- *"Don't envy evil people or desire their company. For their hearts plot violence, and their words always stir up trouble."*(24:1-2)

This does NOT mean that we cannot have friends who are not Christian. Some Christians have used this principle to isolate and insulate themselves from anyone who is not a believer. In fact, we need those friends – and they need us. Our non-Christian friends help us grow in our faith. And they need our witness and testimony about the love of God. People who do not yet know Jesus may only come to know Him through our friendship. Friendships outside of "Christian circles" are essential parts of who we are as "missional" people – people who believe God wants to share His love with everyone.

However, we do need close friends who are Christians. People who can help us grow in our faith, hold us accountable to God's principles, and with whom we can share our lives. C.S. Lewis once said, "*The next best thing to being wise oneself is to live in a circle of those who are.*"

Which friends build you up in your faith? Do you have a few close Christian friends or are you part of a small group that can help you grow in your faith? Pray that God would bring these people into your life ...

*Lord Jesus Christ, while on earth you had close and devoted friends  
such as John, Lazarus, Martha and Mary.  
You showed in this way that friendship is one of life's great blessings.  
Thank you for the friends that you have given me  
to love me in spite of my failures and weaknesses,  
and to enrich my life after your example.  
Let me ever behave toward them as you behaved toward your friends.  
Bind us close together in you  
and enable us to help one another on our earthly journey.  
Amen*

### **Thursday, July 1: Psalm 136 (Canada Day)**

It's Canada Day. Today our country is 154 years old. We celebrate our heritage. We give thanks for who we are now. And, prayerfully, we place our nation in God's hands for the future.

In the Jewish tradition, Psalm 136 psalm is known as "*The Great Hallel*" ("*The Great Psalm of Praise*"). It is

- a celebration of the *past* – remembering His love has no end –
- to enlighten our *present* – His love is with us today –
- and, to give confident hope for the *future* – His love will have no end.

Psalm 136 is not just a recollection of the past – the *past* helps us see God's steadfast love more clearly in the *present* – and the past gives us assurance of God's loving presence in the *future*.

- 136:1-3: We worship God, simply for who He is, first and foremost ... "*Our Father, who is in heaven, holy is your name ...*"
- 136:4-9: God – our God whose loves has no end – created the heavens and the earth. "*This theme ... invites the Christian, not to wrangle over cosmological theories but to delight in his environment, known to him as no mere mechanism but a work of 'steadfast love.'* No unbeliever has grounds for any such quality of joy" (Derek Kidner). We can rejoice in creation.
- 136:10-22: God – our God whose loves has no end – is our rescuer and redeemer. The overthrow of Pharaoh and his armies meant deliverance and freedom for the Israelites. Jesus' cross and resurrection mean even more to us – we are saved from the power of sin and death. We have freedom. We are safe in God's hands forever. And we have a purpose – to live His Kingdom by loving our neighbours as ourselves.
- 136:23-26: God – our God whose loves has no end – is our friend in need. Yes, God has delivered people in the past ... AND He is still very much at work in our lives and world in the present. These verses bring all of this history into the present – my world and my experience today. The One who remembered His people in the past, the One who freed his people in the past, the One who provided for His people in the past, continues to do the same – in my life – today.

This story is not over. It continues in the present. It will continue in the future. God is the same – yesterday, today, and forever: "*Give thanks to the God of heaven.*"

How can we be His good news to our community, today?

*Thank you, God, for this piece of the world called Canada,  
a slice of land broad and wide, blessed with rivers and great lakes,  
wide skies and great forests, high mountains and gracious plains,  
beautiful from sea to sea to sea.*

*Thank you for letting us live in this land,  
even though we do not own it;  
this land is your land, which we use in trust for future generations.  
Thank you for its rich history,  
which includes the Inuit and Aboriginal and Metis peoples.  
We pray for justice and wisdom as we work on difficult  
and abusive relationships with First Peoples.*

*Thank you for our system of government,  
for the right to speak freely, and to elect our leaders.  
Thank you for the freedom of religion and conscience that we enjoy.  
Thank you for universal health care,  
and a social safety net, even though not all are caught by it,  
and not all dwell in safety.*

*We want a country that is the best it can be,  
a home for all, welcoming refugees and newcomers,  
sharing this wealthy country with the world.  
Bless our leaders, our Prime Minister and all members of parliament;  
guide their steps, and empower us to use our voice to help them  
as they make difficult and far-reaching decisions.  
We thank you today for our home and native land--  
thank you for giving us a home here, where we live in peace and security.  
God keep our land, Canada, keep it strong and free,  
keep it safe and beautiful for future generations.  
Amen.*

Carol Penner

## **Friday, July 2: Proverbs 2:1-11**

Back in high school English, Mr. Copeland used to write "ROS" in bright red ink all over my papers. "ROS" stood for run-on sentence. I would get so excited about what I was writing about (a good thing, I thought) that I would go on and on and throw in more and more ideas and never use a comma or a period because what I had to say was just so exciting and I just had to keep on going and so I would just keep writing and writing and writing without allowing the reader to catch a breath and I would just keep on going until I had written down everything that was on my mind and then I would put in a period if I remembered but often I was so caught up in what I was doing that I wouldn't remember to put the period in and start a new sentence but instead I would just go on to the next big idea and the next big idea ...

In Hebrew, Proverbs 2 is virtually one continuous sentence. Solomon gets carried away and runs on and on summarizing how important it is to walk with God, rather than evil people (as in Proverbs 1:8-19). God's wisdom is nothing less than the key to survival. It is life. How do we get wisdom? We seriously desire it. We ask the Lord for it. And we make the effort to find it by getting to know God – through His Word, through prayer, and through Christian community. We settle for nothing less than friendship with God.

Wisdom is a gift of God – but it usually does not come as some instantaneous divine download. It comes through our discipline of studying Scripture, getting to know God, prayer, and Christian friendships.

Notice the benefits of wisdom (2:6-11):

- Knowledge, understanding, and common sense.
- God is our shield, guard and protector.
- We understand what is right, just, and fair, and find the right way to go.
- We will be joyful and kept safe.

Who wouldn't want wisdom? It seems like a no-brainer that we would desire this.

Why do some people reject God and His wisdom?

Why do I sometimes turn my back on His wisdom? Am I doing so now in any area of my life? What am I going to do about that?

*I will not stumble,  
for your hand will guide,  
and in your footsteps, I will tread.  
I will not grow weary,  
for your spirit sustains,  
and my soul shall be renewed.  
I will not be weak,  
for your truth strengthens,  
and no evil shall defeat me.  
From the depths of the earth,  
I shall soar upward  
on wings like eagles.  
I shall spread the news  
throughout the world.  
I shall run the race  
against all odds,  
and shall prevail.  
Amen*

### **Saturday, July 3: Proverbs 2:12-22**

To think something – to know it – is relatively easy. To say what you think is more difficult. To act as you think is even harder. Biblical wisdom encourages us to know the truth. But most importantly, God wants us to live it out, in practice, in our lives.

Solomon goes on to list more benefits of godly wisdom. Wisdom will save us from evil people:

- Those whose words are twisted.
- Those who turn from the right way and walk down dark paths.
- Those who take pleasure in doing wrong and enjoy the twisted ways of evil.
- Immoral people.

A solemn warning concludes the speech: *"The wicked will be removed from the land, and the treacherous will be uprooted"* (22:22).

His advice, *"Follow the steps of good men instead, and stay on the paths of the righteous"* (22:20).

Each of us needs some *"good men/women"* in our lives: people who know God and seek to live out His principles. These people can be wonderful role models for us. They can also be people we go to when we're having a difficult time, confused, or in need of direction for counsel and advice.

Who can you talk with who is a "good person" – someone who loves the Lord with all their heart, mind, soul,



and strength and has godly wisdom? Do talk often with that person. Cultivate that friendship.

Who can you encourage or mentor? Believe it or not, you have some spiritual maturity and wisdom yourself. Be available as a person to whom others can come for counsel. In the process, seek to walk closely with God – any wisdom you have will come from Him, through your relationship with Him.

*For each step that I might take,  
Be my guide, O Lord of life.  
For each load that I might bear,  
Be my strength, O Lord of life.  
For each mountain I might face,  
Be my power, O Lord of life.  
For each river that might impede,  
Be my safety, O Lord of life.  
For each place where I might rest,  
Be my peace, O Lord of life.  
For each sunrise and sunset,  
Be my joy, O Lord of life.  
Amen*

#### **Sunday, July 4: Proverbs 4:1-17**

The book of Proverbs is edited by (and mostly written by) King Solomon. Solomon was the son of King David, who was described as "*a man after God's own heart.*" In Proverbs 4, Solomon credits his father, David, for teaching him the ways of God and His wisdom.

Proverbs emphasizes that godly wisdom is first learned at home (note the repeated use of "*My son ...*" to introduce the speeches). Family is certainly not everything – friends are important, too – but the home is very important.

Gavin Wakefield writes, "*I am a Christian because someone told me about Jesus, and someone told them, and so on back and back, in a chain, or perhaps more accurately a web, of storytelling.*" Most often family members are key links in the chain or the key threads in the web of passing on faith.

Never underestimate the power of family influence. Much of who I am is thanks to the investment of time, effort and love of my parents, grandparents, brother, and aunts and uncles. I can see personality and character traits, values, habits, opinions, and beliefs from other family members in me – and my character traits, values, habits, opinions, and beliefs passed on to my children.

How do you see the influence of others – particularly family – in your life?

Whom do you influence? At least one person looks up to you as a role model. This is true of each of us: a child, grandchild, neighbour, friend, co-worker is watching you and learning from you. Young children at church look at older children and youth. Youth look at adults. We may not want that "responsibility" but it's true – and we have to take it seriously. (I recall a Dad, who had two sons younger than ours, once said to me, "You probably don't know this, but I watch you and how you are raising your boys, and I'm learning from you" – that was terrifying!)

David's advice to Solomon, cited here, is almost identical to Solomon's advice to us in other passages we have been reading. Obviously, Solomon has been strongly influenced by his father.

As you read Proverbs 4:1-17, what new insight into godly wisdom do you hear? What verse, phrase, or snippet of wisdom speaks to you? What will you do about it?

*As I adventure with you today  
be the compass that guides me,  
the light that shines on my path,  
the only one I follow.*

*As I adventure with you today  
be the word that encourages,  
the hand that reaches out,  
each time I stumble*

*As I adventure with you today  
let me glimpse our destination,  
and appreciate the places  
through which you lead me.*

*As I adventure with you today,  
be the strength I need to follow,  
and as the day draws to a close  
let me rest in your embrace.*

*Amen*